SEASONED TIMBER

By DOROTHY CANFIELD

W.N.U. FEATURES

CHAPTER X

The old man's face cleared. He took a long step around the table and held out his right hand. Timothy's hand clenched his, silently took the vow with him. Mr. Dewey drew a deep breath and said in a steady voice, "Yes, now is the time, T. C., for all good men to stand up for their country. But let's get us something to eat first. I'm hollow as a drum."

"You're welcome to whatever Lottie has left for me at the house. Hash, probably." Timothy's voice sounded odd and far away.

"Hash sounds all right to me." Burt Stephenson stood there by the desk, embarrassed and troubled. Then Mr. Dewey moved forward again, saying over his shoulder, "Well Burt, come along with us to the Principal's house, will you?"

In front of the Principal's house Burt said, hesitatingly, "Say, Mr. Hulme—well—you see I get twenty-five cents for every news item I send in to the Ashley Record. I wonder if it would be all right to . . ."

Timothy turned to Mr. Dewey.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

Mr. Dewey thought for a moment, and said, "My Great Uncle Zadok always used to tell me,

'What's got to be done
Better be begun.' "

"That's so,' 'said Timothy, and went on gravely. "Burt, this is about the most serious thing that ever happened to our old town. You're a Clifford boy. It's up to you as much as anybody to help do the right thing. Had your lunch? No? Well, on in the house and telephone your grandmother that you'll have it with us. I'll help you get your news item ready. You'll probably get more than a quarter for it, too."

Timothy found the dish of hash in the warming oven in the kitchen, started the coffee making, showed Burt where the knives and forks and dishes were kept, and stepped upstairs to speak to Aunt Lavinia. He found her about to lie down for a nap, asked her in what he thought was a quiet casual voice, "All right, Lavvy?" and told her, "I just wanted to let you know we're back. Mr. Dewey's going to eat something here before he goes home." But after one look at his face, she slid off her bed, crying, "What's happened, Tim? What has happened?" He shook his head, tried to smile. "Tell you later," he said with what he intended to be a reassuring intonation.

"You're hiding something from me, Timothy Hulme," she cried, over the stair railing. "Somebody has died and you're not letting me know."

"Mr. Wheaton has died, Aunt Lavinia."

Halfway down the stairs she halted, astonished, relieved, resentful. "Why, you crazy loon, that's good news," she exclaimed, with hed bald disregard to conventional decencies. She sat down where she was — looking through the banisters at three men below.

Timothy, back at the table, told her curtly, without stopping his famished chewing and swallowing. "He's left the Academy some money on condition that no Jewish students ever be admitted."

"Well, wouldn't ye know the old rascal'd think up some dirty trick as his last act of life?" said Aunt Laviina conversationally. She was struck by the trouble in the faces below her. "You're never thinking of taking it!" she cried.

Aunt Lavinia stood by the table, putting back the strings of her white hair to peer into his face. "Tim, dear lad . . ." her voice was gentle and serious as he had not heard it in years.

"Yes, Aunt Laviina?"

"Because you have an old woman hanging around your neck like a millstone you're not going to be less than you were brought up to be? Tim I'd starve rather than stand in your way now."

He was pleased with her, kissed her cheek lightly, told her with a smile, "You'll be allowed to starve, Lavvy dear, when I do."

"Then you'll resign? Oh, Tim! Good for you!"

"Resign? I'm not going to resign! What makes you think I'm going to take this lying down? We're going to put our heads together this very afternoon. Burt, what classes have you?"

"Only a lab period from two to four, but see here, Professor Hulme, you don't mean you're . .?"

"You're excused from lab this afternoon for more important business," said Timothy.

Someone was calling to him. Above the babble of talk on the stairs Aunt Lavinia's voice rose, shouting, "Tim-o-thy! Canby's here. I've told him. He wants to know can he come up, too?"

"Oh yes," said Timothy. "Sure, if he wants to."

Aunt Lavinia's small capacity to give attention to matters of literal fact had been used up. But Canby said, "You don't think for one holy second, Uncle Tim, that you can find anybody in this town who'd vote not to take that money?"

"Hasn't it ever happened, Canby, in the history of the world that people have put their principles before—"

"Oh, Uncle Tim, be yourself!"

"Professor Hulme, may I ask one question?"

"I should say so, Burt! This is your party lots more than it is ours."

"Why, we don't hardly ever have any Jews as students, see? Just Jules, and those Hemmerling boys, and Rosie Steinberg, this year. Why couldn't they go somewhere else to school? Good gosh, Professor Hulme, it'd be chaper to pay their expenses up in Ashley at the high school and get all that money for the Academy!"

Mr. Dewey now said with wrath, "Are we a-going to be told how to run our business in our own town by somebody that didn't even vote in Clifford—just because he's rich? I'd fight taking his money if he laid down the law to us this way about anything."

"Listen, Burt." Timothy waited till the boy looked up at him. "If we don't take this money it'll mean that when we're old folks we can look back on our lives and think we had a chance to prove whether we meant anything when we claimed to be free Americans, or whether it was just talk."

The trained instinct of the experienced teacher told Timothy that this was enough. He looked at his watch, said, "Let's get at your news item."

The bugle sent its blare down the hill to Clifford and its people, up the mountain to the pine and the spruces, as for the last hundred and eighteen years. But it did not galvanize into startled speed any laggards loitering on their way to assembly. Every student was there ahead of time, and grown-ups too, both men and women, sitting upstairs in the gallery, downstairs at the back on the bare straight-backed benches where they found some of their youth still left, standing in the doorways and along the hall. The Ashley Record was distributed in Clifford by half past seven in the morning and it was now half past eight, thirty-six hours after Mr. Wheaton's spirit had departed from the heavy old body so carefully tended by his masseur.

Ever since the arrival of the newspaper the closely woven network of telephone wires had been humming stormily in a tempest of exclamations, questions and surmises.

Now they sat and stood in the assembly room, a greater crowd than had ever come, even to a commencement, looking up at the words of America written large in Professor Hulme's square handwriting on the blackboard at the back of the stage, at Professor Hulme standing by the piano, the harsh sonority of his voice carrying his words to the farthest ranks of those standing in the hall, "Our old town and our old school have suddenly been called out from the quiet peace where they have lived so long, to answer a question of life and death importance to those who believe in the American principle of equal opportunity for all, and safety for minorities. The future of our town and of our school depends on the answer we will make at the election of the new trustee two months from now. But before we begin to lay the matter before you, I think we would do well to sing our national hymn."

He sat down at the piano, he sang the first verse with others, "My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing."

From verse to verse, the music swelled like a rising tide of rhythm on which everyone there — would he or would he not — was swept forward. When they came to the last verse,

"Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light!
Protect us by thy might,
Great God, our king.
A-men,"

sang the men, the women, the boys and girls of Clifford, slowly, drawing in deep breaths between the lines, and remained standing for an instant to let the tide of music subside.

Those who had seats sat down rustlingly. Timothy rose, went to the front of the platform and stood, looking out thoughtfully over the expectant faces.

"Perhaps the best place to begin," said Timothy, "is at the beginning, eight years ago when we elected Mr. Wheaton as trusee of the Academy I'm afraid we all just thought that if we elected a rich man as one of the trusees, we could get some money out of him. And using our votes the wrong way, has brought on us a great temptation to do wrong again, this time a wrong we could never set right. Here are the terms of the bequest."

He read aloud slowly then, with pauses between the sentences, the letter from Mr. Wheaton's lawyer. "We are offered one million for endowment and two nundred thousand for buildings, on three conditions: one" — he drew a long breath — "that Academy bind itself never to admit to its classes or to give any education to a Jewish student, the word Jewish being defined as applying to a person with any relatives with Jewish blood." He stopped to breathe again, and to straighten his pince-nez. "Two, that the name be changed to the George Wheaton Preparatory School." He laid emphasis on the word preparatory. "Three, that the tuition fee for day students be raised to not less than $250 a year, but, so the clause in the will reads, 'always making generous provision for scholarships for needy Clifford youth,' and the fee for boarding students to not less than one thousand dollars a year." After letting this sink in, he added more rapidly, "A quarter of a million more either for buildings or endowment is offered if girls are excluded from the student body but this is not made a condition for obtaining the bequest.

"I think now," said Timothy, putting the leter into his coat pocket, and speaking in a level voice, "that probably this will had been drawn in December, when I last saw Mr. Wheaton in New York. But of course I had no idea of it then, and I could not understand some things Mr. Wheaton said about the Academy budget. He objected to the salaries of the teachers of Domestic Science, and of Agriculture and Manual Training because those subjects are not part of preparation for college. He told me he thought that if the Academy would concentrate on those who have money enough to attend college, we would have what he called a much better class of students, meaning by that, I understand, students from families with more money. This, I suppose, explains his wish to have the name changed, not only, you will notice, to have his own name part of it, but to have the Academy called a preparatory school. He spoke on that same day, as he had several times before of his wish to exclude girls, giving it as his opinion that we could never induce gentlemen's sons to come here as students as long as they were obliged to associate with girls in classes." He brought this out in the same fact-stating neutral voice he was using for the rest of his explanation.

(To Be Continued)

HYDRANT IN MIDDLE

"Pop," said Johnny, looking up from his composition, "is waterworks all one word or is it spelled with a hydrant in the middle?"

THE LONE RANGER -:- -:- -:- -:- -:- -:- -:- -:- -:- BY FRAN STRIKER