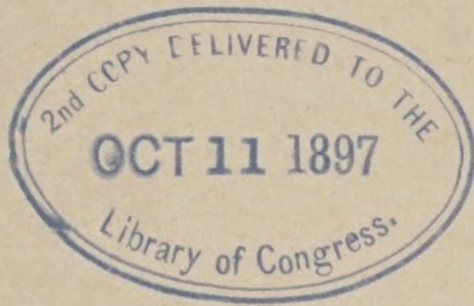


The Little  
Red Schoolhouse

Evelyn Raymond

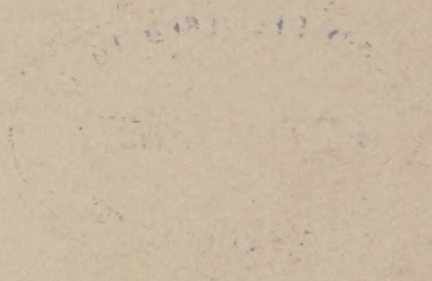


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THE  
LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE









“Jacob made himself comfortable on a mossy rock.”

THE  
LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE

BY  
EVELYN RAYMOND

AUTHOR OF

“THE LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE,” “THE MUSHROOM  
CAVE,” “A CAPE MAY DIAMOND,” ETC.

Illustrated

By VICTOR A. SEARLES

BOSTON  
ROBERTS BROTHERS

1897



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TO  
ALL THE LADS AND LASSIES, THE MISTRESSES  
AND MASTERS, OF  
OUR BLESSED COUNTRY SCHOOLS.



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THE  
LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE NEW PUPIL.

THE schoolhouse stood at the crossing of the roads in the valley,—the wonderful valley, through which ran or leaped the madly merry Black River; trailed the slow waters of its neighbor, the old canal; and gleamed the yellow-brown thread of the plank turnpike.

These three entrancing features of the valley had all one beginning and one end; side by side they emerged from the wooded hills on the east, and, still side by side, they disappeared among them on the west.

To the children, the road, the canal, and the river were a trio of comrades from the world beyond those green imprisoning walls, and each had a tale to tell of it.

Sometimes they liked the river best. This

was in the spring, when it rose to the top of its banks and bore on its breast the long, unending chain of logs, sent by the woodlanders above to the mills below.

But as the season advanced and the lazy boats went sauntering along the canal — ah! then was delight! For the good-natured captains gave many a child a “sail,” from one end of the valley to the other; that is, from the lock to the bridge. Beyond these limits even the most adventurous youngster dared not go.

The river and the canal were surely enough without another; yet there still was left the turnpike, and the “last’s the best of all the game.” Summer or winter, freshet or drouth, nothing affected the turnpike, over which rattled or jingled the mail coach from the Unknown to the Unknown, — as Dominie Davidson explained, “from Carthage to Polinquet;” which was all the same to the listening children.

The “up coach” had four goodly horses of gray; the “down,” two white and two black, and each driver boasted his “team” was better than his rival’s. This question was a never-settled, always-discussed one at recess, about which time, on alternate days, a stage passed by the schoolhouse, heralded by a blast on a musical

horn, which echoed and re-echoed among the encircling hills in tones of bewildering gradation and sweetness.

Often the girl children followed those echoes into the hills, — those great green peaks of delight, where they never caught the echo, but where they found heaps upon heaps of flowers; dainty spring beauties, merry wake-robins, fragrant arbutus, anemones, bloodroots, columbines — why, the half could never be told of the treasures they found in those forests!

Along the turnpike and the wandering roads which crossed it, on a bright September morning, came into this pleasant valley the children of that school and of this story.

By twos and threes, or singly; each in freshly starched sunbonnet or blouse, and each with some old-fashioned text-books under arm, — even the four-year-olds had gay primers or slates, — for it was “the first day of school,” and they were thither bound.

There was the excitement of a fresh experience in the very air. Even Dominie Davidson, already waiting in the open doorway, had a new, let's-begin-all-over-again sort of a look on his kind face, and his dickey was starched as stiff as the girls' bonnets.

But there was no starch in his smile, as he extended his hands to grasp those of the first-comers, and his deep voice rang out without a trace of that sternness which sometimes made it so unpleasant to their ears.

“Well, well! This is good — better — best! Helen, of course; Matilda and Kate; I counted on you three to be prompt. What a morning it is to begin a new year of work! Ah! there they come! All along the roads! Why, at this rate, we shall have to get out the extra desks.”

“Say, Master, can I sit in the back seat by the winder? The one where Betty Wilkins sat on last?”

“Correct your sentence, Matilda, and I’ll answer you.”

“I did n’t know school had begunned,” pouted the beauty of the school, tossing her yellow braids contemptuously, and depositing her books with a bang upon the desk she coveted.

Then in came the lads with a rush, full of the vigor and sparkle of the day, and there was no further opportunity for exchange of remarks between the Dominie and his aggrieved pupil.

Each freshly arrived scholar greeted his master with the civility that was commonly perfunctory, but performed that morning with an earnestness

which proved it genuine; then the torn hats and tidy bonnets were hung on the peg-rows in the "entry," the Dominie stepped to his desk, tapped his bell, and the session had begun.

"Attention! We will open our exercises by the reading of the Word. Proverbs, fourth, seventh. 'Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and —' Silence, in the middle row! — 'with all thy getting get understanding.'

"There, my children. I can add nothing to that. It is your message directly — Jimmy Bolton! Take that gum out of your mouth. Bring it here. Throw it — It is n't gum? Well, what is it?"

"Root licorice."

"Have you a cold?"

"No."

"What?"

"No, SIR!"

"Very well. You don't come to school to chew roots nor set your small brother a bad example. Let us pray."

When the brief prayer was reverently finished, for this loyal old Bible student used none but the Lord's own perfect prayer, Helen Adair went to the wheezy little melodeon in the corner and started the tune for the hymn. It was neither

very cheerful nor appropriate, but nobody noticed that, not even Dominie Davidson. It was music, and so sufficient to express their happiness.

Then followed another tap on the bell, books and slates were rattled about, and study began, with that eagerness which announced it a welcome novelty after weeks of vacation idleness.

Well pleased, Dominie Davidson looked over his room full of young people, as he wrote their names on the new roll. He was getting an old man. Younger educators were reminding him of that and trying to crowd him out, to usurp his place for themselves.

“But I’m here on my throne yet, and good for a dozen years to come, please God! I’m as strong for work as ever I was in my life. Hmm. Give up! Leave the valley school! No. No. That would be more than I could bear, I think, just yet. Just yet.”

He squared, or tried to square, his stooped shoulders, passed his thin hand over his head, adjusted his collar and stock, put on his strongest glasses, and said: —

“Ahem.”

He was about to call the first class in spelling. The class had anticipated this and had already risen to go forward to the recitation bench,

when there came the sound of approaching feet along the entry floor, — heavy feet, middle-aged feet; that had no rightful place among those younger ones, now so impatiently tapping the schoolroom boards because of this delay.

All glances immediately turned toward the doorway, through which there entered a rough, unkempt man whom few recognized. He wore the long striped smock-frock of a laborer, and the axe slung over his shoulder proclaimed him a wood-cutter. His clothing had an odor of bad whiskey, tobacco smoke, and pine needles combined, and this odor instantly permeated the entire room.

He had his hand upon the shoulder of a tall lad, whom he pushed before him into the open space near the teacher's desk, where he paused and remarked: —

“I'm Abel Sharp. I live over the mounting. I've brung ye Dan'l, this here boy, to be taught by ye. I've heern 'bout ye, an' how's ye was a powerful hand to jam l'arnin' into youngsters' heads. Dan'l, he's smart — so they say. But he ain't good fer ary thing, 'ithouten it may be readin' an' so on. I've gin up tryin' to make anything decent out of him. He's ben turned out o' every school he's tackled yet, an' I 'low

he'll be turned out o' thisn. Howsomever, here he is, an' now do your dernedest with him. What's the taxes?"

"Sir? I do not understand."

"Sho! What's to pay? Fer the teachin'?"

"Do you belong to this district?"

"No. To t'other. Th' eastern."

"You'll have to settle that with the trustees or the board."

"All right. An' you settle him. Don't ye let him give ye no sass. If he do, jest let me know. I'm Abel Sharp. Good mornin'."

The woodlander stomped out, leaving the unfortunate Daniel standing awkwardly in the middle of the floor, feeling through all his long body the pin-pricks of those many watching eyes, and seeking refuge in sullenness for the misery which possessed him.

Even before Dominie Davidson recovered from his surprise sufficiently to speak to this undesirable new pupil, there was a gentle stir among the girls on the back row, and a slender little maid stole to the stranger's side. She was blushing furiously at her own boldness, yet her words were resolute with pitying kindness: —

"Oh! I know you, Daniel! You're the boy who brought that beautiful oriole's nest to my



mother last winter. Here is a book. We're just going to spell that line. Over yonder is where the big boys sit. Shall he go there, Master, or where?"

"Yes. Of course. I'll find him a seat. Unless — Daniel, can you spell?"

Daniel flushed even a deeper red, twirled his old hat vigorously, plucked at his blue jean overalls, grinned, shot a swift glance toward Helen, and finally evolved: "Huh!"

The master frowned.

"Take Helen's book, lad, and thank her for it. Then look over that page. If you can spell words as hard as those, stand up among the boys and try. As a treat, children, you may choose sides and spell each other down."

"We never do that till a Friday!" objected one youth who had been diligently counting down the line of words on the designated page, and studying those which should be given to himself.

"Never mind! *Please!*" cried another.

"We do it whenever I say so!" thundered the autocrat of the schoolroom. "Girls, choose your leader."

"Helen Adair! Helen, of course."

The favorite sped to her position.

"Boys, the same."

There was a momentary silence, during which it was observed, for the first time, that he who commonly led on the lads' side was not there.

“Choose. Time 's passing.”

“Why — Phil Sampson, only he is n't here.”

“James Bolton, then.”

“Oh! shucks!” said a voice somewhere.

“What's that?” demanded the Dominie.

“He ain't no good.”

“Neither are you — at grammar. James Bolton, take your place. Opposite Helen. Now begin. Helen has first choice.”

“Matilda Brown.”

“She can't spell — butter!” came a sibilant whisper from another malcontent, which the master saw fit to ignore.

After that the choosing went on with rapidity, the best spellers in the school being eagerly selected by the leaders, till all the first class were in one or other of the two lines, and the newcomer, Daniel, at the bottom of that on the boys' side.

“Heads up. Shoulders back. Hands folded behind you. Toe the mark. Luther Beans! you're three inches over the crack. Better. At-ten-tion!”

With uplifted ruler in one hand and a goodly

sized pin in the other, Dominie Davidson waited for some seconds, during which the intent children literally held their breaths. When the silence was absolute he let the pin drop, and a distinctly audible sound announced the fact.

Into this profound stillness, he hurled upon their startled ears the unexpected word : —

“ ‘ Parallelogrammical.’ ”

Every scholar caught his breath with a gasp. Such a test as that had never been given in the valley school. Helen Adair valiantly tried to compass that dreadful bit of her native language, but failed. Most of the class flunked outright, yet the mighty word travelled on and on till it reached the foot of the lads' line and — Daniel.

“ Next ! ” said the Dominie, as the merest matter of form.

“ P-a-r, par, a-l, al, paral, l-e-l, lel, parallel, o-, parallelo, g-r-a-m, gram, parallelogram, m-i-c, mic, parallelogrammic, a-l, al ; parallelogrammical.”

The silence that succeeded this bomb-burst of learning was far more profound than that which had preceded the pin-fall.

## CHAPTER II.

ENTERS PHILIP.

THE master rallied from his amazement. An electric thrill of delight ran through his veins. Here was a foeman worthy of his steel.

“Daniel Sharp, go to the head. Consider yourself leader of the boys’ side. Attention! Helen: ‘Parallelopipedon.’”

Of course she missed it, with two r’s and four l’s.

“Daniel!”

At one bound the lad rose to the height demanded of him. He became transformed. Here was his chance, the first chance of his hungry, ambitious soul. He gave back kindling glance for kindling glance. One might almost have seen the spiritual lightning shoot between the Dominie’s eyes and his own. Erect, alert, self-confident he stood, and the watching children marvelled.

“‘Zoögeographical.’”

The word aimed itself at the shrinking Helen but hit Daniel. It did not get beyond him. He shot it back to the master, unbroken.

“Irresistibility!”

The boys' leader glanced across at the girls'. She stood mute, trembling, with downcast lids and burning cheek.

Again he returned the word, intact.

Dominie Davidson looked over his spectacles, then under them, each time scanning curiously this unique specimen of youthful erudition. With a swing of his revolving chair he dragged his heavy dictionary toward him and turned its leaves rapidly, selecting polysyllables, monosyllables, — anything, everything puzzling, which his random glances hit upon.

Not one proved puzzling to the new pupil.

The master's swivel chair came back to its normal poise and he turned toward Helen with that unconscious appeal for her sympathy which had become habitual to him. To his fresh astonishment he saw her upon the verge of tears.

Instantly the old man's feelings underwent a change. He loved her fondly, and it was not for this unknown, arrogant stripling to cast discredit on her attainments, who, until now, had been the honor pupil of the school.

“ Sometimes it is easier to spell difficult words than simple ones. One takes infinitely more care in the matter. We will return to the regular lesson. Helen, spell ‘ Ingenuous.’ ”

She shot him a grateful glance and obeyed him. On ground which she knew she was not easily shaken. Yet, finally, after a long, honorable trial, she failed, and Daniel was again victor.

“ Spell ‘ Separate.’ ”

It was the boy’s turn, and he missed it. This was now more surprising than that he should have performed his first wonders ; and after that he missed frequently. All the others gave up the contest to these two, and when it was over, when the clock hands pointed to long past the time a second recitation was due, Helen returned to her seat in the back row with the greatest number of correctly spelled words to her credit.

Before this, while the competition was at its height, there had entered the room another lad, who took his old place at a back-row desk, almost unobserved. This was a surprise to him. He had not counted upon such an easy slip over his tardiness, nor doubted that the master’s salutation to him would be the familiar —

“ Well, Philip ? late as usual. Your excuse, please.”

But he recognized that a strange element had come into the valley school, and he became presently the most profoundly interested person there.

“ Goodness ! I never heard a fellow rattle off hard words like that ! What is he ? He looks like a fool, but I bet he ’d down the Dominie, if it was an even try ! ”

And it was the earnest stare of this late comer which greeted Daniel as, directed by the master, he walked down the aisle between the desks to the distant one assigned him.

The young woodlander returned the stare with interest. To his inexperience, fresh from the forest, all these valley children seemed part of a different, a superior world to that in which his fifteen years of life had been passed. Helen, indeed, in her dainty sprigged muslin and little black silk apron, had suggested to him one of those “ goddesses ” about which he had read in that old book the tourist had given him.

But Helen’s loveliness faded into nothingness before the charm of Philip Sampson’s handsome, debonair face, his fine, almost foreign-looking apparel, the frank friendliness of his smiling dark eyes.

“ I say, fellow, you ’re a brick ! Who are you ? ”

Where 'd you come from?" demanded this brilliant apparition.

Daniel's self-poise forsook him. He dropped back into the sheepishness of his first appearance, and replied, with a nasal twang:—

"I come from t'other side the mounting, — Big Sandy deestrick;" and saying this, slunk into his seat as if he were a culprit.

Phil was surprised. From the stranger's scholastic exhibition he had expected a different manner of speech; but he was well bred, and, when he respected anybody, equally careful not to wound that person's feelings. He promptly veiled his astonishment in the cordial declaration:

"Well, Big Sandy's the loser, then! I reckon you'll give us valley fellows a shake-up in our wits. Do you like school?"

"Ya-as. When I'm letten to go. 'Tain't often. Would n't a ben now if 't had n't a ben fer Ma. Swidgeycorum! What's — that?"

"That's the stage horn, — the 'up stage' from Polinquet, and — recess!"

"Where ye goin'?"

"To see the stage go by, of course. Come on."

With a hand on a desk, either side the narrow aisle, Philip went swinging toward the door. Every movement he made was graceful, every



line of his perfect body was beautiful, from the crown of his golden head to the soles of his shapely feet.

Daniel watched him, wonderingly. Then he started to follow, but the voice of the master halted him and he paused, reluctantly.

“Come here, lad.”

“I was a-goin’ out — with that new feller.”

“Another time. I’d like to hear where you learned to spell like that.”

“Oh! mostly by myself,” indifferently.

“By yourself! It seems incredible.”

“Hey?”

“I mean, it’s remarkable.”

“I went to school when I could. ’Twan’t often I was let. Mostly I was a-choppin’. Can I go now?”

“Those words — few of them are in any spelling book I’ve seen. What one did you use?”

Before Philip Sampson had come Daniel would have been proud beyond measure to talk thus with the master. He would have dilated eagerly upon his own attainments, his love of study, his determination to find out all there was “in any book he could fetch up ag’inst.”

But Philip had come, and books had suddenly lost their interest.

“I used one o’ *them* kind. You see, the long-short on it was this way: One o’ them writin’ men, that makes the books their selves, come along our way and stopped a hull summer to our folks’. He was sick when he come, an’ he hired me ter go round with him, a-shootin’ an’ so on. He teached me a heap o’ things; an’ when he went away he gin me his Dictionary, same as yourn, I reckon, an’ all his books what he’d fetched into the woods fer comp’ny. He told me I could n’t do no better nor study out o’ the Dictionary mostly. I done it an’ kept at it, fer three winters. That’s all how. Now can I go?”

“Yes, yes. Certainly. But it’s exceedingly interesting. I will have another talk with you after school. Daniel Sharp, is it? I am proud to write it on my roll book.”

“It’s Daniel fast enough. But Ma, she married ag’in. My right name’s Starbuck. I’d ruther be called by it. I hate — Sharp!”

The ugly look which came over the lad’s countenance startled the good Dominie.

“There, that will do for the present, Daniel. Join your mates. The stage must be very near. We’ll all go out and give it a royal welcome.”

## CHAPTER III.

### A BALL OF BURDOCK BURS.

THE stage had already drawn up at the corner, before the school playground. With a final, nicely modulated breath upon his horn, Jake Lane, the driver, tossed it down among the clustered youngsters, leaped from his own high perch, and mischievously flicked his long-lashed whip around the bare heels of a rosy urchin, though taking care to merely tickle, and not hurt them.

This act proclaimed to the assembled children that "Jake's in a good humor! He'll let us have some fun!"

They tested this conclusion immediately.

With a scramble and rush they swarmed over the great gaudy vehicle, — upon the wheels, the boot, and up the little ladder to the top.

"Hello! Who told you ye might do that? Hey? Well, I'm glad school's on ag'in. Always seems sort o' lonesome like, when Old Red's shut up. 'Tain't so long ago sence I used to come

here myself, a boy like Lute Beans there, a-tryin' to get some notion o' learnin' into my thick pate. Guess you ain't forgot what a wooden-headed shaver I was them days, have you, Dominie?"

"Oh! I remember well enough when you came to school, Jacob, but not so well about the 'wooden head.' As I recollect, you were about as smart as the average, my man."

"Humph!"

"And you were always very good-natured, very kind to your mates. I remember that distinctly," added the master, fearing he had in some degree fallen short of the tribute expected.

"Sho! Better let it go 't the first, Dominie! Might as well call a feller a fool as say he's a clever soul."

But the driver was in no wise offended, and, laughing at the neat turn he had given the conversation, he faced about to the stage and drew out from beneath his own seat a parcel of books for the expectant teacher.

"Ah! that's good. Though I hardly dared hope for them quite so promptly."

"Would n't a ben, neither, if I had n't gone to the store an' ponied 'em up. Polinquet folks are slower 'n molasses in the winter time. But I remembered how well I liked gettin' new books

when term opened, even if I never did get no further 'n the covers. Hey? What *you* want, boy? To sit in my place a minute? Well —”

Mr. Lane slowly drew from his vest pocket a big silver watch, by which, as he claimed, he was accustomed to “reg'late the sun,” and gazed fixedly at its open countenance.

“Well, I dunno but you may, fer jest five minutes. I'm a little more 'n that to the good. I — Whoa, there! You critter! Stan' still. Sh'd think you'd be glad to rest, after travellin' nigh on to thirty miles. Did you ever see a finer horse 'n that air front off one, Dominie? See him now. He's as full o' gimp an' go as if he'd jest ben let out o' stable. Ain't he a beauty, though? Yet I dunno as he's ary mite better 'n his mate; an' as for them hind ones, they're young, an' none too road wise yet, but — wait a spell. I say, jest wait a spell. That Sim Bed-decker's old white pair o' mares ain't a show 'longside this team. I —”

Every word, every gesture of this wonderful person, who could drive four mettlesome horses as easy as little Rob Miller could drive his hobby horse, who came from the world beyond the hills, and treated its affairs as if they were of no more account than Farmer Beans' haying,

was watched and imitated by his admiring audience.

“When I’m as big as Jake Lane I’m going to buy me a watch just like that,” observed Jim Bolton to his neighbor.

“Where you goin’ to get your money?”

“Earn it, of course.”

“How?”

“Oh — somehow!”

“Pooh! I know how *I’m* goin’ to earn *mine*, when I grow up.”

“How’s that, Joe Beans?”

“Be a stage driver, just like him.”

Jacob Lane heard this remark. He was secretly flattered by it. He called himself a “cranky old bach,” who was “jest fool-silly over children.” He counted as the pleasantest episode of his long route this passing by the old schoolhouse, and he managed, commonly by rapid driving over some stretches of road and by cutting short his stops at insignificant hamlets, to make a bit of time for a pause and chat here.

He had felt, but pretended not to feel, the coaxing little twitch which small Rob Miller had been giving to his striped trousers, and he knew perfectly well what the child was after. He waited till the little chubby face attained just the satis-

factory degree of impatience, and then he tried to affect indifference as he turned and swung the petitioner up — up — up, away up to the driver's seat!

“Now, you baby! There you are. Here's the reins! Hold 'em tight! Step to them horses' heads, will you, some o' you boys? They ain't so fond o' standin' an' talkin' as I be. Give him the whip, whoever's got it. Now — he's fixed. Allow me to make you 'quainted with the new stage-driver, Dominie!”

As Jake Lane's wit reached this felicitous height he waved his hand majestically toward the master, who bowed absently, his attention divided between the outside of the parcel he held and the evident restlessness of the horses.

But the young folks received the nonsense with an admiring outburst of laughter, in which Jake joined heartily. Then his eye fell upon Daniel, standing aloof from his comrades, and recognized him as a stranger.

“Hello, lad! What you a-holdin' back for? Don't you like to see a good team of horses, when you get a chance? Come on an' take a look at 'em. I ain't used to havin' none o' old Red's boys an' girls turn the cold shoulder to me, you know. Come along an' get 'quainted.”

Thus adjured, Daniel sheepishly advanced, gaining courage as he observed that nobody paid especial attention to him, — save that Helen shot him a bright, friendly smile, and Luther Beans, having “seen which way the cat jumped,” moved aside and made room for the stranger close to the heads of the leaders of the “team.”

In other words, Philip Sampson had “taken up” the mountaineer, and Philip’s followers would now do the same.

“Nice team, ain’t it?” remarked Luther.

Daniel laid his hand on the curved neck of the “nigh” creature, and smoothed its velvety surface. “Ya-as. But they ’re a-fidgetin’ powerful. How long does he gen’ally stop here? Does he al’ays?”

“Course not. Depends on how fur ahead o’ time he is. It’s most the end the route. They ’re gettin’ hungry an’ know they’re ’bout home. That’s what ails ’em. I’m goin’ to buy me a team just like ’em bime-by.”

“Be you?” asked Daniel, greatly impressed. Luther might be the possessor of unlimited wealth, for all he then knew to the contrary. “But — somebody ought to be hangin’ on to ’em tighter ’n they is. If they should start off, that little feller up there could n’t hold ’em no more ’n a fly.”



“Oh! they won't start. Not till Jake tells 'em. He's got 'em trained. They ain't never run away but twice. Say —”

“Swidgeycorum!”

Somebody suddenly hurled from some unknown point a ball of burdock burs. Their stickily prickly points fastened themselves in Daniel's shock of hair, and as he angrily turned to discover the offender, a second missile, less deftly aimed, passed by its object and landed upon the sensitive temple of the most restless leader.

“Hi! there! Whoo-a! WHO-O-A-A!”

There was a sudden rear and plunge, a babel of screams and commands, which only served to further incite the frightened high-bred horse, who leaped forward down the road, dragging his mates, the gay coach, and its innocent little “driver” behind him.

“Little Rob! Oh! he'll be killed! Stop them — somebody!” wailed Helen.

The climbing, clambering children had mostly jumped or fallen off, at the first bound of the team. Two still crouched in the boot, comparatively safe; but the six-year-old in front swayed dizzily on the high driver's seat, and his peril was imminent.

“They'll go straight home!” roared Jake Lane,

hoarsely, as he followed his steeds at a breakneck speed. But fleet as he was, another flying figure outstripped him, — a tall, lank youth in blue jeans, whose bare feet scarcely touched the smooth road as he frantically pursued the runaways.

“That hind off one’s lame. I hope—” thought Jacob, panting on.

His hope was realized. The “hind off one” was the most powerful member of the gray quartet. “Thirteen hunderd’s purty hefty fer a roadster,” Jake had reluctantly admitted, as the nearest to a fault one of his “perfect” animals could possess; and he had secretly looked about among the best stables he could reach for “another long-tailed, full-maned, fine-p’inted, iron-gray critter.”

To his failure in this direction, and to the fact that the big horse had accidentally lamed itself a few days before, it was due that after a while Daniel’s flying footsteps began to gain somewhat upon those of his objects.

Little by little the distance between them lessened; the grays came to a slower pace — he to a faster, it seemed; and when the leader, still tormented by the sticking burs, veered suddenly toward the open bars of a river pasture, he made a diagonal cut across to where the team should

emerge into the field and hurled his whole force against the nearest bit-ring.

The ring held. So did the mountain lad's iron grip. But the bur-stung horse would not yet yield, and he plunged persistently forward toward the river bank.

They were almost upon it. Daniel raised his eyes and looking backward saw the white, terrified face of the little child, where it had fallen in the boot below the driver's seat.

An instant more they would all be over the bank and into the stream, and Daniel remembered thankfully, what he had at the time deprecated — that the two youngsters in the rear boot had long before leaped out from it into the dust of the road. They might be hurt, but they would not be drowned.

“Neither shall little Rob!”

There was one chance, the chance of a few seconds, to save the threatened life. It was a hazardous alternative, but its danger did not even suggest itself to Daniel, who saw the opportunity — and seized it.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A BOND OF SYMPATHY.

“**H**ERE, Daniel, drink this.”

The lad opened his eyes in a daze, yet with a confused memory of what had happened, to see the kindly face of Dominie Davidson bending above him, and to realize that somebody was trying to force a draught of water down his throat.

But he swallowed the water obediently, and his consciousness rapidly cleared. He was half-sitting, propped against a boulder on the river bank, and he turned his head anxiously about, looking for the child he had tried to rescue.

“Did the little feller get hurt?”

“No. He’s all safe. He’s over yonder, among the girls. But what about yourself — brave boy? I’m afraid you’re injured, yet I hope not badly.”

“I? Hey? I guess they ain’t nothin’ the matter with me.”

There were the sounds of excited voices all about, and he made an effort to stand, to gratify

his curiosity; but to his own intense surprise he found this a difficult feat and remarked:—

“Swidgey-corum! How I wobble!”

“That weakness will pass directly. Unless you are seriously, — unless, I mean, you have broken some bones. May have broken some bones,” repeated the master, in his absent-minded way.

Daniel accordingly shook himself, with an awkward yet straightforward determination to discover the extent of his own injuries. He experimented first with one long leg, then with the other, and concluded this physical self-examination by stretching his arms above his head, then dropping them suddenly to his sides.

“Hmm. Ain’t nothin’ the matter with me. I’m as sound ’s a nut. How ’s them horses? Killed, I ’low!”

“No! The wonderful thing about the whole affair is that when all concerned in it, even the dumb beasts, might so easily have met their death, not one did. A remarkable Providence, truly. Let us be thankful for it.”

Daniel opened his lips to reply, hesitated, and contented himself with an expressive grunt.

“Eh? What were you going to say, lad? *Are* — you hurt?”

“No. No, sir, I mean. I was jest a-thinkin’ — that ’s all.”

“Of what?”

The Dominie was distinctly interested in this odd specimen of the genus Boy.

“Oh! o’ layin’ that fool piece o’ work to Providence. Ma, she al’ays does it, too. ’Pears to me there wa’n’t no call for the thing ter happen, no way. If that there stage driver ’d had sense enough to ’tend to his own horses, as they was jest a-itchin’ to cut an’ run, there would n’t ’a’ ben no accident an’ no need fer Providence to step in an’ save us.”

“Why — why, Daniel!” exclaimed the shocked Dominie. “I’m afraid you’re not orthodox!”

“Ain’t nothin’. Only, I ’low when I *be* — somethin’, I’ll try an’ treat the Lord jest as square as I would ary human critter.”

With which rude, common-sense philosophy, he walked as steadily as he could toward that point on the river bank where Jake Lane stood among his horses, stroking and soothing them and carefully examining their bruises.

The stage man turned a beaming face toward Daniel.

“You bet, neighbor, I’m a thankful man to

see you able to peg along on your own pins. How you feel? Hurt much?"

"No. Though everybody 'pears ter think I'd ought ter be. How happen they didn't break their legs?"

"That's the meracle of it! If it had been done anywhere else this side Polinquet 'cept right square here, at the old ford, you'd all been in kingdom come afore this. But I always did say them horses know as much as folks!"

"More 'n some!" remarked Daniel, dryly.

"What you mean?" demanded Jacob, pausing in his task to regard the other curiously.

"Oh! nothin'. But I don't see why they didn't!"

"Well, you know, the bank's slopin', an' consid'able smooth, river bed's smooth too; that's why it was chose fer a ford. Reckon them grays jest thought they'd cross over t'other side an' take a nibble at that fat pasture-medder, you see. If it had n't 'a' ben fer them stumps, 'longside the bank, wouldn't ben a mite o' harm done. As 't is!"

Even the driver's philosophy was not proof against the depression which now assailed him, as he regarded with critical eyes the wreck of the utterly demolished coach, about which all the children had clustered in fascinated curiosity,

— save the few older boys, who found a certain pride in “helping hold” one or other of the apparently repentant “team.”

Like their master, who had plunged into the stream and caught them midway, suddenly brought to a standstill by the fall of the lame one, they were dripping with water and they stood with drooping heads, as if apologizing for the bad example they had set the children who petted them.

“Yes. I ’low that stage is about stove up. Can’t never drive it no more, can ye?”

“Don’t so ’pear. Anyhow — There’s the Dominie callin’ you all to go back to school. Reckon old Red don’t often get up sech an excitement, jest to amuse the youngsters, on the first day o’ term!”

The master was, in truth, calling and gesticulating, yet producing little effect upon the actions of the thoroughly animated children, who were talking loudly of what each “would have done” had he or she been a partaker in the late “affair.”

But Daniel, who seemed the calmest pupil there, at last heard the summons and repeated it at closer range, and in such bawling tones that, perforce, it were understood and heeded. He turned to obey it himself, then reflected: —



“It don’t seem like more’n half finishin’ the job to clear out an’ leave this feller alone. Say, Mister!”

“Well? what is it?”

“Need n’t be huffy. I was jest goin’ t’ ask how you goin’ to get them horses o’ yourn home ag’in, — or to wherever they ’re bound.”

“I’ll drive ’em easy enough; but if you don’t mind, ye may take that there horn an’ the whip, if you can meet up with ’em on the road back to the schoolhouse, an’ take care of ’em till I call for ’em. Reckon I’ll have to drive the old rock-away next trip down, an’ sha’n’t want nuther whip ner horn for no sech a turnout as that. My soul! how that there Sim Beddecker ’ll crow over me! Hey?”

“S’pose like ’s not he will;” assented Daniel, and turned schoolward.

But he had not advanced far beyond the barway, which led from the meadow into the road, when he saw the little lad he had rescued walking slowly along beside Helen Adair. The other scholars had all gone forward in a game of tag to the playground, — their attention already diverted from the late accident by this their first fun together after the long vacation.

“Hello, little shaver! Got a purty good scare,

did n't ye?" said Daniel, as the pair stopped directly in his path and he felt that some speech was demanded of him. But he ignored Helen, keeping his eyes steadily forward, hoping thus to ward off the remark he feared she would be impelled to address him.

However, his rudeness did him no good. The girl was determined to be friendly, and she made him stop and listen as she exclaimed: —

“You need n't pretend you don't see me! I suppose it won't seem anything to you, after stopping a runaway team and saving a child's life, but I want to thank you for the way you acted in the spelling match. It was real good of you, and I saw it right away.”

“Spellin' match! Oh! that's nothing. I don't know —”

“Now, don't go and spoil it all by telling a wrong story. You were going to say you 'did n't know what I meant,' but you do. *I* know, well enough, that after spelling all those hard words — which nobody else in school could spell — you need n't have missed those little silly ones as you did unless you'd chosen to do it. You did choose. It was real manly of you, too. You hated to beat a girl quite so bad, I guess, and it shows you're a gentleman. My father says you

can always tell a gentleman by the way he treats women. I'm not a woman yet, of course, but I s'pose I feel as they do, in a kind of degree. Any how, I'm much obliged to you."

It was a long speech, about the longest Helen had ever made; but she wanted to show the awkward lad that he had fallen among appreciative friends, on whom no generous deed would be lost.

Daniel blushed, "Sho!"-ed, pretended to scan the distant landscape, as if he had suddenly discovered an object of absorbing interest, and finally ejaculated, —

"Swidgey-corum!"

At which Helen laughed, and the woodlander felt so much relieved that he volunteered the question, —

"Say, Bobby! Shall I pack ye?"

"Ain't no 'Bobby.' I's Rob-ert Win-ches-ter Mil-ler."

The little one's tone was petulant, his chubby face still pale and grave. The other participants in the past danger might speedily forget it, but Robert would not soon, if ever.

"Pack? What in the world's that?" asked Helen.

"Why — *pack!* I don't — I mean — to carry him on my back."

Inwardly poor Daniel chafed angrily against this enforced walk beside a girl, and such a girl! — whose dress and speech and ease of manner, compared to those of his forest acquaintances, were a revelation to him.

She was so small, so dainty, and so pretty, that she made his own lumbering uncouthness almost unbearable, even to himself. Despite her declaration that he was “a gentleman,” he would have bolted then and there, had she been any other of the girls of this same school; but she had unconsciously set him a “pattern” to which he felt himself forced to aspire.

Again he groaned and muttered his one expletive, —

“Swid-gey-co-rum!”

“Oh, dear! I believe you *are* hurt, after all. If you don't tell, it may be ever so much worse for you. Papa says — you know he's the Doctor — that lots of people suffer more than they need if they would n't neglect themselves so. It makes him so provoked to see folks let a ‘little biliousness’ or something go, till it gets to be a real fever. Then it costs them lots of money to get well, and him a lot of worry. If you're hurt you'd better go right and see Papa, and I'll excuse you to Dominie Davidson.”

Daniel groaned again; but this time he intended the outburst to be facetious, and Helen so accepted it.

“Say, do you know, I think it’s just wonderful that you could learn those words alone, out of the Dictionary! Master told me you did. You can’t spell a whole Dictionary full, can you?”

“No. Sho! ’Tain’t nothin’. I jest didn’t have nothin’ else ter do. So I’d set on the floor, afore the fireplace, an’ pick out the longest ones I seen. Master’s right. ’Tis a derved sight easier to spell them long ones ’n ’tis t’others.”

“Do you know other things just as well? Cause if you do I guess Phil won’t be leader any more.”

“No. Don’t know nothin’. Honest Injin. Nothin’ only to read a little an’ the spellin’. But that’s ’nough to make me jest plum crazy to l’arn more. Swidgeycorum! If I don’t wrastle the insides out o’ some o’ them new books Master’s jest got, my name ain’t Dan Starbuck!”

The ambitious light that leaped into the woodlander’s eyes redeemed his plain face from its denseness, and woke an answering ambition in the girl’s own breast.

“I, too, am bound to have an education! Maybe, if I do my best here, maybe —”

She paused so long that Daniel ventured: “Hey?”

“Maybe Papa *will* let me go away to some big, big place, like a boy’s college or something. Only — you see, my dear mother is an invalid. Aunt Delight is pretty old, and says she can’t keep house always; and Papa calls his notions ‘old fashioned.’ He’d rather I’d learn to be just a good house-keeper and nurse than have the finest education in the world. I would n’t. But — I’ll try to do right, anyway. What is it, Robbie? ‘So tired?’ I guess you’d better let good Daniel carry you, after all.”

So the child was swung up on the lad’s back, very much as if he had been a sack of meal, and they were then able to go forward much faster.

After a moment of silence, Helen asked: —

“Is your name Starbuck? Because I thought the man said ‘Sharp.’”

“Hmm. That’s his’n. Bet ’t ain’t mine!”

“Why, is n’t he your father?”

“Nope. Nothin’ but step.”

“Then you’re just like darling Phil! only, his ‘step’ is a mother. That’s — Why, what?”

He would have been ashamed to tell her, to

admit to anybody, in fact, just how profound an impression that brilliant, fascinating Philip had already made upon his mind, — Philip, who had smiled upon him a few times and made him his ally forever. To Philip's height he had never hoped to attain, and yet — right here in this step-relationship — they met on a common ground!

“Golly! That's the first time in my life I ever was glad about — Sharp!”

But the words were so low that they were evidently spoken only to himself; and Helen walked on into the schoolhouse thinking that, after all, Daniel was “as queer as he looked.”

## CHAPTER V.

AT THE CLOSE OF THE DAY.

“**D**ANIEL, after school is dismissed I will give you a brief private examination in your studies, — a fuller one than I ’m able to do in the classes.”

Dominie Davidson made this remark toward the close of that afternoon’s session, and the lad had received it with a blush and a repellent shrug of his stooped shoulders.

The master hastened to reassure him : —

“It’s nothing formidable, but necessary for every pupil who enters the school. Just look over those question pages in the back of this book. See how much of the matter is familiar to you.”

Daniel might have interested himself in them, as he did in everything which suggested learning, had it not been for a whisper which he overheard passing from Jimmy Bolton to his neighbor, and that confirmed his conviction of his own pitiable ignorance.



“I don’t know no more ’n that there little Bob ’bout most the things! What’s a little readin’ an’ spellin’ ’longside o’ that Hist’ry an’ G’og’aphy? I — I a’most wish ’t I had n’t come. I wish ’t I’d gone to some other place—only, I had n’t no choice. ’T was here or nowheres.” Then he supplemented his bitter thought by the grim determination, “But — Swidgeycorum! I come here for l’arnin’ an’ I WILL l’arn, come what has to!”

Atop of this reflection fell the scholar’s whisper: —

“Pooh! That lanky new speller ain’t no great shucks, no how! ’D you hear that, awhile back? Master asked him where the Deestrick o’ Columbia was an’ he did n’t know. Did n’t know! The Deestrick o’ Columb! Say, lend me your knife?”

“No. Bet you don’t know, yourself!”

“I do so, Joe Beans!”

“Well, where is it?”

“Humph! you ain’t the teacher!”

“There! I *knew* you did n’t know!” — triumphantly.

“Boys! James, Joseph! What’s all that whispering about?”

“Oh! nothin’.”

“Joseph, answer me.”

“Jim says he *does* know where the ‘Deestrick’

o' Columbia is," — with sarcastic emphasis upon the mispronounced word.

"Very well. He shall have an opportunity to air his knowledge. James Bolton, bound the District of Columbia."

Of course, Jimmy flunked, completely, ignominiously, and became the subject of an outburst of ridicule which the master found it difficult to subdue, and in which the victim heartily joined. For he was used to being laughed at, and did n't mind that, so long as it was fun of some sort.

This episode comforted the mountaineer, but his pleasure was again dashed when, at the signal for dismissal, the phlegmatic James caught up his hat and called on Philip Sampson for —

"A race to the canal! There's a boat — Cap'n Wetherby's boat — comin' down. Hurry up! Maybe he'll give us a sail!"

A new and curious feeling of envy stirred in Daniel's breast as he watched them go. All day his attention had been fascinated by this Philip, who was so different in dress and bearing from all the other lads in the school, yet who was so unmistakably hail-fellow-well-met with them all.

"I don't see what he likes in that there humbly feller!" he thought, bitterly, critically observing the careless James.

The latter was not a prepossessing person, maybe; but in manner and attire he was a fair sample of the Pleasant Valley lads. He was tall, somewhat shock-headed, and sun-burned. He wore a gingham shirt and trousers of a neutral hue, — these last well-patched and held up in place by one “gallus” worn diagonally across the body. His feet were bare, for no valley schoolboy, of Jimmy’s social plane, ever donned shoes and stockings till “snow flew.”

Altogether, Jimmy’s portrait was not greatly unlike Daniel’s own; save that on the woodlander’s face one could trace suggestions of something better to come, in the dissatisfied expressions which flitted over it whenever his own ignorance was brought home to him. As for Jimmy, he was wholly and completely satisfied with James Bolton; therefore the good Dominie regarded him as a “hopeless case.”

Daniel did not know, however, just how disagreeable he really felt and looked until Dominie Davidson’s voice at his elbow aroused him.

“Why, my lad! What is it? Has anybody offended you?”

“No, sir. Did I look ’s if they had?”

“Surely. Never mind. Beginnings — of almost any sort — are apt to be unpleasant. I

foresee you will yet make us proud to call you a valley schoolboy. Now let's to our work. Hand me that Geography, will you?" and the master sat himself down in a scholar's empty place and proceeded to put to the trembling youth a host of questions which he could not answer correctly, with a very few that he could.

"Well, well. You came here to learn, so you mustn't be discouraged at the outset," remarked the gentle old man as Daniel hitched rebelliously in his narrow quarters and looked eagerly toward the near-by open window as at an avenue of escape. "Never mind running away, just yet. Let me tell you something, — something in confidence. I've never told it to any pupil before, not in all my long experience as a teacher. No. Because I always felt that it might lessen my influence. But I'm going to tell you. I'm not even going to ask you to keep it to yourself, for I know you will. But the fact is, Daniel, that I was a good many years older than you are before I could read even a single word. I was twenty years old, my lad, before I learned the first letter of the alphabet. And now —"

"Swidgey — co — RUM! And now — you know all — that!"



“Swidgey — co — RUM! And now — you know all — that!”



“‘All that’ is n’t much, measured by other men’s knowledge, though it may seem considerable to you to-day. Some other day it will not. Some other day, when you shall have advanced miles further on the road to wisdom than I have ever been able to go, I hope you will look back and remember what I tell you now: the more a person learns the less he thinks he knows. That’s the truth in a nutshell. It would be a most disheartening truth, too, if it were not that this life is only the beginning of things. A sort of infant class, we’ll call it, where we get ready for the great School of Eternity. Think of it, lad! Just think of it! A whole Eternity of limitless advancement!”

To Daniel, fresh from his sordid, narrow forest home, this speech was a revelation. Everybody in all that countryside had heard of Dominie Davidson. Some called him “queer as Dick’s hat-band, ’t went half-way round an’ tucked under,” and some called him a “saint.”

Daniel called him nothing; but he looked after him, as the old pedagogue rose and walked away toward his own desk, with a feeling of reverence and devotion which was to grow deeper and stronger as the days went by.

Just a common country-school teacher, grown

old in the service. Forty years he had gone in and out at that same little red schoolhouse and for forty years, to each succeeding generation, he had looked, outwardly, much as he appeared to the woodlander that day.

A big-framed, spare-fleshed man, in a faded linen duster, which reached nearly to his heels, and had capacious outside pockets, always bulging forward in obliging readiness to receive forbidden marbles, whistles, chewing-gum — mostly home-made and “spruce.” From the lower right hand one of these pockets there projected along the wearer’s back a “smart hickory switch.” This was so long that its slender tip caught in the black skull-cap or tangled the thin hair below it. Then it would drop out and be lost; and, oddly enough, the same switch was never again discovered! — though this mattered little, for a bundle of similar badges of office was always kept in stock above the schoolhouse door.

The Dominie was nearly bald, hence the cap; but, by way of compensation, he had a tuft of truly ferocious whiskers before each ear, while his faded blue eyes looked out from beneath such beetling brows as had struck terror to many a truant’s heart. Kindly or stern, these eyes looked over, under, rarely directly through, a



pair of great horn-bowed spectacles that bridged an aquiline nose.

The stand-up collar, the dickey, and black satin stock were of the fashion in vogue when Dominie Davidson was himself a new-comer to the valley school, and tradition said that the spectacles antedated these.

Be that as it may. The children who had then welcomed the new master to the new school were parents and grandparents now, when Daniel had also come to learn of him, and none had seen him change. That gentle, imperceptible decay which marked his passing years could not be called by any term so vigorous as "change."

After a moment of sitting silent, taking this mental photograph, Daniel left his own desk and went to the master's, where the latter was busy arranging his books and papers for the night. The lad had been profoundly moved by the unexpected confidence in him, and his soul had been kindled by this other enthusiastic soul to higher aspirations than he had ever known, though in a dim, half-understood way he had always "aspired."

"Thanky, Master. I—I ain't goin' ter ferget, never, the way you've treated me to-day. I—I don't know how to say it—but—'tain't

threwed away. You'll see. I'll show you. — I — I — Swidgeycorum! Why *can't* a feller say what he wants to! Nev' mind."

After a desperate attempt and utter failure, the lad gave over trying to express himself as he wished, and abruptly changed the subject.

"Say, Dominie, who is that there Phil Sampson 't 'pears so diff'rent from all the rest on us? Was he raised 'round here?"

"He's being 'raised' here, in more senses than one, I hope. But he isn't a real valley boy, though his forbears were. His father lives in New York."

"New York! New York! That's where that writin' feller lived 't give me the Dictionary an' taught me all I know 'bout readin'."

In common with many another country lad Daniel Starbuck dreamed of this unknown, distant city as of a Mecca whither he would make his pilgrimage some day. He became instantly absorbed in contemplating its imagined glories, and his silence well suited the master's own mood.

There were all those new books to be examined and Dominie Davidson found now his first opportunity to cut the strings of that precious package. Only, he did not cut them.

With infinite pains, schooling his patience, he laboriously untied the many knots, carefully folded the brown-paper wrappings, and had but just allowed himself to open the uppermost of the pile, when, like a sharp-edged stone through a window pane, a rasping human voice hurled itself into this peaceful stillness.

“Hello, old man! Ain’t you ’bout ready to go home? I ain’t goin’ to wait ’round here all day, I can tell you! I’m goin’ a-fishin’, I am!”

## CHAPTER VI.

AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE HUMANE  
SOCIETY.

DANIEL roused from his dream, and the Dominie from his study.

The boy stepped to the window and looked out, while the teacher hastily closed his beloved books and shut them within his desk. As he did so he sighed, and the sigh had so much of weariness and timidity about it that it impressed the watchful Daniel.

“Hello, you — woodchuck! The Dominie in there?”

The question came from a youth in a buck-board outside the building, which it had approached almost noiselessly by driving over the grass.

“Yes, I’m here. I’m nearly ready,” responded the master, promptly; then added by way of explanation: “It’s Renew and the megatherium. Renew doesn’t like to be kept waiting. If you’ll step out now, I’ll —”

“Who you callin’ ‘woodchuck’?” demanded the woodlander, angrily, ignoring the old man’s explanation.

“You! you — whatever you think your name is! Tell him to hurry up!”

Daniel coolly surveyed the new-comer, with a sarcastically critical eye. When he had satisfied himself he demanded, contemptuously, —

“And who do you call yourself, you terr’ble smart feller?”

“Come out here, and I’ll tell you.”

Daniel’s long legs and forest training had not been given him for nothing. With the quickness of a squirrel he leaped through the window. The suddenness with which he accepted the challenge astounded the challenger, who jerked the reins to back the “megatherium” out of range.

The animal was old and gaunt of aspect, — hence its title, bestowed in one of the Dominie’s playful moods, — and from long suffering at the hands of its present driver it had acquired a self-protecting habit of balking.

That is, the aim was self-protection, but the habit generally resulted in greater misery to the poor beast.

Meg planted her feet firmly in the sod, stiffened the muscles of her neck, laid her great ears back-

ward, and cast a wicked gleam from her one eye upon her tormentor.

“ You won’t, eh? Well, we’ll see about that!”

Whack, crack, swish, swish, swish!

The whip-lash was laid about the bony old body with energy and despatch. Yet the megatherium moved not an inch. She might have served for a sculptor’s model, so rigid was her pose.

Daniel laughed scornfully. His sympathies were wholly with the horse.

The laugh angered the other lad still more, and he laid the whip-cuts on the faster, while his face grew red and his black eyes flashed furious glances upon the mocking stranger.

Now, Daniel had lived all his life among animals, the wild ones of the great woods and the meek-spirited ones upon his step-father’s small farm, and he loved them like friends. He endured this miserable scene as long as he could, and then he burst out:—

“ You quit whalin’ that poor beast, or I’ll tan your jacket!”

“ You? You can’t do it!”

“ Can’t I? Leave the mare alone!”

“ I sha’n’t. She’s got to back this wagon where I want it or I’ll break every bone in her body.”

“Look here, young feller, I don’t know who you be, an’ I ’m glad I don’t. But you hark back to me! If you tetch to lick that horse ag’in, I ’ll lick you. Hear?”

Daniel had now become so incensed that he was calm. Still anger is always the most dangerous; but Renew Hapgood did n’t know this. If he had he would n’t have been warned. He was Renew Hapgood; sufficient unto himself for any deed of prowess. He now laughed again tauntingly, sneeringly, abating not one jot the force of his cruel blows.

Daniel quietly turned and sprang back through the window into the schoolroom. He cast one hasty glance toward the master, and saw, fortunately, that the hungry old student, finding himself free from Renew’s importunities, had immediately opened another book and become engrossed in its pages.

Without arousing him, therefore, the woodlander crossed to the blackboard, above which it had been laid, and took down the stage-driver’s long whip. Then he walked straight back to the window, leaped through it once more, and unfurling the lash laid it about the dandified Renew with such earnestness that the latter jumped from the buckboard and ran screaming away.

Daniel calmly, persistently, pursued him. Each time the fugitive thought he had secured a safe retreat behind some friendly bush or tree, he was driven thence by the keen swish of the fine lash about his ears.

The megatherium woke up, astonished, and followed the battle with a watchful one-eyed glance; and when she discovered that those ominous swishings were not meant for her own well-calloused skin, it seemed to Daniel that she positively grinned.

“Will you beat that there old nag ag’in? Will you?”

“No! Oh! no. Let me go. I give up. I’m whipped enough. I say! Ho-ld on! Hold on!”

“Promise. ‘Honest Injin. Hope ter die,’ an’ all the rest of it. Then I’ll let ye go.”

“I — promise;” then added, under his breath, “till next time!”

The tone was not so faint but the mountaineer heard it. He emphasized this fact by another cut of the handsome whip, though this time sent out in beautiful curves upon the innocent air. Nevertheless, the curves were suggestive, and Renew’s ankles still tingled.

“None o’ yer holdin’ back. Say it out plumb straight an’ loud. After me: ‘I promise —’”



“‘I — promise — ’”

“‘’T I won’t never whip the Dominie’s mare ag’in, ’ithout his consent.’”

The sting of the whip-cuts was growing fainter, and all the malicious deviltry of Renew’s nature rose to the fore. With inimitable mimicry of Daniel’s tone and accent he repeated: —

“‘’T *you* won’t never whip the Dominie’s mare ag’in, ’ithout his consent!’”

Again there was an ominous pause. Daniel’s subsiding anger returned in double force. He squared his jaw, but tossed the insufficient whip aside. Then he made a sudden lunge among the branches of the great fir-tree and drew his enemy thence.

His grip was like steel. Had he not been trained to handle mighty tree-trunks? And what was a boy like this?

Renew could not have escaped if he had tried, and he did n’t try. Daniel stood him up in a position that seemed satisfactory, and the cowed bully remained in it as if he had been a wooden image.

Then the woodlander retreated a pace or two, rolled up his sleeves, spat on his palms, and remarked: —

“Now get ready. Fisticuffs ’ll suit ye better,

maybe. Ye 'd oughter take yer jacket off. It's nice, an' I hate ter spile it."

Renew flushed, squared himself valiantly, and rallying the remnant of his courage, hissed an ignominious epithet toward his adversary.

That straw broke the camel's back, though it had been pretty well cracked before.

"One — two — *three!* There you — *be!*"

There he was indeed! Poor Renew!—flat on his back among the prickly fur needles, whither his opponent had tossed him, as if he had been a useless bit of rubbish, best hidden from sight.

When he thought that Daniel had gone away, Renew crawled out of the fir-tree. He was whipped, indeed, but he was not conquered. He would be exceedingly careful in future to keep beyond range of the mountaineer's fist, but he would not forget their first meeting. With a vindictive scowl on his round, dark face, he ruefully surveyed the jacket which was rent asunder, as Daniel had prophesied it would be.

Then he limped forward toward the school-house, and beheld the victor of the fray still lingering on the field. On the latter's freckled face there was a look of seraphic sweetness. He was now at peace with all the world, and held out

his great hand toward the vanquished stranger, with the words:—

“Hope I did n’t hurt ye much. Sorry I tore yer roundabout. I’ll take it home an’ get Ma ter fix it, if ye say so. Hey?”

Renew gave one fierce glance into the smiling blue eyes, then set out on a run toward help and condolence.

“Uncle! Oh, Uncle Henry — I’m killed! Oh, *Uncle!*”

“Uncle! Him? The Dominie? To that — whelp!”

For a moment Daniel remained as if rooted to the spot, while his amazement grew apace. Then the entire episode, with all its probable and possible unpleasant consequences, pictured itself in his mind, and with a speed as much exceeding Renew’s as his legs and his feelings were stronger, he turned and ran in the opposite direction.

When he had reached the corner of the roads, however, he stopped short.

“What’s the matter with me, anyhow? That feller needed lickin,’ an’ I licked him. Dominie’s a man, I ’low. I’ll go back an’ tell the hull yarn. Anyway ye fix it, I’ll never let nobody — nobody, if he was the President — mistreat an

animal 'ithout givin' him a taste o' the same puddin'. So, here's for the master!"

Yet he was hardly prepared for the sincere sorrow which overspread that master's face when he appeared in the schoolroom again.

"Why, Daniel! I cannot tell you how disappointed I am!"

"Likely 'nough. I've come ter say I did n't know he was any o' your kin. I would n't a s'pected it, an' I did n't mean no disrespeck ter *you*. But he needed all I gin him, an' more. Now you can do with me jest what you think's right. Good-night."

## CHAPTER VII.

### AFTER THE BATTLE.

“HELLO, Daniel!”

The call, the crash of a pony's foot-falls on the underbrush, and the sudden appearance of horse and rider before the astonished woodlander were simultaneous.

“Oh! Hello!”

“Did n't expect to see me, did you?”

“No.”

“Is this the way to your house?”

“Yes.”

Daniel felt that here, in the forest, he was the host, and that something more than monosyllables was due from him to this visitor, who was none other than Philip upon his sorrel pony; but somehow the lad was tongue-tied, and could not easily rouse himself from the sombre mood in which he had been slowly plodding homewards, after his experience with Renew Hapgood.

“Well, what's up? You look as if you wish I had n't come. I was going to tell you I'd ride

up here after school, but I went off with the boys to the canal and forgot it. I've a message for your father from Uncle Adair. I can give it to you, or go on with you and tell him. Which do you like?"

"I don't care. No, I don't mean that. Maybe you'd better tell him yourself. He's like to be in a mad with me, 'count 'o my bein' so late home from school. The first day, too. Only, say, he ain't my father, an' I'd ruther you would n't call him so."

"All right. Call him anything, — Old Squizzlejigs, if you like. Anything'll do for a name. Hold on! Those are wild grapes up there!"

"They ain't ripe yet. We ain't had a mite o' frost."

"Should hope we had n't. Summer is n't really over, you know. All the same, I'm going to get some. Here, hold Dapple, will you?"

Phil took it for granted always that everybody else was as obliging as himself, and as free from care. He ignored the fact that Daniel had already mentioned being late, and added this further hindrance with a cheerful composure that amused the more thoughtful Daniel.

"Well — I s'pose I can hold it. I reckon you think I might as well hang fer a sheep as a lamb.

I'm in fer the lickin' anyway, an' so — go ahead !  
Only — ”

Half way up the vine-covered tree, Philip paused and looked down.

“ Only what ? ”

“ Them grapes ain't fit to eat. They'll give ye the stomach-ache.”

“ Let it ache ! I live with the doctor.”

“ Humph ! ”

However, a few samples of the acrid fruit were sufficient to send the climber down again, with his face in a comical twist, and exclaiming : —

“ Right you are. They're as sour as get out. Make me feel just the way old Deacon Tewksbury looks. See ? ”

Daniel did not know Deacon Tewksbury, but his companion's grimace was so absurdly funny that he laughed outright, and with the laughter forgot all his previous discontent.

“ Ain't you odd ! Say, though, if you're hungry I know where they's some late blackberries. 'D you ever eat any of 'em 'at had ripened in the woods this time o' year ? ”

“ Never. And I'm hungry, of course. I don't remember when I was n't, except right after a Thanksgiving dinner.”

Daniel, the truthful, strictly matter-of-fact

boy, looked his amazement. He had seen the dinner which the other had eaten at "nooning," and, compared to his own slice of cold suppawn and one harvest apple, it had been a luxurious feast.

"You look as if you did n't believe me. You'll find it's a fact. Ask the cook if it is n't."

"Sho!"

"Fetch on your berries. Where are they?"

"Over yender. Down 'longside a brook runs through them big trees."

"Come on, then! You lead Dap."

Daniel obeyed, guiding the animal so gently through the tangle of shrubs and vines which covered the ground over which they had to pass that Philip was surprised and remarked: —

"Why, you treat that pony as if he was — folks!"

"He looks 's if he might be. He's terr'ble cunnin'."

"He ain't so cunning sometimes. If he does n't get his exercise every day he acts like Sancho!"

"Is he yourn?"

"Yes. But he is n't as nice as Helen's. Hers is a beauty, I tell you. Oh! Say!"



Philip paused, struck by a sudden thought which had occurred to him, but not knowing exactly how to put it into words, — rather, waiting to find out something further about the lad beside him before he mentioned the matter.

“Well, what?”

“Nothing. Not just yet.”

They picked their way in silence for a little distance further; then they came upon a glen of wonderful loveliness, where the ferns were knee-deep and where the crisp-leaved blackberry-vines grew richly loaded with the luscious fruit which Daniel had promised.

“My goodness! I never saw such berries! Why, — they’re as sweet as honey!” cried the “always hungry” Philip; and thereafter, for some moments he became so absorbed in gathering and eating them that he remembered nothing else. When he had quite satisfied himself, he turned about and saw his guide sitting quietly upon a big rock near by, holding Dapple’s bridle rein and watching the pretty creature browse among the juicy herbage all about the spot.

“There! That’s enough for a minute. But — say! Haven’t you had any yourself?”

“No. I don’t want ’em.”

“Aren’t you hungry?”

“ No.”

“ What ’s the matter, then ? ”

“ I was just a-thinkin’.”

“ About what ? ”

“ How ’t you might say I ’d started school a horseback ! Only, not jest that way, nuther. But I ’ve been mixed-upedy with horses all day, ’an I ’low one o’ my jobs ’ll cost me dear.”

“ I don’t understand. Explain yourself. Oh ! I see. The runaway. But I don’t know how that ’s going to cost you anything. It’s poor Jake Lane that ’s the loser there, is n’t it ? ”

“ Say, who ’s Renew Hapgood ? ”

“ The meanest little skunk in Pleasant Valley.”

Daniel caught his breath.

“ Do ye mean it ? ”

“ Don’t I ? Ask any fellow in school, or any girl, either. They ’ll all tell the same story. He ’s a regular little prig. He thinks he dresses awfully swell, and he does n’t know what good clothes are. His mother ’s a fool — begging her pardon ! — but she is, all the same. He ’s her only ‘ baby boy ’ and she ’s spoiled him from the word go. If he lived with anybody else on earth, except Dominie Davidson, he ’d be horse-whipped about once a day, and serve him right, too.”

It was evident that Philip did not like the redoubtable Renew any better than Daniel did, and the latter's spirits rose exultantly. His whole face altered, and he slapped his knee with such vehemence that Dapple, startled, looked a gentle remonstrance from her big brown eyes.

"Say, tell me the hull business 'bout him. Who is he? An' if, as you 'low, he needed horsewhippin', why — he got what he needed, fer once!"

"How so? Who'd dare give it him?"

"Who would n't? Sech a coward. *I* gin it to him, then."

"You? *You!* When? Where? How? Tell me yourself 'the hull business.' I don't understand."

Daniel was too interested in the subject to resent the mimicry of his provincialism, though he noticed it. Besides, it was Philip who mimicked, which made it all right.

In a few terse sentences he described the affair, and admitted that it was this which had sent him home in such a dejected mood.

"'Cause, you see, Dominie he treated me fust-rate. He did n't pay no 'tention to all that mean talk o' Sharp's 'bout my bein' turned out o' other schools — an' 't was a lie, anyhow. An' when that boy yelled out 'Uncle!' it jest knocked me

higher 'n a kite. What d' you s'pose the master 'll do 'bout it? Turn me out o' school, maybe?"

"Not a bit of it. Not as soon as he hears the *true* story. But Renew 'll tell him a whopper first. He could n't help it. He's what Uncle Adair calls a 'constitutional liar.'"

"Ain't one kind o' liar same's another?"

"Doctor says not. All the Hapgoods have been the same way — but that's no matter. You see old Dominie has no wife, — he never had one; and when his housekeeper who'd lived with him so long went off and got married, he sent for his niece, Mrs. Hapgood, and her boy, Renew, to come and keep house for him. Aunt Delight says the Dominie has n't known a peaceful day since, but I don't know about that. All I do know is about the boy himself. He's a sneak. He comes to school when he wants to, and never any other time. He comes just often enough to keep us all in hot water. He's a tattler, and while he 'll do the meanest things a fellow could hatch up he 'll watch out for anybody else's fun and tell. He likes to see another boy get a licking, and once in a while the Dominie does whale us awful."

"Can't he see through the critter?"

"He does n't seem to. Or else he puts up with everything for the sake of peace. Mrs. Hapgood

has no money, so Dominie gives her all his salary. Uncle says she governs him a deal better than she does her own son, but almost everybody in the neighborhood pities the poor old fellow. It's odd, is n't it? Dominie rules us, and that young whipper-snapper rules him."

"'T may be odd, but it's goin' to be mighty onpleasant fer me."

"Oh! it won't after he understands. Likely Renew said it was you picked a quarrel with him, and did n't tell why. If he did tell the real reason it'll be a feather in your cap, because there's nobody makes such a fuss about animals as that old man does. Why, last year he nearly killed Lute Beans, just for catching frogs down in the swamp and cutting their legs off. There was a man boarding at the Beans' house and he liked them. They'd never heard of eating such things before, but, of course, they were glad to give him what he wanted. Dominie said Lute had ought to have killed the frogs outright, and not have let them go again. But the man told Lute the legs would grow on, the second time, if he put them back. So he did; and when Dominie found it out, and that little Rob Miller had been helping in the job, he nearly whaled the skin off Lute's back."

“Humph! He’d oughter!”

“Is n’t it just as bad to hurt a boy as it is a frog? And he did hurt Luther.”

“No. A boy has sense. Or he’d oughter have.”

“Well, never mind. It’s getting on to supper time. If I’ve to go ’way home with you, let’s start. It’s a good bit further yet, is n’t it?”

“Swidgeycorum! Will you want any more supper to-night?”

“Why, certainly. Why not?”

“I thought you’d eaten all you could hold o’ them berries. But this is the way. Right acrost here. I ’low the old man ’ll be in a fine tantrum ’bout now, though. Must be nigh on ter half-past five.”

Daniel was still carefully guiding Dapple through the wood, and Philip walking at ease beside him. The latter now pulled out a pretty silver watch and examined its face. The result not being satisfactory, he shook it violently and finally tossed it up among the branches, catching it as if it were a ball when it descended again.

“Golly! I sh’d think you’d spile it!”

“Likely I have. Anyway it does n’t keep decent time. I want a gold one, but Uncle says

I can't have it till I learn to take better care of this. I don't mind. What does a fellow need of a watch in the country? My! Isn't it quiet up here! Do you suppose it will be dark before I can get home?"

"Be ye afraid?"

"Afraid? I was never afraid of anything in my life. Only I should n't like to pass the night in these woods. Besides — there'd be the mischief to pay. There always is when a fellow has the most fun. Hello! What's this?"

Both lads stopped short on the path, just where it emerged into the cleared land that surrounded the Sharp homestead. Confronting them, livid with anger, and with an ox-goad in his hand, stood Abel Sharp.

"So ho! So ho! This is the way ye keep yer promise, is it? You was a-goin' ter be home 'hours afore chore time,' was ye? If only I'd let ye go an' get a little l'arnin' to the Valley school. Wall, then, you young scalliwag, all I can say is — *ye've finished yer eddication!* 'T ain't every-body's so smart as you be; can get all the teachin' they want in jest one day."

Daniel's face paled till Philip was frightened. With an instinctive feeling of comradeship he placed himself close beside the terrorized lad and

laid his hand affectionately upon the young stepson's shoulder.

"Don't mind him, Dan. He'll change his tune when he hears my story." Then to the irate farmer: "You're mistaken, my friend, in the way you speak to this boy. He's a hero. Maybe you didn't know that."

"A — what?"

"A — HERO. Understand?"

"'T you're a sassy feller — yes! Who be ye?"

"I'm Philip Sampson, Doctor Adair's nephew. I've come to ask you if you can supply him with a few loads of that good hickory wood you sent him last winter. He wants it for Aunt Serapha's open fire, and it must be especially well cured."

"Wa-all, I don't — know. Mebbe. I — wall, yes. I reckon I can. But you, Dan'l, jest make tracks fer the barn yard. If you don't get them cows milked within ten minutes I'll cowhide ye, besides makin' ye go 'ithout yer supper. *That's* settled, anyhow. An' so 's the schoolin'. Wall, young feller, if that's all yer arrant ye can jump on yer nag an' travel home ag'in. Tell yer uncle I'll send him the wood ter-morrer. Dan'l will fetch it. He's finished his schoolin', an' so he'll hev plenty of time. Step along, Dan'l!"

The last advice was emphasized by a light



stroke of the goad on the victim's shoulder, — by a possibility of intention, the very shoulder on which Philip's hand rested. The mutual sting which the two lads suffered was the final trifle which cemented their friendship.

An angry flush rose to Phil's cheek, and a defiant sparkle to his brown eyes. Stooping suddenly forward he whispered something in his companion's ear, which electrified that young person and made him actually oblivious to the fact of Abel Sharp's presence.

“Swid-gey-co-rum! Do you mean it?”

“Honest Indian! Get up, Dap!”

With a spring the handsome lad mounted his horse, and disappeared; but Daniel had to be twice reminded of the neglected “chores,” by Abel's cruelly suggestive methods, before he recovered from the abstraction into which his new friend's whispered words had thrown him.

Even when he did look up, and realize what was demanded of him, he turned such a radiant face toward his guardian that that austere person was utterly dumfounded.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AT THE OLD SAMPSON HOMESTEAD.

‘MY darling, has your cousin Philip come in yet?’

Helen Adair paused in her loving task of “fixing Mamma’s room for the evening,” and turned a troubled face toward the couch whereon the invalid passed all of her days, and had passed them ever since Helen could remember.

“No, Mamma dear, not yet. But it is n’t late. Not so very late. He’ll be here soon.”

Mrs. Adair sighed. Philip, her brother’s son, was as dear to her as if he had been her own. She loved him almost more dearly than her own daughter; perhaps because the lad gave her endless — sometimes needless — anxiety, and Helen gave her none.

“How did school go to-day, my child? Was Phil very late?”

“Not so very, Mamma. He was some late, of course. He would n’t begin to get ready in time. But if you’re rested enough may I tell you now

about the runaway and all; how brave the new scholar was? He's such a hero, I think!"

"Wait a little, dearie. Your father and Aunt Delight will soon be coming in. Phil, too, and I don't care to hear the story but once."

The girl laughed, not at all offended. Between these two there was a perfect understanding, and Helen knew that her mother would not be able to listen to any tale, attentively, till the absent member of the household had returned.

It was a big, and by daylight, sunshiny room, — the biggest and pleasantest in the whole house, and furnished the most prettily. Of the fierce battles with pain which its four walls had witnessed, the prisoner within them — a prisoner to an incurable disease — gave little sign, save in the gathering lines upon her face.

This face was very like Helen's own, only for its added years and these involuntary furrows which suffering had traced. It smiled brightly still, as the girl's, and now turned toward the door and the Doctor entering, with a welcome so gay it was a rest in itself.

"Well, I'm tired!" exclaimed the physician, throwing himself wearily into an easy-chair. "Ridden over thirty miles since dinner, just to find — I was n't needed."

“How’s that? The patient get well?” asked Mrs. Adair, laughing.

“Oh! no. He could n’t get well, for the simple reason that there was nothing the matter. It was old Butterfield.”

“Oh! indeed!”

“Old Butterfield” was a hypochondriac, — the most exacting of the doctor’s patients, and the most profitless.

“Yes. I believe I’ll give him up. I told him to-day that I should, I would n’t be bothered so, — that he ought to see some other patients of mine sometimes; then he’d know what courage and real illness were.”

That it was herself of whom he was thinking, the invalid understood from the affectionate glance her husband gave her; but, as she often said, “The one person I can’t abide talking about is Serapha Adair.” So she changed the subject immediately, and gathered news of what had been going on upon the great farm which was their homestead.

Then Aunt Delight appeared at the doorway.

“Serapha, I’m not going to save that supper for that boy another minute! When I was a child if I did n’t know enough to come home to my meals, I was made to go without them. I’m

going to turn over a new leaf with Philip; or I'll march him back to his own people, mighty sudden."

"Now, Auntie! You'll do nothing of the kind! You know you could n't live without him!" exclaimed Helen, running to the tall old lady and clasping her arm affectionately.

"Humph. Could n't live without you, maybe. Why can't you teach him some of your own methodical ways, lassie?"

"Because he would n't be Philip then!"

There came sudden rush and spring; a pair of strong arms were thrown about Aunt Delight's neck from behind; her head with its stiffly starched cap was bent downward, and a smart smack resounded through the room.

"You saucy boy!"

But Phil dodged the blow that the indignant old lady aimed at his ears, and catching her about the waist, gaily waltzed her out of the doorway, into and down the hall, toward the dining-room and supper.

"Philip! Now, Phil! Unhand me, laddie, there's a dear! It's true, all the same, that the next time — the very next time — you are late you will go without your supper."

Philip stopped instantly and assumed a mock tragic air.

“Now, Auntie! That’s serious. It really is.”

“You’ll find it’s serious, my boy.”

“I surely should. What would my life be without my supper?”

“A barren waste, I grant you. Food and fun are all you think about.”

“Right you are, dear Aunt Delight. It’s food has made me late this time.”

“What do you mean?” Then to the maid, opening the kitchen door, “Yes, you may put it on the table this time, Molly. This time only.”

Molly dared not smile. Indulgent as the house-keeper was to this wilful lad, she was anything but indulgent to other folk, and exacted from her servants not only prompt obedience, but every mark of outward respect.

So the girl restrained her smiles till her back was turned, and presently re-entered the room where aunt and nephew were now seated beside the table, bearing a tray well loaded with good things.

Phil glanced over the various dishes as they were deposited before him, his satisfaction growing apace, then cast a quizzical glance into the austere face of his great-aunt.

“Auntie, I thought the way of the transgressor ought to be hard.”

“What now, irreverent?”

“Nothing. Only I’ve noticed, merely noticed, that every time I *am* late to supper I have a little better one than I should have had if I’d been on time. Naturally, as I intend to be a lawyer, I draw my deductions from these premises. When I feel the especial need of a fine supper — I’ll be late.”

“You’ll be no lawyer, young man. You’ll be a minister —”

“Or you’ll ‘know the reason why’?”

“Exactly. And about these extra dishes. They’re none of my fixing. That is, if I did fix them, it was n’t for you. It was for Serapha, who’s that silly about you she always wishes every little tid-bit left over of her own dainty food to be ‘set aside for Phil.’ You ought to appreciate your Aunt Serapha, Philip Sampson. She’s the best friend you have in this world.”

The merry lad’s face sobered, and his manner grew very quiet as he remarked: —

“I do appreciate her, Aunt Delight. I don’t say much about it, and I do give her endless worry. I know it. Every time I do anything wrong I think about it — afterward.”

“The time to think is — before, sir.”

“Yes. It would be better. But, unfortunately, my thinker does n’t work that way. Say, Auntie! Will you do something for me?”

“That depends. But what did you mean by saying that it was ‘food’ kept you late this time?”

“Wait till I show you!”

He darted from the table and returned at once with a dead partridge, and his cap full of blackberries.

“See! These are for Aunt Serapha!”

Game laws were little known and not at all heeded in this isolated region, and Aunt Delight was too good a housekeeper to be offended by this unexpected addition to her larder.

“Why, laddie! Did you get those yourself?”

“Of course. That’s why I was late. I snared that bird down in the long lot, and the berries I picked on my way home from the Sharps. Oh! I forgot! I want to speak to Uncle Adair!”

“Philip! come back here and say your manners!”

With a laugh, the lad returned to the table, took his seat, and gravely inquired, —

“Will you excuse me, Aunt Delight?”

“Certainly,” replied the old lady, graciously,



and, also rising, hastened away to take care of the game and fruit. "To-morrow that will taste nicely to Serapha," she remarked to Molly *en route* to the "buttery," and Molly nodded, well pleased.

Meanwhile Philip had entered the invalid's room, commonly known in that household as the "Refuge," and had bowed gracefully over the thin hand extended to greet him. It was noticeable, plainly, that however gay or even impertinent Philip might be to other members of the household, he never forgot the deference due his helpless aunt.

His voice was quiet and gentle immediately, as she saluted him and he explained : —

"I might have been home earlier, Aunt Serapha, but you need n't worry this time. I have n't been in bad company, I assure you. Have you told her about Daniel Starbuck yet, Helen?" he asked, turning toward his cousin, now seated on a stool at the foot of her mother's couch.

"No. She made me wait till everybody was in. Here comes Aunt Delight, too, so now I will. Or you, rather."

"You begin. I'll finish. You were at school when he got there. I was n't. It'll take two of us to give him all the credit he deserves."

“Starbuck? Starbuck?” said the Doctor, musingly. “I don’t recall that name.”

“Maybe you haven’t heard it. There’s a step relationship in this case, too!” answered Philip, with sudden bitterness.

Nobody spoke for a few seconds; then Helen slipped her hand into Philip’s curls, as his head rested against the edge of his aunt’s lounge, and suggested:—

“Dan’s story, Phil. *Shall* I begin?”

“Yes.”

“The man’s name is Sharp, Papa, — the same one, I think, to whom you sent Phil after school about the wood.”

“Oh, yes. Sharp. A hard customer, but still, I think, a just man. “I’ve attended them. A house full of little Sharps — and some flats — with an overworked mother to mind them. Seems to me I did hear he married a widow. Is it her son you are speaking about?”

“Yes. He’s the one too many in that house, as I am —”

“Now, Phil! If this is my story, do let me tell it! I’ve been bottling it up ever since school was over, and I just can’t keep it in any longer.”

“Fire ahead!”

She did, eloquently. Daniel’s marvellous at-

tainments as an orthographist were introduced, by her suddenly propounding to her father: —

“ Papa, please spell ‘ Parallelogrammatical ! ’ ”

“ Wh-e-ew ! What’s that to do with this Daniel Starbuck ? ”

“ *He* can spell it ! ”

“ Goodness ! I don’t know as I could. Anyway I’m not going to try. But tell your story. I’m interested.”

So were they all. In a moment both young tongues were tripping over each other in their eagerness to do full credit to the stranger lad who had so won both their hearts.

“ And now,” finished Philip, “ I want to ask you a favor. Indeed, I’ve almost promised it in your name. You said if you could find a decent boy to come and work for his board this winter, take care of the cattle, and so on, you’d hire him. I want you to hire Dan. Let him come here and live and see what sort of people there are in the world. Will you ? ”

“ Another boy in the house ? Not if *I* have anything to say about it, and I think I have ! ” ejaculated Aunt Delight with considerable warmth.

Now there were many variations to Aunt Delight’s “ No.” Helen and Phil knew them each and all by heart ; and their spirits sank as they

realized that this was one of her most emphatic and unchangeable negatives. Also, they knew that without the good woman's consent nobody would be allowed to take up residence in the old Sampson homestead, which was still her own by right.

As if to confirm this unfortunate decision, there appeared at that moment in the sitting-room just beyond, and glancing gloomily through the open doorway, a person who carried depression wherever she went. She did not now wait for the ordinary exchange of civilities, but began at once : —

“ You'll harbor a viper, Doctor Adair, if you take that terrible boy into your service. I've come for you this moment to attend my poor little Renew. Horsewhipped, Doctor! My boy's been *horsewhipped!* — by that wild savage from the mountain. He has no business in our district, anyway, and he'll ruin the school if he stays. But he *can't* stay. *He shall not.* You're a trustee, and you'll be the first to forbid him when you see my child. Come at once. He's suffering terribly. I don't know but he may be already delirious with the agony! Will you come?”

Professional interest responded instantly to the

appeal of suffering. Before the woman's tale was half told, Doctor Adair had risen and left the room. Mrs. Hapgood, for it was she, followed him promptly, and the little party in the Refuge were left gazing at one another in dismayed astonishment.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PHILIP ATTENDS A PATIENT.

“THAT woman’s a walking kill-joy,” remarked Aunt Delight, grimly. “Her clothes fairly smell of a graveyard. Poor old Dominie Davidson!”

“Why, Delight!” remonstrated Mrs. Adair, surprised.

“I don’t believe a word of it!” exclaimed Philip, indignantly.

“Nor I. Daniel Starbuck would n’t hurt a fly. I saw him step ’way around an angleworm in the path to-day, rather than step on it. And he was ever so good to little Robbie,” added Helen.

Silence fell over them then for a few moments, which the mother broke by suggesting:—

“A game of checkers, dears. Won’t that make the evening pleasant? Unless there are lessons to be prepared.”

“No, Mamma. Papa has forbidden night study this year. I’ll play checkers, if Phil likes; or I’ll get out my patchwork.”

But Phil did n't care to play. He preferred to sit still where he was, with his head resting on Aunt Serapha's cushions, thinking a boy's thoughts of chivalry and devotion toward the unfortunate Daniel.

"Well, I don't care. I like him. So does Nell. She does n't usually take to anybody who's very wicked. I'll stick to him, anyway."

"Till you get tired of him, dear?" asked the aunt, gently. For Phil's changeableness was one of his greatest faults. He had "chummed" with every lad in the valley and regretted each intimacy more than the others.

"No. Not this time, Aunt Serapha. He's different. He really is. There is n't anything much in those others. They're well enough — for fun. But there's something about Dan which is well for — earnest."

"Yet you say he's awkward and homely."

"Yes, when he's conscious of himself. When he gets interested in anything he's another sort of boy. I think he's awfully clever, even if he does n't know anything besides his spelling yet. A boy who has pluck enough to study an old Dictionary must be a good deal of a boy, don't you think?"

"And he's so kind to animals. If he came

here the horses and cows would n't get handled as roughly as they sometimes do."

Helen was a true little woman. She, alone, of all in the room had seen a swift change come over Aunt Delight's grim features during Mrs. Hapgood's outburst against the young woodlander, and knew that it was perfectly natural for the old lady to espouse any cause which Ruella Hapgood disapproved.

Loyal to the lad who had been so brave and needed friends so much, as she thought, she followed up the slight advantage gained by his enemy's visit and simply suggested the various good qualities which she knew would appeal most strongly to her Aunt Delight's heart.

"It was he who brought that oriole's nest here last year, Mamma, for you, — that one over there on the looking-glass frame now. He was on a load of wood and I did n't know his name then; but he 'd heard about you and your love for pretty things, I guess, for he just half threw it at me and said: 'That's fer the Doctor's sick wife. I've heern she hankers fer sech things.' So he must be kind-hearted, must n't he?"

Mamma nodded assent, but Aunt Delight exclaimed: —

"You innocent little hypocrite, don't you sup-



pose I can see through you? Or that I've noticed you and Phil winking at one another this five minutes? Well, you're right enough. Always stand up for the one that's down, till you know he deserves his position. There are always plenty to befriend those who don't need it. You want Daniel to come, and so does Philip. I don't. That is — I did n't. But — if there is a possibility of doing him an injustice, and rather than let that funeral-faced woman have her own way, this time I might alter my opinion — as an experiment."

"Hurra for the Hapgood 'way'!" shouted Phil, gayly. "Next time I want to go a-fishing I'll get her to come up here and tell you how dangerous it is. Then you'll let me go, you dear Auntie full of Delight!"

"You're a saucy boy, Philip Sampson, like your father before you!"

"Then I can't help it, you know. It's a case of heredity, like I heard you all discussing the other night. But never mind me. Go on about Dan."

"He could have the room over the carriage house," said the housemistress, thoughtfully.

"He could share mine," returned Phil, warmly. "If he's my friend, he's my friend, and that's all there is to that!"

“Now, look here, laddie. Let’s talk this matter over fair and square. Somehow I feel that in taking this stranger lad into our house we are doing a very different thing from hiring an ordinary servant. But what I feel is due to your and Nell’s romantic nonsense, and I’m not going to let it influence my outward actions. Daniel must come exactly as any other lad would come to work for his board, with the privilege of attending school. He has n’t been used to any luxury and he would n’t appreciate it if it was given him. Not yet. People do learn amazingly quick to be finical enough! No. He is to come here to go to school, not to be a playfellow for you — if he comes.

“On that condition, and that alone, I may — I do not say that I will — but I may give my consent to the trial. It all depends, now, on what the Doctor has to say when he comes home. Poor Doctor! It’s a shame to drag him out again to-night. He never knows when he can have a moment’s peace in his own family.”

“He would n’t enjoy a peace — it would n’t be peace — that was purchased by the neglect of duty,” said Mrs. Adair, quietly; though to her, more than to any of the others, was her husband’s absence a disappointment.

“Duty! To that little miserable Hapgood fellow! If he’s sick I’ll be bound it’s for some of his own foolishness! Look here, Philip, can I trust you?”

“As your own soul, Aunt Delight!” responded the lad, dramatically.

“Then go out and harness old Carey and drive to the Dominie’s after your uncle. It would be a shame to let him walk those two miles home again, when he’s so tired; and he would n’t let Dominie bring him, even if the forgetful man remembered to offer.”

“Auntie, I don’t know as I wish to be trusted!”

“Yes, you do.”

“Not under these circumstances. It’s a dark night. Old Carey hates to be harnessed after sundown. It’s a *very* dark night and a lonely road. I’m only a boy —”

“Who’d walk ten miles on the darkest night ever was for a bit of fun if ’t was going. Come, off with you!”

Philip rose, with more pretended than real laziness, and left the room; whereupon the others settled to their sewing or talk of household interests and the evening wore slowly on.

Meanwhile Philip, having harnessed old Carey,

forced that reluctant animal into a trot and drove whistling down the valley.

The night was starless, for the heavy clouds intimated rain; but the horse, once on the way, needed little guidance, save to prevent its turning into the wrong entrances, as it passed along the turnpike.

Dominie Davidson's house was a rambling white cottage, an aggregate of various additions he had made to the original structure, as his taste or need required. It stood a bit back from the road, at one end of the valley, in the midst of a few fields the master called his "farm."

A little barn, a capacious hennery, and a few stacks of hay surrounded the cottage; from the uncurtained windows of which there presently shone a cheerful light which announced to Philip that he had reached the limit of his journey.

The driveway was soft and grass-grown, the night so dark and the lamps within so brightly burning that the inmates of the house neither heard nor saw his approach, so: —

"I guess I'll not let them know either. I'll just wait outside till Uncle comes out, then surprise him with this chance to ride home."

Accordingly Phil curled up in the bottom of the buggy and waited as patiently as he could.

This was n't very long, however, for patience was not a strong feature of Philip Sampson's character.

When he had exhausted all of it at present available, he leaped down from the buggy and walked to the open window of the sitting-room, whence he heard voices proceeding, and peered within.

There on the master's own lounge lay Renew, looking rather pale and very martyr-like; while, seated at a near-by table were Dominie Davidson and his Uncle Adair. Mrs. Hapgood hovered over her suffering son, occasionally bathing his forehead with something from a bottle.

Renew resented these attentions with his usual fretfulness, and Philip grew indignant watching him.

"I don't like that woman any better than Aunt Delight does, but no son has any business to treat any mother so. I'll give him a piece of my mind the next time he pushes her hand off!"

Poor Phil had lost his own mother early in his childhood, and all his fancies of what a mother should be were full of chivalry and learned from that gentle lady who had taken the lost one's place to him, his Aunt Serapha.

Almost while he thus reflected, Mrs. Hapgood

again bent over her son with a draught of something in a glass. But Renew had done with "being fussed over." He raised his hand with such vehemence as to knock the tumbler from his mother's hand and send its contents spattering the floor.

"Now, don't you bring another old thing near me! Do you hear? I told you to let me alone, and you did n't pay any attention. I tell you my shoulders hurt me so I'm 'most crazy. Now keep away from me!"

"Goodness, my young friend. You can't be very sick if you can holloa that way!" thought Phil, and, before he half realized even himself what he was doing, he sprang lightly through the casement, picked up the fallen glass, and bowing, offered it to Mrs. Hapgood.

The promptness of the deed, its gracefulness, and the scorching rebuke of the new-comer's glance as he looked upon Renew, were too much for Doctor Adair's self-control. He laughed, and the Dominie laughed with him. Even Mrs. Hapgood was forced to draw her thin lips into the semblance of a smile, and only Renew resisted the brightening influence of the merry Phil.

"Next time you throw glasses at your mother,

and I see it, I'll break them over your miserable head!" said the champion, valiantly.

That lady hastened to interpose: —

"Don't be harsh with him, Philly dear. Surely he's abundant excuse for his nervousness, seeing what he's suffered in the hands of that dreadful mountaineer! Just look at his poor shoulders!" and with maternal solicitude, which this time Renew did not resent, she turned down the sheet that covered them and showed the blisters under the cooling cloths the doctor had applied.

Poor woman! Every word and action was a well meant, but utter mistake. In the first place, Philip resented the appellation of "Philly" — "as if I were a sick calf;" and he liked none to "dear" him, save those whose kinship gave them right. He despised a person who called bad temper "nervousness;" he was loyal with the enthusiasm of first friendship to the abused "mountaineer;" and lastly, he saw that the blisters so proudly exposed could not have been formed by any whip-lash.

One other little incident leaped into his memory, which, coupled with his estimate of the sufferer's mental calibre, made him fairly boil with eagerness and indignation.

"Why, Uncle, do *you* — does Dominie David-

son, who has certainly raised enough of them on other fellows' backs to know what they look like, — do you suppose for one moment that these are *whip-welts*? Are they the right shape?"

"They *are* peculiar in shape," quietly assented the physician; and now Philip understood why he had remained so long sitting in ordinary converse with the teacher.

"Uncle Adair sees there's something here that's not square. I'll help him out. I'm awfully glad I came!" were the lad's swift thoughts.

His "helping out" was promptly direct and characteristic.

"See here, Renew Hapgood! You can pull the wool over your mother's eyes, maybe over your uncle's, but you can't over mine. You told me awhile back that you'd never take another licking from the Dominie, even if your mother did say you'd have to go to school. You said you'd fix it, and now you think you have; but you're a bit mistaken! I haven't gone pottering round in a doctor's office to learn just *nothing*."

Then he turned suddenly to the astonished Mrs. Hapgood, and demanded: —

"Will you tell me, madam, did you send



Renew over to Uncle's house — just when you knew he'd gone to Carthage — after those — ”

But Renew was off the lounge, his hand over Philip's mouth, choking back to silence the words that would have been uttered, with a marvellous strength and ferocity for a lad who had been so ill but a moment before.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE BITER BIT.

“**D**EAR, dear! Don't, lads, don't! Why, this is dreadful! My lamb, you'll kill yourself by this excitement!” remonstrated poor Mrs. Hapgood, seriously alarmed.

Not so the Dominie nor Doctor. The former was, indeed, distressed that a schoolboy “fight” should take place within his own sitting-room, but he had n't taught boys for so many years to be frightened by them now. He quietly waited till Philip had thrown off the assaulting Renew, and was beginning to speak again, then raised his thin hand, and remarked:—

“One at a time. Renew, tell your story.”

Mrs. Hapgood advanced and threw a blanket over her son, then guided him, this time unresisting, back to the lounge.

“Compose yourself, dear child, then obey your uncle.”

She, too, had seen that sudden decision grow upon the benignant face of her benefactor, and

knew that there were times when even his spirit asserted itself.

“Well, there ain’t — there isn’t, I mean — anything to tell but what you know. I went to school after Uncle with old Meg, this afternoon — I had such a dreadful headache I couldn’t go this morning — and the first thing I knew that hulking mountaineer jumped through the window and began to horsewhip me. He’d got hold of the stage horsewhip somehow, and he thought he’d be smart, I guess. I begged him to stop, and kept backing off, but he wouldn’t. I yelled to Uncle, and he wouldn’t do a thing, till, finally, when I was about killed, I broke away and ran into the schoolhouse; then the fellow ran away, too. He came back though, and tried to smooth it over with the Dominie, but he didn’t succeed. That’s all. He tore my coat all to flinders, and blistered my shoulders, just as you see. And all I wish is, he had ’em on his own body — then he’d take care how he tackled other fellows again! And I say, if he goes to school, I sha’n’t!”

“There, there, my darling, don’t excite yourself any more. Of course Uncle Davidson and Doctor Adair, as trustee and teacher, will see that it’s impossible to allow such a ruffian

in a school of decent children. Isn't it so, Doctor?"

Philip was well-nigh beside himself with impatience, but he was trying hard to be always, under circumstances which tried his temper or otherwise, that which his Aunt Serapha had desired him to be, — a gentleman; so he bit his lip to restrain the leaping words until the lady had ceased.

"Now, Philip, your side of the story;" remarked the trustee, ignoring the question to himself.

"That whole yarn *is* a yarn — and no truth. Renew did get a terrible thrashing. He did get his jacket torn. Dan Starbuck did both. Why? Because that coward there was ill-treating old 'Megatherium' and saucing his uncle. Dominie had been kind to Dan, and Dan's not the boy to forget a kindness. He loves animals better than folks, he says, mostly; and when he asked Renew to stop misbehaving, and he wouldn't, he just naturally thrashed him. But he didn't raise those blisters. Spanish fly did that! I think you must have recognized them, Uncle!"

Renew began to speak, but Dominie Davidson interposed:—

“Philip, this is a serious accusation. Substantiate it if you can.”

“Easily enough. Everybody in the whole valley, all the children I mean, know that Renew hates school and you and everything he ought to like. He’s bound to run away and be a sailor. He’s told us all he would n’t go to school this year, no matter what happened. That if you folks insisted upon it he’d find a way out. So he came, when Uncle was gone, in terrible haste for some Spanish-fly plasters. Uncle Adair often lets me help wait on the patients who come for such things when he’s away, and I did n’t think it anything unusual. He said his mother was very ill and needed them right away and I needn’t say anything about it. She knew how to use them and so on. Still he asked me so many questions about them and, finally, how quick they’d raise a blister, that after a while I thought it was funny. I forgot it though, till now. Now I’ll tell you what I think!”

“And I’ll tell you,” interrupted Mrs. Hapgood, angrily, “that you are imputing dreadful things to my innocent boy! A suffering —”

“Beg pardon, *is* he innocent? Look at him. I’ll save him the trouble of talking. He thought

he'd get ahead of the Dominie at first, and make you think he was so badly treated at school that you'd let him go to sea. Now, he does n't care half so much about that as to punish poor Daniel Starbuck for proving himself a champion and a hero."

All eyes turned toward the unhappy Renew, who had dropped his face upon the pillows to hide the shame it betrayed. Like most of his sort, when driven to bay, he was ready to confess his guilt.

The master's voice broke the awkward silence which followed Phil's speech.

"Renew, which side of this story is the right one? Do not be afraid to speak. You shall have justice — full justice."

"Well — I don't see what great harm there was! I've hurt myself worse — worse 'an anybody else! I wish — I wish you'd all go home! I — I —" But the voice from the pillows was too muffled to be heard again, even if further attempt to speak was made.

Comment was unnecessary. The Doctor was a man of few words, at the best, and there seemed absolutely nothing more to say, beyond the professional advice.

"He certainly is suffering, Mrs. Hapgood.

Continue the dressing of the blisters as I have begun, and — Good-evening, all.”

Carey knew the homeward way and travelled it briskly, but neither the Doctor nor Philip felt like talking till they had quite left the Dominie’s home behind them, when the former broke into a hearty laugh, and remarked:—

“ Well, nephew, I don’t know whether you ’ll make the better lawyer or physician; but you ’ve certainly won your case.”

“ Then you *did* know there was some tomfoolery there, did n’t you ? ”

“ The first lesson a doctor learns is to keep his own counsel. It was n’t the professional matter I was thinking of. It was your plea that Daniel, this hero of many adventures, should come and live at Sampson House.”

“ Then you ’ll hire him ? ” questioned the lad, delightedly.

“ As far as my ability goes, yes. Yet you know that we always defer to Aunt Delight. If she says ‘ yes,’ also, then — ”

“ Then he ’s already hired ! Oh ! Uncle, what a happy boy he ’ll be ! May I ride up there in the morning and tell him ? ”

“ It will be better to wait. His father will, probably, come himself with the wood you or-

dered for me and I will talk with him about the matter. Even though Daniel may not like his guardian we must not forget that Mr. Sharp is such, and it will be all the happier for the boy if his departure from his home is made with the full approval of his family."

"But — what if Sharp should object?"

"Mr. Sharp, Phil."

"Oh! bother! Beg pardon. Mister Sharp, then. He looks as if he'd object to anything which promised pleasure to anybody else. He's a regular old curmudgeon!"

"And you're a hot-tempered, too enthusiastic lad; who needs a few whacks from 'common sense hammer' to lick you into shape. But a lad I love, my Phil! Always remember that. I think Dan's coming, if he comes, will be a good thing for us all. Even the mother may gain a new interest by it. Only, take care that there are not too many 'larks.'"

They were presently at home, and Philip offered to put out old Carey for the night. Believing that a little labor was good for everybody, and conscious that he never shirked his own share of it, the uncle accepted the offer and went in, leaving Phil alone to meditate upon their evening's experience.



It was quiet in the old stable and dark. Whether this had anything to do with the matter or not, in a very few minutes Master Philip found himself brooding over the possibility that this thing upon which he had set his heart — having Daniel Starbuck for a companion — might not be accomplished.

The more he brooded the less probable the realization of his wish appeared.

“When he finds out anybody else wants him, old Sharp ’ll want Dan himself. He’s strong and willing. Sharp isn’t going to let him out of his clutches so easily. That’s all he meant this afternoon, when he said Dan could n’t go to school again. He’s found he could n’t spare his work. Now — I —”

He paused so long, unharnessing, that Carey whinnied impatiently.

“Hurrah! I’ll do it!” cried Phil, softly, and slipped the harness off only to slip a bridle on poor Carey’s astonished head.

An hour passed, yet Philip had not come in. Helen put up her patchwork, bade her mother good-night and went to bed.

Aunt Delight’s ears had been strained to hear the lad’s footsteps, and failing, had rejoiced to hear, instead, the cheerful converse of the Doctor and his wife.

“Serapha is n't thinking about the boy, for once, thank goodness! else she'd be asking for him. Likely he's in the kitchen with Susan and Molly, but I'll just say 'good-night' myself, and slip away before I'm questioned,” thought the old housemistress, and did so.

Yet Phil was not in the kitchen, and the women had left it dark and in order for the night.

Miss Sampson struck a match and lighted the oil lamp; of that sort then in use, before the days of kerosene. Picking up its soft cotton wick with the point of a hair-pin she adjusted her spectacles and sat grimly down to wait the absentee's return.

Yet if he could have seen her face at that moment this return would have been long delayed, for it wore its most forbidding aspect, which no amount of cajolery would have altered.

“There is a limit beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue, and I've reached that limit,” remarked Aunt Delight, unfolding her knitting.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DANIEL TURNS COWARD.

“WELL, Auntie — I was after — a ‘lark’ — and I — caught it! Did n’t I?”

Then Philip went off in a faint, and Helen ran away weeping, believing he had died.

The whole valley had been alarmed, and every able-bodied man who could do so had turned out to aid in the search. Trouble in the Doctor’s household was trouble in all; for into all he had gone many and many a time, carrying help and sympathy.

The search lasted for many hours; thirty-six had passed since Aunt Delight sat down to wait in the empty kitchen for the return of the giddy youth upon whom her warmest affections were secretly set, though openly she reprimanded him a dozen times a day.

Then Daniel found him,—Daniel, who had come to the Sampson home early in the morning of the second day of the school, driving an ox team and bringing the desired load of wood.

But, though he had himself selected and heaped the wagon with the choicest sticks his step-father's pile contained, nobody paid any attention to this fact; but each person he met as he advanced along the driveway from the turnpike to the great house put the same question to him: —

“Have you seen anything of Philip? Did you know that Philip Sampson had been out all night?”

Daniel did not know, nor did he understand just what it meant, until he came where Miss Sampson was pacing restlessly up and down the broad veranda, her cap awry, her white hair tumbling about her shoulders, and her energetic hands expending their force in a nervous clasping and unclasping which spoke volumes for their owner's condition.

As soon as he drew in sight, with his skilful “gee-hawing” of the oxen, swinging ponderously from side to side, and the dismal creaking of the ill-greased cart upon the crisp air, Aunt Delight cried out that same puzzling question which had been hurled at him all along the route, since he had left the mountain and come among the valley folk:

“Have you seen Philip?”

“No. I hain't seen nobody, Ma'am. What's — what's the matter?”

“ Matter ! you — Are you Daniel ? ”

“ Yes, Ma’am.”

“ Then you ’re the matter, I believe ! And if he is n’t found I shall wish you ’d never been born.”

This was amazing, even to old Susan, who followed her mistress about in the vain hope of administering comfort.

“ Laws, now, Miss Delight ! I ain’ done gib him up, yet. Dem what ’s bo’n to be hung doan’ nevah get ddowned ; an’ I ain’ seed Massa Philip in no place so tight he ain’ twistin’ out again. He ’ll come back all right, honey, he sutney will.”

All the color had left Daniel’s sunbrowned face. He had come to the valley that morning full of eager hope and thinking only of this wonderful new friend he had found yesternight ; and this was his greeting !

He left his team to follow its own will, and walked swiftly to the veranda’s edge. His fear and grief lent a sudden dignity to his bearing, and he no longer slouched, but stood alert, ready for action : —

“ If you ’ll be so good as to tell me what you, an’ everybody means, I ’ll be obleeged to ye. I ain’t seen your Philip not sence afore sundown last night. He was up our way then, a-tellin’

Sharp 'bout this here wood. What's happened him?"

"That's more than I know — than anybody does. This is it, all the story: —

"He went out on a professional visit with his uncle later than the hour you mention, and came home with the Doctor. He stayed in the barn to put up the horse for the night and has not been seen since. Carey, the horse, came back here about daybreak with her bridle hanging broken from her head. She had on no saddle, but Philip often rode without one. He had unharnessed her, therefore, and gone off again on her back. Where? We think in pursuit of yourself. He took a fancy to you, it seems, and had asked the Doctor to hire you. Doctor had said he would, if your step-father would consent to spare you. Philip didn't believe Mr. Sharp would do this, and our supposition is that he started off on an impulse to tell you, and — I don't know any more. It's all guess-work. Only the fact — Philip is lost."

"No, Ma'am. He ain't. He sha'n't be! I tell you I'll find him. He can't have gone many miles away, an' I'll scour every inch o' the earth, plain land an' woods, but I'll find an' fetch him back!"

“Do that, Daniel, and win our eternal gratitude. The lad is wild — a wee bit wild, but aye so bonny!”

“I’ll find him, Ma’am. I will.”

That was all he said. Without even glancing toward the team, standing patiently behind him, he started off at a swinging pace and presently vanished from sight.

He kept his word. Twenty-four hours later, just as the sun was rising, he staggered up to Sampson House and deposited the half-conscious Philip on its threshold, then sank down breathless, with only strength enough left to reach his long arm toward the door and give a feeble rap.

The door opened instantly, and Philip himself looked up and spoke.

Kind arms caught up and carried both lads into the great living-room, though Daniel protested as vigorously as he could against this treatment, and ejaculated, brokenly: —

“Jest tend ter him. I’m all right, only — a little — mite thirsty.”

Old Susan ran to him with a cup of steaming coffee in her hand, and poor Daniel quaffed the most delicious draught he had ever tasted.

“Hmm. That’s nice. That sets a feller up ag’in,” he remarked by way of thanks, and he

was, indeed, so well "set up" that by the time Aunt Delight returned to the room, after having put the other lad to bed, he was able to answer her running inquiries as promptly as she put them.

"Where did you find him? Are n't you almost dead yourself? How could you carry him — did you carry him all the way from the woods down here? Did n't you meet anybody to help you? Tell me — quick!"

Daniel took the tangle of questions and unravelled it backward.

"No. I did n't meet nobody. They've looked all over the nigh ground an' had gone further. I carried him — 't wa' n't so fur — from the edge o' your own bush lot. He's considerable hefty, but I'm heftier. That's how I done it. If I'd had anything t' eat 't wouldn't a ben nothin'. 'T wa' n't anyhow. Now, I guess, I'll be movin'. Do you happen to know, Ma'am, what's become o' th' oxen?"

Daniel rose as if to depart, but Miss Sampson's hand was on his shoulder. She felt how damp it was, that the cotton blouse had soaked its fill of dew and perspiration, and how the great lad's body quivered through all its length from the fasting and exhaustion.



“Team? Whose team? Who’d bother about anybody’s team when Philip was lost? There, don’t look so worried. I presume it’s all right. Your father, or step-father, was down here yesterday, and the Doctor made all arrangements for your remaining here, if — you both came back again. So just step out into the kitchen, where Susan has a hot breakfast waiting, and tell me all the rest between times. After you’ve eaten I’ll get you some dry clothes, and by that time I think Phil will be ready to see you. It was only a faint, you know, this morning; and the Doctor can find nothing worse than a strained ankle the matter. Except, of course, there is the added weakness from want of food and exposure. But — that won’t hurt him. He *ought* to be punished for giving us all so much anxiety.”

Daniel was surprised at the alteration in his hostess’ manner. Philip lost had been Philip an angel; Philip restored was Philip as full of faults as ever.

He followed the lady into the great sunny kitchen, the largest and cheeriest apartment he had ever seen; but he felt as if he could never dare to eat before the watchful eyes of Susan or Molly, who stared at him in open admiration. He looked about him helplessly, seeking a place

whither he could flee, and Aunt Delight's ready tact fathomed the difficulty. Once she had been shy herself, and she knew the symptoms.

“Here, you Molly! Just take that cup of cocoa up to Mrs. Adair. Why has n't it gone before? Tell her that everything is quite all right again, and that as soon as he has eaten his breakfast and freshened himself a bit, I will bring the 'Hero' up to see her. Susan, go wring another pullet's neck and get some broth a-stewing. Don't you know that Master Philip must have plenty of nourishment?”

Left alone with Miss Sampson, Daniel's ease of manner — what little he possessed — speedily returned. They were both straightforward people, and the odor of the food banished his last remains of bashfulness. He fell upon his breakfast with an avidity which did Aunt Delight's soul good, and he managed between mouthfuls to reply to her still numerous questions.

“Yes, Ma'am. 'T was in the Devil's Ditch I found him. That's right up yender on your own land, where 't seemed as if you could n't a helped hearin' of him callin'. But I've noticed that always. If a body gets lost in the mountings it's gen'ally right to hum, so to speak. Philip, he'd wandered all over the hills, a-gettin'

confuseder an' confuseder, an' Carey, she'd lit out fer her own stable soon's Philip tumbled off her back. 'T ain't sech a terr'ble deep ditch, if he had n't confused himself; but it's steep's a steeple, an' rocky! It's smoother'n a bald head, all up an' down the sides, them rocks is. So, once he was in it he could n't get out. Jest had to stay there till somebody hauled him."

"He might have died, — but for you!" remarked Aunt Delight, with a return of tender anxiety.

"Oh! no. I reckon somebody 'd 'a' heered him, — if he had n't starved, like, first. A feller kinder loses heart, you see, when he ain't et nothin' fer a day an' a half. Besides, I callate 't Philip cares ruther more fer his victuals 'n some does."

"Rightly guessed, Daniel! He's a wonderful boy for good living!" and this time Aunt Delight's laugh rang out so heartily that Susan ran in, chuckling in sympathy with it, and forgetful of the recently beheaded fowl still dripping in her hand.

"Laws, honey! It done do my ole hea't good to heah dat! Reckon t'ings allays does tu'n out fo' de bes', Missy. See dat capon! I done

did n't get de pullet. I reckoned, long's we had n't no fattened calf, one ob dese yere capons 'd be jest de checkah!"

"But, Susan! That's not only sacrilegious, but disobedient! I distinctly told you one of the pullets. Those capons are for Serapha alone."

Old Susan was wholly unabashed.

"Laws, honey! What's de differ? You know, yo'self, Miss Seraph', she done druther see Massa Phil eat dis yere bu'd 'an eat it herself. Ya, ya. Dat's so."

And Susan went chuckling out again, to pluck and stew the dainty fowl before Miss Sampson should forbid her.

It was all a wonderland and a wonder life to the keen-eyed Daniel, — the great house, by far the richest in all that countryside, and the simple — but to him luxurious — habits of the people who dwelt in it.

For Sampson House was indeed a fine homestead, and dated back to the Revolution. Its first owner had selected the site with rare discretion, on a little rise of land, a sort of spur from the mountains behind, which commanded a magnificent view all up and down the valley.

As a matter of security against the Indians,

the original portion of the house had been built strongly of stone; and to this original many additions had been made, yet each in keeping with the first plan. Time and increasing wealth had for generations beautified and enriched all the surroundings; and though at the date of this story the family fortunes had greatly diminished, the old homestead still stood to all the valley people as a representation of the best a home might be.

To Daniel it was a revelation; and he followed Miss Sampson through the long halls to a room she assigned him in the kitchen part, with a feeling of awe constantly growing in his mind.

When the lady left him alone, and he examined the plain suit of clothing she had provided for his use, wonder reached its climax.

“Swidgey corum! SWID-GEY — CO — RUM! Be I me, or be I somebody else? Well —”

But he couldn't express himself, and he sat down gingerly upon the edge of a chair, the better to collect his wits.

They came to him presently, for he was abundantly endowed in “saving common-sense.”

“Sho! Ain't no call fer me to be so shook

up. 'Tain't nothin' but a house, an' they ain't nothin' but folks. They're treatin' me square, an' all I've to do is square 'em back ag'in. An' I'll do it, sure's my name is Dan'l!"

Yet all his tremors returned when just outside his door there came a hurried, gentle tap, and the sound of a girlish voice, crying: —

“Oh, Daniel! You dear, dear Daniel! Do come right out as quick as you can! I can't wait to kiss you, and tell you how much I love you for bringing home my darling, darling Phil!”

Kiss him! Love him! — that dainty, fragile piece of girlhood, that he would no more dare to touch than he would a china doll!

“Wall, I guess not! Not if I can help myself! I'd sooner face a mad steer!”

Helen's summons was repeated, with a patient insistence which it was terribly hard to resist, yet impossible to obey. Daniel was unused to girls — such girls. How did he know that she might not suddenly open the door and appear before him?

The coveted suit of clothes still lay untouched upon the snowy counterpane. He cast one hasty, regretful glance upon them, and a second one sought some avenue of escape.

“The window!”

Then, as the tap-tap-tapping still continued, he made a dive for the open sash, and, without waiting to see whither it led, leaped headlong through the aperture.

## CHAPTER XII.

### EXCHANGING CONFIDENCES.

“**S**HO, sho! Huh! Wha — wha — Sho!  
Oh, my soul!”

Susan fell sprawling over backwards upon the floor of the pretty arbor-kitchen, a grape-vine covered veranda, where she was busily plucking the fat capon against the delicate “brile” for her restored prodigal.

The basket flew one way, the downy feathers another, and some into the cook’s capacious mouth, wide open to remonstrate against this sudden onslaught from above.

Daniel picked himself up out of the debris of lattice-work, grape-leaves, negress, and chicken, and started to flee.

But Susan’s fat hands grasped his loose trouser-legs, and prevented.

“Heah, you, whoevah yo’ be! He’p me up! Oh, my back’s done broke!”

Considerably shattered himself, his blouse torn upon the crashing slats of the arbor through



which he had projected himself from the window above, his own mop of hair decorated with feathers, a long scratch on one cheek, he was a sorry-looking object indeed. But he could n't well refuse the aid which was entreated, and he seized Susan so vigorously by her fat shoulders that she yelled again ; and this outcry brought not only Molly from her pantry, but Miss Sampson and the Doctor himself to the scene.

“Susan ! Susan ! What in the world do you mean by all this noise ?”

“Noise, honey ? Well, I reckon you done make consid'able racket yo'se'f, if you meet up wid a boy like dis yere ! He doan' eben know 'nough to walk down a stairs, but must go flingin' hisse'f clean fru a window plump on my back ! I done conclude it's broke, ain' it, Doctah ?”

“Well, since you're still able to step around so lively, I conclude not,” replied the laughing physician.

They were all laughing then, all but poor Daniel, who would gladly have continued on his downward way clear into the cellar, or into the earth itself, if by that means he might have escaped the presence of that amused group.

“Through the window !” exclaimed Miss Sampson ; and then the lad did bolt, — straight

past his would-be friends, out into the barn and up into the loft, where for a long time he remained hidden, and oblivious to all things.

For he was worn out by his long search and hours of wakefulness, and his head had scarcely touched the heap of hay, into which he had burrowed, before he fell fast asleep.

Doctor Adair followed the lad's flight from the house with an amused but kindly glance.

“Poor fellow, he's half-dazed by fatigue, and so bashful he's a torment to himself. He'll get a nap and wake up in a different frame of mind. Let nobody disturb him nor make any reference to this ludicrous accident, when he does appear; else he'll surely take to the woods again, and we shall have lost our 'Hero.'”

With which he pinched Helen's cheek mischievously, as she joined the group, and laughed at her amazed question:

“Auntie, didn't you put that boy in the west shed chamber? 'Cause if you did he's gone, and he must have —”

“Departed by the window! I wonder why, Nell.”

“I'm sure I don't know. I just went to tell him how crazy I was to see him, and — But what are you all laughin' at?”

Of course there was no school for Helen that day ; and it proved a long one, with Philip a prisoner — and a contentedly sleeping one — in his own room ; the mother taking absolute rest from her anxious vigil ; and everybody else in that silent, irritable frame of mind which commonly follows unusual excitement.

When the day had nearly waned, and Daniel still in hiding, the girl begged permission to seek and bring him again into the house. “ For just think how hungry he must be, Aunt Delight ! He has n’t had anything all day except his breakfast. If it were Phil — ”

“ He ’d be hunting up his own provision ! Well, run along. Only take care you don’t scare him into jumping out of the barn window this time. That would be a more dangerous leap than the other, and he would n’t have Susan’s fat back to break his fall upon.”

“ I ’ll take care. He sha’n’t be so silly, again. That big, brave, queer Daniel ! ”

So when the woodlander finally roused from his long slumber it was to see Helen’s face peeping in at him through the beams of the hayloft, and to hear her asking : —

“ Are n’t you rested yet, Daniel ? ’Cause Philip is asking for you every little while. He ’s asleep

again just now — seems as if you boys have to rest a great deal, does n't it? — but he'll wake soon, then he'll want you. Are n't you hungry? See, I've coaxed Molly for this piece of pound cake, and I've brought two peaches from Papa's pet tree, and we're going to have a picnic up here in the old loft, just you and I. I want you to tell me the whole story — every single word. Will you?"

Daniel sat up, picked the hay out of his tumbled hair, observed how quiet and matter-of-fact the intruder now was, and finally evolved: —

“Yes.”

“That's a bargain. But you must eat first. There. That's your piece. I guess it's as large as this one. Anyway, if it is n't it will have to do, for just as I came by Dap's stall he reached out and took a nibble from this slice. So I'll eat that myself. Are n't these lovely peaches? Did you ever eat a peach before? Papa says there are very few will grow in this place, but he's trying an experiment with different sorts, and this kind is just de-li — cious!”

She sat herself down, “Turk fashion,” and planted her elbows on her knees and her white teeth in the rosy cheek of the rare fruit. That effectually banished stiffness, and as Daniel sampled his own peach, he remarked: —

“Once.”

“Where?”

“Ma brung it hum from the County Fair. She went. It was two years ago. 'D you ever?”

This was fine, Helen reflected. “He is n't as bashful as he pretends.” Aloud she replied:—

“No, not yet. Papa says he may—perhaps, just perhaps—he may take Phil and me—and now you, of course—this fall. If he can't, if the folks will get sick and keep him at home, as they generally do, there'll be other years, you know. So it does n't matter, does it?”

“No.”

“Eat your cake, boy.”

He obeyed her in silence. It was delicious, and in this instance, at least, virtue was its own reward. Even he thawed out sufficiently to pay a slight tribute:—

“It's likely, if I do say it.”

Helen knit her brows, but guessed at his meaning.

“Yes. Susan is a splendid cook. But now, tell. Everybody is too tired and busy in the house, and I must hear it all.”

Thus adjured, Daniel briefly narrated the story of his determined search for the luckless Philip,

and when he had finished, inquired, in his own turn : —

“ Won’t you tell me all they is about him? You said he had a ‘step,’ too, an’ I’d like to hear. If you don’t mind.”

“ Not in the least. I’m delighted to tell. I can talk about that precious boy all day. He’s my brother-cousin, you know.”

She fixed herself more comfortably and resumed : —

“ There isn’t anything to tell. Only — his ‘step’ is a mother. Uncle Philip — all the Sampsons ever were have been Philips, you see, and Phil’s father is Philip senior, now. Where was I? Oh! Well, Uncle Philip’s wife, Phil’s mother, died when he was a baby — Phil, of course. And two years ago he married again. Up till that time those two, ‘big and little Phil,’ as Auntie Delight called them, had just lived for each other. Uncle Phil is a great politician, a ‘statesman,’ Auntie says, and he has plenty of money and is always travelling and seeing things. He’s a ‘Representative,’ that does something in Washington; or he has been. Now he isn’t, not there. He’s a ‘Minister’ to some country in Europe, I guess it’s Austria. Maybe it’s Prussia, but it’s some queer place ever so far away.

To get to it he had to go across the ocean. Papa says it took weeks to get there, and it will be a long time before he comes home again. Are you tired? Shall I tell any more?"

"Yes, yes! Don't leave off plumb in the middle on 't."

"All right. Only, if I tire you, let me know, will you?"

"Sartain."

"That's about all, anyway. Before Uncle Philip married my new aunt he used to come out here every summer and stay awhile at the old home; but after that he didn't. By and by he wrote for Papa to go to his house, away to the city of New York, and when Papa came back he brought little Phil with him. The new mother didn't like boys at all, and Phil thought she took up too much of Uncle Phil's spare time, so he had n't any more fun with his father, ever. Mamma thinks it would all have come right, will come right yet. Only, you see, the Government sent Uncle Phil away on this Minister business, and Aunt Josephine declared up and down that Europe was n't the place for a growing boy. She could n't have the care of him. Uncle Phil agreed with a part of her, — of what she said, I mean. He did n't want his son to grow up any-

thing else but a straight, out and out American. So—that's all. Phil's here, and is to stay here, studying with Dominie Davidson and 'learning to be a true-hearted gentleman,' as his father says. Till by and by, I suppose, he'll go away to college — and — But I won't think about that. He's here now; and he's all the time doing naughty things, and then right away something so good he'll make us all love him more than ever. You see! For a week or two now he'll be what he calls 'heavenly sweet;' then he'll forget and do something he ought n't. Now, Dan, tell me all about yourself."

"They ain't nothin'. I'm only Dan'l. I was born in the woods an' have allays lived in 'em. I like 'em, too, only I want to l'arn book l'arnin'. Ma, she was a widder. I don't remember my Pa. She married Sharp, an' I hate him. I like her, though, an' I kinder like the young ones. They tease me awful sometimes, an' jine in with their Pa. But mebbe 't was my fault, partly. I did n't like him, an' I did n't try. I've enj'yed sassin' him more 'n anything else I done, an' — But, somehow, seein' I'm shut of him now, I—I sorter wish I had n't. But he had n't no right ter lick me so often, I 'low."

"Maybe he thought he was doing right. Mas-



ter says he must n't ' spare the rod and spoil the child ' every time he whips anybody in school."

" 'D he ever lick you ?" demanded Daniel, with sudden fierceness.

" Me ? Why — what a notion ! No, indeed. Why should he ? Nobody ever struck me in my life. I don't think I could — Why, Dan, I could n't bear it ! I think it would make me as ugly as sin !"

The idea of corporal punishment as connected with herself was so strange, so repulsive to the sensitive girl that for a few seconds she sat gazing abstractedly into the depths of the loft, trying to make this horrible suggestion seem possible.

Suddenly her gaze came back to fix itself on the face of the homely, ill-used lad before her. The indignities from which she shrank in terror he had daily endured. The poverty and barren misery of his childhood was mentally pictured in sharp contrast to the happiness and richness of her own ; and the longing that is instinctive in every womanly soul, young or old, to comfort and aid, was developed in hers then.

She leaned forward and tried to take the boy's great hands in her own small ones and exclaimed, earnestly : —

“But all that is past, Dan, dear. You must rub it all out and set a new sum on your slate, and there must n't be any anger or hatred or bitterness in it. It was only the ignorance made it. Dominie says, often and often, that ignorance brutalizes and wisdom makes folks gentle. That's what he meant when he read the first morning: ‘Therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding.’

“I'm just getting ‘understanding’ — a little bit — out of your experience. But I'm not going to forget it, soon. I'll help you all I can, and you must help me. So'll Phil. He's a darling, if he is bad sometimes, and he'll be awake by this time and want you. So'll Mamma. Let's go down and to the house. I'll fetch you a comb and towel and you can make yourself tidy in the men's room, off the carriage house there. Then, if you'll come around the house to the little balcony outside Mamma's window, she'll talk a bit with you through it. That'll be easier than marching in and sitting down on a chair to be looked at and gotten acquainted with, won't it? I should like it better, myself. Do you know, I too hate to meet strangers. I don't let them know it if I can help it, for it is n't kind, but I do, all the same, feel that silly.

“Then, too, if you’re outside the window and are taken with another running-away fit you won’t have to scare anybody, will you?”

She laughed at him from the foot of the ladder, down which he was descending to her level on the hay-strewn floor, but so merrily and utterly without malice that he laughed in response.

“I ’low I sha’n’t never want to run away no more!”

Nor did he, from that day forward, from any member of the Sampson household.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### INTRODUCING DEACON TEWKSBURY.

“**T**HERE is no rose without a thorn.”

The thorn to Daniel's rose of happiness was — the wearing of shoes and stockings.

Miss Sampson's dictum had gone forth: —

“I will have no barefooted lad around this place, even if he were an angel — which Daniel Starbuck is n't.”

“Yes, Ma'am. But I *never* wore 'em afore right smart cold weather, an' o' Sundays.”

“Hmm. I fancy that your Sundays — for properly dressing yourself and attending service — were few and far between.”

The lad colored, and remarked by way of explanation: —

“Sharp, he was a perffessor.”

“And because he was an unworthy one, if he was, you will have none of church-going. Exactly. Well, you'll have to wear your shoes and stockings or — return to 'Sharp'!”

In any case, Daniel would have made a valiant effort to please his new friend, but that settled the matter. He was obliged to forego leaping over any obstacle he met on his path and plod soberly around it. His feet seemed weighted with lead, and the creaking of the new leather was intolerable to him.

One day he complained to Philip : —

“ The Doctor’s wife, she signified as how she ’d like a cute little squirr’l, same ’s I was tellin’ her ’bout, for to play with an’ tame an’ teach tricks to, this comin’ winter ; but though I ’ve ben up-mounting three er four times after dusk, to try an’ get her one, I can’t get nigh none. If ’t wa n’t fer that — ”

“ Never mind, boy. You’re improving. You walk ever so much more naturally and comfortably than you did a week ago. In another one you ’ll do as well as if you ’d been — to shoes and stockings born ! Heigho ! Does n’t seem as if you ’d been here a month already, does it ? ”

“ No.”

“ Does n’t your mother think you’re doing finely ? ”

“ Yes. Every Sunday, when your aunt she makes me go up an’ see the folks, — I s’pose ’t is right I should n’t fergot ’em, an’ I ’m sure I don’t

want to make Ma feel no lonesomer 'n I can help, — Ma she says as how I do her proud. I mean to some day. Some day, when I'm a man, if she wants to, I'll earn me a house an' let her keep it fer me. Only, she does seem pizen set on Sharp."

"That 's as it should be, I suppose. My 'step' is 'set' on my father, too. Well — Bother! What 's the use of thinking about them? Uncle says that after our own lessons are done with to-day, we may ask to be excused and go to the woods for a while. It's 'most too early for nuts, but I'll take my gun, and you can catch your squirrel and have some fun. You need n't wear your shoes in the woods either, on such an errand. It'll be all right."

Dan's face lighted wonderfully. He was a silent, thoughtful boy by nature; and he missed his "woods" more than he himself realized, till the chance arose for his visiting them again. He was a regular "hired boy" now; for he had proved himself so capable and kindly among the "stawk" that the family at Sampson House felt he was entitled to wages, over and above his board and school privileges, and that this arrangement would give a pleasanter feeling of independence on both sides.

“Then I ’low I’ll jest take my money along an’ gin it to Ma. ‘Seein’s believin’,’ an’ Sharp’ll believe money quicker’n ary thing else in this world.”

“All right. Only, I think you ought to keep it for yourself.”

“No. I don’t want it. I’ve got all I need, hain’t I?”

“A few old school-books and a few home-made clothes. But Uncle says — Did you hear what he said this morning?”

“No.”

“That if you went on as well as you had begun you’d be a man the valley would be proud of yet! that all you wanted was a ‘chance’ and he meant to do his best to give it to you. Odd! isn’t it? Soon as a body begins to have friends every other body wants to be friendly, too. That Jake Lane met Uncle yesterday, and told him he’d been up your way looking for you. He wants to hire you, too, — to help him drive the stage and take care of the horses. I wish he’d give *me* the chance!”

“Why, Philip!”

“True. I hate study — ”

“You never have to study! You l’arn things by jest lookin’ at ’em.”

“Well, I’d rather drive a four-in-hand, and

that's what Jake does every day. That new stage of his is a beauty, is n't it?"

"Yes."

But Daniel pondered long over the oddities of human nature; and, it may be, carried his own head a trifle the higher, during that long school day, because there had been freely offered to himself a position to which the fortunate Philip might hopelessly aspire!

The last class of the day for Daniel was a "primary geography." It was a grief and bitterness to his soul, at best, to find himself placed among "the little shavers" because, as yet, he had not advanced sufficiently to join an older set; but it had never seemed half so humiliating as on this afternoon when, while he was eagerly counting the moments till he and Phil should be off on their outing, there came the rumble of heavy wheels along the road, and a wagon stopped before the schoolhouse door.

Every eye peeped through the windows, for visitors were rare; and every face wore a look of disappointment when the new-comer was recognized.

"Old Deacon Tewksbury!"

Dominie Davidson peered over and under his spectacles, in his accustomed manner; and his



own countenance dropped and flushed a little as he, also, beheld the approaching guest.

The visitor entered, after a preliminary and quite unnecessary knock, with a vigorous clearing of the throat, as rasping and pompous as the voice which followed.

“ Good day, Dominie. Good day, children. I was passin’ by and I gave myself the pleasure — the pleasure — of — of this little surprise visit. Ahem.”

The master rose and proffered the Deacon the one arm-chair always reserved for such an occasion.

But it was waved pompously aside. The hesitation and the pauses of the opening salutation were not due to any lack of self-possession on the speaker’s part. They were simply to render more effective the condescension of his coming.

“ Presently, Dominie. Presently. As a trustee, and a friend of eddication — without which I should have been as ignorant — as — as ignorant as — well, that young mountaineer there, who has to be in the infant class because he has not had — I say, because he has not had — an opportunity of learning earlier in life. Do not be discouraged, Daniel — Daniel Sharp, I believe; there is n’t no — there is no ‘ r’yal road to learning ’ and if you

persevere you 'll catch up with the best. By and by. 'Rome was not built in a day,' you remember. 'Rome was not built in a day.'"

Poor Dan! He had had no thought of discouragement, the idea of failure had never entered his mind; but he now flushed, and suffered all the pangs a keenly sensitive, or self-conscious lad could endure, and he dared not raise his eyes from the floor to which his gaze was glued.

Phil half rose in his seat to defend his friend, and Helen's eyes filled with sympathetic tears.

But the visitor continued speaking, and their curiosity made them listen.

The Deacon had turned toward the master.

"I don't know, Dominie, but things are different now from what they used to be when I went to school. Though, for the matter of that, there should be little difference — under *your* rule; under your rule, I say, because you must be as old as, or older than, myself. So you ought to know the old principle that when a visitor, and a trustee, — and a member of the board in full authority, — came to spend a little time in the school, why, any pupil whom he condescended to address was taught to stand up while he was being talked to. Eh?"

“Possibly.”

The Dominie's tone was so curt that the children were surprised. But it diverted attention from the unhappy Daniel, and he was not forced to rise and make himself any more conspicuous than he already was.

“Hmm. I thought likely. Why, let me see. It must be nigh on to forty years, is n't it, Mr. Davidson, since I was a pupil here myself, and you were the master, then, just as now?”

“Quite long enough to have made the memories of that distant day pleasant and sacred memories to us both, I hope,” said the old teacher, wistfully.

The children were more amazed now by the sudden alteration in the speaker's tone than by his first sharpness.

“Hmm. Memories are all very well, very well in their way. But the thing is to progress — to progress, my children. The manner of conducting a school nowadays, in more advanced localities is quite different, I understand, from what prevails here. What we need is new life, new ideas. I might almost have said — but let that pass. Let that pass, for the present.”

The trustee paused. He was a short, rather stout man, of exceeding complacency of bearing,

yet with an expression that does not commonly belong to self-complacency, and that Phil had once characterized as “sour,” and suggested by eating unripe grapes. He paced back and forth across the little platform whereon the teacher’s desk stood, with his hands under his coat skirts, his spectacles on nose, and his glance piercing every child on which it fell — “Jest like a bee stingin’ me,” thought Matilda Brown.

Whispering was surely against the rule, but the man affected Helen so unpleasantly that, for once, she cast rules to the winds and exclaimed to Kate Wilkins: —

“I do wish he ’d sit down! He looks exactly like Mamma’s pouter pigeon!”

“The class in geography is dismissed,” remarked the master, very quietly; and though his voice was low, it reached and relieved every trembling urchin on the recitation bench.

When the clattering to seats had subsided, the visitor resumed his address, if such it was intended to be considered.

“Yes, my children —”

“Thank my stars, he’s a-lyin’!” murmured Kate.

“Hey? What’s that? Did I hear somebody speak? Will you kindly repeat your remark, my

dear?" and his spectacles focussed themselves upon the guilty Katharine.

"I said we were n't your children, sir. I did n't mean nothin' sassy."

The scholars giggled, but the girl was none abashed. She was perennially in disgrace, and it mattered little to her if she were found fault with. What *would* have mattered, greatly — for she was generous — was that any other should be blamed.

"We can always say for Kitty that she takes her own punishment every time!" now remarked Philip to Renew, in so pointed a manner that that young gentleman fidgeted and thereby attracted attention to himself. To divert this notice whither it properly belonged, Renew immediately raised his hand and filiped his fingers desperately.

"Well, my young cousin, what is it?" asked the trustee, indulgently. They were of spiritual as well as physical kin, these two.

"Phil Sampson's talking while you're addressing the school."

"Oh! you little reptile!" retorted Phil, angrily.

Again the tell-tale's hand flew up and his thin finger-tips clicked.

"Well?" — impatiently.

“Now he’s calling me names!”

If it had been any other than Philip, the guilty youngster would have been promptly reprimanded. As it was, and for reasons of his own, the Deacon was disposed to be magnanimous.

“It is greater to forgive an injury than to resent one, Renew,” he said piously.

By this time all eyes were on the clock. The hands had travelled around its face to the very hour when writing-books should have been ordered out,—an order equivalent to a general relaxation of school discipline, and positively the last duty to be accomplished for the day. By this time, also, Daniel and Philip should have been far up the mountain side, enjoying a well earned holiday.

“Now, Dominie, I’ll take that chair if you please. I want to ask a few questions of some of the pupils, and then, and then, I have a plan, a truly delightful plan, to unfold to them. Have I your permission?”

The request was a farce. None knew it better than the old master. He would not have dared withhold his consent to this proposal; and yet, for his own, as well as his pupils’ sake, he was exceeding loath to give it. However, with again that pathetic droop gathering about his mouth,

he simply nodded assent, then shot an encouraging, sympathetic glance over the anxious young faces confronting him.

Far more to him than to them, meant their failure, as fail they surely would! Rarely does anybody his best when put on sudden exhibition, and the good Deacon had a most unfortunate influence, a perfect gift, so to speak, for making everybody ill at ease. Was this because he was so wholly at ease — with himself?

“Ahem.”

The very manner in which the examiner took off his glasses sent a fresh shiver through every watching youngster. But by the time he replaced them something had happened.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TRUSTEE'S SCHEME.

“FOLLOW me, Dan!”

The command had been swiftly given, swiftly obeyed.

An open window was conveniently near — open windows to wrong-doing always are conspicuously handy! — and lads' legs are lithe. There was a dissolving view of heads and heels, a possible suggestion of amusement on the Dominie's worn face, and two empty seats.

By the time the Deacon's spectacles were re-adjusted, and his throat cleared by another portentous “Ahem!” there was also a suppressed titter running about the whole schoolroom and dozens of envious hearts sent their owners' eyes around toward that alluring window.

This was Renew's most golden opportunity. He embraced it promptly.

“Click! Pstchik! Snap, snap, snap!”

Even his sympathetic relative was this time astonished, and exclaimed, testily: —



“Again, Renew? It seems to me that you have a great many remarks to make. Well, what is it?”

“Phil Sampson and Dan Starbuck’s leaped out the window!”

“What? Has anything happened? My horse —”

“Oh! Your horse is all right. I guess they cut and run so’s to get rid of your questions.”

For a moment there was a dreadful silence in the great room. One could almost hear the young hearts beat with indignation. Save a few of the elder girls, not a child was there but would have followed Phil quite as readily as Daniel, and few would have suffered half as much remorse afterward. Yet never a one would so have “tattled” about another, save this miserable Renew.

Anger rose in the Deacon’s eyes. He opened his lips, paused, and all expected a scathing outburst against the runaways. Though, finally, with the mildest possible sarcasm, the lips ejaculated merely the comment: —

“So this — is a sample of the discipline — the discipline — in the Valley school!”

Odd that at this simple speech the trouble should deepen on Dominie Davidson’s counte-

nance, and that a wave of color should suddenly suffuse it, only to die away and leave it paler than before !

Seeing which, Helen again did an unprecedented thing. She beckoned all the girls near her to put their heads to hers and whispered to them very earnestly for the space of a full half-minute. She did this openly, determinedly, and the Deacon set it down in his mental note-book as one item the more to his side the account.

The action distressed the master. Helen, his favorite, his always-to-be-depended-upon pupil ! However, it was only "one more drop in the bucket" of his present discomfort, and as yet the "bucket" had not overflowed. But he could not refrain from sending her one reproachful glance, as he had sent her so many sympathetic and encouraging ones ; and what was she doing ? Smiling ?

Ay, smiling, — her bonniest, bravest, most reassuring smile. Also, come to notice them, just such a look was on the face of every girl to whom she had whispered. Each sat erect in her place, alert and self-possessed. For Helen had seen and guessed one cause of their dear master's trouble. Having guessed it, her incipient womanhood responded royally.

So that now, to the anxious teacher, those girlish faces, bright with an almost soldierly resolution, became a tonic. He straightened himself in his own place with all his ancient dignity, turned toward the visitor with the prestige of a one-time instructor, and requested:—

“Mr. Trustee, if you will kindly make your examination now, at once, the children will be grateful. I remember that you, also, longed to be released when the clock hands pointed to four—and you were a little tow-headed urchin behind that third-row desk. Your name is on it still, where you whittled it once—on just such an occasion as this.”

He did remember, then!—this old-time Dominie, who pretended to yet be young. Did he so pretend?

Deacon Tewksbury turned and bowed courteously; and, bowing, shot a keen, observing glance over the man beside him.

It was an hour of unusual happenings; and to him also something unprecedented occurred. A certain softness, very like respect and tenderness, stirred in his hard, self-sufficient heart,—till, for the moment, he beheld in the old master, not a superannuated pedagogue, who must be gotten out of office at any cost, but a man grown gray in

serving others, — a man who had gathered the “understanding” and the “wisdom” which is gentleness.

“Ahem. Well, Dominie, since you remind me of it, I guess I won’t make the examination very long to-day, not very long — on account of its being near the closing time. I see by the bright looks of the little gals that they’re ready, anyway, to answer, even if the boys don’t spunk up quite so quick. I’ll just put a few simple questions ’at anybody could tell right off, and proceed — proceed to what mostly brought me here to-day. As a friend of eddication, I have a grand scheme to propose.”

Thus having wrought expectation to its height, he fixed his eye on Katharine Wilkins and suddenly propounded: —

“What’s a pile of wood worth, that’s a hundred foot long, four foot wide, six foot high, and cost three dollars an’ seventy-five cents a cord?”

Kate stared — blushed — stammered — and gasped out: —

“I s’pose it would depend on what kind of wood it was. Some kinds is worth a lot more’n others.”

By the sudden ominous silence over the room she discovered that she had been impertinent, but

she had n't so intended. Flashing a deprecating glance towards Helen, she stammered afresh: —

“If you'll — if you'll please to say it over again, maybe — I'll try.”

“Very well. I'm always willing —”

“Excuse me, Trustee, but I think if you used the one word 'cost' in both instances, it might simplify the question. The 'cost' and the 'worth' of a thing represent two ideas.”

Deacon Tewksbury frowned. He had purposely studied up a few problems to give out, and he preferred to manage the examination to please himself. However, he did repeat the statement, modified as the Dominie had suggested, and though Kate failed, another girl — quicker at figures — “ciphered out” the problem and raised her hand to signify this fact.

“Well, Cornelia Dayton, then?”

The answer was correctly given, and everybody was pleased.

“Good. Very good. Your pupil does you proud, Dominie. Ahem. Hmm. Matilda Brown if I hire two men and a boy to lay three hundred and fifty-seven rod of stun wall for me, how much ought they to lay, all together, per day, and how long ought it to take 'em to finish the job? Come now, that's an easy one.”

Matilda resented the imputation that she required examples of especial ease, though it was quite true, and tossed her lovely head disdainfully.

“That depends on the wall.”

“Matilda!”

“Well, Master, don’t it? If it was such a wall as is round your garden patch I reckon it ought n’t to take ’em overly long. But if it was like that there one ’round Sampson House, why — it would take longer. ’Cause that’s all matched stun.”

Even Deacon Tewksbury smiled. Who could be angry with so pretty a girl?

“Well, that ain’t so bad an answer. But just supposing it’s the ordinary sort of stun wall, same as a likely mason could lay two rod a day at an’ not know he’d done anything; what then?”

But poor Matilda hopelessly floundered. She wriggled and blushed and pouted; then she was attacked by a violent fit of coughing; and when this had subsided she leaned sidewise and asked Helen: —

“Won’t you button my apern for me? It’s all undone.”

Helen nodded and held up her own hand.

“Give it up, Matilda?”

“I hain’t said so. I — I guess Pa would n’t

hire a man could n't work no faster n' that. I —”

“Helen Adair!” thundered the trustee's voice. He felt his dignity insulted, and turned to the well-bred Helen for its restoration. She, meanwhile, had had ample time to think the question over.

“Please, sir, do you mean that the boy's labor would be equal to one-half a man's?”

“Yes. Exactly. Ex-actly. Now we're comin' to it. Well?”

“They should lay, all together, fifty-one rods per day, and it would take seven days to complete the work.”

The girl's voice trembled slightly, though she felt confident her answer was correct. However, the approving nod of her teacher meant a great deal to her, even without the emphatic endorsement of the Deacon.

The few questions next put were to the boys, and met with varying success.

“But on the whole — on the whole — I may say this brief examination has been satisfactory. Next time I will give you more time —”

An audible groan from somewhere.

“I will give you more time and we will get down to bottom facts more thoroughly. Now

for my scheme. It concerns both boys and gals, and I request perfect silence in the room while I am speaking."

Renew's hand had been up and down spasmodically, for several moments, but the teacher had paid no heed to him. He now thrust his long arm ceilingward again, so vigorously and with such a resounding "Tchitk!" of his thin fingers that attention was forced to him.

"Well, Renew?"

"Please, sir, may I go out?"

"When the school is dismissed."

"Children, you all know what a great and glorious country you live in. You —"

"Shucks!" from the back seat, very low and muffled.

"You are proud of your country, I hope. You ought to be proud of a land for which — for which — our forefathers bled and died. You —"

Another uneasy chap followed Renew's example.

"Please, Dominie, I must go out. I've got to get a drink o' water."

"Silence!"

"You have all been taught, I hope, something of map-drawing. It is very essential — most essential, in fact — that every gal and boy here



present shall be able to draw a correct map, not only of his native State but of the whole United States in general. States and — territories ; counties and — county seats ; mountains and — rivers ; lakes, canawls, and — the princerpul towns and — cities in the land. I hope, I say, you are being taught this — and — ”

“ Please, teacher, I ’ve got a toothache ! ”

A little shaver on the front seat had also caught the prevailing restlessness.

“ Come here, and I ’ll put some peppermint in it, Sammy. ”

The little chubby fist went down and Sammy snickered audibly.

“ What I propose is this, Dominie — ”

While Mr. Davidson’s eyes were turned toward the guest and his back toward the big boys’ row, Renew beheld his opportunity and seized it. But he walked through the open doorway with a swagger of bravado which had its effect upon the smaller children, if upon nobody else.

“ What I propose is that the school shall make a map of these here United States, our glorious country. *Make* it, I say, not draw it on a piece of paper. I am not only the trustee of the Valley school, but I am one of the directors of our county fair, and I want to see a good exhibition

made of what the Valley school can do. There will not be time to finish the map — we'll call it a map — this year, but there will be by next year. The map is to be made of cotton cloth ; a patchwork quilt, in short, of the glorious United States ! Each State is to be one 'block,' correct in shape ; and this block is to be composed of counties, set in of different colors and also in the correct shape. The States are to be separated by a narrow black braid, sewed on very neatly, and all of this part of the work will have to be done by the gals, I suppose. The marking of the mounting chains, and of the towns, and of the cities, and of — ”

“ My Jimminetty ! ”

“ All the rest I mentioned is to be put on in Injy ink by the boys. It'll be the combined work of the gals and the boys of the Valley school ; and if it is done perfect — after the latest map of our glorious country — I will — Attention, childern ! Here comes the best part, to you prob'-ly, the reward. All them who does their share of the work perfect — according to them I shall app'int the judges — shall have a free admittance to the County Fair next year, and a chance to see this wonderful patchwork quilt hung up in Exhibition Hall, in the most con-

spic'us place I can get it hung. There, childern, what do you say to that?"

"I say it's splendid!" cried Matilda Brown, without real thought about it.

"It would be nice if we could do it, sir," said Helen, meeting the Deacon's glance toward herself.

"If you *can* do it? IF — I say. IF you can do it! — *Why*, — can't you do it?"

"It seems to me a pretty hard task. If it was a quilt of just plain blocks; but the maps in our geographies are so small. I'm afraid —"

"To childern properly instructed there should n't be no such word as fail! If you can't do this — well! All I have to say is — I have my own 'pinion of the way-behind-the-times sort o' teachin' you must get. Good afternoon, childern. Good afternoon, Dominie. I leave you the proposition to do with as you please."

The tone in which these last words were uttered was a menace. Even the young, unsuspecting scholars of the hard-placed Valley school recognized that, and a feeling of indignation rose in all their hearts.

"He need n't have gone fer to done that!" exclaimed Matilda, veering swiftly round, as she saw public opinion did not echo her premature "Splendid!"

Again the drawn look showed about the master's lips, and again Helen Adair's sympathy responded to that mute appeal.

Her hand went up as eagerly as ever Renew's had done.

"Please, Master, may I speak?"

"Surely, there will be time, directly, my dear. Let us commit ourselves to the care of the Lord before we separate for the night."

The old man rose, closed his eyes, and reverently folded his hands, then waited an instant that utter quiet might be secured; and into that peaceful hush there came a series of such shrieks and groans, such rattling of wood and iron, and such a wild stamping of horses' feet, as effectually banished all spirit of devotion for that time.

"Oh! Ah — a — ah! Who — a — oa! Oh! I'm killed!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### ACCIDENT OR INTENTION ?

**A**LMOST instantly the schoolhouse was deserted. The boys swarmed through its windows, and the girls tumbled over each other out of its narrow doorway. Even the master made breathless haste, for the groans and halloosings without grew louder and fiercer each second.

And it was the Dominie himself who really first reached the spot where the Deacon lay, or rather sprawled, in a chaos of wagon-wheels, seats, buffalo-skins, and meal-bags, a greatly shaken and thoroughly astounded man.

“Are you hurt, neighbor? What has happened?”

“Fool — questions! Can’t you see what’s happened? Course I’m hurt!”

“Your wagon — is shattered, but — I don’t understand. Can I help you? Here — lean on me. There — so!”

“I don’t know — I ain’t — yes I be. Oh! my back! my sides! Oh! dear — dear — dear!”

Mr. Davidson was seriously alarmed; but his anxiety was somewhat allayed when he found that the trustee could manage to rise, though painfully, and that he seemed to have the use of his entire body.

“Oh! that’s better. I’m glad. I don’t think there are any bones broken — for which let us be thankful.”

“Thankful! Thank-f-u-l! Hmm. Huh! Maybe, may — be! Only, I guess it’s a derved sight easier fer you ter be thankful, jest now, ’an ’t is fer me! Gosh all hemlocks! Gosh — gosh — gosh!”

The last word ended in collapse, with the Deacon again sunk amid the jumble of things.

The master was shocked. He was even frightened. It must be a sign of extremest anger, possibly of serious brain trouble, when a leader in the church should let himself go as recklessly as this! — a man so careful, commonly, of his vocabulary, and so painfully, aggressively pious.

“My dear sir, the — the children!”

“Well! What of ’em? I don’t — I can’t help it. I — Here, you clear out. I want ter get up again, if I can, an’ I don’t want no sech old tremble-bones as you be to help me, nuther!”

Mr. Davidson stepped gently aside, while the

ghost of a smile flitted over his face. This was precedent sufficient for the amused youngsters, who broke into a general titter, needing but one degree more to make it boisterous laughter.

“Children! Silence! James, do you step to that horse and take hold of his bit-ring. He’s getting restless! Helen, can’t you —” nodding significantly toward the victim of this strange accident, as he still sat ruefully amid the debris.

She went instantly to the trustee’s side and held out her hands.

“If you’ll just steady yourself by my grasp, I think I can help you out. There. That’s all right. Now, one more — down — the ground. How queer it is! Every wheel is off! How could they all come loose at once? Do you suppose you forgot to put them on right, last time you greased them?” asked the girl.

“Do you s’pose I’m a fool? An idjit? D’ye ever hear tell o’ me — me — Deacon ’Lijah Tewksbury ridin’ round this here Valley, ’ith my waggin-wheels a jagglin’ an’ wragglin’ all over the face o’ th’ yunivarse? Hey? Well, then, I guess I ain’t a-beginnin’ now.”

At this moment Renew was seen leisurely approaching from the well at the bottom of the playground, — a spot hidden by trees from the

building itself, and utilized, therefore, from time immemorial, by every delinquent as a hiding-place.

But Renew could not have been in hiding! Certainly not. The entire gravity and innocence of his round, full-moon face precluded such a possibility.

Yet Helen, watching him saunter lazily forward, was struck by the peculiarity of his manner and exclaimed, reproachfully:—

“Oh! Renew! Here is your cousin hurt, or has met with this dreadful mishap—and you not here to help him! Did n't you hear the commotion?”

“N-o-o. I mean— What's happened, Cousin Elijah!”

“Hey? Here, you young rascal, fly round an' take a holt. Roll that there wheel— Say, Renew! Do you know ary thing 'bout this here job?”

“I? *I!* Why, Cousin Elijah! I was so terrible thirsty I went down and pulled a fresh bucket of water. And the first thing I hear now— is— Helen asks me why I'm not in two places at once, and you think I ought to be watching your property without being asked to do it. The last time I offered to hold your horse, down at



meeting, you ordered me to go in and take my own place ; said there was no need of two people being late and disturbing the congregation. So, of course, I — ”

“ Look here, young feller ! You ’ve altogether too much gab. An’ you ’pear ter take it ’mazin’ cool. If I did n’t — if you did n’t — know ’t was to your int’reest to keep in my good graces I should think you ’d had — ”

“ Why, look here, Cousin Elijah ! Shall I tell you what I think ? ”

Renew had now begun peering about, turning the hubs of the wheels around and poking his fingers into every axle-box, as if thus to solve the mystery of the break-down.

“ No. Your opinion ain’t wuth hearin’. There — take a holt. Lift them bags out. Put them seats to one side. I ’m goin’ ter turn this box over an’ see — because it don’t seem nateral to reason that the hull four on ’em should ’a’ come off to onct ! ”

Interested in the investigation, all the children, as well as their elders, were silent, while Deacon Tewksbury raised one side the box and examined the “ gear ” critically.

“ They ain’t nary thing bust, so fur ’s I see. They hain’t but one conclusion to come to — and

I've been comin' to it — I've been comin' to it — right along!"

The man raised himself upright, as far as he could, placed his hands on his hips with an audible sigh, and looked reproachfully around upon the company. His anger had cooled somewhat, or had diverted itself into a deeper and quieter channel, but there was a vindictive gleam in his eyes which frightened some of the girls into a retreat toward the schoolroom.

"You need n't run, little gals. I know it was n't none of you, 'cause you were all inside the building with me. But there's been bad work here — there's been mighty bad work. Here I come, a peaceable man, a tryin' to raise the standards of the valley school a peg higher, an' what do I meet? This — this!" and he waved his hand dramatically over the wreck.

"Now, Dominie, do you s'pose this here happened — jest happened?"

"It is a peculiar accident. I do not understand it."

"I do," interposed Renew, rather too glibly. "Somebody that's had a spite against Cousin Elijah has taken the nuts off every axle an' loosened the wheels so far 't the first time they

turned round they 'd turn off too! That's let the whole thing down ker-follup!"

"Why, Renew Hapgood! Who 'd dare?" asked Jimmy Bolton, angrily.

"Huh! Plenty would."

"Shucks! There is n't a fellow in the school so mean as that! Unless —"

"'Less what?"

"No matter," — darkly.

Renew turned the attention of the listeners by asking, innocently, —

"Where's Philip Sampson? And that long-legged mountaineer?"

A profound silence followed the question, during which the insinuation which Renew had hoped to convey did accomplish its miserable work.

"Sure enough! where are they?" asked Kate, curiously.

"Oh! Kate!" cried Helen. "Surely you heard me say that Papa gave them permission to go into the woods this afternoon! That's why they were so impatient while the Deacon was talking, — and what made them climb out of the window and slip off."

"Hmm. Exactly. Well — they were the *first* boys out here, were n't they?" returned Renew, maliciously.

“I don’t know what you mean. No, that isn’t true. I do know — and I can’t see how any boy can be so mean as to imagine such a thing of anybody else! They went to the woods right away. I *know* they did! What did they care about such a dirty trick as this?”

Poor Helen was in dire distress. For once she was almost too angry to speak, and if glances could have withered, Renew Hapgood, toward whom, principally, her indignation was directed, would have shrivelled upon the instant.

But he didn’t shrivel, not in the least. He stood his ground quietly, indifferently, wholly satisfied with the turn affairs were taking. He settled his pink necktie, ran his fingers through his dark hair, thrust his hands into his pockets, and began to walk about with quite a lordly air.

“Somebody’s got to pay for this! I say — somebody — *somebody* — has got to pay for this! Dominie, I expect you to make it your business to sift this matter to the bottom.”

“Certainly, I shall do so.”

“Here’s the case. I come to make a visit to the school. When I finish an’ start home, I find that somebody — somebody, with malice aforethought — has done what Renew says — fixed every one o’ my wagon-wheels so as they’ll fall

off the minute they begin to turn. Now — *who* is there in this school 'at is likely to do such a thing?"

"I can imagine nobody mean enough," said the master, warmly.

"You ain't a-goin' to shield the transgressor, then?"

"I, sir? Have I ever — ever — knowingly condoned wrong-doing?"

"See here, Helen, I hate to make you feel bad, but I'm a kind of a lawyer, you know, — a justice o' the peace, — an' I look into things. Here 's a few plain questions 'at about answer themselves. Who's been at the bottom of all the mischief a-goin' here this past year? Who rides high-footed square over rules and regulations, studies when he pleases an' plays when he pleases? I kinder guess you know the boy. There's that wagon — an' there's them wheels!"

The trustee interrupted himself to stand and glare savagely upon his broken-down vehicle, and, as before, with his rising anger his speech suffered.

"There's them wheels, I say, the hull four on 'em! They was all put on square an' as they should be. They never come off afore. Why should they come off now? Why, — somebody's

helped 'em off! An' suspicion p'int's, I say suspicion p'int's — to them boys what run away! There. That's all. I shall make it my business to see t'other trustees an' lay this matter afore 'em. What's a school fer if 't ain't fer discipline? Have we got discipline? Huh! An' if we hain't got it, had we ought to have it, er not? If one teacher can't keep it—let us hope another can. Here, you Renew. Flax 'round now an' hunt up them wheel-nuts! Then help me put 'em on ag'in. All o' you big boys, lend a hand. I'm goin' home now, quick 's I can get there. Then I'll 'tend ter business. Then, I say, I'll 'tend ter business."

It was a villanous scowl which the irate trustee bestowed upon the poor Dominie, but it was met by a look of such serenity, though sadness, that somehow its giver felt he had wasted it.

The master was utterly silent. Even when Helen stole to him and laid her head against his arm, entreating him, "Please say you don't believe it was my Phil, dear Master!" he merely stroked her hair absently and then passed on to assist in righting the disabled "democrat," by which name such equipages as the Deacon's were thereabout known.

Sadly she turned toward the empty schoolhouse and gathered up her books, putting her

desk in order for the night. Then she put on her little knitted jacket, which a thoughtful mother made her wear, now that October days had come, and tied her white dimity sunbonnet over her yellow curls.

Kate met her at the doorway, just as she was going out, and in a burst of remorse exclaimed:

“I did n't mean it was Phil, Nell, darling! I don't believe it was. He likes tricks — yet —”

“That's just it, Kate! He does like tricks — and it's just the sort of 'lark' he'd be up to if he had been a little mad. But he was n't. I did think — I don't know — I'm all mixed up in my thoughts. Why should Daniel let him do it, — Dan, who is studying so hard and trying to do every single thing he can that's right? No matter. I don't want to talk about it, — not till I know the real truth. As far as our way goes together, let's walk along the brook. It's quieter, and none of the other children will talk to me of Phil.”

Kate fetched her own pink sunbonnet and tucked her arm within her friend's, and they struck off across the playground toward the narrow stream which passed its southern corner, and wandered thence beside a leafy lane for a full half-mile.

Once out of sight of the schoolhouse and beside their beloved Funny-Child Brook their spirits rose again, and they forgot everything save the wonderful gentians which grew upon its banks.

“Oh! here’s the loveliest bunch yet, Kate! Are n’t they so pretty and so odd? Never to open their hearts a bit more, and — Oh! what! Look there!”

The change in tone startled the other, and she turned to see Helen, pale and wide-eyed, pointing dramatically toward the middle of the stream.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### NOT A PURSE, BUT A WHISTLE.

IN response to Phil's special pleading, Miss Delight had set aside her usual decision, that all the hired help of Sampson House should take their meals in the kitchen, and had graciously accorded Daniel a seat at the family board over which she presided.

In all the other valley households the employers and employees ate together, in democratic simplicity; but, unpretending as she was in most things, there were one or two customs of her aristocratic ancestors to which the good lady clung tenaciously, — this, of having two tables, being the most rigidly adhered to.

It was, therefore, all the more of a slight to her generosity that the favored Daniel should be late to supper on the evening of the Deacon's visit to the school; and some other matters, wholly domestic, having gone wrong, she looked up with considerable vexation as he finally came

creaking in, wearing his Sunday shoes, just as the bread-and-meat course was ended and Molly was serving the cake and preserves.

“Well, Daniel! I did not know as you intended honoring us at all with your presence to-night!”

“Ma’am?” asked the astonished woodlander.

“Hmm. You’re late,” she returned, feeling that sarcasm was wasted. “I conclude, because you stopped to change your school shoes for your best ones.”

“Yes, Ma’am, I know I be. I mean, I know I — am.”

“That’s right. You are improving in your grammar wonderfully. Whenever you take care about it you speak quite correctly. Where is Philip?”

Daniel fidgeted, blushed, and awkwardly took his seat, but he did not reply until she repeated:

“Where is Philip?”

“I don’t know — ezackly.”

“Daniel, that’s impertinent!”

“Sho! I did n’t mean to be sassy. But — I’d — I’d ruther you did n’t ask me, Ma’am.”

“It is n’t necessary to say ‘Ma’am’ continually. I like it occasionally, but — I insist upon your telling me where my nephew is.”

“He ain’t in any harm, Ma’ — I mean, Miss Sampson.”

“Where — is — he ?”

Loyalty to Philip and honor to his benefactress, as he always considered Aunt Delight, pulled the lad in diverse directions, but he finally collected himself so far as to say : —

“Won’t you please excuse me from tellin’ this time ? He ’ll be home afore — afore — I ’m sure he won’t be gone a great while.”

Miss Sampson said nothing further at the time ; but she showed her displeasure by correcting more often, and sometimes needlessly, poor Daniel’s awkward habits at table, till he became utterly confused, and even the placid Doctor was in distress.

As for Helen, she had been strangely preoccupied ever since her return from school, and though she had brought a beautiful bunch of gentians to her mother, she had seemed so sober when presenting them that half the recipient’s pleasure was destroyed.

“My darling, what’s happened to make you so serious ? Anything wrong at school ?” Mrs. Adair had asked ; and her child had responded, mysteriously : —

“Yes, Mamma, dearest, there is. But I don’t

want to tell you just yet, — not till I have seen the boys. Then — when I understand — you shall hear the whole business.”

This same uncommon mood had continued ever since; and it was a relief to everybody when, just as they were rising from the table, Philip entered, rather boisterously, and with his eyes fairly dancing with merriment.

“Oh! Auntie! Uncle! There’s the greatest fun out ever you heard of! Somebody — nobody knows who — loosened all the nuts of Deacon Tewksbury’s wagon, and — Hello, Nell! What’s the matter? What do you want?” for she had run to him and clasped his arm entreatingly.

“Oh! Phil, did you do it? or Dan?”

“Well, upon my word! I like that!” — with infinite indignation.

“Don’t put me off. Tell me. Did you do it?”

“No! no!” returned both lads, swiftly and hotly.

“They think you did!”

“Then they, whoever ‘they’ are, may unthink! But, I say, it’s the best joke I ever heard of! That old —”

“Philip!”

“Yes, Uncle.”

“Nephew, where did you hear this?” demanded Aunt Delight, keenly.

“Why — well, if you must know — down at the old mill.”

“Where you’ve been forbidden to go.”

“Oh! hang it all, Auntie. You can’t keep a fellow in a straight-jacket — outside a prison! I mean, I’m sorry to be disrespectful, but — it’s so awfully dull here. I can’t help going where I can have a little fun once in a way. It was nothing great to-night. Some of the boys were getting up a little supper, and they asked me, and —”

“So, of course, you went! I, also, have ‘asked you,’ but that does n’t count, it seems.”

“Now, Auntie Delight, that’s cruelty to poor me. You know I have n’t any ‘say No’ in my make up, and — Well, they wanted something a little nice. They had no money and I had, and so — I went down to the store and bought some candy and lemons. That’s all. Surely. We just had our supper, then after I’d heard this news I could n’t wait till I got home. There’s nothing wrong about those boys either, Uncle Adair, only they like nonsense.”

“Exactly. Now, Daniel, what is it?”

“I — I just wanted to tell you about my shoes.”

“Your — shoes?”

“Yes. I’ve been doin’ wrong, too. You told me to wear ’em, an’ I did n’t — I hated ’em so ; an’ so I took ’em off — an’ — I’ve lost ’em, an’ —

But here the penitent caught sight of Helen’s face and stopped in surprise.

“Why — Swidgeycorum ! What have I said or done *now?*”

“Where did you lose your shoes, Daniel?” asked the Doctor, breaking the silence.

“That beats me ! I took em off, after we clumb out o’ windows —”

“What ? Explain yourself.”

Daniel looked at Phil, who suddenly exploded in a burst of laughter, and in an aggrieved tone replied : —

“I’d ruther not.”

“Helen, do you know anything about all this business ? If you do, tell all you know.”

Frightened by the unusual sternness of her father’s tone, she made her recital as brief and explicit as she could ; from the moment of the Deacon’s arrival at the schoolhouse till that in which she had discovered — But here she, also, paused abruptly, and looked piteously toward Daniel.

“Please, Papa dear, I don’t want to tell the rest. Ask — him.”

“What does she mean, lad?”

“Blest if I know!” returned the mountaineer, apparently completely mystified.

“Oh! Daniel! I did believe in you being truthful!” burst out poor Helen, shocked beyond bearing by the duplicity of her “Hero.”

Daniel’s face flushed scarlet and he tossed his head backward as if she had struck him, but his glance did not flinch, and he asked her instantly:

“What do you mean, please? Did ever you hear me — did anybody ever hear me — tell a lie? I ain’t perlite, an’ I always am a-doin’ things I had n’t oughter, but — Swidgeycorum! I ain’t a liar!”

“Daniel! That’s a hard word; a word no gentleman, nor one who aspires to be a gentleman, should ever use toward another, least of all toward a girl, a woman!”

“I know, sir, an’ I’m ashamed. But it come out afore I knowed it. Yet I mean it, — in one sense. I hain’t told no lies, an’ I do wish she’d say out plain, plumb straight what she’s a-thinkin’ about.”

“Helen, tell him.”

“Dan, I found your shoes and stockings!”

“Goody! Did you? Where?”

“Where you put them.”

“Under the wood-pile alongside the school-house?”

“The wood-pile! Oh! Daniel Starbuck! How can you?”

“Well — I’m dumfounded! I —”

“Helen, my daughter, tell at once where you found them.”

“On a rock in the middle of Funny-Child Brook.”

“Swid — gey — co — rum! How come they there?”

“Did n’t you put them there?” asked the girl, severely, yet still hoping that he would be able to say no.

He did say no, with a vehemence and readiness that carried conviction with it, conviction, at least, to her trusting soul. As for Miss Sampson — but that was afterward.

“How in the mischief could they have gotten there?” asked Phil, curiously. “It’s all my fault, Uncle, Auntie, and this is all there is to the ‘business,’ so far as either of us know. You’ve forbidden Dan to go without his feet covered, and he has obeyed, even though it was a real torment to him. He wanted to find a squirrel for Aunt Serapha — and he has found one, too, a beauty! — but his shoes creaked so he could n’t



get near any, and I took pity on him this time. I take all the blame, if there is any for such a trifle. So, when I saw we were in for a regular homily from Deacon I just scrambled out the window and called to him to come too. He did without thinking — till he was outside. Then he wanted to go back, but I coaxed him not. And to comfort him I made him take off the ‘pesky’ things and leave them under the wood-pile.

“That’s all there is about it. When we came back it was quite dark, but the shoes were gone. We stayed, and searched everywhere, for he feared Auntie Delight would be mad — excuse me, offended. She’d think he did n’t appreciate his advantages, and he does, if ever an unfortunate chap did.

“Somebody, I can’t imagine who, has taken those hateful shoes and stockings and thrown them into the brook just to plague him. Whether it was the same person who played that funny trick on Deacon Tewksbury or not, I can’t tell, but I think it likely. Don’t you?”

“I think nothing yet, — save that this insult to a good man which you are pleased to call ‘funny’ may prove something quite different from fun to an innocent person. Enough of

the matter for to-night. Now, Nell, let's go to Mother's room and tell her about that marvelous quilt. Maybe she'll be able to give you some helpful ideas concerning it."

Then the group separated. Doctor Adair and Helen repaired to the mother's "Peace Room;" Aunt Delight departed kitchenward, intent upon her last household cares for the day; while Daniel hastened to his neglected "chores," and Phil went to amuse himself with the newly caught squirrel, and to fasten it in the cage which he had bought during his late visit to the Valley store, whose forehanded proprietor kept "everything in stock, from pulpits to penny whistles."

As the mountaineer passed Miss Sampson, on his way to the barn, he heard the long-suffering house-mistress remark to herself, in a disappointed tone:

"Well-a-day! One 'can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'!"

Was it accidental that she glanced at poor Dan as she said it?

As if she had spoken to him openly, he replied, politely:—

"No, Ma'am, I s'pose not. But some *can* make 'whistles out 'o pigs' tails,' 'cause it has been done; an' I mean to show you it'll be done again."

“Words, Daniel, words. Deeds are better.”

“Yes, Miss Sampson, I ’gree with you.”

By which odd little dialogue some ideas were exchanged which proved helpful to both; for the lad went out to his stable with a firmer tread, and Aunt Delight let a grim smile come out and rest upon her lips.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MORAL BEFORE THE HOMILY.

“**B**UT I tell you, little girl, the thing is ridiculous. Simply ridiculous. More than that, it’s about impossible.”

“About, but not quite. I do believe we could do it. I—I must try, anyway. Please say yes to the only way I can think of. Won’t you?”

Helen’s arms were around her old aunt’s neck, and her sweet face coaxingly near the time-furrowed features of that “strictly common-sense person,” as she was pleased to term herself.

“Child, you’re as persistent as — some other people.”

“Phil, for instance?”

“Never mind Philip. I’m not pleased with Philip, my dear.”

Helen sighed. Things at Sampson House were not running with their usual smoothness. Almost daily, at school or elsewhere, there was

some complaint about the mischievous lads in the valley, and directly, or indirectly, nearly every "lark" would come home to rest upon Philip's laughing —

"I did n't think;" "I did n't see any harm."

"Well, I know, Auntie dear; but Philip is n't concerned in this thing yet. And it must be done. I talked over a lot of things yesterday, when I was riding with Papa, and — oh! Auntie Delight, if you're a friend, a real friend to dear old Dominie, it must be done, some way."

"A friend, Nell? Why, we were lad and lass together, child, like you and Phil. What threatens that good man's peace, my Helen? Tell me all your father said."

"It is n't so much. He says there's a conspiracy — I think that's what he called it — to get rid of our master and hire a new one, a young one. Papa says it's the hard way of the world that when a man gets ripe in wisdom he's immediately shelved, like a completed volume. No matter how good he is or —"

"Never mind philosophy, Helen. You're too young for that, even at second hand. What's your scheme about this dreadful quilt? I believe, by the wanness of your face, that you

actually lie awake nights to plan how it may be done."

"I have lain awake. That's the way I've thought it all out."

"Go on."

"First, I want to take my money out of the bank, my little savings-bank, and send to New York, or Boston, or away off, wherever they get such things, and buy a big, splendid map of the United States. Just as they are now, with all the new States and everything. Then I want to have all the girls come here every Saturday afternoon and make the quilt right after that pattern, if you'll let us have the loft or the big garret, to work in. It's light, and I think Papa would give me wood enough to make a fire there. And after it's all pieced and put together, or maybe each state-block as it's finished, the boys could come and put in the rivers and things like they were told to do. It would be best, I know, to do it by the blocks, so if any mistakes were made it would be easier to fix it."

"Any mistakes were made! Child, it would be all mistakes. I—and I'm an experienced seamstress, Nell,—even I would n't undertake to do such a monstrous thing, unless I wanted to go to a lunatic asylum."

“But if it were for Master?”

“Well, if it ‘were for Master,’ and if it were possible.”

However, Miss Sampson did not look quite so scornfully amused as when Helen had first seriously broached the subject, and the girl went on: —

“We think, Papa and I, that the Deacon believes it’s an impossibility — whew! what a long word! — just as you do. He gave us the task because he did so believe. So that when we failed he’d be able to say it was a proof our dear Dominie didn’t know enough to teach the children of this generation and should be removed; and, Auntie, I believe he’d die, really die, if they made him give up teaching!”

“Hmm. May be. I’m afraid I should die if I had to do it for him! Three youngsters are all my patience is equal to, — and it has to be stretched, like that stocking-leg of yours, even then.”

Helen laughed and smoothed the knitting-work on her knee. It was Aunt Delight’s rule that the girl should knit all her own stockings; and sometimes, when the boys were having especial fun out-of-doors and wanted her companionship, they would each take an end of the half-com-

pleted work and pull it so forcibly that it lengthened an inch or two.

“But, Auntie, dear! You know I don't cheat about it, do I? For I always count the ‘times round’ and knit as many on each one, the same as if they didn't stretch it. So may we have the loft? And if we get into a tight place, will you, who've pieced so many lovely quilts, show us and set us right? Because we must do it. Besides that, we've all talked it over, all us girls, and some of the boys; and we're going to study this year harder than we ever did before, and pass just perfect, perfect examinations at the end. If we haven't learned things it has n't been dear old Dominie's fault.”

“No, dear. Nor do I see how he can be, as he is accused, so very ‘far behind the times;’ for I'm sure he spends a deal of money upon new books, and he is an inveterate reader. It is he, always, of all the valley folk, who is first to hear of the world's progress, and to spread the news to all who will listen. No; if the school is backward it is n't the master's fault.”

“And, Auntie Delight, may I?”

“Persistent! Well—yes. I'm laying up a terrible winter's task for myself,—it'll mostly come upon me, my dear,—but you may invite



the girls to come here one week from next Saturday. By that time the map should be here, and I'll help you organize and begin. Only, Helen, remember: if this task *is* begun, and it is possible of completion, it must be completed. Also, all the expense of the map is to come from your own little store of cash. But the pieces can all be furnished easily enough, if each girl supplies enough for her own 'block.'

"Now run and brush your hair and put on a clean apron. There's to be a temperance lecture at the little red schoolhouse this evening, and I am going with you young folks, myself, while your father remains at home with Serapha. All the rest of us, even Susan and Molly, must hear this wonderful orator who is turning the world upside down with his new theories of total abstinence. So run and get ready."

Helen needed no second bidding. It was a rare thing for her busy aunt to leave Sampson House, save on Sunday mornings; when, at the head of her flock, she regularly appeared in the old meeting-house away down the turnpike, and took her seat in the front pew, — the same pew which had been occupied with corresponding regularity by "the Sampsons" of succeeding generations, since the erection of the building.

Away sped the child to her own little room and arrayed herself in her gray merino gown, with its prim little ruffles of lace at throat and wrists, and so short of length that, according to the fashion of the time, a goodly expanse of stiffly starched pantalette showed beneath the hem. A dainty apron of nainsook was tied over the frock, for no self-respecting lassie of those days would risk her best attire without this protection. Then she donned her knitted over-socks, her scarlet cloak, and hood, and thus equipped ran lightly down to her mother's room to be inspected and kissed good-bye.

“Am I all right, Mamma? And all the trouble's over! Aunt Delight is going to help us, and that 'dreadful quilt' shall 'do' our master 'proud'! Isn't it funny for me to be going out after dark? I've never been, you know, but once or twice in all my life!”

“Such a short life, yet, my darling!”

“And I'm so glad it's in the schoolhouse; because Auntie's going to let us three children walk. Only she and Susan and Molly and old Abraham will ride in the spring buggy.”

“Then you'll keep close in sight of it, won't you, my child? It's a lonely road, as I remember it.”

“Why, Mamma! and I walk it every day! It’s never lonely to me.”

“But the shanty settlement. They’re rough people who live there. That group of hovels always was a blot upon our beautiful valley. I wish — and yet, they’re human. Well, I only hope some of them, some who need this lecture, will go to hear it.”

“Yes, dear, so do I. And did n’t you know? There’s only one family left now in the settlement. That’s in the last one of the ‘row.’ Mike Walsh, his wife and his six little children. I was there with Papa the other day, and they’re the dearest little creatures. Papa went to offer the man a job at the threshing; but he did n’t care about it. He — but there’s Auntie. Good-bye. I hope you and Papa will have a lovely evening.”

“And you, my child, as well! Good-bye. God bless my little maid.”

The spring buggy, drawn by old Carey and driven by older Abraham, the serving man, moved sedately out of the grounds and down the frozen turnpike, with Helen, Philip, and Daniel walking close behind. At frequent intervals Miss Delight looked around over her shoulder to see that all was well, but after a while fell into a

discussion of the farm work with her ancient retainer and left the "youngsters" to themselves.

Susan and Molly were full of the novelty of the occasion, and the two lads deep in boys' talk which did not in the least interest the girl behind them.

The moon was at the full and the wide landscape almost as light as sunshine might have made it; and Helen paced dreamily on after the rest, absently humming an old-time tune while she pondered upon the details of the patch-work task to which she had set her hand.

"It shall be perfect, even if it is ugly. For my part, I think a 'rising sun' or a 'goose chain' is much prettier. Then, think of the whole school going to the County Fair!—where everybody sees— Hark! What's that?"

It was the sound of a child's sobbing. It came from behind the rail fence that bordered the turnpike, and it pierced the frosty air with pitiful distinctness.

Helen's quick sympathy responded instantly, and running to the bushes which hid the weeper from her sight, she parted their bare branches and looked through the spaces of the fence. At first she could see nothing clearly. It was all just a heap of shadows in the hedgerow, and the

sobs had ceased as soon as the crackling of the frozen twigs betrayed her presence. She waited a bit and then, in her gentlest tone, inquired: —

“Little child, who are you?”

There was no answer, but her eyes had grown accustomed to the dimness beyond the rails, and she could make out the form of a tiny girl crouching on the ground.

In another instant Helen had placed her mitted hands upon the topmost rail, given a boyish swing to her supple limbs, and leaped over, landing close beside the hiding little one, who now crept to her own feet and started to run away.

But the action was not swift enough, and the lifting of the small head disclosed its identity.

“Why, Kitty Walsh! You baby! You poor, cold little girlie! What are you doing here?”

Even then the child would have escaped, but Helen had flung off the cape of her own warm cloak and wrapped the shivering midget in it.

The warmth, the tenderness, the sudden sense of safety wrought an equally sudden change in small Kitty's mood. She had recognized her comforter as one of the family upon whose charity her improvident parents were accustomed to depend when necessity was dire.

“Kitty's so cold! so hungry!”

“But what are you doing here? Now? You should be asleep, a little thing like you! Does your mother know where you are?”

“Daddy’s cross! I’s e so afraid! I runned away. I’s e so hungry.”

“You poor baby! And I have n’t a thing to give you. But come. I’ll take you home. I’m going past that way. See. I’ll put you over the fence first, then I’ll come. You shall wear my cape all the way, and I’ll ask your mother to give you some food. You are a naughty little girl, I’m afraid, Kitty, to run away.”

“No. No. Not naughty. Dad’s naughty. Dad did holler — loud. He hurt Ma. She — Oh! I can’t go home!”

Had she not been restrained the little creature would have escaped and crawled back through the fence, to bury her face in her hands and, because she could not then see, fancy herself hidden.

“No, Kitty. I’m going to take you home. Nobody shall hurt you. Come, show me the way!”

“Kitty’s c’oak. Pitty c’oak,” remarked the child, her attention already diverted to the soft fur about the gay cape which enveloped her.

“Yes. Hold it up so you won’t step on it —

so. Now let's run. See if you can get there first!"

They reached the cabin directly, but Helen stopped short on its threshold. The sounds of drunken laughter, a rude song, and a woman's shriek of pain, mingled in one hideous babel, and, for an instant, froze the blood in her veins.

Catching up the little child in her arms, she hugged it protectingly, while her eager gaze scanned the moonlit road in either direction. But forward, the buggy and the lads following it had already passed out of sight, and backward there was no sign of moving creature.

Another shriek pierced her soul, and pushing open the door she confronted the inebriate, Mike Walsh, horsewhip in hand, with maudlin hilarity chasing his wife and little ones around and around the room.

A hush of astonishment followed her appearance, and before the astounded man could recover his benumbed wits Helen had crossed to him, taken the whip from his unresisting hand, and seized his coarse fingers in her own firm grasp.

"Come. You must go with me. There's a man down the road has something to say to you. Come."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE UNSPOKEN SERMON.

“**Y**OU can do anything with poor Walsh when he’s half drunk.”

This remark heard, but unnoticed at the time, from old Abraham’s lips came into Helen’s mind at that instant with vivid distinctness.

Another half-remembered saying of Aunt Delight’s, on an occasion when Phil had teased her for timidity, also arose and ranged itself alongside the other, sending a thrill of conscious power through her eager soul:—

“She’s only a girl, but there’s soldier’s blood in her veins. She’d fight for the right—as well as another.”

The “soldier’s blood” tingled in response to the thought. With a still firmer grip of the laborer’s hand she guided him out of the hovel, into the road and down it, as swiftly as his stumbling feet could move. A glow of enthusiasm was in her face, and her eyes shone like stars.



“I never saw anybody like this before ; but, surely, here is one of those whom Mamma hoped might hear the lecture. He shall hear it. He must.”

They were at the cross-roads almost before she realized it, and here she was no longer alone. All along these byways were people hurrying lest they should be too late for the rare entertainment, and on the turnpike a straggling company made equal haste. Some cast curious glances upon her, not all recognized her, and most were more intent upon their own chances for securing a good seat than upon their neighbors' business.

Outside the building she saw, as they reached it, teams of every description ranged along the bordering fences or — a fortunate few — safely housed beneath its sheds, humanely erected for horses' comfort on the weekly prayer-meeting night.

But no prayer-meeting, not even during a revival, had ever seen so many people thronging the ancient building. The lecturer was already world-famous, and would surely never have spared time from his busy life to visit this isolated region, save for love of his old friend and fellow-worker in the “Cause,” good Dominie Davidson.

So that, as Helen steered her wondering, half-stupid charge up to the door she found it blocked by a press of persons which effectually prevented her ingress to the room.

“Please. Please, good people, will you not let me go in?”

“Can’t be done, Sissy. Nuther in nor out now, I reckon. Never see sech a jam, nowheres.”

She fell back somewhat and felt Michael’s hand slipping out of her own. But, wheeling about, she caught and drew his arm through hers and thus brought the truant hand in front of her, to clasp it with all the might of her firm young fingers.

“No. No. Keep still. We’ll get in after a little. Oh! Isn’t this — strange?”

It was strange. The wonderful magnetism of the man whom all had come to hear seemed to penetrate those walls which hid him and this unseeing, waiting humanity beyond the threshold.

Slow-witted, illiterate countrymen, some, with many of keener brain; still, it was all the same: one power, one expectation enthralled them, and already — long before he had uttered one audible word — the lecturer’s task was half accomplished.

In ten-fold degree Helen’s sensitiveness responded to the emotional excitement which had

electrified these duller natures and she became absolutely oblivious to everything save the fact that in there, behind that barricade of men and women, was the one man she must reach, — the one man to whom she was bringing this malodorous sinner beside her to be purified and saved.

Once more she made an eloquent appeal to be let pass ; and at the ring in her beseeching voice the outmost layer of that overlapping throng fell off and permitted her a foot or two of progress.

To do more than this was impossible. The little entry was so packed that neither hand nor limb could move, and only a few, half-suffocated ejaculations filtered through to the free outer air.

Then she fell back ; tears in her glowing eyes, despair in her heart, yet holding still the faster to the confused and speechless Michael.

A memory, an inspiration came. As swiftly and noiselessly as she could she retreated from that crowding throng. She felt that if she were seen she would be followed, and she must not be — yet ; not till her charge was safe where she would have him.

When she was quite free of all these others she ran, dragging the stumbling victim of her zeal over the frozen ground behind her. Had he been

other than a stupid mass of flesh she would have failed, but his matter obeyed her mind quite unresistingly.

At the very back of the building, where were neither doors nor windows, of ordinary construction, was a small lean-to. It was used for summer storage of the great stove and the disused benches. It opened outwardly by a wooden shutter, and its rude inner door, admitting to the schoolroom, was screened by the big blackboard.

“If I can get him through that window — it isn’t high! That old log — a wagon-seat — *I can!*”

She braced Michael against the lean-to, beside the shutter, and, with misgiving, loosened her grasp upon him. He remained where she placed him, as stupidly as he had obeyed all her former behests.

“How queer! He frightened his wife — and I frighten him! But he was noisier then, and he struck her.”

However, the fact of his present submission remained, and she rejoiced in it. Within a few seconds she had made a sort of stepping-block to the low window. The shutter, never fastened, yielded to her touch.

As soon as it was opened she pushed, pulled,

tugged, and finally tumbled Michael through the aperture; and in this, of course, his mechanical obedience aided her, else she had not succeeded.

“There, Mr. Walsh! That’s very good. It’s rough in here, but never mind. I know the way. The room is empty. Come.”

They crossed the short distance safely, the light coming through the unglazed window showing them the way. Softly she raised the latch of the door and swung it inward. She had now but to roll the intervening blackboard sidewise along its grooves and she would have reached her goal; ay, even to the very side of the man upon the platform beyond, who was so wonderful to save and to uplift.

She whispered to the dull ears beside her, —

“Hark! I hear a strange voice. No, that’s Master, in the prayer. We must wait.”

The girl and the drunkard — spirit and clod — became equally silent while the words of that petition floated through the panel of wood and lingered echoing about them. Even after the deep “Amen!” had resounded from various parts of that crowded room, Helen stood with bowed head and now swiftly throbbing heart, longing, yet dreading, to push that flimsy barrier aside and to bring this poor neighbor of hers

unto that other marvel, who had himself lain afoul in the gutter, but who had now become a man and a helper of men.

“If only he would speak!”

He did.

She knew the voice on the instant, though, of course, she had never heard it before.

“This is the man with the message for Mike! Quick — he must hear it!”

The orator opened his lips, —

“My friends, once I was as —” He waved his hands dramatically, outward, downward, to indicate the depths of his one-time degradation.

It was at that instant that the blackboard panel rolled softly aside and there stood revealed in the opening the girl and the inebriate, — the spirit and the clod.

Never before nor afterward to that gifted speaker, came an aid to his eloquence like this.

Melodrama could not have designed it; only reality could have rendered possible a climax so powerful.

At the slight sound which the moving blackboard made, the lecturer turned and his expressive gesture was arrested, half-finished.

With each passing second, illuminated by the lights overhead, those two contrasting figures

seemed to glow and intensify the purity and the defilement that is possible to "the image of God."

In Michael, the rescuer beheld his former self. For a moment he gazed upon his prototype, while a profound hush stole through the room. One could hear the catch of a woman's breath in the furthest corner. Then he sank backwards into the chair provided for him and dropped his face in his hands. A tear ran down his cheek and glistened through his fingers, and a sob escaped him.

The sob was caught up and echoed somewhere. Another, and another. The audience, true, simple-hearted people who lived with nature, were on the verge of tears; and as yet, of all there had been prepared to say, not a word had been spoken.

When at last the tension of feeling had slightly relaxed, the lecturer again arose. There was now no attempt at oratory, at eloquence.

"My neighbors, the story is told. I came to teach and I have been taught. When God speaks let the people keep silence. Only, in His Name, are there any here who will sign the pledge?"

The silence he had requested prevailed for a space, during which Helen and Michael remained standing at the back of the platform; she with a

slowly awakening consciousness that she was being regarded curiously by that sea of faces confronting her, and into the dullard's brain a dim conception of the scene beginning to penetrate.

Then the spell was broken. The Dominie and the stranger took each a long sheet of paper in hand, and the master read aloud the heading, the pledge, which was printed at the top of these white pages.

They started to pass down the aisles between the desks, but progress was impossible; nor, indeed, was it necessary; for now, comprehending, the people pressed forward, eager to set their signatures on that saving sheet.

Yet first, before even one name was written, the lecturer stepped to Helen and offered her a pen.

She did not understand, and looked up frightened. The exaltation which had possessed her was ebbing somewhat and she trembled, visibly.

"Your name, my child. Your innocent name must lead my list to-night!"

"And he, Michael? May he sign, too?"

"Surely. Yes, yes. Or you — for him."

Then she seized the pen and wrote swiftly, and turning, held it toward the ragged fellow.

He shook his head dumbly.

"Mike — it's to promise you'll let the drink



alone. For Kitty's sake! Won't you?" and she clasped her hands, entreating him.

The man was sobering rapidly. The excitement around him, like a pungent chemical, had pierced to his clouded brain and cleared it.

"For Kitty's sake!" What was there he would not do for Kitty, the flower of his flock and his idol?

"Ay. I'll do aught for she."

"But you must understand. You are never to taste that dreadful stuff any more. Never — any — more."

"I understand."

"Will you keep your word?"

"Faith, but I'll thry."

"Write, then."

"No. Not I. Do you the writin', Miss, like you've done all the rist;" and he dropped his head shamefacedly.

Helen remembered. Only a few days before, she had seen her father sign a paper for another, unlearned, and had questioned about it as she questioned all strange facts which came in her way.

"Michael Walsh + his mark."

It was done. Her miserable charge was saved. So she believed.

With a sigh of profoundest satisfaction, and with the physical relaxation that follows on such enthusiasm, the girl raised her eyes and again beheld that multitude.

Now their bold glances seemed to scorch her. Why was she there? What had she done? Why, away backward, at the end of the room, hemmed in by all those other faces, should she come gradually to see only one face, white and stern, the face of her aunt Delight?

Why should that countenance stand out so clearly, with its patrician dignity of feature? Was it because of its crown of snowy hair, or for the cold, disapproving gaze it fixed upon her?

Certainly, it was the face of a person totally unmoved by all that wave of emotion beating against it.

Helen bowed her head and covered her eyes with her hands. She would have sunk down where she stood, but there came a leaping, flying figure over those myriad heads and shoulders, a boyish, sustaining arm was thrown around her, and Phil's voice was in her ear.

“Bravo! my Nell! See! Here's my own name, close to yours!”

She hid her face on his shoulder, and he turned his glance backward to where Dan's

tousle of tawny hair showed close beside Miss Sampson.

“Come, Dan! Be next to me!” he shouted.

Aunt Delight’s gaze sought the mountaineer’s eyes, calmly curious for his response.

It came silently, with a negative shake of the head; whereupon just the faintest sign of satisfaction revealed itself in the dilating of his benefactress’ delicate nostrils.

Unfortunately, these two were not the only ones who beheld the dumb refusal Daniel had given.

The lecturer, also, had seen and comprehended it; maybe regretted and resented it; for, raising his arm to a level with his shoulder, he pointed his forefinger backward over the crowd, so steadfastly that all glances followed its guidance and fixed themselves on the young woodlander. Then his voice rang out in those vibrant tones which made his every sentence so effective:

“There stands a youth who will fill a drunkard’s grave!”

## CHAPTER XIX.

### TROUBLES BY THE WAY.

“**N**OW, Daniel, if we can gather our simpletons together let us get home. Thank goodness, you, at least, retained your common-sense.”

“Yes, Miss Sampson,” replied the lad, absently, really heeding only the first part of her remark. Then he made way for her through the crowd which, thinned a little, still lingered about the building.

“Loath to take the plunge from excitement to hard facts,” thought Miss Delight, grimly smiling over a weakness to which she felt herself superior.

Then when they had gained a vantage point where they could watch the door, and await the appearance of their own party, both the lady and the lad drew a deep inspiration. The impulse was mutual, and again she was struck by the sympathy in their feeling.

Then she asked: “Daniel, how came it you did n’t lose your head in there, like all the rest?”

He turned toward her, and by the moonlight she could see how earnest, even how angry, he looked.

“Miss Sampson, do you believe it?”

“What? That you will die a drunkard’s death?”

He nodded.

“No, Daniel.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

“Yet, why did n’t you sign the pledge, when nearly all the others did?”

“I’d a liked to, for Philip’s sake. ’Cause he asked me.”

“Tell me. I’m curious to know all you thought about it.”

“Yes ’m. I don’t know. Somehow I could n’t. You see, I hate promises.”

“Indeed?” Miss Sampson was more than ever interested.

“It ain’t, I mean it is n’t, hardly ever easy to keep ’em. They make me think o’ harnessin’ a colt. His spirit gets broke with the straps an’ things. I always feel dreadful sorry for the poor beast first time he puts his head through a halter.”

“Why, but Daniel! The colt is useless until then.”

“Yes, Ma’am. But it’s losin’ his freedom. I’d ruther be free, I guess. Besides, I got one halter on a’ ready.” His voice dropped low as he said this.

“You have? What is it?”

There was a pause. The boy broke it with a ring of manhood in his voice.

“It’s my promise to you: that you should n’t be sorry you’d helped me on the road to be — somebody. I guess that halter ’ll hold, ’ithout no straps o’ this here stranger’s fixin’.”

Again she was astonished.

“Why, lad, that’s poetry. Of the best sort; which has truth and wisdom in it. Where did you learn it?”

“Hmm. I don’t know. ’Less it was out in the woods. I didn’t have anything to do up there but chop an’ think. But there’s Susan and Molly. I guess the others ’ll come soon. Shall I fetch the horse?”

“Yes. But we’ll go home differently; that is, Helen must ride with us. I’ll take her in between Abraham and me. You and Philip had better see that Michael gets safely back to his cottage, for Helen will be anxious to know that he does. Silly child! She is n’t afraid of ‘harnessing’ herself with promises!”

They were presently again on the road, in the order elected by Miss Sampson, and Helen very gladly nestled down between her elders on the front seat, where she could rally from the excitement of the evening and yet keep her eye upon the "rescued" Michael, walking soberly along beside the wagon, with Philip and Daniel as his body-guards.

When they reached the cottage, however, the girl begged Abraham to stop, "for just one minute, while I go in and tell Maggie the good news. May I not, Aunt Delight?"

"Well, yes. I suppose you may as well finish up the job. Only, see to it that you don't go pledging yourself to act as his spiritual god-mother from this day forward. You've helped to set him on his feet; now he must balance himself there. Five minutes only."

Yet this remark, somehow, took all the pleasure out of the announcement for Helen. She realized anew that her aunt was seriously displeased with her, and this grieved her greatly, yet she did not understand exactly what she had done to rouse this displeasure.

Nor was Maggie Walsh's reception of the news of her husband's reformation especially flattering.

“Sign a pledge, did he? Well, it ain’t the first time he’s done a foolish thing. He won’t keep it, Miss. He’s promised me, more times ’an I’ve fingers an’ toes, to let the drink alone. He always lies. He’s lyin’ now. Though you mean well, Miss, ’an I’m obliged to you just the same. There, Mike. Say your manners an’ let the young lady go. It’s long past bed-time an’ I don’t want the childern woke up ag’in this time ’o night.”

With a heavy heart Helen retreated at once and crept silently into her place beside Miss Sampson; but Philip tarried long enough to give Mistress Margaret a “good dressing down” for receiving the good offices of his young cousin so ungraciously. The absurd part of the whole matter was, that the woman liked the angry lad and his reprimand “a deal betther nor that soft-spoken chit of a girl ’at ’d let a fellow like Mike fool her so easy.”

However, when the mother’s “Peace Room” was reached there was comfort at last, and some crooked things were made straight to the girl’s understanding.

“You see, my darling, that Aunt Delight was reared in the most rigid of schools; that, in her code, a young lass who becomes at all conspicu-



ous, even in a good cause, loses in modesty; and modesty is to her a woman's cardinal virtue."

"But, Mamma! Was n't it — right? Is n't right-doing higher than modesty? Besides — I did n't know I was bold. I did n't once think of myself. I *had* to act as I did. There was something driving me beyond myself. After it was over, after Mike had signed the pledge, I began to realize how many people were looking at me and I wanted to hide. But I could n't. Oh! I hope I did n't do wrong!"

The mother stretched out her frail arms and gathered her child to her breast.

"Wrong! Wrong, my Helen! No, indeed. You have acted from the best and purest motive. I believe God gave it. Remember nothing, save that Michael has promised to reform, and that we must help him to stand upright in every way that we can. And besides Michael, your action has done one inestimable good."

"What's that, Mamma?" lifting her head and searching her mother's face.

"Philip. He would n't have signed if you had n't. It was his love for and chivalry toward you that made him step up and place himself beside you, and it was that, with the enthusiasm of the moment, which made him

write his name to a promise he had never at all considered. But — I am glad of it. More glad and thankful to God this night than I can express. So, also, will Aunt Delight be, later on.”

“Can you tell me, Mamma, just what you mean?”

“I will. I had not meant to trouble you with my anxieties about our boy, but — such a little woman is wise enough to know, I now think. Philip is a gentleman, and he thinks more of keeping his word than of anything else in the world. He will do all sorts of wild and forbidden things, but I have never known him to tell a lie. He will keep his pledge, and I hope it will keep him — to the right in other ways.”

“Why, Mamma! You look so grave. What has he done?”

“He is fretting against the restraints of our quiet life. He has organized a ‘club’ of the wildest, gayest lads in the valley. There have been times when your father has been greatly perplexed as to whether we should keep Philip still here or send him away to some strict school.”

“Is it the ‘club’ which meets at the old mill?”

“Yes. They have wild fun there, I fear; and sometimes when we think our lad is asleep in his

bed, he is off — who can tell where? There, darling. Don't let this be a fresh worryment to you, but a comfort that you have acted to-night exactly as you have. Try to make Sampson House the most delightful spot on earth to our laddie. If we can hold him to the right for just a little while longer he will get wisdom with his years, and love right-doing for itself. Anyway, now I know that, whatever else he may do, he will not drink. Good-night. Here comes Papa and bed-time. You have had much that is new to think about, and to-morrow I'll talk more plainly with you, if I can."

But even the morrow's explanations did not make matters much clearer to Helen. Philip appeared exactly as he always had; and the fact that he came to her just before school and asked her to lend him a half-dollar did not very greatly surprise her.

"Why, boy! You have ten times, yes, forty times almost, as much money as I do, and you're always out of it! What do you do with it?"

Phil tossed his head and flushed angrily.

"Well, if you don't want to let me have it —"

"Of course I want to, all I have. But the map cost a lot of money, and I cannot give you much."

“How much?”

“I think — Let’s count it. You shall have all there is. Only hurry. I don’t want to be late to school.”

“You won’t be. It’s beginning to snow, and Uncle is to send Abraham and the sleigh.”

“Sleighting, so soon? It’s been snowing such a little while.”

She ran to the window to examine the driveway and the lad called, impatiently: —

“Oh! Nell, the money! Bother the snow!”

“There’s the sleigh now, and Abraham’s cross. Must you have it — now? This morning?”

“Yes.”

At which she ran away up to her own room, and presently returned with her little tin “savings-bank” in her hand. It was of an old-fashioned sort, and the only way to get the contents out was to shake them slowly through the little chimney.

Helen began this operation, but her haste hindered her success, and when Aunt Delight’s footsteps were heard approaching, Philip lost his last atom of patience and, catching the bank, dropped it to the floor and crushed it under his foot.

“Oh! Phil! my pretty bank!”

“Hush! Don't tell Auntie!”

He stooped, caught up the ruined toy and its scattered contents, and thrust them hastily into his pockets.

“Here she comes! Nell, if you tell her I'll never forgive you. Never. Promise you won't.”

The lad looked so determined and so strange that the promise was uttered instantly and without thought.

“You won't?”

“No.”

“All right.”

Philip disappeared and Helen tried to make up for lost time by running out of the house with her cloak unfastened, buttoning it as she ran.

But Miss Sampson met her in the passage and made her return to the sitting-room, and: “Fix yourself properly, child. There's no such haste required as will send a girl out-of-doors on a winter morning in that shape.”

The return to the inner apartment was, perhaps, unfortunate for both. Helen's glance detected at once a fragment of her blue-painted little bank and a silver coin lying beside it, which Philip in his hurry had overlooked.

Aunt Delight's eyes were "still as sharp as a girl's," so she often boasted. They were quite "sharp" enough to see the gay scrap of tin as promptly as had Helen, and housewifely instinct made the old lady stoop to pick it up before the other could reach it.

"Why, Nell! What's this?"

Helen's cheeks reddened, almost as deeply as her hood, yet she answered, presently:—

"Excuse me, Auntie, but I cannot tell you. May I go?"

"When I've done with you — yes. Is this a piece of your savings-bank? It looks so."

Nell's surprise at her aunt's quickness made the affirmative answer in the sudden uplifting of her own eyes, but she did not otherwise reply.

"Hmm. I thought as much."

The lady stepped to the window, raised the sash, and called sternly:—

"Philip! Come here."

The lad, waiting in the sleigh outside and pelting snowballs at Molly in the doorway, obeyed the summons promptly, by leaping through the still open window. By this means he deposited a goodly lot of the freshly fallen snow upon the carpet, which did n't trouble him

in the least, as he bounded forward to the middle of the room and clasped his snow-powdered arms around his guardian.

“ Well, most Delightful Aunt of all the Sampsons, what is it this time? That mince pie I hooked last night, or something still more dreadful?”

“ Philip, have you taken to begging pennies from a girl? You — with your far too liberal allowance!”

The lad's arms fell from Miss Sampson's shoulders and he faced about to his cousin, his ready temper in a blaze: —

“ Humph! So you, Miss, call yourself a Sampson! But — they never — lie!”

Having hurled this scathing reproach at the trembling Helen, he leaped back through the window and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE GREAT SNOWSTORM.

THE snowfall which began that morning lasted, with brief intermissions, for nearly a week. At the end of that time "the whole valley," meaning all the able-bodied men and lads, turned out to break roads.

For five days there had been no school, and the little red building at the cross-ways looked like a crimson dot in the wide white landscape.

"But it 'll never do to let the cause of eddication languish like this. When I was a boy, we went to school, snow or no snow, an' the teacher was there ahead on us," remarked Deacon Tewksbury, to his man-of-all-work.

"Reckon they didn't have no sech snows them times, sir. I never seed none to ekal this 'n."

"Pooh! Folks grow lazier as they grow older. I mean this generation ain't half so smart as the last one was. Hitch up Solomon to once, an' let's git to work. I'll just call an' see how



many days' vacation that old patriarch means to take. A vacation, right here in the depth o' term time! If we had a younger man now fer teacher — ”

“ He 'd cut stakes an' quit entire! No man what don't love the valley is a goin' to stan' sech a blockade as this.”

“ Harness Solomon, I tell ye.”

The Deacon felt no kinder toward Dominie Davidson than he had done on the afternoon of his unfortunate visit to the school. The momentary softness which had then come into his heart, by the stirring of old memories, had promptly changed into a more adamant hardness, because of the trick played upon his wagon later on that same day.

The perpetrator of this trick had never been discovered. Daniel and Philip still stoutly denied their connection with the matter, and after a little inquiry, secretly prosecuted, the Deacon had suddenly let the whole matter drop. This had been set down to his piety by some of the valley folk — “ Such a good man is Deacon! ”

But there were others who thought they knew him better. These believed that he was merely biding his time, and that retribution would come later and more completely.

“ He don’t want to get out with Doctor, or the other trustees, yet. He ’s workin’ underground, is Tewksbury. He ’s like a bull dog. Once he gets set of anything he don’t let go ; an’ if he don’t growl none, ’t ain’t a sign he’s let loose.”

Soon after had come the excitement of the temperance lecture, and the old master’s rise in popularity because of his service in securing the orator to the valley, even for one night. All the temperate people who had then pledged themselves to total abstinence felt that they owed the Dominie a debt of gratitude. Clearly, then, it was not the time to attack a man who was so deep in the hearts of his neighbors as the gentle pedagogue.

Now this “ great snowstorm ” had arrived and brought with it a fresh excuse for faultfinding.

For five days the Deacon had watched the schoolhouse chimney, from the window of his own comfortable sitting-room, and never once had the blue smoke curled upward from it. The snow heaped it and the playground path remained unbroken.

“ Hmm. That ’s a burnin’ shame. Here I am, trustee. A-payin’ out the people’s money. Fer what ? A rheumatic old feller to lie abed an’ grunt. Hmm. We ’ll see about that.”

Yet, still mindful of rheumatism, — his own, — the worthy public officer had delayed his visit of interference till the snow was over. Then, when at last the sun shone again, he had ordered his hired man as above.

By daily, almost hourly, shovellings, the paths immediately about the Deacon's domicile had been kept passable. This deceived him into believing that anybody could travel along the roads whose business made it desirable, and he announced to his wife, at dinner: —

“I'm goin' to see what's got into Dominie Davidson to be idlin' 'round this way. I'll jest let him have a piece o' my mind, you 'low.”

Mrs. Tewksbury had been her husband's wife for a great many years. She had learned when “silence was golden” and “speech was silver;” so, since something was evidently expected of her in the way of reply, she flung this small coin of her “speech” down for what it was worth: —

“Laws, now, 'Lijah. You'll only get yourself wore out fer nothin'. A man can't do no more 'n his duty, an' quarrelin' 'll keep. 'Specially in sich weather.” With which she turned her cross-eyed glance toward the window and sighed profoundly.

“What do you mean by that, woman?”

“Oh! nothin’. Only th’ other trustees don’t worry so over the plaguey old school.”

Being her husband’s sole companion during their late enforced seclusion, and the school being his sole subject of conversation, she may be pardoned a slight testiness, due to her soul-weariness.

“Hmm. The ‘plaguey old school.’ Hmm, indeed. The — plaguey — old — school. Huh! Silly women. Sho. Well, I’m goin’. Has that man gone to harness that horse, or has he not? That’s what I’d like to know.”

“He’s a harnessin’,” replied the dame, meekly. There was even a ring of pleasure in her tones; and the alacrity with which she now bestirred herself to make her lord comfortable upon his outing might have aroused, in any close observer’s mind, the suspicion that she was glad to have him go.

But there was no observer there, except the cat; and that had been kicked out of the Deacon’s path often enough during that past week to hide itself now behind the air-tight stove and merely blink its sympathy with its mistress.

So Mrs. Tewksbury fetched the fur cap and put it on her husband’s head, pulling its flaps

well down over his ears and tying them under his chin. She buttoned his greatcoat, which had seen the snows of thirty winters and whose pristine black was fading to a rich green on the shoulders. She tied a striped woollen "comforter" around his neck, and pulled on his white "tufted" mittens. His trouser-legs were already tucked into his cowhide boots, and nothing further suggested itself which would add to his safety; so, Solomon being now in the shafts of the pung, the good man bade his wife a characteristic farewell:

"Don't give them chickens too much corn. An' I hope you'll have somethin' decent fer supper. Apple turnover, er roast potatoes, er somethin' another. Now I'm off."

"Yes, but I'm dretful 'fraid you won't get no further'n the gate," assented Mrs. Tewksbury, from the threshold.

"What you mean by that?"

Her tone had been low, but not quite low enough to hide her satisfaction and doubt.

"Nothin'. The roads ain't broke a mite, you know."

"I've got shovels an' crowbars," remarked the hired man.

"Reckon you'll need 'em;" said the woman, and shut the door.

They did need them. Half-way to the gate, giving from the front yard to the turnpike, Solomon floundered in a drift up to his body, and Nathan turned to his employer, on the seat beside him, expostulating.

“Better give it up, Deacon. We ’ve got all we need to eat an’ drink an’ keep warm with, an’ I call it real foolhardy to ’tempt to go.”

Misguided man! Even by his mistress’ daily example, Nathan could never learn that opposition always made his master more headstrong.

“’Tempt to go! Attempt to go! Well, then, I ’m a goin’ an’ you ’re a goin’ with me. Huh! Think I ’d be downed by a snowstorm? By — a — snowstorm! Huh! Drive on.”

“It ’ll be shovel on fust, I guess.”

“Shovel, then. ’T ain’t nothin’ but a drift. Always did drift in this lane.”

Nathan obediently stepped out of the pung and as immediately disappeared. He had sunk to his armpits in the drift and in trying to extricate himself had been wholly engulfed.

The Deacon roared aloud.

“Ginger! That’s the funniest thing I ever did see! Here! Stick your arm up — give me a holt! I ’ll pull ye out!”

“May — be — funny — fer — you!” remarked

the hired man, as he was finally yanked back into the vehicle, sputtering the snow from his mouth meanwhile.

“Ho, ho, ho! Why, I declare! After bein’ shut up in the house fer a week, with nobody but a woman an’ you an’ the cat as company, it does a man good to get out into the fresh air again. Gosh. It makes me feel as spry as a boy. Here. Hand me a shovel. I’ll soon get Solomon a movin’. We’ll go back to the barn an’ hitch up to the sled. It’s weightier. Like as not we’d break the pung, a-draggin’ through heaps. Sho. Feel like a kitten, I do.”

Getting Solomon started was not so easy as anticipated. It required much digging, more pulling, and Nathan’s strongest expletives (though as a good church-member he kept these reasonably mild), to finally get the horse back again upon the shovelled path.

By this time the Deacon’s blood was fully up. Even his enemies (all good men have them) had never accused him of indolence. He had, instead, the name of being a “hard driver to work,” and it needed but slight opposition to set his will, like steel, to any object.

“Well, snow or no snow, to Dominie Davidson’s I’m a goin’. He’d ought to be looked

after, any how. He's old. He's dretful old, 'an sorter childish. Maybe he could n't get to school. Maybe I've been too hard in judgment, I ain't too proud to say I'm sometimes mistook. But, whuther I be or no, we'll jest drive over there an' see into things. I ought to remember, too, 'at Ruelly Hapgood is widder to my second cousin, an' her boy's near o' kin as anybody they is. Long's old Davidson needs her, an' she bein' own niece to him, I'm more 'n willin she should live there. One silly woman's all I can stan' to a time. But when Mis' Tewksbury gets too old to do the work, why then, I s'pose, I'll take Ruelly in."

They had made their way back to the barn by then, and were exchanging the light pung for the wood-sled; to which, in evident disgust, Solomon now found himself being reharnessed.

"Well, folks think she come back here to the valley after her man died, more on account o' your bein' her kin, or his 'n, an' the boy likely to inherit," said Nathan.

"Humph. Don't know what she c'd base her expectations on. Ye'd better buckle that hold-back a couple o' holes tighter."

"Reckon Sol won't need nothin' 'cept the drifts to hold him back to-day. But that's what



a man gets, you see, fer bein' 'counted the richest man in the valley. They say they's more money locked up in your hands, maybe in your house, 'an ever was even to Sampson House, in its best days," continued the other, flatteringly. "There. Guess that's all right. But I 'low we can't get there."

"An' I 'low we 'll get there or — I 'll bust myself a tryin'. Hold on, though. Speakin' of money. That reminds me. I 'll jest step inside the house a minute. Don't let him start till I come back."

"Humph! Sol, he hain't no notion o' startin' ary place, ness it's back to his stall."

Mrs. Tewksbury, having settled herself for a nap in her rocker beside the air-tight, with the cat in her lap, felt a bitter disappointment when the stamping and shaking of snow announced her husband's prompt return to the house.

She roused herself and dropped the cat on the mat, just in time to receive the reprimand: —

"Huh! Goin' to sleep, are you, this time o' day? Ought to get up an' stir round. Make a new woman o' you, right off."

"Can't you go? Can't you break the roads?" a trifle wistfully.

"Course we can go. I only come back —

Sho! Mis' Tewksbury, have you been taking my money out of my pocket?"

This question was hurled at the drowsy woman in her husband's sternest Sunday voice.

"Money out of your pocket? I never touched a cent of it, uther in nor out, hardly, sence I married you. No. But —"

"But what? Don't keep me standin' here —"

"I'm sure I don't want to, — a-melting snow all over that new rag carpet. But I seen you take your wallet out o' that coat an' put it in your desk. I guess you'll find it jest where you laid it yourself, if you look."

"Why could n't you say so, then?"

Mrs. Tewksbury relapsed into her chair again. But she noted that her husband did find the wallet, a fat, well-filled one, and dispose it in one of the pockets of the undercoat he then wore. She remarked, casually: —

"I don't think it's right for you to keep so much money in the house, anyway, 'Lijah. It's a temptin' Providence."

"That's what I think. If any scalliwag should come here while I was gone you'd be jest silly enough to tell 'em where the money was, if he asked for it. There's three hunderd dollars in that wallet, — all I got for them three horses

I sold down to Polinquet. It 's what I expect to pay for that land I 'm goin to get o' Hobson."

"Hm. Sometimes, Mr. Tewksbury, I do think you 're just land-crazy. It 's buy, buy, buy, all the while. An' not a chick nor a child — save —"

She paused suddenly. A look had come into her husband's face which always terrified her. She shivered a bit, then, hoping to propitiate him as well as to cover her own emotion, asked, gently: —

"What would you like for your supper, Elijah, — of them things you mentioned?"

"A wife 'at knows enough to hold her tongue!" he retorted savagely, and went out, banging the door.

The woman left behind dared not to weep. Red eyes are not easily hidden when one grows old. So she busied herself in putting the room in order and telling the cat: —

"It was n't losin' the money by folks, kitty, 'at I meant. 'Lijah, he's always expectin' to get robbed; though sech a thing never happened to nobody in this neighborhood, as long 's I've lived; an' that's a good many years, kitty, — a good many lonesome years. Oh! where is he? My — But I must n't! *I — must — not.* It's only fire I

worry 'bout. If the house ever should ketch afire, an' if the Deacon should have money in it when it burned, an' if I did n't think to take it out in time, I don't know what he 'd do to me. But, bein' 's we 're alone, kitty, let 's jest step up attic an' look —”

When once they had ascended thither it was the odor of mice that sent Mistress Kitty a-scamper about that wide garret ; and it was a drawer full of boy's clothing, rude and patched, which sent Martha Tewksbury's gray head down till her forehead rested against the sharp edge of the wood, and that made the unwished-for tears to flow among the furrows of her thin cheeks.

Yet she heeded neither the edge nor the tears ; nor that, by and by, the daylight waning, she was still alone.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### TO FOLLOW THE CROW'S FLIGHT.

“**D**EACON, we 'd better quit. Ain't no manner o' use. Here we 've been strainin' an' diggin' fer more 'n two hours, an' yet we hain't got no further 'n the fust bend the 'pike. Let's give up.”

“Never. I've started for Davidson's an' to Davidson's I'm a goin' or bust myself shovellin'. What's all this fuss about, any way, 'cept a mite o' snowdrift?”

“I 'low 't is a might o' snowdrift,” returned the other, chuckling over his own witty play upon words.

Deacon Tewksbury had not understood the jest, and now failed to see any cause for his helper's unseemly merriment.

“Huh! Must ha' found a tee-hee's nest in it, then. I will say it sounds uncommon simple fer a great feller like you, Nathan, to stan' right up in a snow-heap an' cackle like a hen's just laid her egg.”

“Hmm. I don’t feel very cackly, boss. I’m gettin’ dretful tired an’ sorter light-headed.”

The trustee paused and regarded the hired man with some anxiety.

“You ain’t a-goin’ to have one o’ your spells, be ye, Nate?”

“Not if I can help it, sure. But this here snow’s so — so all alike, an’ the sun’s so blindin’, things is a gettin’ real zigzaggy. ’Pears like I c’d see rainbows everywhere, an’ — I’d ruther go back.”

“Just hold on awhile; then, if we don’t strike it easier, you may.”

They started forward doggedly again, and for sometime neither spoke. But their progress was almost imperceptible, and finally the Deacon paused, after extricating Solomon’s unlucky legs, for about the hundredth time, from the engulfing snow.

“Plague take this turnpike, anyway! It’s crookeder ’an sin.”

“We ain’t goin’ t’ argy that to-day, Deacon,” responded the serving man, wearily.

“Who’s argyin’? You, if anybody. You may be dizzy, Nathan, but you’re a blamed sight snappier an’ you be dizzy. Now I —”

“It’s you’s the snappy one, I should jedge,

but I ain't a complainin' of it. Nobody could tackle this road-break an' not be, I 'low."

There was no retort as the Deacon stood up and carefully surveyed the landscape. It was one wide, unbroken whiteness; even the trees which would have served for landmarks, to indicate where the buried highway ran, were so hidden by the heaping snow that they were no longer guides.

In any case, the way was a long one; for the turnpike followed the river, and the river followed its own will; wandering back and forth through the valley, in many graceful curves which the settlers of that fair region had wisely utilized for dwelling-places. So that the vagaries of both river and turnpike were but added charms to the valley homes, and few complained that it took four miles of road to accomplish a distance of one, had the river been ignored or bridged more frequently.

Deacon Tewksbury, however, was an exception, who did assert at every town meeting that the road was too "all-fired crooked an' ought to be straightened, if a man's time was wuth anything;" to which his neighbors replied: "Time's plenty in our valley, an' horse flesh is cheap. Our fathers was n't fools. They built

the 'pike, an' I reckon what wuz good enough fer them is good enough fer us."

"It's hard lines to be progressive in a hole like this!" the trustee would retort, and was always asked why he remained in the "hole," and proved his fondness for it by constantly buying land and more land; adding acre to acre, wherever he could, and steadily increasing his possessions till some, like Miss Sampson, would exclaim: "If we don't take care the man will own the whole valley soon!"

Thus it was small wonder that Nathan's spirits sank at the prospect of shovelling all the roundabout way to "Davidson's," and that lugubrious sighs escaped his grim lips each time he lifted his snow-blinded eyes.

"Look a here, Nate Heard! You quit takin' on that way. I ain't to blame fer the road bein' ten times longer'n it ought to be. You know that. An' as the crow flies, it ain't above a mile cross-lots to the Dominie's. With this state o' things we can drive that way just as easy as by the 'pike, — right over the walls an' fences. So, head Solomon toward Davidson's, cross country."

"All right."

Yet heading Solomon in the desired direction and persuading Solomon to follow his head were



two distinct matters. The Deacon floundered to the rear of the sled and hoisted that unwieldy vehicle to the top of the nearest drift, where it immediately sank several feet. Nathan yanked at the bit-rings and yelled lustily: —

“Giddap, Sol! Now you’re a pullin’! now —”

“What-ye-otter-there?” echoed the Deacon from behind, in that tone of voice which the wise and wary Solomon was accustomed to obey.

But customs and precedents were, in that strait, matters of no account; and after a while longer of almost unavailing struggle, which still showed no loss of determination upon the Deacon’s grim face, Nathan tried his last resort.

“Deacon, they’s a bad holler ’twixt here an’ the Dominie’s, you recollect? If we should happen to strike that, an’ Sol should go overhead in ’t, an’ I should have — I feel — Swon! I’m gettin’ terr’ble dizzy.”

“Sho, now, Nathan, don’t get silly. You *ain’t* goin’ to have a spell, right out here in the medder, now *be ye?*”

“The medder! The snowbank! The north pole an’ ar’ctic regions! Yes, I ’low I will have a spell. Things, that is, the snow, is gettin’ more zigzaggier an’ cur’user-colored all the time.”

The Deacon was frightened. Nathan’s speech,

begun in half-pretence, had ended in entire earnestness, and a peculiar look was growing upon the heated face of the afflicted man. Though the elder, the master was much the stronger of the two, and he now promptly decided that, so far as Nathan was concerned, the attempt to reach "Davidson's" was hopeless.

"Now, look here, boy. You hold on an' keep yourself steady. We'll turn about, an' I'll go as far as in sight o' home with ye, an' you can get the rest the way by yourself. Solomon'll take you, even if you do lose your senses a mite. Plank down on the sled an' we'll start."

"Oh! 't ain't so bad as that, I guess. I can help some — yet," replied Nathan, and he did; for the prospect of reaching his own comfortable quarters at the Deacon's fireside was restoration in itself. Nor did he pay any attention to the words "as far as in sight" — for he believed that once on the retreat the valiant leader of this forlorn expedition would not pause till he had, also, reached home surroundings.

"Now, you talk sense, Deacon. 'T ain't safe, to life ner limb, a-flyin' in the face o' Providence, like we've been a-doin' this last few hours. They'll be road-breakin' parties, a dozen er more in a lot, as they'd oughter be, an' they'll come

an' dig us out, when they get round to it. Meanwhile, we can get rested."

"You mean, you can take care the stawk an' look after what Mis' Tewksbury may need, while I jog on to the Dominie's," corrected the Deacon, and Nathan wisely let the matter rest there.

The return over the partially broken road, with a warm stable and well filled manger at the end of it, proved highly acceptable to the shrewd Solomon; and in far less time than it had required for the outward trip he had retraced his way as far as "the turn of the 'pike'" whence the Tewksbury farmhouse could plainly be seen.

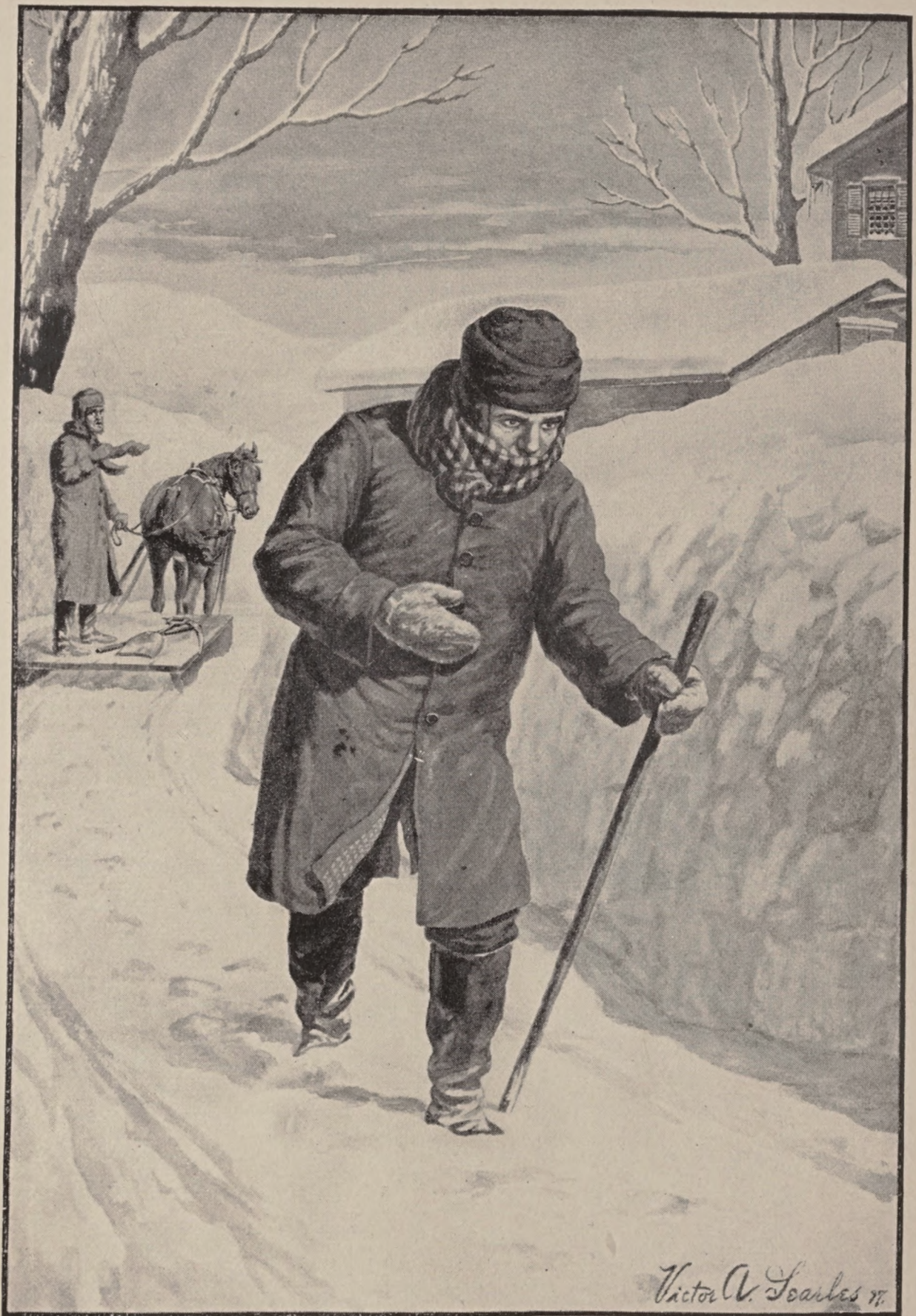
There the Deacon called a halt.

"Now, Nathan, you can get the rest the way safe enough. Tell Mis' Tewksbury I'm just goin' to step over to Davidson's, 'cross-lots, an' see how they're a-gettin' on. Have her keep the supper hot; an', after you've done up the night chores, if you still feel dizzy, why, ask her to brew ye some sage tea an' put a few drops o' 'composition' in it. Drink the stuff hot an' put a hot brick to your feet an' go to bed. You'll be all right, soon's you do. It's a pity you ain't no ruggeded, Nate. I'm afeard if ye don't brace

up more you won't never make old bones. Hmm. No. Well, I'm off now."

"Deacon, Deacon! Don't. Hold on. Come back! Fer yer own sake, don't 'tempt crossin' them lots an' that Holler to-night. It's nigh sundown, a'ready. Be dark afore ye know it. Don't see where the 'arternoon's gone, anyway."

But the rising wind, fierce and bitterly cold, which now swept the fresh snow upward in blinding sheets of whiteness, drowned the warning voice. The Deacon bent his head to the blast and turned doggedly toward "Davidson's" while Solomon ploughed steadily away from him toward home; and in a very few seconds both master and man had each passed utterly out of sight of the other.



“The Deacon bent his head to the blast and turned doggedly toward ‘Davidson’s.’”



## CHAPTER XXII.

### A WORK OF RESCUE.

“**H**ERE, you boys! Tumble out and get dressed instantly! Hear?”

It seemed to Philip that he had but just closed his eyes, after the hardest day's labor he had ever accomplished, and he was not inclined to answer the imperative summons which at last penetrated his drowsy brain.

“Dan! Philip! Get up! You're needed! At once!”

Daniel heard, and responded by running out of his room to the head of the stairs and demanding to know what was the matter.

As soon as a reply was called back to him he burst into Phil's room and unceremoniously pulled that sleepy lad from his warm bed.

“Get up, boy! Quick! There's a man lost in the snow! We're ordered out to search for him!”

Both boys had been helping to break roads nearly all that day past, and their muscles were

sore with the unusual strain of the continual shovelling. But the words "man lost" banished every sense of personal discomfort, and as soon as he had comprehended what was said to him, Philip followed his mate's example and "threw himself into his clothes."

They were dressed and had bounded down the stairs, several steps at a time, almost before the Doctor, who had aroused them, had gotten himself into his great-coat and had tied his fur cap over his ears; while Aunt Delight — in a nondescript costume donned for the emergency, stuffed all sorts of restoratives into the capacious saddle-bags and poured forth a stream of advice as to what should be done in this calamity.

"Don't go and make the poor fellow too warm, Lyon, now will you? Not at first. Thaw him out gently. Poor Mrs. Tewksbury — what lots of trouble she has had!"

It was a sign of extreme excitement on Miss Sampson's part that she omitted to call her niece's husband by his title and addressed him by his name, "Lyon."

"What's up, Auntie? Who is it lost?"

"Phil! You going? Now, Doctor —"

"Of course they're going, Aunt Delight.



They 're almost men in stature if not in years, and every pair of hands is needed now. Wrap yourselves up well, lads, and each take a lantern. Then follow me down the road as fast as you can."

The physician was out of the house, into his sleigh, and off over the driveway in an instant. They could hear the musical, old-fashioned bells jingling faintly and more faint; while Abraham's hoarse adjurations to old Carey, distinct at first, died softly away in the distance:—

"Take care, there, lady! You'll have us over! Steady, old—horse! It's—life—and—death—this—"

Many and many a time had master and man driven out of those grounds at a breakneck speed on errands of almost equal necessity, but never once over such a road as this, nor for an interest so widespread.

All day, like everybody else in the Valley who could handle a pick or shovel, they had been out, toiling to make a passage for the physician to his scattered patients; from whom he had been kept by the terrible storm for all the time of its continuance, when to venture forth into the blinding snowfall would have been to court death.

Now, after all the labor, after all the hurried visiting from one bedside to another, himself well-nigh exhausted, the Doctor had returned to his own house to find the cruel wind already filling the fresh-broken paths with the merciless drifts.

“All to be done over again to-morrow, and harder than before; for this time the snow is packing hard and firm.”

“But the night is to rest you in, Papa dear,” Helen had answered, and had herself bathed the cold feet and drawn on the warm slippers, and done her simple best to make her father comfortable.

Then he had sent them all to bed, and had himself fallen asleep before the fireplace, filling himself full of the delicious warmth and peacefulness of home.

“Deacon Tewksbury’s lost somewhere in the snow!”

This was the brief story which had been hurled in at the door of Sampson House and into the Doctor’s rest, by a mounted messenger. The man had floundered through the drifts to whack the butt of his whip upon the panel, shout out his terrible tidings, and had ridden away again to rouse the next household to the rescue.

“The rescue! It’s hopeless!” said Aunt Delight, disconsolately.

“We don’t know that yet!”

Then the physician had tossed aside his slippers, thrust his feet into his heavy snow-boots again, rushed up the stairs and summoned his “men folk” with the alertness of youth, and had once more gone forth into the night and the awful snow.

Those left behind regarded each other with pale, frightened faces.

Then, as he drew on his woollen mittens, Daniel asked: —

“Does anybody know where?”

Miss Sampson knew nothing beyond the simple fact already stated. The messenger had come and gone, like a vision of the night. He had not even asked for aid in the search. “But,” said the old gentlewoman, proudly, “he had no need to do that at Sampson House. Never a one of our blood failed in a time of danger.”

“Yet, Auntie — you don’t want me to go! Now, do you?”

“Yes — and no. No matter. Go, and God go with you. Is your lantern filled?”

“I think so. I heard uncle telling Molly to see to it that every lamp and lantern on the

premises was filled to-night. Funny, was n't it? Seems as if he knew — Are you off, already, Dan?"

"Yes. Hurry! Every second's a chance to save him!"

Miss Sampson caught her own lad in her arms and dashed a hasty kiss upon his muffled lips; when, moved by his instinct of chivalry, he pulled the "comforter" from his mouth and returned her caress with a resounding smack.

"There, Auntie Delight! That's for luck — and good-night. Go back to bed. You look so — so funny, and you'll get cold. Don't worry, dear. If I'm out to-night it's for a good motive, isn't it? Now go to bed and sleep. Because — I — I — Well, I'm not all bad, Auntie Delight!"

He tossed another kiss to her from the tip of his fur glove, swung his lantern aloft, to the danger of the carpet, and vanished behind the outer door. But somehow, thus indirectly, he had apologized and she had accepted the apology for many a night of sleeplessness which he had given her of late.

"The dear, brave laddie! His faults — Who has n't them? It's only the 'wild oats' that

most youths sow. He'll come all right yet, please God! Yet — what — what does, what can he do — with the money?"

But she did not go to bed again, as she had been bidden. She reflected that the searchers might return at any time, cold and hungry, and needing her care. So she dressed in her ordinary garb and betook herself to the great kitchen, where she remade the fire in the big stove and set the teakettle on "to boil."

From the well-stocked "buttery" she brought all sorts of indigestible dainties, and a few that were simple and wholesome, — "This cold meat and bread for the Doctor and Abraham, but the lads — why, there's nothing a growing boy likes as well as plum cake and mince pie."

Then adding to these a few other trifles which her knowledge of "men folks" suggested, she sat down beside the fire to wait and knit; and she always afterward averred that she had not been asleep, "not at all," when she roused to see Daniel standing over her and gently touching her shoulder.

"Hmm. You back? So soon? Where's Phil?"

"He's gone right up to his room, Ma'am."

“Gone to his room? Without eating? Is he sick?”

Daniel laughed, and the laugh was reassuring.

“No, I think not. Of course he’s nearly exhausted. Abraham had to carry him —”

“Quick! Why —”

“Please wait, Miss Sampson! He’s all right, he surely is. And he’s the hero! He found him — the poor Deacon.”

“Tell me the rest up there!”

Daniel laughed again at the frantic speed with which Aunt Delight departed; but he followed her to Philip’s room, where Abraham had just laid the worn out “hero” upon the bed, and while she got her darling into dry clothes and warm blankets, narrated the events of the night.

“You see, when we heard the whole story, as it was, everybody started ’cross-lots from the Deacon’s to the Dominie’s. But any tracks the poor man had made had all been covered up by the drifts. In the first place, a party from t’other end the Valley had come along to Tewksbury’s an’ turned in there to dig ’em out. They found poor Nate Heard in the barn, the door open, an’ old Solomon harnessed to the shafts yet. Mis’ Tewksbury, she seemed kind of lost in her wits.

She said they 'd been gone ever since dinner, an' she must ha' went to sleep up attic. She was dretful cold herself, they said; an' as for Nate, he was out of his senses, stretched flat on the sled, an' the snow had blowed in the barn door an' half buried him. Doctor thinks it helped keep him warm. I don't know 'bout that; pears like a snow bedquilt would n't be overly hot. Does it?"

"There. Are you comfortable, darling? Sure? Everywhere? Go on with your story, Daniel. Wait. Phil, let me put that pillow —"

"Hang the pillow! Give me a piece of pie. I saw some on the table as Abe carried me past the kitchen door."

"Shall I?" asked Dan, eagerly.

"Yes. Of course. If he can eat he is n't going to die. Bring up a whole tray full of stuff. You must be hungry, too, and tell Susan to make the coffee just as quick as she can."

The rather peculiar breakfast already provided met with such hearty acceptance by the returned searchers that Miss Sampson's fears were wholly allayed, as far as her Philip was concerned, and she gathered from the hungry lads, between mouthfuls, the facts of the case.

That Nathan had felt a "spell" coming on

him as he entered the barn, but had been powerless to rise and exert himself. That a party of road-breakers had found him and carried him to the house. That as soon as he revived he had told them of the Deacon's probable attempt to reach Davidson's by a cross-field route, and the rescuers had concentrated their attention upon that line.

“But it was Philip found him, Miss Sampson. Found him after everybody else thought it useless to work any more. He knowed — he knew — a path 'at nobody else did, an' I can't see how he could make it out in sech a blank-lookin' heap o' snow, as that hull Holler is; but he did; an' they think, the Doctor does, 'at the Deacon may pull through. Anyhow, if he dies, he 'll die in a bed an' not a snowdrift; an' Mis' Tewksbury says that 'll be some comfort to her, anyway. An' they jest about carried Phil on their shoulders, all the way back to the road, the men did.”

“Where is the Deacon now?”

“At the Dominie's, o' course. He 'd got almost there. I tell you, he must ha' had grit! Folks say it 's a wonder how he ever could crawl that fur, it 's so terrible drifty. I 'low you never saw anything like it.”



“I hope I never shall again, Daniel.”

“Yes, Auntie, and is n't it queer? There's the Deacon just acted as if he hated the Dominie, and here he is taken there to be sick, nobody knows how long, if he does n't even die there. Uncle says he's in a terrible state — but 'only not dead.'”

“Hmm. That's retribution. I presume if that poor stiff-necked old man could have his will he'd almost rather die than be indebted to Dominie Davidson for his nursing.”

“And another queer thing. After I'd found the Deacon and halloed to the men and they'd taken him up to go off with, I happened to see his hat lying not far away. I picked that up, and then, I don't know why, but I poked around in the snow some more with my shovel-handle and —”

“Well, what?” asked Miss Sampson, in eager interest, for Philip had paused in his narrative and seemed to be deeply thinking.

“Oh! nothing. Only I found his wallet. That, and his spectacles lying together as they had fallen out of his pocket, probably.”

“What a fortunate thing! Was there much money in it? What did you do with it?”

“Yes. It was full and hard. I did n't open

it, but I'm sure there was a lot. I'd like as much myself. Hi! wouldn't I?"

"Philip, what did you do with it — the wallet?"

There was something in the tone that made the lad turn his face and gaze piercingly into his aunt's eyes, while a flush rose steadily in his cheek.

But he answered, carelessly: —

"I don't remember, exactly. Though I think I gave it to Dan, and he gave it to Renew. Yes. That was it. Renew had it the last."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### JAKE LANE VISITS THE SCHOOL.

“**T**OOT! Ahoo-ah! Yo-ho-ah!”

Jake Lane's stage-horn! Every boy and girl in the schoolroom recognized it and wondered at its sound just then and there. Every head was lifted and every lesson forgotten, for close upon the piercing salute of the horn followed the loud jingle-jangle-jingle of the wonderful silver bells, than which, their owner boasted, —

“There never was four finer strings in the hull United States.”

“Whooa-a — up! Hello, there!”

Dominie Davidson started toward the door, but a half-dozen lads were before him and he did not reprove them for the rudeness. He kept on his own way thither, however, and was just in time to receive a hearty hand-shake from the bluff driver, who was issuing commands to the lads, laughing, stamping the snow from his great feet, and dispensing an atmosphere of gayety about him all at one instant.

“Come in, Jacob, come right in. It’s right cold outside, but the old schoolhouse is always cosey, you know.”

“Cosey? I should say so! It’s the spot for me, Dominie, the very spot for me. Same’s ’t is for you? Where the youngsters are, there you’ll find us every time. Eh, old Master?”

“Yes, yes, Jacob. I declare, I’m right down glad to see you. Yes, children, yes, of course. We always take a recess when Mr. Lane pays us a visit. Yes, surely.”

The driver clapped his red hands, mischievously tossed his snowy mittens toward a rosy little chap on the front seat, who blushed to be thus honored by the visitor’s notice, and wheeled round several times upon his heels, “taking an inventory of the younkits.”

“Hmm. Good enough. All here, I reckon; or ’most all. Enough anyhow to spread the news. Yes, Dominie. Don’t worry. The boys’ll blanket them horses jest as good as you—I mean, jest as good as I could an’ a sight better ’an you would. Hey? you know ’bout as much o’ horse flesh as I do o’ triggernomertry. That’s it, ain’t it?—that all-fired hard kind o’ ’rithmetic, ’at you’re tryin’ to hammer into Phil Sampson’s yaller head? Hmm. ’Bout as much sense to it

as — But never mind. Here 's the boys, a'ready. Got 'em blanketed, have you? Tight an' warm? Good enough. Now file back into your places — short metre. I'm the Dominie for a few minutes, ain't I, Master?"

The dear old pedagogue nodded, laughed, and already looked years younger than he had before this interruption. Then he remembered something and asked: —

“Lads, did you tie them? so they cannot run away?”

“Sure. I can see that right through the window,” replied the owner of the animals, contentedly. “I ain't never goin' to let 'em run away with no more the little shavers, you bet! Now — didn't you say it was recess, Dominie?”

“Yes. Of course, it always is when you come.”

“Ain't anxious to have me examine the children in, well, let's say 'Rithmetic?”

A laugh ran round the room, and was echoed quietly by the gentle master.

Mr. Lane stepped to the teacher's desk and took up one of the books lying there, adjusted a mighty pair of snow-goggles over his short nose, threw his head back in inimitable mimicry of Deacon Tewksbury, and began: —

“Hmm. Matilda Brown, if I hire two men

an' a boy to lay three hunderd an' fifty-seven rod o' stun wall — Hey? What you all laughin' at? Ain't I the 'Trustee' an' the friend o' 'eddicat-ion,' now t'other one is laid up — ”

“Jacob! Mr. Lane! Really, I cannot allow — ”

“All right, Master. I stand corrected. Should n't hit a feller when he's down, an' that's where the poor Deacon is now. No. That is kind o' mean. Well, ain't any of you young ladies goin' to ask me to take off my 'things'? This great-coat o' mine — ”

The loud laughter which had followed the visitor's facetious “examination” subsided, and Helen with Kate Wilkins ran swiftly forward and tried to remove the foxskin garment which made the rotund stageman appear so like a huge animal.

“There, now I'm peeled, I can talk. Hmm. That's good. A feller 'at spends most of his time in the fresh air don't like warm rooms overly much. Well, Dominie, why don't you ask the news, — what I'm here for, et cetera?”

“It is n't necessary. You'll tell.”

“Hmm. Sharp on me yet, ain't ye? Same's when I was knee high to a hop-toad, like this here Bob-o-link, Robert Winchester Miller, Esquire.”

Again the laughter was uproarious. There

was nothing witty about Jacob Lane, but his overflowing cheerfulness, his great love for his kind — especially for everything juvenile, “man or beast” — won the instant liking of all simple-hearted people, like this good master and his flock.

Besides, the merry twinkle of his eyes, the funny arch of his brows, and his round fat cheeks, all predisposed the observer to mirth before even a word had issued from the wide, good-natured mouth.

When the fresh outburst of merriment had subsided, Jacob took a copper cent out of his pocket, held it up to view, and remarked: —

“I’ll give this ‘Continental’ to the first girl or boy guesses what I come here for to-day. Up with your hands, now, an’ no scrougin’. Remember I’m the teacher, *pro tem.*, an’ you’ve all got to mind me!”

Up flew a dozen hands, and at a nod from the guest Matilda Brown replied: —

“You want a little fun yourself, Mr. Lane. That’s why you come.”

“Oh? Say, Dominie, that girl’s grammar’s ’bout as bad as mine, ain’t it?”

“Matilda is improving. Yes, Matilda is certainly improving,” was the comforting response.

“Guess it don’t matter much to her whuther she is or not, so long’s she’s got a new frock on, ’at all the other girls wish was theirn. Well, she’s right an’ she’s wrong, too. Out with it, Jimmy Bolton, afore you snap your fingers off!”

“Reckon you come to give us a sleigh-ride.”

“A sleigh-ride! Sleigh-ride? Haven’t you all had sleighing enough this winter? With the hull Valley blockaded like it had been erupted with a Vesuvius, or some other volcano? When folks travel over all the walls an’ fences, ’stead o’ ’long the ’pike, where they’d ought to? Humph! When I have to give up half my trips an’ only go once where I used to go four times? That’s half, ain’t it, Lute Beans?”

“No. It’s a quarter.”

“So? Well, Luther, you’re gettin’ on, since last time I examined you. Right you are. Just once where I used to go four times, an’ I tell you that makes the days hang mighty heavy on a poor old bach like me, hain’t nuther chick nor child to worry himself over. Now I’ll quote you some poetry an’ give you a riddle to guess at the same time. Listen, the lot of you. ‘Of all the days are in the week, I dearly love but one day, and that’s the day that comes between,’ a Friday night and Sunday! Why?”



“ ’Cause it’s Sat’day ! ” cried Rob Miller, eagerly.

“ Right again. My, Dominie ! What a lot of bright scholars you do have ! Yes, a Saturday. And, to-morrow bein’ Saturday, I’ve come to invite you all — Master an’ his hull kit — to take a sleigh-ride in my bran-new-painted four-seated sleigh. White as the snow it’ll slide over, an’ drawn by them four grays o’ mine. Harness all tosselled up to the Queen’s taste, red ribbin on my whip, heaps o’ clean straw in the bottom, younkits packed closer ’n herrin’ in a box, jingle-bells — ride till you can’t ride no longer. Then what ? ”

“ Home, I suppose, ” said Helen, who had kept her place by her teacher’s desk, and stood idly stroking his thin old hand as it lay upon the sloping top. The action, so unconscious on her part, was exceeding pleasant to its recipient, and not unnoticed by Jacob ; who, in common with “ all the Valley, ” loved the Doctor’s gentle daughter, and felt the better every time he came in contact with her simple naturalness.

It was for her, had she known it, more than for any other there, that he had planned the little treat he meant to give them all, and his face lighted afresh with anticipation of the surprise in store.

“ Well, Mistress Nell, once you ’ve failed ! No. And I ’ll not tease you any longer. I ’ve asked permission of all your folks beforehand, an’ to-morrow afternoon, at one o’clock sharp, I ’m to start from my house, t’other end the Valley, an’ begin loadin’ up that beautiful white sleigh with the childern that live nearest. I ’ll go the hull rounds, an’ I won’t leave out a single girl nor boy, ’less he goes an’ gets the croup or sunthin’ between now an’ then, an’ I ’ll take you down as fur as Polinquet meetin’-house. Then home again, but not to any home ’cept mine. I ’ve got old Mother Biddle to come an’ help a bit, an’ I lay out to have the biggest candy-pull to-morrow afternoon ’at ever was in our old Valley. An’ after the pullin’, the eatin’. An’ the one eats the most candy can have the most cold turkey an’ mince pie an’ plum cake an’ apple jell — an’ I ain’t got breath for no more. Now how many of you wants to come ? All in favor, say ‘ Aye ! ’ ”

They were instantly uproarious again. The master raised his hand warningly, but quite in vain. Even Helen, who mostly aided his efforts when she could, now caught his uplifted palm and drew it down between her own, lest he should stop the fun.

But at the end of five minutes Jacob himself

thought there had been enough, and begged the Dominie's permission to speak a word with him in private. The driver's face, asking this favor, was serious enough to have satisfied even the "Board," and the request was granted most promptly. The room was cleared of all its young inmates, and the two men were left alone.

"Well, Jacob — Mr. Lane — what is it?"

"Jacob's best. Same as it always has been since I was little's one o' these shavers here to-day. My! it don't seem a minute ago 'at you licked me, right there on that same old board full o' knots, for whalin' Sim Beddecker in G'og'aphy class. I've liked you, an' hated him, an' he's needed whalin' continual, from that day forth till now. Dern him!"

"Jacob! Ja-cob! Stop!"

"All right. Here's my hand. Ruler it if you like. I desarve it, same's ever, but not for despisin' him no more now than then. He's a sarpint born, an' a sarpint he will die."

"Don't be prejudiced, man. Prejudice warps character sadly from the upright."

"That's right! Whack it into me, old feller! I need it. Beg pardon. I don't want to be sassy, even if I have growed up. But look a here,

Dominie Davidson, there's trouble a brewin' for somebody!"

"For me, do you mean?"

"For the hull Valley. I've got wind on 't. That's the why, the real why, I'm givin' this candy party this especial particelar Saturday. The fight's narrowin' down to betwixt Deacon Tewksbury an Sim Beddecker on one side, an' me an' a good many decent folks on t'other. Only, this stuff about the money caps the climax. Well, I'll get to the bottom o' that to-morrow if I can. An' maybe, so's to give me a better chance, maybe, if you don't overly care, you'd better not make it convenient to come to the party. Eh? Ain't that a mean thing to do, — ask a man to visit you an' then tell him he'd better stay to home? What you think?"

A look of weariness and despondency flitted across the teacher's thin face. But he responded promptly and honestly enough to satisfy his friend that the weariness came from another cause than the latter's apparent inhospitality.

"I think you are right. It would be far the best way to leave you alone with the children. They'll tell you all they know, surely, if they will anybody. The darkest feature of the whole affair is its secrecy."

“Well, you keep a stiff upper lip, Dominie. An’ remember, old man, whenever you feel the need o’ good advice an’ a strong arm to brace yourself up on, all you’ve got do is to holler for Jake Lane, an’ he’ll rally to the rescue every time. Lord bless you, Master! You an’ them younkits is all that keeps me from losin’ faith in folks entire.”

“Thank you, Jacob.”

“Oh! by the way. A revivalist’s comin’ along next week, I hear, an’ that was another reason made me get my party in ahead, ’fore Parson Bolton up an’ calls it sinful, as he does nigh everything jolly. Don’t wonder his Jim’s in with that gang.”

“Friend, he is a most godly man.”

“He may be. All I know is he ain’t a pleasant one. Your religion makes you charitable to folkses’ failin’s, even to your enemies’, but he takes his’n hard. Gives him a spiritual dyspepsy, I ’low. He always looks ’s if he’d been eatin’ dried sour apples without havin’ ’em soaked first.

“Hello! Hel-l-l-l-o! BY—THE—GREAT—HORN—SPOON!”

The jovial face of the stageman underwent such a sudden and startling transformation that

the Dominie sprang to his feet in alarm. But he could not see through the window, which Jacob's burly form obscured.

“What is it? Quick? What's happened?”

The thought of harm befalling some member of his flock was instant and grievous; and, as the other did not immediately answer, the master started swiftly toward the door.

Beyond this the noisy shouts of children at play had given place to a strange silence, and this, in turn, lasted but a brief while. Then followed a mad rush of girls and boys, screaming and tumbling over each other in their frantic eagerness to reach the shelter of the schoolroom and their master's presence.

He met them on the threshold and instinctively opened his arms as if he would enfold them all within one yearning embrace.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### PEDAGOGUE PRO TEM.

WHEREUPON, there rang out the stage-driver's mighty laughter, and the children's startled faces turned outward again, and averted eyes sought timorously the explanation of the mystery which had driven them to bay.

“Well, of all the critters ever I see!”

It was a curious sight.

A creature of various hues; striped and blotched with vermilion and blue, yellow and white; its form suggesting a horse, its great green ears flapping like a mule's, and its solemn eyes looking out from encircling rings of white and black, gruesome and awful.

It stood squarely in the path leading to the door and regarded the ancient building with its fearsome gaze, as if meditating immediate onslaught and utter annihilation.

“What in the name — of common-sense — is it!”

“Is it a — a — What is it?”

“Some kind of a horse?”

“ A zebra ? ”

“ I did n't know they was — blue ! ”

“ An' red — an' — Oh ! my ! ”

“ It's some wild — It moves ! ”

“ Is it — the — the — Devil ? ” asked little Rob, burying his face in Helen's skirts and shrieking out his terror there.

“ Hush, Robbie, dear ! It's not that. It can't be. Hush ! It is coming — it is coming ! ”

Catching up the child and hugging him to her breast the girl leaped to the blackboard, rolled it aside, and burst into the little lean-to behind.

There was an odor of fresh paint there ; an odor which had been strongly perceptible all day by the children in the adjoining room, but from their interest in nearer matters had not been much commented upon. Now, to Helen, it revealed something of the truth.

“ Paint ! It's an animal of some sort, painted ! Do you hear me, Robbie, darling ? Just a painted thing of some sort. ”

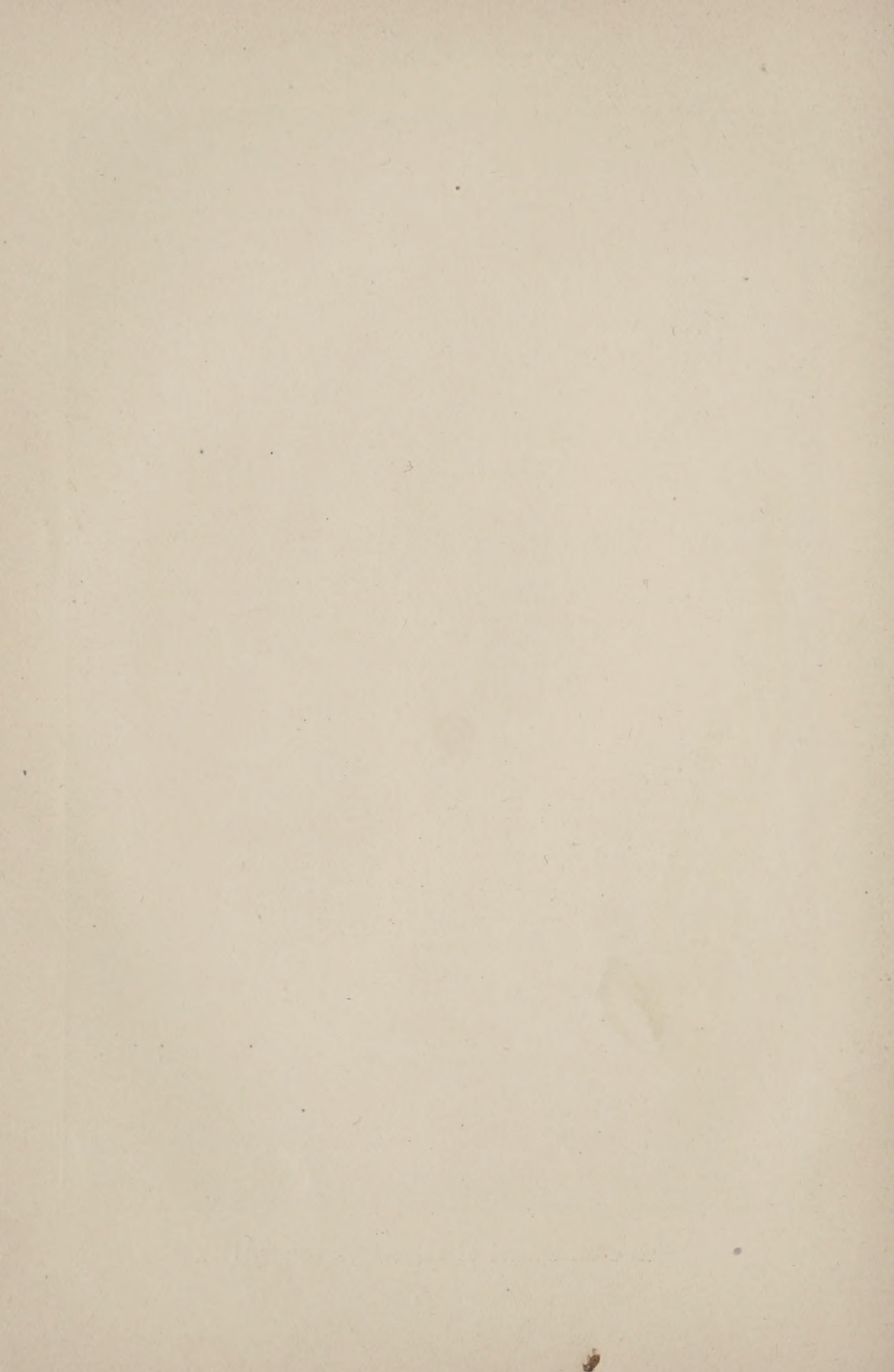
“ Will it bite ? Will it eat poor Robert all up ? ”

“ It sha'n't do that, and I don't believe it will bite. It can't you see, little one, if we stay safe in here. Master will take care of us. He always does. ”





“It’s an animal of some sort, painted!”



“Master always does,” assented the child, growing more confident.

“Of course he does. Hark! I want to hear what they are saying. I want — Why, there’s somebody else in here!”

“Hush, Nell, yourself! Don’t spoil the fun.”

The tittering which had startled her ended in a rush forward and the clapping of boyish hands over her mouth.

“Why, Phil!”

“Hush, I tell you! Hush, Nell, please, please! It is such a lark — such fun, such fun! Why, I’m almost dead with trying to keep in the laugh. And I’ve had to fight Dan every other minute for fear he’d give me away before I was ready. Come out of the brush-pile, Dan, it’s only Nell.”

The speaker had shut the door, which the girl had opened, after having carefully replaced the tell-tale blackboard; and the four were now imprisoned in total darkness, though perfectly able to hear all that transpired in the schoolroom itself.

But Helen heard nothing save that dear, familiar “Nell” which her cousin’s lips had uttered in his excitement, and now for the first time since that memorable morning so long ago, when the great snowfall began.

“Oh! Phil, darling! Then you’ve forgiven

me! You know I did n't tell Auntie about the wretched money!"

She had forgotten all about the strange occurrence of the past few minutes, her loving heart being conscious only of the happy fact that "Phil is friends again."

"Hush, girlie! Yes, of course. Yes, I've forgiven. I'd forgotten. Did n't I tell you so? Well, never mind. Maybe I was mad — but hark! can't you?"

Instantly she became silent, and even stilled little Robert's timid questions, lest they should jar upon this unexpected, benignant mood of Philip, her idol, — Philip, with whom she longed to stand shoulder to shoulder again, as in the happy old days of their comradery, before he had begun to do strange things: before he had ever run away at night; or had secret uses for the liberal pocket money which his father's authority made absolutely his own to control; or had acquired that irritable, impatient manner toward anybody who reproved him; or had learned to treat her as if she were a nobody, "a mere girl," too insignificant to speak with; and, oh! as he was before that unhappy morning when he had accused her — a Sampson — of a lie!

She dropped her arms from his neck and

listened obediently, as he bade her; and it was Daniel who presently put little Rob aside and whispered the explanation to her, though so low that the child at her knee could not hear: —

“It’s only Parson’s horse, the old white one that he lets run the country all the time. Phil was mad about that sermon last Sunday, when he hinted — the Parson did — that all the trouble in the Valley came from the bad boys of this school, and that I was the ringleader. I did n’t mind that myself, but I was mad, too, when he spoke o’ Phil that way: ‘The rich man’s son that had come into the Valley an’ brought a trail o’ evil with him, a contaminatin’ all the innocent youths o’ the neighborhood, an’ so on. That did make my blood bile, I tell you! So, when Phil said that charity ought to begin to home, an’ I could n’t stand seeing a poor old horse turned out in the winter time to pick up a livin’ as it could —”

“Why, everybody feeds the poor creature, you know, Dan! Half the time he’s in our own stable, and when he is n’t there somebody else takes him in and cares for him. I don’t think he’s suffered any — till now. That paint —”

“Hmm. ’T ain’t the minister’s fault if he hain’t — has n’t, I mean. When I get excited

I forget to talk proper like I'm tryin', you see."

"Oh! the talk is all right. But that poor old horse, Dan! Yes, Rob, you shall go. Please, Phil, dear, open that outside shutter and let the little fellow free."

"Let us all free. We might as well go 'round now and see the fun close-hand. Come on, Bob-o-link!"

The shutter flew open, small Robert flew after it, deposited in a snow bank by a well aimed toss of Philip's dexterous arm. Then, before she realized what he was doing, he caught Helen's slight figure also, and made as if he would send her following Robert's flight. However, he only thrust her through the window, and set her very gently upon the crust, which was almost even with the casement.

In the transit, though, he had managed to place on the tip of her nose a shamefaced little kiss, which was his boyish ratification of the "making-up" that so delighted her soul.

Dan joined them, and it was he who rescued Robert from the drift, brushed the snow off the fat little legs, and setting the child upon his own strong shoulder followed the laughing cousins to the front of the building.

“Dan always does go behind to pick up the fragments, does n’t he, Phil, darling? I reckon it’ll be he who will have to clean that dreadful paint off that poor beast!” exclaimed Helen dancing along in the path beside her cousin, too happy now to walk and “keep up the scare awhile longer,” as he continually bade her.

In any case it would n’t have much availed had she been as sedate as the decorated horse itself; for Jacob Lane had found out the real truth of the matter, before this, and between his outbursts of laughter was catechising the scholars as to who had done this outrageous thing.

“It’s a painted horse. It’s the Parson’s horse. That I can see for myself, an’ the paint’s consid’able fresh. Now, what I want to know is: Who done it?”

“I did n’t!”

“Nor me!”

“Nor me, nor him, nor her!”

There was no more school that day. Jacob furnished a halter and tied the striped monstrosity safely under the warm shed; then he re-entered the schoolhouse and aided the Dominie in an “investigation” as to the guilty perpetrator of the deed.

“It’s fun now, younkits. I can’t no more

help laughin' at the miserable critter in his convict's suit o' clothes 'an I can help breathin'. An' that 's the gospel truth. But there 's another truth, too. This here thing 's a-goin' to start a heap o' mischief. I don't like to make 'a mountain out of a mole-hill,' but — jest now, in the present state o' feelin' in the Valley, a straw 'll turn the popular opinion. What in — Jerusalem artichokes 'll any on us do, if this here skylark should oust the dear old Dominie from the little red schoolhouse?"

The awe-stricken hush which fell upon the crowding children was proof beyond words of the love they bore this possible victim; and when, touched by this silent tribute, the tender-hearted old master dropped his head upon his hands and hid his face from them, tears leaped to the eyes of many, and Helen ran forward to clasp her arms about him.

"They can't! They dare not be so mean! Just for a bit of nonsense like that!"

Never had the girl seemed fairer nor more a leader than as she stood thus, ready to do battle, defying that cruel "popular opinion," for her life-long friend. It was the same spirit of loyalty animating her then that had made her rally to the support of the pedagogue on that day of



Deacon Tewksbury's trying visit ; and that had, during all the past weeks toiled faithfully with them all to accomplish that "impossible" quilt which the trustee had suggested as a test of the old man's ability to instruct. The quilt was well-nigh completed now, and even those who had once pronounced it a hopeless undertaking began to see in it a proof not only of thorough instruction, but of this scholarly loyalty that was sure to win.

Back in the further corner, Philip watched his cousin breathlessly. Would she betray him? For, somehow, a sudden reluctance to confess his part in the transaction had come upon him. Escapades and insinuations, to her as yet unknown, had already reached his guardians' ears, and there had been stormy scenes at Sampson House, which threatened to result in his banishment thence and his imprisonment in a school that he regarded as little better than a "Reformatory."

"I never thought how it might work against the poor old Dominie. They'd say he could n't keep order, and all that bosh. But will she tell? Dan won't. That I know. He'd die first."

Something suggested itself to Jacob Lane, and he turned his glance upon Helen.

“Child, do *you* know who did that thing?”

The girl caught her breath. Then she answered steadily: —

“Yes.”

Philip's brow grew dark, and he clinched his hands, listening.

“Who was it?”

There was no reply. The silence grew and intensified. At first, to the children, it had seemed to mean but a trifle; now it held them spell-bound, their young sympathies touched by the tension of feeling suddenly developed around them.

“It lies, I guess, between shieldin' some school-mate an' shieldin' this faithful old feller. Now, how 'll you choose?”

Helen cast her gaze upon the floor, pressed the Dominie's hand still tighter, but answered nothing.

“You 'd ruther let 'em turn him out o' office, as an imbecile old worn-out man than jest to mention the culprit's name?”

In his own mind, Jacob Lane believed he knew the guilty person, and that he was there present. Yet he did not intimate this in any degree, and for the last time he asked the trembling girl: —

“Won't you jest speak, little Nell, an' save the Dominie?”

“He shall be saved! But — I’ll never tell.”

“Then I call it this school’s dismissed. Jim Bolton, go out and take your father’s old nag home; an’ tell him, for me — for me, hear — that the next time I catch him wanderin’ the country round, in the dead o’ winter, I’ll jest put a bullet through its miserable old carcass, and end its misery. An’, bein’ ’s Dominie’s upset — I’ll close this arfternoon without a prayer.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE CONVERSION OF SIMEON BEDDECKER.

THE revival was in full progress.

Never, in all the history of that Valley, had there been such a universal waking up of human souls as this.

All other interests gave place to it. The prominent question upon the lips of men and women was: "Whose heart has been touched to-day?"

The little red schoolhouse, conveniently central, became the glowing point of spiritual fusion. After the first few days of the excitement the school sessions were abandoned for the religious services which were held in their stead, morning, afternoon, and evening.

The wild March weather suited the wilder fervor of the itinerant evangelist who had come into the Valley to lead the movement. The little children felt the wrath of God in the winds which lashed the sodden snows, and His approval in the brilliant sunshine that melted them.

Grandsires and grandsons came hand in hand to the "mourners' bench," or placed themselves side by side upon the "anxious seat," that they might receive the especial, personal ministrations of the preacher.

Jacob Lane was among the earliest to become converted. Oddly enough, from having always been the jolliest, most easy-going of men, he now became fiercely belligerent and aggressive.

"Why, I tell you, neighbors, such a chance as this 'n don't come into a feller's life more 'n once. It'll never come into our Valley ag'in, never, so long as we all live. So you've got to embrace this golden opportunity now, or lose it forever. You must come. You must! I can't be happy 'less you do! Come one, come all! Now, don't hold back another minute! Walk right forard with me! I'll stan' by ye, an' help ye give old Satan a whack 'at 'll settle his hash forever, so fur forth as you're concerned."

Hitherto his fellow-citizens had known him as a cheerful, warm-hearted fellow, whose love for little children, and their confidence in him, bespoke him a good man if not a wise one. The worst any Valleyite had ever thought concerning him was that he might occasionally get the better of a customer in a "horse trade." However, who

ever really laid a thing of that nature up against a professional "dealer" ?

Now, by his own showing, there were no depths of wickedness into which this simple soul had not been delving ; and hearing him thus berate himself, the "younkits," over whom he yearned more than ever, grew frightened and withdrew as far as possible from his presence.

He saw this and grieved over it ; but none the less he waged his bitter war against sin, his own and — his neighbors'.

Most especially Sim Beddecker's.

On his way to the schoolhouse one day, he met his rival, Simeon, in the narrow, only passage that the yet remaining deep snow left available. Mr. Lane reined in the two grays he was driving, just as their noses touched the black and white noses of the other's advancing team.

Yelled Jacob : —

"Hello, you old reprobate ! How happens it that you're travellin' in the wrong direction ? Why ain't you on the road to meetin' ?"

"Oh ! come, Jake, you mind your own business. 'Pears as if you'd clean lost your senses, a-gettin' so excited over things. Turn out, can't ye, an' let a feller by."

"Turn out ? No. I can't. What's more, I

sha'n't. I'm jest where I'm ordained to be, or I should n't be here. Yes, yes. To speak the warnin' word to you, my sinful friend, an' lead you back into the way o' holiness."

"Plague take you! Turn out, I say! Wish to goodness this snow'd melt an' drown you in it, rampagin' around as you be, a-neglectin' your regular business an' carryin' on like a crazy critter."

"Crazy, be I? Yes. Yes. Jest plumb crazy with the wonder an' glory on it all. I, a sinner, worse 'n a heathen —"

"I agree with ye entire!" interrupted Mr. Beddecker.

"But saved at last! An' now I'm bound to snatch you, too, you old enemy, as a brand from the burnin'. Yes, Sim Beddecker, bound an' determined; an' what Jake Lane sets out to 'complish he gen'ally does. Come. Head them horses o' your'n round, square in their tracks. I 'low there's room enough, an' if they hain't I'll take a holt an' flop that sleigh into the right direction quicker 'n 'Jack Robinson.' Come. Round with ye!"

"But — I ain't goin' round. Understan' that? I'm on the road to Carthage, a-mindin' my own business, as a decent citizen should, 'stead o'

blockadin' the turnpike, like you're a-doin'. Move out an' let me along."

By this time other vehicles, also bound meeting-ward, had come up and fallen into line behind Jacob's, their occupants now waiting impatiently for the end of this controversy. To turn out and attempt to pass around the wordy combatants was to be upset, for the snow-banks were still almost shoulder high on either side the passage, which just there was narrower than common.

One, seeing no probable termination of the dispute, exhorted the stagemen: —

"Hold on an' shet up for a spell, you simpletons! Most on us behind you have been drivin' fast to get to meetin' on time, an' our horses can't stan' here unblanketed in this wind. Make way there, one o' ye, an' let us pass."

Jacob had risen to his feet and stood upright in his sleigh, the better to address his opponent; but he now wheeled fiercely about to face backward, exclaiming: —

"An' what's horseflesh compared to a human soul? His soul! Sim Beddecker's, who's done more evil an' carried more young lads to perdition an' ary man 'at ever set foot in the Valley. Horseflesh — an' Sim Beddecker! Why,



I would n't name them innercent critters in the same day along 'ith him ; no, not as he is now. Oh ! I tell you, neighbors, if ever a poor contemptible sinner needed to be brought to the knowledge o' his own vileness an' to the savin' power o' religion, if ever a scalliwag needed convertin', Sim's the feller. An' I'll fetch him where he'd ought to go, an' I'll not move foot nor step from this spot till I do."

A laugh that ended in a groan arose from the people whose course was thus obstructed.

"Then we might all as well turn about home again," cried the foremost.

"No, you need n't. No, you need n't. I'm tryin' persuasion fust. I'm preachin' the gospel o' peace an' free salvation on the start, an' if that don't fetch him I've got a lever what will. There's more ways 'an one to budge a balky mule."

"You ain't balky yourself, be ye, Jake?" asked Simeon, facetiously.

"Yes, I be. Yes. I'm balkier 'n the balkiest quadruped 'at ever was harnessed to your stage or mine. I don't know no way to give up. I can't give up. More 'n that, I declare to you an' all these folks now collected 'at when I leave this dug-out road 'twixt these two snow-banks,

I'll leave it with you in tow, a-headed straight for the schoolhouse an' the 'anxious seat' 'at's there awaitin' ye. Awaitin' for you, Sim Beddecker. Now, be ye ready to start yet?"

Simeon lost patience wholly. In honest Jacob, once his rival and straightforward enemy, he now beheld a fanatic gone mad with zeal, who must be treated like any other madman.

"Well, for my part, I'm tired o' this. I've got affairs to 'tend to, if you hain't. An' I flatter myself 'at I can keep clear o' this spiritual frenzy what makes sensible men turn silly."

With this, and an air of lofty superiority, the unregenerate Mr. Beddecker descended from his sleigh and walked to the heads of the horses, turning his own team to the right and gently forcing Jacob's in the opposite direction.

Though wider elsewhere, in this particular drift-filled spot, as has been said, the shovelled road was so narrow that only by the nicest calculation could even smaller vehicles pass each other, while the ice crust on the snow had become too softened by wind and sunshine to make a "'cross-lots" trip any longer possible.

Simeon must either back his horses over a long retreat to reach a better "turn-out," or meeting a generous response of "half road" from

his opponent, guide his big stage carefully past these other obstructing sleighs.

But there was no "half-road" generosity in Jacob's spirit. As Simeon's hands touched the handsome heads of his beloved grays, he leaped into the road and yanked them forcibly back into the middle of it.

His earnest, flushed face looked out between his fur cap and the great collar of his fox-skin coat with indomitable determination in every line.

"Come, Jacob, don't act the fool any longer! Look at all that funeral-procession-like string o' sleds an' pungs behind ye, cram full o' folks a dislocatin' their necks to see me an' you do the Kilkenny cat business. Come. I don't owe ye no gredge. Here's my hand on 't, I don't. Shake an' turn out, an' that 'll be more piouser, I 'low, 'an all this bull-doggedness o' your'n."

"I'll shake an' gladly, Sim, old boy. But not — till you agree to go to meetin' with me. Say the word an' make a happy man o' yourself an' me, too. Will ye go?"

"No, Jake. Not now. I can't. Why, I've got to make some trips over the line, hain't I? The more especial as you hain't, not once sence this protracted meetin' begun. Sure, the hull

Valley can't go without the mails an' the pervision it's 'customed to depend on us a-bringin' in, can it?"

"Meat that perisheth, Simeon. The meat that'll turn to soul-pisen in your mouth if you value it afore salvation."

"Well, I don't o' course. But there! I jest come from Sampson House, an' there's Mis' Adair been needin' her dainties from town this week or more, an' not gettin' 'em 'cause you, 'at gen'ally does her arrants, is neglectin' 'em complete."

There was a momentary change in the expression of Jacob's face. That the invalid lady whom all the Valley honored might need aught with which he was accustomed to supply her had not before occurred to him.

But he banished the fleeting regret as a suggestion of the devil, while Simeon made haste to follow up the advantage he had gained. He had his own personal reasons for avoiding an open rupture with the other.

"Yes, an' there's Miss Delight had to go into the kitchen an' cook, 'count o' old Susan an' Molly a trapesin' to meetin' continual. Old nigger was jest goin' out the door as I druv up, an' Miss Sampson was a-coaxin' her to come back

an' finish up the ironin' an' leave meetin' go for one day. But no, sir! Says Susan:—

“ ‘Laws, honey! cayn't 'spect po' ole cullud woman to stop an' iron body-clo'es, can ye, when her po' soul's so full o' sin-wrinkles she cayn't be comf'able day nor night, till the flat-iron o' salvation's a-squeeged on 'em all out. Plenty tìme to cook an' iron, Missy, when I done get my soul saved. Shuah! ’

“ An' that old fatty wobbled off, shoutin' ‘Glory!’ an' leavin' Miss Sampson starin' after her, clean beat out an' disgusted.”

“ Humph! ” ejaculated Jake, half-laughing.

“ Yes. It's jest as I'm a-tellin' ye. ‘Well, Mr. Beddecker,’ says Miss Delight, says she, ‘my religion teaches me to do the duty 'at lies nearest,’ an' I agree with her. An' the nearest duty I, Sim Beddecker, 's got is to get plumb straight to Carthage, soon's I can, an' fetch back them medicines an' oranges an' things 'at's wanted to Sampson House.”

With varying degrees of interest others besides Jacob had listened to Simeon's words, for several of the men from the blockaded sleighs had left them and come forward to the point of collision between the stagemen.

These spectators now saw a second hesitation on Lane's part, but it quickly vanished.

“Temptation. Temptation! I must n’t listen to it. Nor shall you, Sim Beddecker. Nor shall you. Once more, for the last time, — it’s flyin’ fast, poor sinner! an’ your day o’ grace is almost spent, — will you go peaceable to meetin’ an’ plant yourself down where religion can touch you, or will you not?”

As he uttered this demand, rather than question, the enthusiasm in Jacob’s eye congealed into a stern resolve. With his hand on his opponent’s collar he silently awaited the reply, and the spectators as breathlessly waited with him.

“NO!!”

Like the roar of an angry animal this negative was tossed from Simeon to his tormentor, who actually rebounded from the shock. Then, all suddenly, the fierceness fell away from him and a look of ineffable compassion and gentleness stole over his face. Still retaining his hold upon Simeon’s collar, Jacob bent forward and whispered a few words in its owner’s ear.

The curious people craned their necks, smiling at the little by-play; but they ceased to smile and opened their eyes in wonder as they beheld the transformation that whisper wrought upon its recipient.

Sim’s face grew pallid and terrified. For an

instant he stared stupidly into his rival's countenance; then, as silently as a mute might have done, he began to move his horses out of the way, backward toward the schoolhouse.

When the wider space was reached which allowed of turning the vehicle around, this was done; and still silently, in the same quietude which had fallen also upon all the watchful people behind them, he now led the way toward the designated spot.

Fifteen minutes later, with his arm about Simeon's shoulder and (as did not escape the observation of some) his hand still upon the latter's collar, Jacob marched proudly down the schoolhouse aisle and planted his captive firmly on the "anxious seat."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MERCY AND WRATH.

ONE week after Simeon Beddecker's forcible conversion, the emotional excitement culminated in a meeting devoted to the young.

Especially were the evangelist's efforts directed toward arousing interest in the hearts of the lads whose ages ranged from fifteen to twenty years, and among whom, it had been noticeable, there were fewer awakenings than in any other class.

Everybody was in the schoolhouse who could get there and whom it would hold, — Deacon Tewksbury the most in evidence, looking like a stranger, with his pale face and crutches; having that evening left the shelter of the Dominie's house for the first time since he had been carried into it nearly frozen. He limped back and forth across the platform, shouting, singing, exhorting, all at once; and, finally directing: —

“Come up here, you young folks, every one of you! Make way there, good neighbors, for these poor ignorant childern. Give the preacher a



short range to fire at 'em with his gospel bullets. Come, Jimmy Bolton! Come, Philip — you ring-leader in mischief; an' you, Dan'l, the mountaineer, 'at would n't sign the pledge. Come, an' get your heart softened at last. Renew, Joseph, Luther — all of ye, come, come, come forard!"

Shrinking back, blushing furiously, already suffering indescribable tortures of bashfulness, led, pushed, and pulled by their friends, the "unregenerate" youths stumbled into the seat immediately behind the "mourners' bench."

They had reason to fear, many of them, thus to face the full gaze of their fellow-townsmen, and it did not add to their comfort to have the girls, their somewhat despised and critical mates, ushered into the row next themselves.

"We must make this a glorious occasion," cried the Deacon, excitedly, hobbling to and fro. "I've been let an' hindered from bein' amongst ye durin' the rest o' these meetin's, but I'm here to-night to give in my testimony, an' I feel, I feel — 'at I must make the most on't I can. Yes, my young friends, I look for great revelations to-night. There have been strange goin's-on, an' wicked ones. But the works o' darkness shall be made manifest in this light."

In the fierce glance which the Deacon trailed

along the line of boyish faces before him they read a sort of menace ; and any youngster who is "dared" commonly responds in spirit. Their shamefaced awkwardness gave place to their habitual desire for fun, and at the word "light," Philip cast his own glance contemptuously toward the sputtering tallow candles overhead, and the low-burning whale-oil lamps, whose radiance an energetic woman was endeavoring to increase by picking up the soft wicks with a pin point.

Jimmy Bolton echoed this wordless criticism by a titter, which was caught up and sent along from lad to lad till it reached the limits of the row.

But the preacher had noticed this unpropitious beginning, and hastily arose to prevent further mischief. He was all aglow with Divine love, and not so far removed in years from the ages of those boys but that he could wholly sympathize with them. After the briefest of opening prayers he began, simply and directly : —

"Little sisters and brothers, this is my last night with you. I have overstayed my time and now I must go. I have a message for you and this is my only chance to deliver it, for in this world you and I will never meet again. I go to a home beyond far seas and to a heathen people —

if so be I shall live to reach them. You've all been well taught and you've heard a great deal about Christ; yet did any of you ever stop to think about just Christ the Lad? — half-grown, half-strong, more than half-misunderstood, just as you are; no doubt the jest and butt of many thoughtless people, as well as their drudge. He toiled in a carpenter's shop. He fetched water and fagots for his mother. Probably He was called upon dozens of times a day to 'do this' or 'that' thing for some grown-up person, who thought then, as others think now, that a boy's legs never can grow tired. Do you not pity Him, this beautiful young Prince, enthralled to a drudgery worse than ever held captive a prince of mere fairy tale? In His natural humanity hating, maybe, this servitude as much as you hate doing your father's 'chores.' Did you ever get acquainted with that Boy? Then — do so now!"

The theme was a beloved one to the young evangelist and he presented it with a novelty of language and ideas, clothing the yearning sincerity of his soul, which could not fail to move hearts simple as these.

At the close of the address half the "Owl Club" to which he preached was in tears. The other half was uneasy and longed to get away

from an influence sure to engulf obstinacy sooner or later; and the more sanguine of the audience already felt that the meeting's prayed-for result had been achieved.

But — then uprose good Deacon Tewksbury, from his chair of state beside the Dominie's desk, and opened his lips to speak.

“It was like falling off a mountain top into a muck hole,” was the forcible, if inelegant, comparison that one disturbed listener made afterwards.

For the very first thing the new speaker said was : —

“Walk right up to the anxious seat, young brothers and sisters. Come. Let us hear the confession that will clean out your hearts all good an' hullsome at the start. Who is it amongst you that begun that wicked ‘Owl Club’? What's been a-goin' on in that old mill on the river bank? What's become of all the money has disappeared from one house or 'nother, durin' these past months sence that sinful organization was institooted? Who took five dollars out o' storekeeper Dill's drawer? Who dressed up in paint an' feathers an' went to the Widow Brown's an' scairt her out o' six dollars an' forty-seven cents? Who had a skylarkin' in old Elder

Simpson's fur-meadow barn an' smoked pipes an' set it afire an' burnt it up to the ground? Hey? Who'll be the first to open his heart an' repent an' tell? If ye hain't done it yourselves, who'll name them other wrong-doers amongst the Valley boys what has?"

Groaned one good mother at the back of the room: —

"Oh! what a dreadful mistake! He should n't have taken that tone. He don't know boys. Oh! he's undoin' all the good the other one has done!"

Her lamentation was true. At this unexpected fusillade of rebuke, after such a moving outburst of tenderness, the face of every lad in that row behind the "mourners' bench" grew hard and indignant. A few blanched and some hearts beat guiltily; but already the only thing that interested any was: "Who'd ha' thought that? How much does he know? what'll he say next?"

Scarce a youth among them but had heretofore proudly numbered himself a member of the "Club" and wore his "Owl" badge with satisfied composure; but this was alarming!

However, in every sense, the inquisitor had shown his incorrect estimate of character. The one requisite for admission to this famous society

which Phil had organized had been allegiance to a promise: "I will not tattle."

"Huh! He thinks we'll tell on each other, does he? Hoh!"

Thoughts of scorn filled every youthful breast, and each lad braced himself upright in his place and threw his shoulders back, as facing an enemy, while a nudge of elbow-to-elbow telegraphed down the line:—

"Stick together! Keep your mouths shut!"

"Let us sing," remarked the preacher, hoping to alter the current of feeling.

Immediately, with that perversity of incident which sometimes happens, a blundering, well-intentioned sister piped forth:—

"And from his righteous lips  
Shall this dread sentence sound?  
And through the numerous guilty throng  
Spread black despair around?"

And now to the single voice, other singers who had found their hymn books, took up with added volume and solemnity:—

"Depart from me, ye cursed,  
To everlasting flame,  
For rebel angels first prepared,  
Where mercy never came.

"How will —"

However, the third verse of that dolorous hymn was cut short by a direct interposition of nature. A single, heavy clap of thunder burst upon their startled ears, and died away in growling reverberations, as if protesting against this doctrine of wrath. To the thunder succeeded a low, gathering sound, softer and more continuous: the rising of mighty winds and the onrush of a beleaguering rain.

Women looked into each other's faces in new affright, and those who lived at a distance fidgeted in their seats.

During all these weeks since the great snow had fallen it had remained upon both mountain and lowland without perceptible wasting; but of late, since the sun's rays had had greater power over it, the enormous mass had softened and "honeycombed," till when the south wind arose it would offer but little resistance to that warm, dispersing breath.

"It looked like a storm, a terrible one, as we come along," whispered Mrs. Beans to her neighbor, "an' I'm 'most sorry I did. Husband says there'll be a reg'lar washout when the snow does go."

"Yes, an' don't you hate to hear thunder this time o' year? Always sort o' scarey, I think.

Hark! They're goin' to sing, and — My soul! there it goes again! What a clap! Ain't that awful?"

This time the roar of the thunder was instantly followed by an equally loud roar of the wind, while a sudden dash of rain and hail against the thin window panes threatened their speedy destruction.

Then the storm lulled, absolutely, and the hush of this peace seemed more ominous to some than the previous tumult had been.

But not to Deacon Tewksbury. He had come to the meeting, it is to be hoped, with some idea of its religious benefit, but also with a determination to discover the truth of a matter which had long perplexed and angered him. In all honesty he believed that the elements were getting up these strange manifestations of their power simply as an accessory to his eloquence, and he improved the silence by exclaiming: —

“Yes, yes, ye guilty ones! Don't you hear the thunder? Don't you feel the searching of that mighty wind? What is it for but to tell you that there's no use in tryin' to hide your wicked secrets any longer? Friends, brethren, sisters! and you sinful young souls that have given yourselves over into Satan's power, wake



up and hear the summons. Confess, confess, an' be saved! Now, now, in this last hour o' grace, before your chance is took from ye! I know, I — KNOW all about it! Every single one among ye who's been committin' these awful sins. But I give you the chance first. Tell o' your own accord, my dear young fellow-mortals, an' save me the pain o' doin' it for ye. Tell — tell — tell! Who took the money out o' Dill's drawer?"

This was too terrible for the evangelist to endure. His loving heart yearned over those now frightened yet obstinate lads with the tenderness born of God. With a stride forward he laid his thin, trembling hand upon the Deacon's broad shoulder.

"Not this way, oh! my brother! Not in this way of anger and terror! But by love, by mercy, by that sweet charity which wins! The charge you have whispered into my ears this evening — how can I believe it of such young, healthy, happy youths as these? No, no. Not in that way. Oh! leave them to me. This —"

A sudden inspiration seemed to seize him. With an almost imploring gesture he turned and swept his gaze over the adults who filled the main part of the room.

"You, my older brothers and sisters, is it not

possible for you to go away and leave us to ourselves? This is the young folks' meeting. I, too, am young. I know how hard it is to show the enthusiasm of an untried soul to the hard gaze of experience. Please go away and leave us children all together — with the Lord."

Yet, even as he asked this favor, he realized that it could not well be granted; and reading a swift denial in the faces he searched, he retreated to his chair and buried his own face in his hands, praying silently for those he would befriend.

"Not this way, Preacher? What way, then? Are we to bring souls to the truth an' yet not let 'em hear it? Pooh! I've no sort o' patience with this new-fangled doctrine o' jest mercy, mercy, mercy! Show mercy to an unruly colt an' he'll kick ye. Let these here sinful boys think they can pull the wool over our eyes any longer an' they'll go on from bad to worse. No. If they won't confess for themselves I'll have to do it for 'em. Then we'll pray an' convict 'em o' the sin, if we can. If we can't there's other ways o' convictin' — an' they'll find it out. They'll find it out!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### UNDER THE OLD HORSE-SHED.

A FIERCER gust than any which had gone before it hurled itself against the school-house, and the structure shook under the onslaught. But silence still sealed the lips of that row of stern-faced youths, who confronted the Deacon with the firmness of innocence or the indifference of guilt.

The sight of their immobile countenances seemed but to infuriate their accuser, who had suffered little opposition in his life, and who found this boyish audacity intolerable.

“Well, then, you wretched sinners, let the blame rest on your own heads if you are here disgraced before your neighbors. I’ve given ye a chance an’ you’ve despised it. An’ I’ll bring home the charges to ye, in order, one by one. The ringleader — No. Not him the first. He can wait, — though he’s led the wickedest set o’ boys at ever polluted the Valley with their presence, they bein’ all too ready, by fur, to

follow where he showed the path. But let him wait a spell. You, Luther Beans, stan' up."

This astonished lad remained seated. But his honest, happy-go-lucky face crimsoned till it seemed the blood would burst through the skin.

"You won't, hey? Well, never mind. I can tell the hull story jest as well with you an' the rest your guilty mates a sittin' down. Not one shall escape. Luther Beans — I accuse you o' takin' that money out o' storekeeper Dill's drawer. For what? To — gamble — with. TO — GAMBLE — WITH."

In spite of the storm which gathered again, there was a silence that could be felt, after this terrible accusation. But the Deacon had paused only for effect. Almost immediately he went on, with a satisfied rapidity and unflinching plainness: —

"It was you, James Bolton, parson's son 'at you be, who dressed up in ghost clothes an' went to the Widow Brown's in the dead o' night, an' made her give you up all the money she had in the house, almost all she had in the world. For what? To gamble with!"

The poor minister on the platform behind his angry parishioner groaned aloud, and hid his eyes from his son's disgrace.

“ You, Dan’l Starbuck, it was you, a-beginnin’ when you first set your foot into this Valley to do evil. You near pounded to his death my young and recently converted kinsman, the fatherless Renew Hapgood. I accuse you o’ tryin’ to do me mortal damage, a takin’ them nuts an’ pins out o’ my wagon, right here to the schoolhouse when I come to visit it. An’ more: o’ settin’ fire to that fur-meadow barn. An’ further: o’ paintin’ the minister’s poor horse. Of sech general bedevilment as ’ll ruin the hull school an’ the hull community if you don’t confess your guilt an’ take your punishment; though it would be easier to have you clear out, at once.”

Daniel’s face looked as if marked by exclamation points at every feature, but his honest gaze was never once removed from his accuser’s spectacles; which, apparently imparted some cloud to their clearness, for they were immediately taken off to be wiped on a silk handkerchief.

The accusation was resumed: —

“ An’ now I come to them in high places. Most of all to Philip Sampson, that innercent lookin’ boy, ’at ’ll do more wickedness in a day ’an ary other ever thought on. You, Philip Sampson, stan’ up. I’ve that to say to you ’at can’t be said an’ you a-sittin’ down.”

“Certainly, if it will oblige you,” replied the lad, rising with easy grace, erect and undismayed. Seen thus, even in the dim light which surrounded him, he seemed the handsomest specimen of incipient manhood which had ever shone upon the admiring, pitying eyes of the Valley people.

“My! but he’s a bonny boy!” exclaimed Jake Lane, audibly, and lovingly.

“Philip Sampson, in the presence of all these people, I ask you what you have done with that three hunderd dollars you stole out o’ my pocket that night you found me in the snow.”

The lad had expected nothing like this. The worst he had foreboded had been the disclosure of what seemed to him matter of little import — even if not wholly in accordance with Valley principles — and he had hoped to face it out with the disdain he brought to any other simple reprimand.

But this blow staggered him. He reeled visibly; then righted himself, squared his fine shoulders, tossed back his fair hair, and though his cheek paled till some women looked to see him faint, his eyes riveted themselves unflinchingly upon his accuser’s and he answered not a word.

“Humph! So you think to brazen it out, do ye? That your family’s standin’ in the commun-

ity 'll help cover up a theft like that? For it is a *thief* I name you, an' in a court o' jestic I'll prove it. Shame on ye, Philip Sampson, son o' Philip Sampsons, an' honest men from way back! To be a — ”

But the dreadful word was not again uttered. Before it could pass the accuser's lips it was choked back into his throat by a pair of strong hands, which caught and held him in their terrible grip, swaying him to and fro like a wind-blown reed.

A dozen men sprang forward promptly, to interfere, and Daniel's hands were finally wrenched from the Deacon's throat; and at that instant the tempest broke again over the spot in such wise that puny human passion died abashed before it.

For a moment, as the man had been swayed by the lad, so the little red schoolhouse rocked in the force of that gale, while the flashing of the lightning and the booming of the thunder almost stilled the beating of every heart.

The breaking of glass, the crashing of riven timbers, the falling of trees, drove away, for a space, every thought save that of personal safety.

Then — “The horses!” cried one man, at last, and started for the door.

A single touch upon its latch sent the slight

barricade inward upon its hinges, knocking him backward against a crowd of followers, who had been aroused by his example to think of the animals tied beneath the sheds outside.

“It was there it struck!” cried another, recovering from the shock of his fellows and dashing forward into the rain.

Only to be driven instantly back. No man could stand against that irresistible storm, and though his retreat had been so sudden he had become thoroughly drenched.

“Shut the door! shut the door! The candles are going out!”

“We can’t. The wind’s too strong.”

“Oh! my soul! Oh! my po’ sinful soul! We’s all be killed. It is the jedgment day!” shrieked old Susan, and her outcry was caught up and re-echoed by hysterical women all over the building.

Men groaned. Some shouted in prayer. A young girl fainted. For awhile utter confusion and desperate terror reigned. Had it been possible the disorder would have been augmented by the fact that the strong draught which swept through the place, between the broken window on one side and the opened door on the other, extinguished nearly every candle.



The dim lamplight still remained, yet even these small flames flickered in the current and threatened to expire at any instant. However, the almost incessant flashes of lightning made everything visible, and, finally, unable longer to endure the scene, Jake Lane pressed forward toward the platform and shouted, cheerily: —

“ Pray, preacher, pray! You pray an’ I’ll work! Who’ll follow me to the rescue o’ them horses? ”

In the silence that his words brought they could hear each other’s hearts beat. Then the resonant voice of the evangelist — calm, fearless, even triumphant — called to them above the roar of the swelling gust: —

“ ‘ Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.’ ”

That jubilant tone broke the spell of terror. At the same moment, also, the lightning showed Jacob climbing through the shattered window in the direction of the sheds.

Daniel was the first to understand and imitate the stageman’s example; and though the wind caught them up and dashed them upon the ground as they forced themselves into the outer world, they had now gained an unnatural strength

from the excitement and the incentive to save life. As soon as they regained their feet Jacob caught Daniel around the body, and, making a united effort, they struggled to the sheds.

“The snow — it’s so much deep water — over boot-tops a’ready. Them folks must — be got — out — an’ home. If the dam gives — way, nothin’ — can save ’em.”

“How?” gasped Daniel, unable to say more.

“See. The shed’s afire — over there. No! It’s out. The rain — Well, begin with the first team. If somebody else — yes, they’re comin’.”

A few men joined these pioneers and a hurried consultation was held. The flood was growing greater each second. A brief while later every road would be impassible, if not already so.

Daniel suggested: —

“Form a cordon o’ men, by joinin’ hands. Pass each team from one to t’other, only lettin’ go your grip as little as may be. Get ’em round to the leeward o’ the schoolhouse, an’ pass the women an’ childern through the windows there. Fix ’em snug’s you can in the wagons, an’ then let every man start towards home — trestin’ more to his horse ’an to himself. Natur’ ’ll teach ’em what’s best to do.”

The plan was the best devised and was

adopted. Yet some idea of the wind's terrific force may be had from the fact that again and again, almost as fast for awhile as it could be formed, "the rope o' men" would be broken by one or more being thrown to the ground.

Daniel was the first in line, close under the shed, and his knowledge of animal nature stood him in good stead; for he could often quiet a rearing, terrified beast which would not allow its own owner to come near it.

At length the shed was empty. A few of the most unmanageable horses had been cut loose from their vehicles and turned free to care for themselves, which was more humane than to leave them under the rocking roof that might fall and crush them at any moment.

"There, Dan, that's a good night's work!" cried Jake Lane, drawing a long breath of relief. "The wind's fallin' a mite. Come into the schoolhouse now. There's some folks left. I'll stay an' do what I can. Come. You've done well. No matter — Come."

As the driver's voice died in the gale and he disappeared toward the schoolhouse, Daniel started to obey; but he was exhausted, and leaned against the "upright" of the shed to regain his breath and strength.

Resting thus he heard another voice, — one which would have arrested his footsteps anywhere, on the brink of any peril, so dear it was to his boyish soul.

“Dan! Hold on. Wait. Don’t go. I’ve got to tell you something.”

“Phil! You here? Go away — I — seems ’s if — the shed’s movin’.”

“It’s only the wind. Say, Dan, I’m off. Good-bye. Sometime I’ll let you hear from me. Sometime I hope — Make it easy to Aunt Serapha and little Nell. She’s a dear, but — There! I must n’t talk. Don’t tell if you can help it. Let them think — anything they choose. Maybe that I was killed in the storm. It’s the best way. Good-bye, old fellow, good-bye!”

There was a fierce grip of his hand, a boyish, loving slap upon his shoulder, and the woodlander was alone again.

“Philip!” he called eagerly, and tried to follow. But something seemed wrong with him, oddly enough. His head felt light and queer. He waited an instant, till he “could see better.” Yet again he called, less strongly: —

“Philip! Wait! Let’s go home — together.”

There was no answer.

“Sho! I’m gettin’ silly in my wits, like Nate

Heard. I'm awful tired. I'll wait a spell, then — I wonder what he meant. Hmm. My head — ”

It was some moments afterward that the people still left in the schoolhouse, who were prisoners for the time being, since they could not walk home as they had walked thither, heard a heavy crash outside. It was close at hand and louder than any tree-fall which had gone before.

“Oh! there goes the shed! How fortunate that all the horses were gotten out of it before it fell!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE MORNING AFTER.

AS the sun rose on the morning after the storm, Jacob Lane rode swiftly up to the entrance of Sampson House and halloed lustily for some one from within.

To his surprise Miss Sampson herself opened the upper half of the old-fashioned door and inquired, courteously, the reason of his summons.

“ Hmm. Well — is the Doctor in ? ”

“ No. He has been out since midnight. ”

“ Don't know when he 'll be home, I s'pose. ”

“ No. When his work is all done — if you can guess at that time. Why ? Who is it needs him now ? ”

“ Mis' Hapgood. She's a-takin' on terrible. On account o' Renew's bein' drowned. ”

“ Renew — drowned ! How horrible. Yet no. Go back and tell her she's a happy woman ; to dry her tears and set about serving her less fortunate neighbors. ”

“ Ma' — am ! M-a-a'-am ? ”

Good Jacob was utterly dumfounded. Then he promptly formulated in his own mind the one excuse he always made for the uncomprehended actions of the opposite sex: —

“I forgot. She’s a woman. They’re jest riddles.”

Aloud he said: “Ruelly ain’t the only woman’s broken-hearted in the Valley to-day. There’s Sim Beddecker’s wife been ridin’ bare-back from Dan to Beersheba, askin’ every mortal she meets for her man. His clothes, some on ’em, was picked up, too, away down the turnpike, where they’d washed from somewheres. I’m hopin’ he’ll turn up, after a spell. He’s able-bodied an’ crafty-headed; don’t believe he’d get himself drowned, not till the last extremity. But Renew’s different. He’s young an’ —”

Jacob paused abruptly and regarded Aunt Delight with a critical air. He was thinking:

“I’ll jest search her countenance an’ see how she’s feelin’ ’bout that fool talk o’ the Deacon’s. An’ I hope, maybe, she hain’t heerd it. Only —”

And now his thought was interrupted, as his speech had been, — this time by the lady herself inquiring, in the most casual way: —

“Oh! Jacob. Do you happen to know where Daniel is? He has n’t been home yet, and with

the Doctor away and Abraham gone into the Valley to look after the far barns and tool-houses, I need him."

"Why, no, Ma'am. I hain't seen him. Not to-day. Last night he done a man's work — yes, two men's. He's a noble feller, is that young mountaineer, no matter what that old Deacon said ag'in him. I've always found him straight, every time I tackled him, an' that's consid'able often. The only thing needin' is — I wish he'd been converted! And I think he would ha' been, only for the Deacon's talk. It'd 'a' been a good thing if he'd been too lame to got out to meeting last night, — a good thing in every way. He's like to be laid up ag'in, from the exposure; but, thank fortune! this time he'll do his gruntin' in his own house, where they're used of him, an' not worry the life out o' poor Dominie Davidson no more. He was druv home, last night, the Deacon was, in about the first wagon left the schoolhouse, an' good riddance to him!"

By this harangue honest Jacob intended to convey a number of ideas: that he, for one, disbelieved entirely in the terrible accusations brought against the Valley lads, most especially those against the two of her own household, and yet, that he sympathized in her distress if



these reports had reached her — which he hoped they had not; that, in any case, she could count upon him as she had always counted, save and excepting during the late revival, when he had allowed his spiritual business to get the better of his worldly.

“Yes. Daniel is a good boy. So I believe. I have always found him superior to what I had expected of him. And, if you see him, just mention, please, that he will be doing as much good at home as in helping elsewhere.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” replied the stageman, meekly. He could n’t understand it, yet somehow, by these few words, uttered in that calm tone of hers, he felt that Miss Sampson disdained both his aid and his sympathy.

Then he glanced into her stern face and suddenly remembered the sunny brightness of Philip’s. Her he respected, profoundly, but Philip he loved. So he burst out abruptly, —

“As for that cussed thing the Deacon — ”

Miss Delight raised her hand, protesting.

“A man who has just experienced religion should be overflowing with charity and should hate profanity. But you are wondering. Yes, Jacob, I have heard. Susan went ‘to get her soul saved’ again last night — she speaks of the

matter as if it were buying a pair of shoes — and she brought back the word. Some friendly neighbor dumped her on the back porch in a flood of water up to her boot-tops, and her fervor got a little dashed. But she did not forget her news nor her indignation; and — that is all, I believe. If the Doctor comes in I will tell him about Mrs. Hapgood. However, please give her my message. Adding, if you will be so kind, that we, at Sampson House, will serve her in any way possible to us. Good-morning.”

With a stately bow and a face as calm as the light growing in the eastern sky, Delight Sampson closed the half-door between herself and her visitor; but could his shrewd gaze have penetrated the oaken timbers he would have seen a gray shadow flit over the proud countenance, and the gray head bowed for an instant in bitter humility.

But no such abnormal vision belonged to Jacob Lane, and he rode away almost as angry with her as he was with Deacon Tewksbury, with his simple brain in a muddle, and his heart filled by a gathering new anxiety.

“Plague take it all! There is a difference between them kind o’ folks an’ — an’ mine. Why don’t she sputter out her mad? Can it be

she believes it? Believes it — she, a Sampson, of a Sampson? Most any woman I know 'd had her eyes half cried out, but she — Sho. An' that's queer about Dan'l. Hain't been home yet. Did n't say Phil had nuther. Last time I saw either of 'em, Dan was restin' a mite in the old shed, an' Phil on his way from the schoolhouse toward it. To jine him, I reckoned. Them two was thicker 'n molasses in the winter time. I'll — Oh! my soul!"

A sudden, horrible thought had come as a climax to Jacob's soliloquy, and he checked the gray horse so fiercely that it reared on its haunches, while every vestige of color died from its owner's ruddy countenance.

The next instant horse and rider were galloping headlong through the flooded Valley, guessing where its roads were hidden or caring for none at all; splashing the water till it drenched them both at each plunge forward; and leaping over the great cakes of ice that had washed up from river and canal, as well as over tree trunks and timbers riven from many an outlying barn.

It was a wild and terrible scene on which the sun rose that morning. Its like had never been seen — please God might never be again — in that fair Valley. The last vestige of snow had

disappeared. The earth, wherever it uprose, was black and washed free from even the dead verdure that had covered it beneath the snow. But mostly, over all ran that fierce brown flow of water, water — working ruin everywhere.

To the few men abroad, intent upon saving some bit of floating property, Jacob yelled madly as he dashed by, and they bethought them at once of some new calamity; or else, that the sight of so much suffering and destruction had turned the brain of this simple soul who had no thought save love for his fellow-men.

Some, to whom he came nearer on the watery path, caught the anguished cry, —

“To the schoolhouse! Leave all! To the schoolhouse! The schoolhouse!”

Visions of little children — rosy no longer — Ah! let the barns and the haystacks float whither they would!

To the schoolhouse they rode, each one gone mad like the first. For the Valley was the home of little children, the children they loved, whose price was above all the store of barn or granary, above the devastated farms, ay, even above life itself.

Each shouted to his fellow afar off, who heard and turned and rode a frenzied pace; and the

foam-flecked horses gathered one by one in the pool that had been a playground.

“Jake! What is it, man? Why do you tear at that old shed like that?”

“The lads! the lads!”

His quivering lips could frame no more. They had no need. To those warm hearts they had spoken volumes.

In a silence none could break they tore and ripped and struggled at the timbers. Alas! in those old days men builded even horse-sheds honestly and well, of beams and planks that should outlast a dozen generations. Even these labor-strong arms would have found the task hopeless, all without tools as they had come, had not the lightning's work prepared the way before them.

When a fair headway had been made and the united efforts of all had raised the stanch shingled roof a little way, one caught a glimpse of a lad's coat beneath, and closed his eyes in horror.

But Jacob had gathered a new hope. Rather, he was a man in whom hope never died, and he found speech easier than to see that dreadful look upon his neighbor's face.

“Oh! that's nothin'. He took it off when he was workin' at the horses. He got so warm,

you see. Look. He ain't near it. I'll call. Maybe — Daniel! Oh! Daniel! Lad, be you there?"

There was no response, yet the call had done a good thing, — it had broken the terrible tension of fear which had enthralled them. The toilers, some of them, caught a portion of Jacob's hope, and even those who did not toiled as faithfully as if they had.

In a few moments they had made double progress.

"You see," said Jacob, cheerily, "there's a first-rate chance he would n't be hurt much, even if he was under it. An' I don't see no signs o' Philip. I hope they ain't nuther on 'em nigh. Only this old coat."

Yet it was noticed that he lifted the garment reverently and laid it aside upon a dry timber, as if it were a sentient thing.

Then he fell to work again; and when he saw that, as he had said might be, there was a corner where the timbers yet held intact and formed a sort of cave beneath, he put all his courage to the test and called softly: —

"Daniel! Hey, Danny, boy!"

Silence. Then an exclamation that was half groan, half shout.

“Here! Here! He’s here!”

Jacob at the head, another tenderly lifting the feet that had so willingly served others, they bore the lad through the flood into the school-house, whose floor was deep with the same dirty yellow water. There, on an improvised litter above the tops of the benches, they laid him, while Jacob fell to rubbing the great limp hands and chafing the numb limbs as if he would infuse into them a portion of his own overflowing life.

Maybe he did. For after a time that seemed interminable the woodlander opened his blue eyes languidly, and gazed into the face above him.

Not for this did Jacob relax his zeal, nor till languor had given place to a feeble anger, and the boy had demanded, with weak resistance: —

“What — you doin’?”

It was a tenet of the stageman’s simple philosophy: “If you want to brace up a man — or a horse — jest make ’em mad.” So he replied by asking, testily: —

“Why did n’t you come out o’ that there shed when I told ye to, — ’stead o’ makin’ all this work?”

“I — don’t — know.”

“Humph. Well, where’s Philip?”

Daniel raised his hand to pass it over his brow, but a twinge of pain caused him to drop it again. However, the pain had brought clearer remembrance, and he cried: —

“ Was he under there ? Is he — hurt ? D-e-a-d ? — ”

“ No. Nuther one,” asserted Jacob, in sublime confidence that none of these questions dared be answered affirmatively.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NEWS AND A GIFT.

“**H**ELEN, put on your hat and sacque, and come for a walk with me. I have something to say to you. I will be ready in a few moments.”

“Yes, Aunt Delight.”

Surprise prevented any further reply; but having prepared for her outing, the girl paused for a bit in her mother's room to mention this request and to wonder why it had been made.

“I cannot tell you, dear. But waste no time in surmises. Isn't this the first time that Aunt has left the house since the flood and Philip's disappearance?”

“The very first, Mamma. Oh! I do hope she won't talk to me about him. She believes him wicked — I know she does — and I never will. Sometimes it seems as if she had no heart, for she keeps so calm and quiet and sort of don't-care-y.”

“Helen! Her whole life has been a proof of her great heart. The deepest feeling does not

always show upon the surface. Poor Aunt is suffering profoundly, even though she makes no complaint. Is n't she as kind to you as ever?"

"Yes. Even lots kinder. I wish she was n't. 'Cause it seems like taking Phil's place, Phil's things. I don't like that. I was always glad, glad to have her love and pet him most, because I had you and Papa, and he needed her more. But —"

"'But' — don't take fancies, little daughter. Run and do your sunny best to cheer up Aunt Delight. I wish you the pleasantest of walks."

"Thank you, and good-bye, Mamma. Though I can't feel that she needs any cheering up."

Miss Sampson stood waiting beside the sundial in the old garden fronting Sampson House. The stately lady suited the primly ordered parterre, with its privet-trees exactly in each corner, and its squarely clipped box-borders along the weedless gravel-paths; but there was a tender smile upon her noble face as she watched Helen's dancing feet come speeding down the slope to stop with a graceful pirouette close beside herself.

"Oh! Auntie dear! Just smell the hyacinths and jonquils! I did n't know they were so far out. And the daffies and tulips are fairly nodding their heads off, they are so happy in this breeze

and sunshine. Isn't the world lovely, lovely, this May day?"

"Very beautiful, my dear."

"It's so good just to be alive. Hear the robins telling stories! Oh! you naughty birds! Your 'feet' are not 'wet'! There's not even a drop of dew left anywhere. It's all pure sunshine and blue sky."

"Feet are — wet! feet are — wet!" chirped the ruddy-breasted birdlings, out of pure mischief, so it seemed.

At which Helen laughed and Miss Sampson's grave face lost something of its calm sadness.

"It's good to go out with you again, Auntie Delight. Where are we going? For how long a walk? By the fields or the 'pike, or only around the home-place?"

"I'm to answer which question I please, I suppose, since you do not pause between them," answered the lady, smiling; and looking into the girl's bonny face she felt almost as if it were "good just to be alive" still; though of late life had not seemed especially desirable to her proud heart. "Well, then, by the foot-path way to the river and the ruins of the old mill."

A shadow chased the sunshine out of Helen's eyes.

“Oh! Auntie! There?”

“Just there, my dear.”

“It’s awfully desolate. I saw it but the once, yet I dreamed of it for nights afterward.”

“All the more reason you should look upon it again with a common-sense glance.”

“Where people died.”

Miss Sampson made no response, and in silence the pair crossed the sunny meadows, by the foot-path through the grass which led straight from the garden gate of Sampson House to the spot where the old grist-mill had stood for a hundred years. Till the night of the flood, when, like many another old landmark, it had met destruction — carrying death with it.

The mighty mill-wheel still hung, half-broken, as it had always hung since Helen could remember, but the great yawning foundation cavern was new and awful.

“Aunt Delight, do you suppose it went down all at once? Were they in the room upstairs — Mr. Beddecker and poor Renew? If it had n’t been for the meeting that night many more might have been here, too. And, oh! Auntie! that hole down there! How deep and dark and terrible! Was it *there*?”

The fascination of horror held the imaginative

girl as she leaned far over the abyss of ruin, peering into the depths below ; while Miss Sampson, silent and abstracted, seated herself upon a jutting piece of timber near at hand, — till, suddenly turning, she observed the dangerous poise of her charge above the chasm, and cried out in warning :

“ Move back directly, Helen. All these stones and beams that are left are jarred from their places and unsafe. Sit back. I came here to talk to you a little, and to see — ”

But what she hoped to see she did not say ; and, awed by the sternness that had again settled upon Miss Sampson’s features, Helen immediately removed her seat to a safer distance from the brink and turned her back upon it. The wide outlook of the green fields was far pleasanter than that dark ruin ; and to rouse her aunt, or “ cheer her up,” as she had been bidden, she asked : —

“ Auntie, will you tell me why it is that old Deacon Tewksbury so hates poor Dominie Davidson and persecutes him still ? — even after having been ill and so kindly cared for at the Master’s house, who is so good and gentle I cannot understand anybody being his enemy. Why is it all ? ”

“ The very goodness that you mention is the cause.”

“How could it be?”

“The Tewksburys once had a son, — a lively, careless boy, who rebelled against his father’s sternness and too rigid discipline. The Deacon’s idea was that hard work and no play was good for lads, and he gave his own no holidays, except once a year, the annual school picnic, held then as it is now. One year he forbade even this to Galusha. Jacob Lane is Mrs. Tewksbury’s nephew. He was an orphan and lived there. He was full of fun and reckless, and he coaxed Galusha to run away to the picnic. It was held on the river bank, and in some way or other the Tewksbury boy fell into the water and was nearly drowned.”

“Oh! was n’t his father sorry?”

“Quite the contrary. He would neither forgive nor receive his son at home. He had threatened to cast the lad adrift at the next disobedience, and he did. Dominie Davidson took Galusha in and cared for him till he was well, then, oddly enough, mortgaged his own little place — to the Deacon — to raise a few hundred dollars for Galusha’s benefit. Dominie always believed in young Tewksbury, and the elder one never forgave that fact. Then, too, the mortgage, begun in such a curious way, was occasionally

increased, till now the Tewksbury claim on the little Davidson property almost covers the latter's value."

"Why did Master do that? Mortgaging is running in debt, is n't it? That's what I understood from Papa's explanation once."

"About the same thing, dear. Dominie Davidson has increased his indebtedness each time simply to help out some person in trouble: the Widow Brown, once; and the Walshes again. His own wants are few. He'd live easily enough on his salary if he did n't give so much away. Those Hapgoods keep him poor. Ruella is no housekeeper nor manager, to my notion."

"Will the Deacon take the little farm away?"

"Probably. He wants it to 'square out his own property,' he says; in reality, I think, to satisfy his grudge against the opposer of his own will and the friend of his son. However, he is a good man — according to his perceptions."

"Hmm. I like the Master's sort of goodness best. Don't you?"

Receiving no answer, Helen went on: —

"Did they ever hear from that Galusha — what a funny name! — again?"

"Never, that I know. He is supposed to be dead."

“Ahem. But, beggin’ your pardon, Ma’am, that’s what he ain’t! He’s as much alive as you or I be, this minute!”

Miss Sampson’s head turned in surprise at this unexpected interruption, and Helen ran forward to clasp the rough hand of the man who had approached them unperceived.

“Why, Mr. Lane! I did n’t hear you come.”

“No, child, I don’t s’pose you did. The grass is soft this time o’ year. No, Ma’am. Galush’ ain’t dead. I’ve come here — I was on my way to see you to your house — with this here letter in my hand. Writ by him. Tellin’ the astonishin’ news that Sim Beddecker an’ Renew Hapgood, ’at all have s’posed was drowned when the old mill went down, are alive an’ kickin’. But — a couple o’ rattlesnakes, I call ’em, the pair.”

“Why, Mr. Lane! What do you mean?”

“It’s ruther a long story. Have I your permit to set down on this stun? It’s warm hurryin’ as I have.”

“Surely. Sit down at once, please.”

Jacob made himself comfortable on a mossy rock and spread an open letter out upon the ground before him, regarding it first with one eye half closed, then with the other, in an odd



fashion that sent Helen off into a peal of laughter. Which he did not resent in the least; merely smiled back upon her and facetiously winked again.

“Laugh away, little girl. I ’low we ’ll all do some laughin’ afore this game’s played out. Well, Ma’am, to begin to the beginnin’. I hain’t been satisfied with the way things has been a-goin’, this ’long back. So I’ve been doin’ a bit o’ detective work on my own hook. First place, Galush’ never died. He took the money Dominie raised for him and went to N’ York. He tried his hand fust at one thing an’ then another, but failed in all; an’ finally, some fashion, when he ’d lived up all his money, he got to be private watchman for a big firm o’ rich men. He was so all-fired smart at that, an’ caught a passel o’ thieves so cunnin’, ’at his name got in the city papers. Then he got a place on the police, or constables, or whatever you call it. An’ he’s just riz an’ riz, constant. I ’low he must be gettin’ rich. He’s always writin’ for me to come an’ see him, but I hain’t never been yet, though we’ve kept up our writin’ occasional, ever since he ran away. But I certainly expect to see him back here, sometime, an’ I can wait till he comes. Valley boys always do get back

to their old home again, no matter how fur they wander. Noticed it, hain't ye, Ma'am?"

"Yes. There is an old saying, you know, that 'Those who are born in the Valley must die in it.'"

"Hmm. Well — to make a long story short, I kinder patterned after Galush'. I set out to investigate that there 'Owl Club,' an' what meant all these terrible charges o' stealin' an' so on. *What you think?* that what the Deacon said was gamblin' was jest *the — lottery!* Sim Beddecker's wicked foolishness o' gettin' rich to oncet."

"The — lottery? Interested in that — here in our Valley?"

"Yes, Ma'am, but Beddecker, he wa'n't born here, thank the Lord!"

"Jacob!"

"Oh! I mean it, Ma'am. The Valley ain't no snake hole, I 'low. It's a home for straight goin' men an' women. Well, Sim, he was once a sailor, an' he done somethin', I need n't say what, — though I know, an' he knowed I know — 'at sent him out o' town for a spell to hide himself. He happened to light right here; an' he married a likely woman an' might ha' done well. But that there old Adam was in him, an' even the

revival did n't take it out, complete, I fear. Anyway, he got the lottery fever. He used all his own earnin's an' his wife's. Then he got scent o' that 'Owl Club'. They was a passel o' innercent boys, jest full o' larks an' carryin's-on. Thought it was dretful smart to hook a few 'tatoes or corn-ears to roast in the ashes on the sly. Got up little suppers, mostly out o' Phil's pocket money. Dressed themselves up like Injins an' played they was—folks! Sho! it makes me laugh an' wish I'd been a shaver myself to been amongst 'em. Bless 'em!"

In spite of her conviction that the famous "Club" was a far worse organization than Jacob admitted, Miss Sampson's face lost a little of its gravity, while Helen's broke into the most beaming smiles.

"Oh! Auntie, I knew it!"

"Well, Ma'am, soon 's Sim got scent o' this, as I said, he wormed himself into it. He used to bring the boys home iysters an' trash in his stage, an' they, naterally, invited him to supper. The rest come easy. He told 'em about the lottery,—how they could chip in their money an' buy tickets all together; hull tickets, or quarter ones, or ary sort they liked. They'd make about ten million per cent, he made 'em

think — them babies, a'most! Lute Beans, he was goin' to set himself up in a store. Jimmy Bolton, he was goin' to give his mother a house an' lot. But Phil! sho! he was the top o' the heap in that, as always. He was a-goin' to surprise his Aunt Seraphy by the present of enough money to build that there Hospital for Incurables 'at she's always hankered to build right here in our healthy Valley. Sho! it makes me laugh, an' it — I swan, it makes me cry! Them simple little fellers!"

The child-lover wiped a tear from his eye and pretended he had killed a gnat that stung him; but Helen threw her arms around his neck and hugged him tight.

"Oh! you precious old Jake! *you* don't believe any harm of Philip, do you? Nor Dan?"

"O' nobody, child, save them 'at's proved themselves scamps."

"Your story, Mr. Lane," suggested Miss Sampson, a trifle huskily.

"Yes, Ma'am. I'm too long winded, I know. Well, I spied round, an' I found out, fust, that money o' the Widow Brown's. Well, that was straight enough, Sim's own. She owed it to him for arrants he'd done on his trips an' things he'd bought to her order; an' everybody knows she's

as tight as the bark of a tree. He could n't get a cent out of her, so he sent that boy to play ghost an' scare her out o' jest the sum she owed. Then that Dill's drawer business. Dill, he owed that to Lute Beans for working in the garden an' hayin' time; but he would never pay,' cause them Beanses are that shiftless their store account ain't never paid, an' he kept that back to help a little. So Lute took it himself."

"How about that barn-burning?"

"Mike Walsh's tipsy old father done that. He owns up to it. He'd been drinkin', an' since Mike jined the teetotallers himself, he's been dretful hard on the old man. So old Anthony went to sleep a-smokin' in that barn an' come near losin' his life."

"But — that — three hundred dollars?" asked Helen, breathlessly, while a great pallor overspread her aunt's calm face.

Jacob's countenance fell. He stooped and lifted his letter, and, patting it softly, remarked: —

"Galush', he's writ here that he's got track o' Sim an' Renew. Old Anthony's story was true about his comin' here to the old mill that afternoon afore the flood. It was jest about sundown, an' he heerd them two a-fixin' up to clear

out. Sim was a-goin' anyway, an' Renew had coaxed him to be took along too, so it seems. Sim was to go sailin' ag'in an' get Renew a job at it. They changed their clothes here. Renew put on his Sunday ones an' Sim fixed up some disguise or other, 'cause he'd heard they was to be revelations o' some sort at the meetin' that night, an' he'd begun to feel the Valley would n't be a comfortable home for him afterwards. He'd brought his two best horses, an' Anthony says they rode off in fine style."

"Why did n't he tell it before?"

"Oh! he thought they was drowneded, all the same. Does yet for all I know. He believes the high water overtook 'em, horses an' all. But — I did n't. I knowed 'them was born to be hung would n't never get drowneded,' an' I wrote to Galush' to keep his eyes open. He did. He's seen 'em. Sim's in N' York yet, an' Galush' 'll keep him there, long's I want him to. Renew's gone to sea, an' may he stay there till he l'arns some sense. He's a bad one, that critter is; an' if I ever get my hands on him I'll tan his jacket, as I've a right to do, bein's he's a sort o' family connection. Connection, Ma'am, not relation. I hope you understand the difference."

"Quite. But, Jacob, does not Daniel give you

any information yet that will lead to the discovery of that missing money?"

Helen knew how moved her aunt must be, even to mention this subject again to Mr. Lane; at whose house Daniel had remained ever since the stageman pulled him out from the ruins of the school horse-shed; and where he had but slowly regained the health and strength he had so suddenly lost.

"No, Ma'am. But — but — there'll be a — a transaction down to the schoolhouse, I understand, an' he says he's got somethin' to say then. I don't like the looks o' Danny, somehow. He don't perk up as chipper as he ought."

"Well, I am delighted with your news, good Jacob. I wish you would go straight to Mrs. Tewksbury and tell her of her son. No matter if, as you say, he has forbidden the disclosure, you ought. It will all come out anyway, will it not, — in connection with this affair?"

"No, Ma'am. I shall merely call him a friend o' mine. He's a right to tell her in his own way an' his own time, an' I'll leave it to him to do it. Good-day, Ma'am, an' little Nell. I hope the Doctor'll be out to the — the board meetin' an' transaction next week, without fail, — even if all the sick old women the hull length the canawl get the hypo to oncet."

“He’ll be there, I think;” answered Miss Sampson, bowing and turning away.

It was not till they were back again at the foot of the old garden that either of them remembered the promised talk of Miss Sampson; for their minds had been too full of the exciting news which Jacob had imparted. As they passed through the old stile, however, Helen recalled her aunt’s words, and asked:—

“What was it, Aunt Delight, you wished to say to me?”

“The talk can wait; or rather, I will leave that to your parents, who understand all that is in my mind. But I have a fancy I would like to put this into your own small hands, my girl, with the hope that it may give you every happiness, every benefit.”

As she spoke the lady handed the girl a plain white envelope, and Helen opened it, wondering. But all it contained was a strip of paper, crisp and clean, bearing figures and words upon its face which were not intelligible to its recipient. That is, though she could read them readily they conveyed no meaning to her, till Miss Sampson smilingly explained:—

“It is a draft upon a New York bank to the amount of two thousand dollars.”



But even this was no explanation to the amazed girl, who remained stupidly staring, first upon the paper, then into her relative's eyes, till that good woman rather hastily betook herself out of the range of the perplexed and troubled glance.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A TALK IN THE NIGHT PASTURE.

“IT is amazing with what readiness so loving a heart has accepted the fact — yet unproved — that our Philip did that wrong,” was the first comment which Mrs. Adair made upon the strange gift her daughter had received.

“Circumstantial evidence is strong against the lad. Aunt Delight prides herself upon her matter-of-fact temperament, and she forces herself to look at the case exactly as an outsider would. The worst feature is his running away. If only he had been wise enough to wait.”

“But how could he wait, Papa, thinking he was believed a — thief? How could he bear it? Would n't anybody run as fast and as far as he could? I'm sure I would.”

“You, too, are ‘Sampson,’ little girl, remember; and the Sampson temper is not a patient one.”

“Well — tell me first — what does this money mean? Why did she give it to me?”

“For your education. It is a sum she had laid aside toward Philip’s college expenses, if he ever made himself ready to go. She hoped he would be a great man in some walk in life, and her giving you this money is, also, proof that she has quite given him up.”

“I won’t touch it!”

“Not now, surely, nor for a long time. Although none of the agents we have set upon the search have yet brought us any word or trace of our lost boy, we will never give over looking for him till something is learned. Meanwhile I am to explain your aunt’s will about this money. If, by and by, no trace of Philip shall be gained, and you still love learning for learning’s sake, you are to use your gift toward securing a liberal education, in the direction your talents most strongly suggest. You, the last of the Sampson race, though only a girl, must then do your best to bring honor to the old name. Yet I am, also, to make you understand that this money which was Philip’s, or to have been his, is now your own, absolutely.”

“Does that mean to do with as I please?”

“She said so. If you did not desire the schooling.”

“Then,” eagerly, “may I take three hundred

dollars of it and give it to that dreadful old Deacon? Right away? Quick? There would be time before night, especially if I might drive old Carey."

"No. Oh! no. That would never do. You would n't acknowledge Philip's dishonesty till it is proven, would you?"

"I? I! Never! Not even if it were proved a dozen times over."

"Paying this money that you do not owe would seem like such an acknowledgment, to Deacon Tewksbury."

"Then he shall never touch a cent of it, never!" cried Helen, veering swiftly round. "Here, Papa, please. Just take this dreadful piece of paper, which is money, you say, and put it where I'll never, never, never see it again!"

"Very well. I will safely dispose of it for the present. But it will still be in existence and yours to command, — subject to the contingencies afore-mentioned," answered the father, assuming a semi-legal air to amuse his daughter.

But she had had enough and to spare of money talk, and turning to her mother, said: —

"If you are willing, I'll go out in the stable and see the horses a little while, Mamma. Abraham says that old Speckle has a nest in the loft, and I'll hunt for that, too."

“Very well. Only go first to Aunt and thank her for her rich gift to you.”

Indeed, down in Mrs. Adair's secret heart was a wordless thanksgiving that this daughter, whom she, at least, thought so intelligent, should have a better chance than most women then had to give that intelligence its highest development.

Helen paused on the threshold.

“Mamma, is it being truthful to thank for such a gift when I do not want it?”

“Surely. Did n't you thank Mrs. Walsh for the homely green and purple mittens she made for you?”

“But that was different. It was all she had. I liked them, too, though I hated them. I mean, I always made myself wear them when I went past her house — oh! you know. For I knew she'd saved the yarn to make a hood for Kitty — as I often wish she'd done.”

“Exactly. So you can call that paper a 'green and purple' draft, and regard it as you do Mrs. Walsh's offering. In each case it was her all — and had been intended for a different purpose.”

“Why — is Auntie Delight poor? Has she no more money?”

“Of her very own, little more, I fear. And she knew that brother Philip would never save

much, though he seems a rich man and lives lavishly. All the more, for that reason, has she cherished this sum for Phil's expenses. Now she gives it to you. Is it not worth a cordial acceptance?"

"Yes, Mamma. Poor Auntie! I wonder which will be the harder, for me to thank her or for her to hear me do it! Oh! isn't life horrid? Why cannot things go straight?"

"My child, from God's point of view they always do."

Helen went away and found the housemistress so busy in the kitchen that she dared only walk to her aunt's side and hold up her face for a kiss.

The lady stooped and bestowed the expected caress; and that was all the acknowledgment ever passed between those two, yet it amply satisfied both.

Once in the stable, Helen paused a moment, sadly, by the empty stall where Philip's pony had stood. For horse, as well as master, had disappeared on that night of the flood. Aunt Serapha had been startled out of a quiet nap by the apparition of her nephew, greatly excited, very angry and unhappy. He had implored her to "believe in him always;" had assured her that he was only "wild, not wicked;" that he had meant to give

her a "great and glorious surprise," but it had come "only to this!"

He had kissed her and clung to her for a moment, and then had bolted out of the room and the house, without a word to signify why or whither he went.

A few minutes later, she had heard the clatter of horse's feet upon the driveway; and that was the last of Philip, so far as any trace of him had yet been found.

As Helen left the stall and passed on toward the hayloft she heard a lad's whistle.

Such had not been heard there for weeks, and her feet now flew over the space to the night pasture, at the stable's rear, whence the summons came.

"Philip!" she cried.

"Not him. Just me."

"Oh, Dan — only you!"

"Only me."

"Why do — I mean, why don't you come home again, boy? Are n't you well yet?"

"Yes. I'm well. I can't come no more."

"Why not?" severely. "You should, all the more because now — there's nobody at all."

It was funny to see the small maiden correcting and frowning upon the big woodlander; only,

after all, come to notice it, he was not so big as he had been. His face was thin and white beneath its freckles, and his blue eyes had a look of sorrow in them it was not good to see.

“Yes, I s’pose I should. But I — can’t.”

“Pooh! You mean, ’cause Phil is n’t here. Well, is n’t it a deal harder for us, to whom he belonged, who loved him?”

“He did n’t belong to me. But I love — him.” He rather emphasized the present tense, and Helen felt rebuked.

“Of course. You ’d ought to. Everybody did — does. There was nobody like our Phil.”

“No, Miss, nobody.”

“Oh, Dan, where do you think he is?”

“I don’t know. When I get free I’ll go find him.”

“Free? Are n’t you free now? What do you mean? Surely, you’ve thrown aside your duty and promises to Papa and Aunt Delight mighty easy.”

“I had to, Miss; I could n’t help it.”

“Dan Starbuck, have you lost your wits? Why do you say ‘Miss’ to me after calling me ‘Helen’ all winter?”

The lad looked away over the fields and shuffled his big feet awkwardly.



“There’s goin’ to be fresh trouble for the Dominie. I come — I came — hopin’ your folks could put a stop to it. They’re a-goin’ to turn him out; on account o’ my — of our — Swidgey-corum! They must n’t! He warn’t to blame. They must n’t!”

“They sha’n’t!”

“They had n’t ought. Not account o’ me — an’ —”

“Dan, don’t be silly. I know all about that dreadful lottery business, and — everything. Jake Lane’s found it out and told — though you ought to know that, if you’re living with him. And everybody will forgive everybody all round, and everything will be just beautiful again; only — my Phil!”

With a sudden flood of tears the girl threw herself against Dan’s shoulder, just as she would have done against her cousin’s in like emotion. But unlike Philip, to whom all gracious acts were natural, Daniel neither put his arm around her nor tried in any way to sooth or laugh away her tears.

He merely stood like a wooden youth, his arms limp by his side, his face blank of all expression, save in his eyes. These spoke volumes, and mutely petitioned that their owner might escape

this miserable strait in which he found himself.

But Helen did not see this. Her grief was too genuine, and she would have leaned just as readily against a door casing, had such been most convenient for support. However, she was a trifle surprised to find herself handed over to the tender mercies of a bale of hay and stood up against it like a disused pitchfork.

She lifted her head, dried her eyes, and looked after the vanishing figure of the mountaineer, as his long legs leaped onward in retreat. Then she did the next natural thing, — laughed aloud till the old barn rang again.

The laugh reached Dan at the pasture bars and arrested his progress. Startled by the change in Helen's mood, he was presently affected by it, and facing about regarded her from his vantage ground with curiosity, not untouched by dismay.

However, she seemed perfectly harmless again, as she followed him over the short grass ; besides, he had not finished his errand with her. So with one hand on the top rail, ready to leap over if need be, the boy awaited her advance, and she reassured him, promptly: —

“ Don't be afraid, Dan ! I sha'n't do it again. Was that all you came to see us about ? ”

“No. I’ve took a notion — I thought — Shucks! How my tongue gets in the way! But I ’low, if you ’d get up somethin’ like this — a petition as I’ve written out — an’ all the scholars that like the Dominie to sign it, an’ take it to the meeting, where there ’ll be other transactin’s, I ’low, maybe, they would n’t turn him out, after all. An’ I — I — Swidgeycorum! what ails me? But I want you to be there that night, special. More’n anybody in the Valley. You an’ Miss Sampson. Will you come?”

There had come something so profoundly moving into the expression of the lad’s face that Helen’s eyes grew dim again, she knew not why. She had seen just such a look once, in the eyes of a noble dog as he lay dying, and gazing upon her, the child whose life he had saved at the cost of his own, done to his death by the horns of a bull which had aimed to kill her instead.

“Dan! Dan! Why do you look like that? Are you ill, suffering? Is it because you loved Philip so well? What is it?”

The girl caught her schoolmate’s hands again, and this time the warm, sympathetic touch of her small fingers was help and sustenance to him.

“Yes, Helen, it is because I love Philip so well ;

better than anything in this world. So you'll be there, won't you?"

"Yes, yes. We'll both come. I know Auntie will say so, though I don't understand — one bit."

"Never mind. You will. Only — come."

He leaped over the bars and walked swiftly away, but the perplexed girl long stood and pondered.

"I don't understand it. Yet, how much like old Faithful Dan Starbuck looked that minute. I wonder — is he going to die too!"

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### ANOTHER NOTABLE MEETING.

MISS SAMPSON approved Daniel's suggestion of the school children's petition, and she interested herself to draw up a better form than his ignorance had made it possible for him to do. To this she affixed her own firm signature and had Helen's written just below.

With this important paper, and under the charge of Abraham and old Carey, the girl was sent about the Valley very quietly, to call at her schoolmates' homes and explain the matter to their mothers. Not a matron among them but loved and honored the old master, and they readily consented to keeping the subject of the appeal a secret from the opposing party, headed by Deacon Tewksbury, until it could be introduced as a "surprise" at the coming meeting.

But the good trustee had been at work as well as the young folks, and almost as quietly; and he had gained a large constituency. For he was a man whom many feared, because of certain

business transactions which had left them his debtors. Times were not always prosperous, even in that pleasant Valley, and the dead weight of the Deacon's mortgages lay heavy on the land or chattels of many Valleyites; so that they were obliged, they felt, to accede to his request to —

“Go an' vote down them old obsolete ways o' teachin', an' vote in new progress, new idees, an' a decent disciplinarian. Discipline! That's what we want, neighbors, in our school. Then we won't have no such goin's-on as has been here durin' this past year.”

But Miss Sampson heard of this counter labor to her own, and resolved not only to attend the meeting herself but to allow Helen to do so, with a delegation of the scholars. Only, she stipulated, the paper should be presented at the auspicious moment by Jacob Lane or some other notable citizen.

“Because you must never again make yourself as conspicuous in a public place as at that temperance lecture, my dear;” to which the girl most cordially responded.

Never was an ordinary school meeting so well attended; and the question upon every lip was:

“Which side will win, — the Deacon's, or the Dominie's?”

Said one who would have sided with the master had he dared: —

“It’s a pity, though, that Davidson gave himself that day’s vacation again last week, — without any rhyme or reason, so far forth as I can see. I’m feerd it’ll work ag’in him.”

“How so? Did n’t hear about it,” commented the first speaker’s seat-mate.

“Did n’t? Hey? Oh! I recollect. You hain’t got no youngsters to send. Well, it was this way. Thursday afternoon, when time for dismissin’ come, says the Dominie, says he: ‘To-morrow’ll be a holiday. There won’t be no school, ’cause I’m blegged to go to Polinquet on business,’ says he. Never so much as ‘by your leave,’ nor nothin’.”

“Well, the young folks did n’t object, I’ll warrant. Reckon that must ha’ been the Friday ’at Jake Lane druv away with his grays an’ come back with that rickety old mule team, was n’t it?”

“Yes, the same.”

“Hmm. Thought Jake would ha’ parted with his own feet sooner ’n he would with them horses. He loved ’em like they was folks.”

“Sure. An’ I heerd a man say, ’at was by when Lane swopped ’em off, ’at he jest leaned

his head ag'in the nigh one an' about reg'lar cried. Only for a minute, though. Then he up an' cracked his joke about how he'd always ambitioned to own a span o' mules, an' now he'd got 'em. An' he made out to the Dominie that them flap-eared critters was a mighty sight safer for the ginerall public to ride behind than them frisky-legged grays had been."

"They say the widow — I mean Mis' Bed-decker — tried to sell him them old whites o' Sim's, but he answered her plaguey short, 'at he would n't tetch to Sim nor his team 'nuther one!"

"Pshaw! But — hold on. There comes the Doctor an' Trustee Whittlesey, an' — Jerusalem! If there ain't Miss Sampson an' the little girl an' a half-dozen more youngsters. Down here to an evenin', an' a men's meetin'. Sho! It'll be a lively one, I guess. Somethin' 's up, sure."

Evidently he was right. Miss Sampson's dignity had never seemed greater than when she moved down the narrow aisle to the rear seat, followed by Helen and her mates. Yet on the faces of all there was an alert watchfulness which let nothing escape. Was it quite by accident, either, that the opposing factions seated themselves on opposite sides of the room? — the



Deacon's adherents ranging themselves on the right of the platform where he sat in state, with his crutches beside him; and the advocates of the Dominie's cause on the left, with Jacob Lane as their leader.

Indeed, the honest stageman had never seemed quite so much in evidence as he was that night. He fairly showered his radiant smiles upon everybody, most of all upon the men on the right; and he even winked, facetiously, to Helen, who nodded and smiled gayly back, significantly tapping the folded paper she held in her hands.

But though Jake beamed with equal cheerfulness upon that other champion of the old master, Daniel Starbuck, this youth, sitting a little apart, did not respond at all. This so perplexed Jacob that he remonstrated with the boy, now his own charge and home-sharer. But the woodlander shrank the more into himself and silence; till, finally, really provoked, the driver ceased his effort and left the lad alone.

“Swidgeycorum! I'm glad he's gone. If he'd pestered me much more with his 'cheer up' talk — I'd ha' told — I could n't — nohow! Lord help me! They say He does them that trust. But — if they do what I'm a-goin' to — deliberate an' full intendin' — Oh! shucks!

This homely self-communion bore the burden of a heartbreak.

There were those there present whose gaze was drawn again and again toward the boy's awkward and dejected figure; who never forgot the abject misery which his drooping head suggested.

"Yet why should he feel so badly, I wonder!" whispered Helen to her aunt. "Everybody else, including Master, is all excited, but nobody except Dan looks so sad. As if he wanted to cry — yet was so unhappy he could n't. I wish — May I go ask him to come and sit with us?"

"No; not now. They are opening the meeting. We will speak to him when it is over. Maybe he has heard bad news from his own home."

Deacon Tewksbury opened the session with prayer, as usual. He then opened the case; and though he referred in scathing terms to the indelicacy of a man who would attend a function in which he was himself to be "sat upon" he waxed so forceful and eloquent that his own side was materially strengthened by defections from the other party. When he had exhausted all his arguments he abruptly closed his speech and sat down, leaving the leaven to work.

For a few moments it did so, silently, insidiously; while Doctor Adair, who was to follow on the Dominie's behalf, considered how best to begin his counter argument.

Miss Sampson was deep in a whispered conversation with the stage driver, who had gone along the aisle to speak with her; and as Helen — who had been duly impressed by the Deacon's peroration — looked around over the faces in the room it was suddenly forced upon her conviction that the tide of feeling had gone strongly against the teacher. Everything else was forgotten, save the impulse to help; and waving her folded paper she bounded forward, calling: —

“Come, schoolmates! they must hear *us*, too!”

The lads and lassies followed as impulsively, and the little group closed about the astonished Dominie, who looked over his spectacles into one excited young face and under them at another.

“Why, why, my dears! Why — what — my children!”

“Read it, Papa! Read it out — quick! every single name, and ask whose wishes shall win, — ours, the children who know and love our master, or theirs, who ha —”

A look from that master restrained the impet-

uous word; and amid a profound silence the Doctor rose and read the simple petition. Adding no comment, still in this hush of listening, he sat down.

Most of the men there present were fathers of the children whose names had been repeated; many of them had learned their own letters at that old master's knee. How could they, thus appealed to, steel their hearts against him?

Quick to perceive the new turn of affairs, the Deacon pulled himself up on his crutches.

“Hmm! Ahem! Hmm! Well! In course, I hain't the hull Valley, but I did n't know as this was to be a sentimental gatherin'. No, sir. I come on business, an' business I mean. Keep your antiquated old teacher if you like. I resign my office as trustee, an' 'll get out as soon as the law 'll let me. Furthermore, I announce here in public that I hain't no malice in the matter. Fifteen years I've been a-carryin' the Dominie along, renewin' his notes an' mortgages, an' he's had due notice o' foreclosure. I'm gettin' an old man an' I want my money. So I ain't makin' no bones o' the statement: if so be you all elect to keep him in the school he'll merely have to find another house to live in. For I shall go for'ard with the foreclosure, an' sence

the money can't be had, I'll have to take the place an' do the best I can to save myself."

Jake Lane's laugh rang out over all their heads: —

"That's a good one, I say! That is a good one. Ha, ha, ha! So, Deacon, you want your money, do you? Well, — here it is!"

With funny nods and smiles, the stageman dramatically pulled from his pocket a roll of crisp bank-notes, tied about with a cotton string, and waved them aloft, much as Helen had waved her paper.

"What? What's — all this — tomfoolery?" gasped the astonished chairman.

"Tomfoolery? I wish I had all my pockets stuffed with jest such tomfoolery, right clean out o' Polinquet bank. I'd buy up the hull Valley an' portion it out amongst childern an' horses an' — noble old pedagogues. You're a-fore-closin', be you? Do you object, Mr. Deacon an' Chairman, a statin' to this assembled audience the amount, princerpul an' interest, every dime, cent, an' dollar, 'at you think the schoolmaster owes you?"

"It's none of their —"

"Oh! yes it is. Yes it is. It would n't ha' been if you had n't fetched it here, this business,

yourself, lugged it in, body an' bones, what had ought to ha' been jest betwixt you two. Suits me fust-rate, though; an' seein's you've done it, an' we're all neighbors together, jest accommodate us with the figgers, will ye? Or, if you've forgot, I can myself."

The chairman collapsed into his chair, silent with rage.

Jacob continued:—

"Fifteen hunderd an' forty dollars an' seventy-five cents. That's the reckonin', fust an' last, o' the Dominie's debt to the Deacon. Need n't mention, I s'pose, that the fust on't was raised to help out the creditor's own son; nor 'at never a poor feller, down on his luck, went to Davidson's that did n't go away richer, by so much as the master was poorer. Need n't —"

"Order! Order!" cried the chairman, angrily.

"All right. Order it is. But witness, neighbors an' friends, the Deacon's 'gettin' an old man an' wants his money.' Then I 'low he shall have it, an' here it is. Trustee Whittlesey, you hold the stakes an' I'll count it out. Here you be: Thirty good fifty dollar bills—Uncle Sam's money— with forty more dollars, an' seventy-five cents in change. An', by the way, I'll jest mention that 'Davidson's' will always be 'David-

son's ;' only, I'm goin' to live there with him, 'stead o' Mis' Hapgood, who's goin' to remove to her husband's folks ; an' all orders for Polinquet or Carthage can be left at the new stand ; mine now bein' the one direct stage route betwixt them two places."

"Why, Jacob ! Where —"

"Hmm. That's my affair. Hush. The Deacon ain't done yet. I swan he's got a grip !"

The chairman had risen, however, merely to throw out his last plank, by adjourning the meeting, which he would move to reappoint under a different and more private aspect. He waved his hand majestically and remarked : —

"I move to adjourn —"

"Hold on ! wait !"

Something in the tone of those three words arrested every movement, while flashing glances followed Daniel Starbuck's leap to the platform and noted his strange appearance there. Pale, almost, as the whitewashed wall behind him, his eyes glowing, his tall figure now erect and manly, he stood ; and when he spoke his voice was clear and vibrant — even triumphant.

"You — people — all — wait. This talk of 'thievin' in high places,' that the Deacon has had over more'n once, must stop. There's other

money owin' him, 'at he'll never forget. He's accused Philip Sampson of stealin' — stealin' that three hunderd dollars — an' — HE'S LIED every time he said it. I come here to-night, 'cause you'd all be by to hear me, on purpose to tell you that — that — I — Dan Starbuck, the good-for-nothin' wood-chopper, an' not Philip Sampson, the gentleman, — I — *am that thief*. Now, sir, you can do with me what you think best."

Yet the air with which he turned toward Deacon Tewksbury would have befitted a princely rather than a plebeian birth.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AS THE SUN WENT DOWN.

WHEN the audience had somewhat recovered from the consternation into which Daniel's confession had thrown it, Doctor Adair arose and again called the meeting to order.

Then he silently indicated to Miss Sampson to withdraw, which she did immediately, taking with her the few women and children present; but it did not escape Daniel's furtive glance that already the gentlewoman's head had regained its old bearing, and that a happy light shone in her dark eyes.

Seeing which, a flush crept into his own pale cheek, although his gaze was so instantly cast down again that only Helen had observed his fleeting glance.

Now Helen was, or would be, "a woman through and through." Wherever she loved she trusted; and she had long before learned to regard Daniel as one "of her own folks." Had he

not saved Phil's life, and little Rob's? — done unnumbered brave and kindly acts, to which only a noble nature would have been impelled?

Well, then, the lad's astonishing confession made not one whit's difference in her opinion of him. His words amazed, but did not impress her; and as she passed by him on her way to the door she managed to seize his hand in both hers and to demand indignantly: —

“Whatever in the world should make you tell that falsehood, boy?”

It had been satisfaction to the culprit to note the happiness in Miss Sampson's eyes; but a keener delight shot through his heart at Helen's question.

“She does n't believe it!” he thought, and could have shouted. But he neither returned her hand-clasp nor answered her; and really hurt by his manner, she snatched her fingers away and hurried out among the others.

Then a poll was made of the most responsible citizens remaining in the room, and all others having withdrawn, the adjourned meeting became a court of justice.

“Oh! Auntie, do you believe it?” demanded Helen, as she climbed into the buggy to ride home beside Miss Sampson.

“Why should he say so, else, — if it were not true?”

“I don’t — know. Yet *I* don’t believe it. Dan Starbuck steal! He never — never — no more than Phil. They could n’t, either of them; not possibly.”

“We really know very little of the boy, child. Only a few months’ acquaintance.”

“Auntie! Well, but one can know some people in a single minute! He never did it — never!”

The girl’s persistence was annoying. To divert it, the lady asked of Abraham: —

“How do you suppose that Jacob Lane raised that amount of money so soon? He’s always a little improvident, and generally in debt, is n’t he?”

“Yes’m. But he’s got a big heart, Jake has. When he heerd tell o’ this here foreclosure business he went to Squire Muller, who’s been a wantin’ to buy Jake’s little house an’ strip of land this long while, an’ offered to sell. Muller took him up so quick it made him dizzy; an’ that’s how he got the ’leven hunderd dollars. I suspicion that why he went an’ swopped off his fine-blooded horses for them flap-ear mules was to raise the rest on ’t. Must ha’ been like takin’

wife an' childern away from him — if he 'd had 'em — to part with them grays."

"The splendid fellow!"

"That 's the true word, Ma'am. An' I reckon he'll be just as happy. He'll have the old Dominie to fuss over, 'stead o' them horses, bein's Mis' Hapgood's movin' away. Yes'm. Jake's humbly as a hedge fence, an' rough as a hetchel, but he's kinder noble, seems to me."

"Yes, yes, indeed. He's proved it."

"Auntie Delight, is n't it queer how this same Valley could 'raise' such a grand heart as Jacob's and such a mean one as Deacon Tewksbury's?"

"Helen! Judge not."

But Abraham laughed aloud.

"She's right, Mistress. Like pisen vine an' green pease growin' out the same garden patch."

"Oh! I wonder — what they will do with Daniel."

They were soon to know.

For once, from some better impulse in his own nature or from deference to his neighbors' opinions, Deacon Tewksbury forebore to inflict the legal punishment he had a right, and when Doctor Adair returned to Sampson House he brought the information: —

"Deacon declines to imprison the boy, or even

have him arrested. Daniel seems willing to do or bear anything required of him, and he and the man he has wronged have arranged the matter in this way: Daniel is to go to work for the Deacon, at eight dollars a month, and continue in this service until he has earned the full amount of the stolen money."

"Why, nephew! That will take more than three years!"

"Exactly. Hmm. But the Deacon is satisfied, for he knows that if Dan were sent to jail he could n't pay the debt at all. The boy is a first-rate worker, and if any punishment is needed, he will suffer the worst possible one in continuing to live here in the Valley, yet known to all his neighbors as a self-convicted thief, working out his penance."

"Poor lad! poor lad! I should think imprisonment preferable."

"Doubtless so would he."

"He'll probably run away."

"No. I think he'll expiate his sin to the bitter end. He'll be closely watched. Papers of a most binding nature are to be drawn up and signed to-morrow. No. Poor Dan! I shall hate to meet him now, knowing what a bond-slave he has become!"

“It does n't seem possible he could have done it. Why should he? What has he done with the money?”

“There's the mystery. No amount of questioning can elicit a word concerning it. ‘I took it, an' not Phil Sampson,’ is the beginning and end of his declaration. Well, Aunt Delight, we all can rejoice that the cloud is so completely lifted from our own name and honor. We can thank God for that; and now — if we only knew where our own laddie sleeps this night!”

Months passed, — months during which Daniel learned to bear his open degradation with a stolid composure that was perplexing to those about him. If he was sensitive to his position only those who knew him best suspected it.

To the Deacon and his household the boy was a mystery. He toiled early and late, indoors and out. To old Mrs. Tewksbury he became as a second son; and to his master a wholly trustworthy servant, more and more to be consulted and relied upon as week followed week. He could never be induced to speak of the missing money, and he uttered no complaint at any hardship laid upon him. The only privilege he asked was an occasional extra length of candle; and,

being allowed this in his garret chamber, he was known to study far into the night.

But though he did not meet them often, his old schoolmates grew gradually to avoid him when chance threw them together. To them he was a — thief; and though he had been the most reluctant to enter into their wild pranks in the old days, they now felt themselves too good for association with him.

The lad bore this as he bore everything else — silently, manfully, showing no resentment. His tall figure stooped a little more and more, and his face was always pale and serious; but there was yet something in his manner which seemed foreign to the bearing of a criminal, — as if his own soul still retained its self-respect.

One twilight, returning from a distant field and a hard day's toil, his tools over his shoulder, he heard his own name called, wildly, loudly, joyfully, — in the tone and the voice that he had not dared hope to hear again; that he had loved with all the strength of his noble, hungry heart, a voice which instantly transformed the world to him.

Wheeling about he answered with a shout equally joyous: —

“*Philip!*”

Then he remembered, and again bowed himself; and so stood waiting the onrush of that speeding figure, with its gleaming golden head, its dancing eyes, its flushed and beautiful face.

“Daniel! Why — my Dan!”

They say that boys never clasp and kiss. The lame little squirrel which Dan had sheltered in the breast of his blouse might then have told of one exception.

Be that as it may; in a second's time they were down upon the ground, side by side, as they had used to sit, in the old happy days, while over Philip's laughing lips chased and hurried the words that could not be uttered fast enough.

“Oh! Dan — Dan — Dan! you noble, great, magnificent fellow! Don't you suppose I know, I understand? You never took that money any more than I did. But rather than let folks blame *me* for it — and to save your ‘benefactress’ pride, you pretended it was you. Oh! lad, I never dreamed you loved me so!”

“You — Miss Sampson — all your folks —”

“Yes, yes, I know all that. But look at me — square — you blue-eyed martyr! You never took that money. You couldn't. Because — See here!”





“Daniel! Why—my Dan!”



Philip thrust his hand in his pocket and pulled out — Deacon Tewksbury's long lost wallet!

The same; considerably soiled and worse for careless handling, yet plump and well filled still, and with the Deacon's honest name distinct upon its lap.

“There it is, the whole miserable business. Come on! I'm going to the old man this minute. Come!”

They sprang to their feet and sped forward, while Phil's story was swiftly told.

“I ran away, angry — indignant. I meant never to come back. I went to New York, — I had some money, you know, — to a ship's captain who was an old friend of my father's. I told him the whole story and — well, he'd been a boy once. He agreed to take me on the voyage he was just about to make, and hand me over to my father, or help me to find him.

“Well, sir! The queerest thing! When I went aboard ship, there was — Renew Hapgood! shipped as a cabin boy; and in a day or less, the sea-sickest, home-sickest, wretchedest chap you could imagine. But I was glad to see him, glad to see anybody from the Valley, 'cause I'd had time to cool down a little. I guess he was just as glad to see me. He owned up that he'd run

away, too, along with old Beddecker, who'd helped him get this berth. The Captain was once a Valley boy himself."

"Was n't it queer, — all of you together?"

"Oh! no. The world is n't so very big, you know," responded the other, with an air so unmistakably his own that Daniel laughed aloud — as he had not laughed since they two had parted, months before.

"Never mind! Laugh ahead. I like it. Well, we did n't have a good trip. Lots of sickness aboard, and Renew the worst of the crowd. First he knew he was down with a dreadful fever, and everybody thought he'd die. I had n't anything else to do, so I took care of him; and one day, when he saw that the surgeon thought there was n't much chance for him, he up and told me about that wallet. He'd seen you lay it on the mantel-shelf over Dominie's fireplace that night of the great snow, and while folks were too busy fussing over the half-frozen Deacon to notice it. So — he just took care of it — for the time. And — he's a queer dick! Got a sort of crazy twist to his honesty, seems to me. He'd heard he might sometime be the Deacon's heir; and he said he 'thought and thought over that money till he made himself believe he really had a right to it.'"

“Swidgeycorum!”

“Oh! Dan, how good that outlandish word does sound! Well, I mighty quickly undeceived him, you bet! You see, he'd started off before that meeting where they accused *me* of stealing it, and did n't know it. But, I do believe, the little sneak was really grateful to me for nursing him; for he gave it straight up to me — *when I made him*. He owned up to lots of mean little tricks, too. It was he, as I always suspected, took the nuts off Deacon's wagon that time; and put your shoes and stockings in the brook; and — well, about all the petty, no-fun scrapes there were.”

“Shucks! I should think he'd feel so mean he'd — *ache*.”

“Not he. But say. Was n't that fine of Nell and the school petition? Do you know, I think she's 'most plucky enough to be a boy. And what do you think? Aunt Delight's had a letter from Father, and he's got some money he did n't expect, and I'm to get ready for college, forthwith.”

“Did n't you go to see him?”

“No. After I got over my mad, I thought: ‘What's the use of stirring him up over this miserable business? Sampson blood's a good deal

thicker 'n water, and he 'd be wretchedly unhappy over a family squabble.' So I just came right straight back again with Captain, when he sailed home to New York."

"I guess that was good sense. But how did you pay your way?"

"Oh! I took Renew's place and worked the cabin racket. And Captain wants to make a sailor of me, anyway. But not yet, if ever. Because Auntie full of Delight has given Nell two thousand dollars—that was to have been mine—and we're going to make you take that and go to college with me, too! And now, Nell says, she'll study hard and learn something, of course, but she does n't see any use of her worrying herself to keep up the family learning, since she has two brothers—that's you and me, Danny, boy—to do it for her. So she's always to be our home-maker, and everybody's darling—and, oh! Dan! what a hero you are!"

Poor Daniel! Sorrow and contumely he had borne unmoved, but this sudden flood of sunshine unnerved him. At the very threshold of the house where he had suffered his disgrace he paused, trembling and shamefaced.

"I can't, Phil. *You* go in an' tell 'em."

"Oh! pshaw! You must. Besides, they'll

never notice *us*. For when I came back, an hour ago, on Jake's old mule-stage — he's got to have those horses back! — the Tewksburys' son, who was supposed for so many years to be dead, came too. He had to, he said, to take care of Renew, who's a far-away kind of a cousin; and they're all in there now together. I would have left it to Hapgood to restore the old wallet, but I dared not. He's such a slippery sneak, you know. Hark —

“Hello, Deacon! Yes, I've got back. And here's your pocket-book. Renew will explain. You can give him Dan's unfinished job — to sort of tone up his moral calibre — which will be fair all round. 'Cause Dan's going home to Sampson House, to live forever and ever and ever.

“Good-night. Come, boy, for Home! But let's make it by the road runs past the Dominie's door and the precious Little Red Schoolhouse.”

THE END.





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