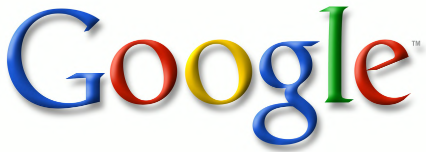

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# THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL TEACHER

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

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# THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL-TEACHER

*By*
MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

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THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL-TEACHER

THE SLEUTH OF ST. JAMES'S SQUARE

THE MYSTERY AT THE BLUE VILLA

UNCLE ABNER, MASTER OF MYSTERIES

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*These Are Appleton Books*

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
Publishers New York

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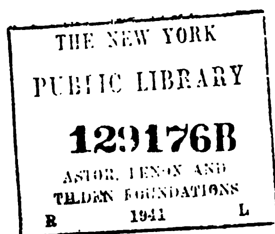
# THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL-TEACHER

BY

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE ABNER," "THE SLEUTH OF ST. JAMES'S SQUARE," "THE MYSTERY AT THE BLUE VILLA," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK : : LONDON : : MCMXXII

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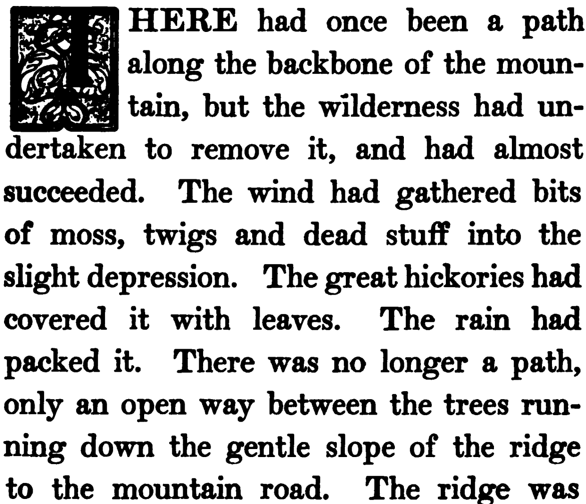
# THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL-TEACHER

## CHAPTER I



THERE had once been a path along the backbone of the mountain, but the wilderness had undertaken to remove it, and had almost succeeded. The wind had gathered bits of moss, twigs and dead stuff into the slight depression. The great hickories had covered it with leaves. The rain had packed it. There was no longer a path, only an open way between the trees running down the gentle slope of the ridge to the mountain road. The ridge was

heavily wooded. The primeval forest was there. Great hickories shot up sixty feet without a limb, and so close that a man putting out his hand could reach from one tree to another. A gigantic poplar now and then arose, a sugar maple, an oak—huge at the butt, deep rooted in the good soil.

The afternoon sun, excluded by the forest, seemed to pack itself into this abandoned path.

The leaves fallen from the hickories, under the touch of waning summer, took on now, by the magic of this sun, golden tones of red and yellow. Woodpeckers hammered on the great trees along this path. Insects moved between the branches, the wild bee, the hornet, the yellow butterfly, as though the aerial life of the woods had been drawn here to the sun.

A man was coming through the forest

along this abandoned path. He walked slowly, his hands behind him, his head bare. He was a very young man—at that period of life when, within a day, as by the crossing of some unmarked line, the boy becomes a man. There was about him the vigor, the freshness, the joy of youth, under a certain maturity. He was not above middle height, his face was oval, his eyes gray-blue, his hair of that soft rich brown which a touch of the sun burnishes into a living yellow; the mouth was sensitive and mobile.

There was a marked contrast between the man and the wild, rugged, primitive country in which he appeared. His hands were firm and white, and his skin was not in the least discolored by sun or weather.

Now and then the man stopped and looked up at the dappled woodpeckers, and the swarms of yellow butterflies, gathered here along this sunlit path as though to

welcome his arrival, and his mouth relaxed into an eager, luminous smile, as though, despite his maturity, he retained a child's sense of some universal kinship with all living things. He came down the long ridge toward the place where the mountain road crossed the low gap.

Half a mile below him a patriarchal ox was plodding slowly up the mountain road. The ox was old. His red hair was worn away in a variety of places, by long labors at the sled and the plow. His ancient horns were capped with brass knobs. Astride the ox sat a small boy on a sack of corn, perhaps a bushel and a half shelled from the cob. Under the sack was a strip of homemade carpet dyed yellow with copperas. The little boy guided the ox with a piece of old rope tied to the left horn below the brass knob, precisely as the driver of a four-horse team directs it with

a single line. When he wished the ox to go to the right, he jerked the rope and shouted, "Gee, Berry," when to the left, he pulled on the rope and shouted, "Haw, Berry."

But the ox no longer required these elaborate directions.

"Gee," "Haw," accompanied by a kicking of the rider's naked heels, were enough for the patriarch, or the soft heels alone on the broad iron ribs.

The boy could not have been above six years old. He wore two garments, a little blue shirt of the material called "hickory," and short trousers, with tiny hand-knitted woolen "galluses."

He was now engaged with an extreme difficulty.

For more than a mile, under the ox's rolling gait, the corn had been moving over to one end of the sack. To keep the bag from falling, the boy had added his

weight to the decreasing end. As the corn moved, he shifted his seat a little farther out on the sack. He sat now, well over the ox's side on the very end of the sack. His little mouth was contracted.

It had been a long, painful struggle—this fight against the corn. Every inch, every fraction of an inch, contested.

The grains had crept slowly over, and the child had considered and estimated the change, and moved with it. He had attributed to the corn a certain malicious intent, a certain insidious hostility, and he had resisted with dogged courage. It was all in the set of his little mouth, in the clutch of his tiny brown hand.

For the sack to fall was a calamity which the child well understood.

He could not lift the sack. He could not leave the ox and go for aid, because Berry, although a member of the family, was an eyeservant and not above making

his dinner on the corn when the master's back was turned.

Neither could he leave the corn lying in the road and return with the ox. Some one might carry it away and, besides, it was his bale of stuffs, the cargo with which he had been intrusted, and he could not leave it.

The mountain road was deserted and the evening sun was beginning to descend.

The child's whole energies were centered on his desperate struggle with the corn, and the ox traveled on leisurely as he liked. Presently, as he neared the top, the ox stepped on the root of a tree remaining in the road, and his shoulder went down. The sack slipped forward and fell, carrying with it the boy and the piece of carpet.

The ox instantly stopped, the boy rose and sat down on the sack, resting his elbows on his knees and his chin in the hol-

low of his tiny brown hands. His features retained their set, dogged expression, but presently big tears began to trickle slowly down over his determined little face. He sat with his back toward the mountain gap, looking out over the vast wilderness of tree tops below him. The ox stood before him in the road, a figure of unending patience.

The day waned, long shadows crossed the road, the sun withdrew to the high places. Far away through the deep wooded gorges night began to enter the mountains.

## CHAPTER II

HEN the man came out into the mountain road, he saw the little boy sitting on the sack of corn beside the red ox, and he smiled as he had smiled at the hammering birds, at the yellow butterflies. He turned down toward the tragic picture, lengthening his steps. The sun, by some trick of the moving world, seemed to follow him out of the abandoned path.

The little boy did not see the man approaching, but he observed that the ox, apparently resigned to passing the night on the mountain, was making ready to lie down, knees first, after the manner of

cattle. And the comfortable assurance of Berry in this, the hour of their misfortune, was more than he could bear. He arose and began to beat the ox with his little fists.

"Git up, Berry!" he cried. "You ole dog! You ole scalawag! Git up!"

The ox slowly arose, and the child turned to find the man beside him.

"Poor Berry!" said the man, smiling. "Is he a very bad ox?"

"He's a lazy ole pup," replied the little boy, his wet eyes catching and reflecting the stranger's smile. "He's sp'ilt!"

Then he crowded his little fists into his eyes to remove the traces of weakness with which he had been taken unawares.

"Do you reckon," he said, "that both of us could put the corn on him if we lifted together?"

"I think so," replied the man; "at least we will try."

He took up the piece of yellow carpet and laid it over the ox's back. Then he stooped down, put his arms around the sack, linking his fingers together under it. The little boy took hold of the corner. The man raised the sack with scarcely an effort, the child contributing his tiny might. Then, as though the child's help were essential to the task, he nodded.

"Now," he said, and with a swing lifted the sack onto the ox's back.

The boy straightened up, and put both little hands on his hips. His face was now radiant.

"We got it up all right, didn't we?" he said, "both a-liftin'; an' now," he paused and regarded the ox with some concern, "I've got to git on somehow-er-nuther."

The ordinary man would then have lifted the child and set him on the ox, but this man did not. He seemed to know and regard that self-reliance which was so dear

a thing to this child. He stood back and looked over the patriarch.

"Berry is a big ox," he said. "We will lead him up to the bank."

The little boy walked across the road with a bit of a swagger.

"Yes," he said, "Berry's a big ox."

He liked this strange man who understood and considered him.

The man led the ox to the roadside, and standing by the beast's shoulder, set his knee against the bank. The little boy put his foot on the man's knee, caught hold of the ox's shoulder, and climbed up onto the sack of corn. He panted with the effort.

"Berry's everlastin' big," he observed in comment. Then he set himself squarely on the sack.

"We're goin' to mill," he said. "Where are you goin'?"

"If you don't mind," replied the man, "I shall go along with you and Berry."

The tiny chest expanded.

"I don't mind," he said, "ner Berry don't neither."

Then, as a sort of condescension, as a sort of return for the man's kindness, he gravely handed down the bit of ancient rope.

"An' you kin lead Berry if you want to."

They crossed the low gap and began to descend the mountain on the other side. The man walked in front with the rope in his hand, the ox followed with a slow, rolling gait, his head lowered, the child sitting astride the sack of corn. The sun seemed to linger on the crest of the mountain as though loath, now, to withdraw wholly from the world, a vagrant breeze began to move idly in the tree tops, a faint haze to gather over the forests, below the sun, as though it were some visible odor arising from the earth.

The road was steep and rough, low stumps and the roots of trees remained in it, and it was washed out in great ruts. The winter rain had carried the loose earth out of it and left the stones and the tree roots uncovered. A modern vehicle could hardly have kept together on such a road, although it bore the marks of wheels where the mountaineer had gone over with his wagon.

The little boy sat regarding the man who walked before him in the road. He seemed not to have felt with this man that fear of the stranger which is so strong an instinct with a child. From the first moment he had been wholly at his ease. He spoke without restraint.

"Where's your hat?" he said.

The man paused, and put up his hand as though he had not until this moment realized that he was bareheaded.

A note of distress came into the child's voice.

"You've lost your hat. Are you goin' back to look for it? 'Cause me an' Berry can go on to the mill by ourselves."

"No," said the man, "I shall go on with you and Berry."

"But you ain't got no hat," the child continued.

"Perhaps I shall find one somewhere," replied the man.

"No," said the child, "you won't never find one, 'cause nobody don't lose their hats up here. You'll have to buy one at the store."

Then he went on to tell of all the wonderful things that the store contained: Striped candy in sticks in a big glass jar, and fishhooks, and sea grass fishin' lines, and guns, and pistols, and knives. But principally knives. Upon this particular topic he spoke with deep personal inter-

est. In that place of wonders were knives with six blades, with "peraly" handles, with gimlets and tweezers in them, little knives that one could hide between one's fingers and big ones with a ring in the handle so one could tie them to his "galluses." And Barlows with IXL on the blade.

He paused and thrust his hand into his pocket. He had one that his grandfather had given him at Christmas, and he held it up—a Barlow with a bone handle and a single blade.

The man stopped and came back to the ox's shoulder. He took the knife and examined it carefully, opened it and tried the edge on his thumb. The blade was round and blunt at the end. The child explained this with an air of apology.

"Gran'-pap was afraid I'd run it in my eye, so he grinded it off. Have you got a knife?"

The man felt in his pockets.

"No," he replied, "I don't seem to have a knife."

"Well," said the little boy, "you can git one when you go to git your hat."

The man walked on by the ox's shoulder, and the child continued to talk. There were difficulties to be met. The store was very far away, and one required money to obtain its treasures. The getting of money was a very troublesome affair. But he knew a way or two by which the thing could be accomplished. One could gather hickory nuts or one could dig ginseng. The latter method was to be advised—a pound brought a dollar and seventeen cents. But it must be dried. One strung it on a string and hung it over the fireplace. The storekeeper would not take it green.

He spoke a word of comment concerning the storekeeper.

He was hard to fool. He always broke the ginseng roots to see if there was a nail concealed inside. The child knew a man who had outwitted the storekeeper once by putting shot in the ends of the root, leaving the middle unmolested; but, he added, that was "no way to do."

The road on this side of the mountain was steep. The turns short. The little party soon reached the foot, and came out into a valley, cleared and sowed in timothy grass. Through this valley, between sodded banks, ran a dark-colored, swiftly flowing stream.

The road followed the stream through the meadow until it approached the mill. There the stream descended swiftly over ridges of sandstone into a dam of ancient logs. The mill sat beside the road, its roof projecting, its porch raised above the ground, its door and its gable open, its entrance coated with white dust.

The machinery was of the simplest, two stone burrs turned by a paddle wheel; the water carried down from the dam in a boxed sluice, covered with green moss.

The mill evidently served two uses.

There was a second door to one-half of it, also opening on the porch, and through the open door one could see a stove, a bed, a well-scrubbed table.

As the man leading the red ox approached, a woman appeared in the mill door. She was a sturdy woman of middle life, her calico dress pulled up in front and girded around her ample waist with an apron string. Her sleeves were rolled to the elbows, and her fat, powerful hands rested on her hips. Her mouth was compressed, the muscles of her jaws protruded, her bright gray eyes rested on the strange man with a profound, unmoved scrutiny. When the ox stood beside the porch, the man spoke.

"Good evening," he said.

The woman did not reply, she jerked her head; then she came slowly out, still looking at the man.

"Jump off, David," she said to the boy; then she took up the sack with ease, swung it into the hollow of her arm, and went with it into the mill. But over her shoulder she continued to regard the man standing in the road.

She threw the sack down by the hopper, and came again into the mill door. Her fat hands returned to her hips and her eyes went again to the man. But she spoke to the boy.

"You'll be late gittin' home."

"I ain't goin' home," replied the child. "I'm goin' to Uncle Jimmie's," and he pointed his finger up the valley.

"You can make that by dark," said the woman, "but you better be movin' along."

She came out and spread the piece of

carpet on the ox. The small boy stepped off the mill porch and went out into the road behind the man, where a flat rock lay in the dust.

He remained a moment squatted down on his bare legs. Then he returned, climbed onto the ox, and set out up the valley, kicking his heels against the patriarch's ancient ribs.

At the bend of the road, the boy stopped and shouted. The man turned about where he was standing. The boy pointed his finger.

"There's somethin' under that rock," he called.

Then he swung around on his piece of carpet, spoke to the ox, and was swallowed up in the shadows of the valley.

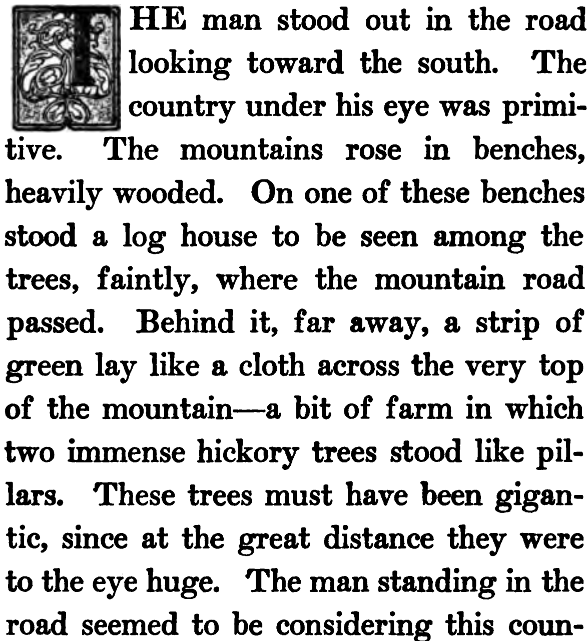
The man stooped down and turned the flat stone over. There lay the Barlow knife.

The woman, watching the man, sud-

denly brought her bent palm to her fore-
head and looked up at the mountain, to
see if some stray bit of the setting sun had
entered the valley. But there was noth-
ing.

Night had descended.

## CHAPTER III



THE man stood out in the road looking toward the south. The country under his eye was primitive. The mountains rose in benches, heavily wooded. On one of these benches stood a log house to be seen among the trees, faintly, where the mountain road passed. Behind it, far away, a strip of green lay like a cloth across the very top of the mountain—a bit of farm in which two immense hickory trees stood like pillars. These trees must have been gigantic, since at the great distance they were to the eye huge. The man standing in the road seemed to be considering this coun-

try. His face was lifted and, in repose, melancholy.

The woman continued to regard the man standing in the road. Finally she spoke, swinging her body a moment on her sturdy legs.

"You're the new School-teacher, I reckon."

The man replied, without moving.

"Yes," he said.

"You're a little behindhand."

"Yes."

"You've come a good piece to-day, I reckon."

"A long way."

The woman took her fat right hand from her hips, and began to brush the skirt of her calico dress, although there was nothing on it to remove.

"Well," she said, "you better come in and git your supper."

The man turned and faced the woman.

His features appeared by a powerful effort to exclude something which he wished not to show and had been until this moment not wholly able to conceal.

"You are very kind," he said. "I am hungry."

"Just set down on the porch," said the woman. "We've had our supper, but I'll git you a bite."

The man came over and sat down, his hands idly on his knees, his face looking out toward the mountains. The woman began her preparations for the stranger's meal. She entered the room where the wooden table stood, crossed to a cupboard, opened it and took out some dishes. These she began to put on the table. Then she stopped and stood with her hands resting on her hips. A moment later she removed the dishes, went over to a chest, standing in the corner, lifted the lid, took out a

clean homespun linen cloth, and spread it over the table.

As she moved about she talked.

"When are you goin' to begin school?"

"Monday morning," replied the man.

"Word ought to be sent 'round."

"I think the children will come."

"They'll come when they know it, an' they'll know it purty soon; news travels powerful fast. We looked for you yesterday."

"Yes."

"Somethin' kept you back, I s'pose."

"Yes."

"Well, there's allers somethin' to happen. You won't have much of a school, I expect. The big boys have all gone off to the sawmills, an' the big girls are helpin' with the work. It's a mighty busy time."

"I would rather have the little children."

"They're a heap of bother."

"I don't think I shall mind the bother."

"Don't you? Most people do. They're harder to teach than the big ones, ain't they?"

"I think they are easier to teach."

"Do you? What makes you think they're easier to teach?"

"They understand me better," replied the man.

The woman had taken down an old glass bowl with a notched glass cover from the top shelf of the cupboard, rinsed it with water, wiped it carefully and set it on the table. In this she had placed a comb of red, mountain honey. She continued to talk.

"I want Martha to go to school. She's a-goin' on nine. I can't spare her very well, but I don't want to keep her back. She saves me a good many steps. She's gone after the cow. She ought to be comin'."

The woman was busy at the stove.

"I don't see why a cow can't learn somethin', can't learn to come home at night, anyway. Everything else learns to come home at night. Ketch a dog forgittin' it. I 'spose old Bloss has gone as fur as she could git, an' you can't allears hear the bell. But Martha'll find her."

The woman came from the stove to the table.

"Martha can read, an' she can spell out of the spellin' book. She's real smart."

A stone jar sat on a bench in the corner of the room, beside it was a yellow gourd with a long handle, the bowl of the gourd cut out to form a dipper. The woman got a plate out of the cupboard. A very old plate, somewhat chipped, with quaint little flowers painted on it in bright colors. The plate had not been used for a long time. It was covered with white dust. She carried the plate over to the jar, dipped up some water with the gourd,

and holding the plate over a bucket, poured on the water, then she polished the plate carefully with a cloth and set it on the table. Her conversation continued.

"The schoolhouse is old, but it's got a good roof on it. It'll turn the weather. Ole man Dix put that roof on three years ago. The clapboards are all smoothed with a drawin' knife. He was so slow that it made you tired jest to see him workin', but he done a good job. He used to have a sayin' that he got out of the Bible—when you made fun of him for bein' so slow. He must have heard it in meetin'. He couldn't read. But I've heard him say it over an' over a thousand times, I reckon—'He that believeth shall not make haste.' I don't know what he believed. I know he was never paid nothin' for puttin' on the roof."

"How do you know that he was not paid?" said the man.

"I know it very well," said the woman. "He was dyin' of the janders all the time. He sawed the comb of the roof the very day before he went."

The iron skillet on which the woman was baking cakes, overheated, at this moment caught fire. She lifted it from the stove, blew out the flame, and turned the cake with a deft twist of her hand.

Engaged with the pancakes for the man's supper, her conversation became a monologue.

She reviewed the families living in the mountains, enumerated the children, named them, classed them as good or bad with a few clear strokes and attached the history of their ancestors, running on, as she moved about. Then, when she had finished, she got a little yellow bowl from the cupboard and came with it in her hand to the door.

"I wonder what's keepin' Martha," she murmured.

At the door she came near to dropping the bowl out of her hand in her astonishment. A little figure in a red calico sunbonnet sat beside the man on the mill porch; close beside him in the gloom of the descending night.

"Goodness!" said the woman. "How you skeered me. When did you git back?"

The child arose, laughing. In the darkness only the bonnet, the short dress, the little white legs were visible.

"While you were talkin', Mother," she replied.

"Bless my life!" said the woman. "I didn't hear you." She handed the child the bowl. "Run along to the spring house and git some butter."

The woman went back into the room, got a tallow candle, squeezed it into an old

brass candlestick, and set it on the table. In a moment the little girl returned with the butter. She regarded the table for a moment, then she removed the old blue plate, drew out from under the bed a store box with a lid fastened with leather hinges—evidently her private chest—took out a plate, washed it with boiling water from the teakettle, and set it on the table. It was a little, cheap, porcelain plate with the letters of the alphabet raised around the rim. The woman watched the child with a certain smiling condescension. Then she went to the door, wiped her hands on her apron, stood back by the doorpost, and spoke to the man.

"Now," she said, "if you'll come in to supper."

The man got up, came into the room, and sat down at the table. Before him on the clean linen cloth were honey, brown

corncakes, and a goblet of milk. The light of the candle seemed to gather and illumine his face; and curiously to bring out in his brown hair those touches of living yellow which the sun had so strikingly indicated on this afternoon. And more curiously, too, there was no stain of travel, no evidence of fatigue on the man. Instead of it, there was an abiding glow of fresh, vital, alluring youth.

The woman moved about, setting the room in order, the little girl stood by the man's chair.

Presently the woman finished and came over to the table, bringing with her a heavy, hickory, split-bottom chair. She stopped, snuffed the candle, and then sat down opposite the man. Her hands, as though accustomed to constant occupation, wandered to the table, smoothed the cloth by stretching the two corners, flicked away invisible dust. Finally she spoke.

"You're goin' to board around, I 'spose."

"No," replied the man, "I'm going to stay at Nicholas Parks' house."

The woman dropped her hands into her lap. Her mouth opened with astonishment.

"Not with ole Nicholas!" she said. "Why, the devil couldn't live with ole Nicholas! He's the meanest man that ever drawed the breath of life! He wouldn't give you a meal's vittels if it was to save you from dying!"

She arose to her feet.

"Dear me!" she said, "that won't do at all." She walked about the room moving articles of furniture, and crumpling her apron in her fat hands. Finally she came back to the table.

"It ain't cold," she said, "an' if you could sleep in the mill loft, you could stay right here with us."

She hastened to explain.

"You could help me grind on Saturdays—that's the busiest day, an' maybe, if you're handy with tools, you could patch up the mill some. The wheel needs a new paddle, an' you could board up the loft, an' you could put in some steps."

The man listened.

"Yes," he said, "I can work with tools; I will do these things for you."

"Then you'll stay," said the woman.

"I am sorry," repleid the man, "but I cannot stay."

The woman sat down in her chair.

"How you'll git on with ole Nicholas, I don't see," she said.

"He will not be there," said the man.

"Not be there!" the woman repeated.

"No," replied the man, "he is going away."

The woman's face became, on the instant, incredulous.

The little girl, standing beside the man, saw it and shook her head. The woman, her mouth open, her chin lifted, marked the signal and respected it. She dropped her hands into her lap.

"Well!" she said, and after a moment, to establish her composure, "you can't go on to ole Nicholas' to-night,—it's dark now."

"I am going to the schoolhouse to-night," replied the man.

"You're more'n welcome to stay with us," said the woman, "if you'll stay."

The man had now finished his supper, and he rose.

"I know that," he said, "you are very kind to me."

The woman got up and went to the door.

"Dear me," she said, "I hate to see you goin' out in the night."

The man stopped to kiss the little girl.

"I don't mind the night," he said. "I have some things to do."

"The schoolhouse will need cleanin' up," said the woman, "an' to-morrow's Sunday. I ought to a-helped you clean it."

"You have already helped me more than you realize," replied the man. "If I need further help, another will help me."

Then he went down into the road. There was no moon, but under the brilliant stars, the road became a vague white way, leading the stranger up into the deeps of the forest.

The woman remained standing in the door. Presently the little girl spoke.

"Mother," she said, "the Teacher has no clothes, he didn't even have a little bundle."

The woman came back to the table. She

stood a moment with her hand resting on her hip.

"That's so," she said. "I reckon he didn't bring any. Carryin' things gits powerful tiresome, when you come a long ways."

Then the dominant quality in the woman—the instinct to find a resource for every condition that arose, moved her. She went over to the fireplace, above which, on the high mantel shelf sat an ancient clock. She stood on her tiptoes, opened the clock door, and took out a little brass key, then she crossed to the foot of the bed, stooped and dragged a little old horsehide trunk out into the floor. She fitted the key into the lock, but it was rusted and would not turn. The trunk had not been opened for many years. She came back to the table and rubbed the key with melted tallow from the candle.

"There are some fine shirts in that

trunk that we could give him," she said. "Your grandma give them to your pap at our infair. She made them herself. But he never wore them. He said, they was too fine to skuff out. An' they've laid there for ten years. They're a heap too big for the Teacher. Your pap was twice as big as he is. But I can cut off the sleeves and take up the neckband, so he can wear them. They're good linen. Your grandma was mighty handy."

The little girl had removed the dishes from the table, while the woman was opening the trunk. She now came and held the horsehide lid, while her mother searched for the articles. Finally the woman found the shirts. She found also, at the bottom of the trunk, a folded piece of linen, as though that one making the shirts had used only a portion of her material.

"Well, upon my word," she said, "if

here ain't a big piece that your grandma didn't make up."

She brought the shirts over to the table where the candle stood. She regarded them with surprise and admiration.

"Bless my life, they're nice," she said, "not a yaller spot on them."

A moment she stood in rapt appreciation of the beautiful, snowy linen. Then she caught up one of the shirts and spread the neckband with her fingers.

"Well! Upon my soul!" she said. "Upon my soul!"

She held the shirt up and measured it from shoulder to shoulder, and from the neckband to the wrist.

"Why, they'll fit him! They'll fit him just as good as if they'd been made for him. If that don't beat all! Your pap was over six feet, and long armed. Now, how in the name of common sense did your grandma ever make such a mistake?

It ain't like your grandma—she always sewed by pinnin' and measurin'."

The little girl was not listening. She had gone out onto the mill porch. She now spoke, but not in reply to these exclamations.

"There are lights up at the schoolhouse, Mother."

The woman, still under her surprise, replied without looking up.

"I reckon the Teacher's cleanin' the schoolhouse."

"But the lights look like they went up an' down through the tree tops."

"I suppose he's carryin' water down from the spring on the mountain," replied the woman, still bending over the shirts that lay spread out on the table.

## CHAPTER IV

T SUNRISE the following morning, a man riding a lean bay horse came down the mountain road toward the mill. His left hand was deformed, as though from infancy. The fingers doubled in against the wrist. He held the bridle rein, tied in a knot, over the crook of his arm. He was a big man and he sat in the saddle as though more accustomed to that seat than to any other. The horse traveled in a running walk. He turned into the little valley and approached the mill. The miller was feeding her chickens in the road before the door, throwing out handfuls of yellow

corn. The man called to her before the horse stopped.

"Have you got enough of that corn for a horse-feed, Sally?"

The woman turned, scattering the chickens.

"Bless my life," she said, "it's the doctor. Where you been?"

"Up there," he replied, jerking his deformed arm toward the summit of the mountain where lay the bit of farm, marked by the gigantic trees.

"Is ole Nicholas sick?" said the woman.

"He ain't sick now," replied the doctor.

"You cured him, did you?"

"No, I didn't cure him," said the doctor, getting down from his horse; "they were dyin' in Hickory Mountain before I come into it, an' they'll keep on a-dyin' after I've gone out."

He lifted his leather saddlebags down

from the horse and carried it across to the mill porch.

The woman remained standing in the road, her closed hand full of corn, the yellow grains showing between her fingers.

"You ain't tellin' me ole Nicholas is dead!"

"Yes, he's dead," said the doctor. "Now get me a gallon of corn; that horse ain't had a bite to eat since yesterday evening."

He went across the road, picked up a box, knocked the dust out of it and brought it over by the mill porch. Then he took the bit out of the horse's mouth, and put the bridle rein over the saddle, under the stirrup leather.

"Ole Nicholas dead!" the woman repeated. "Well! Upon my word!"

"Why shouldn't he be dead?" said the doctor. "Every damn thing's got to die."

"What killed him?" inquired the woman.

"I don't know what killed him," replied the doctor. "He was stretched out on the floor when I got there."

"Did he die just like anybody else?" said the woman.

"No," answered the doctor, "he didn't die like anybody that I ever saw. Will you get me that corn?"

The woman went into the mill and presently came out with the toll measure full of corn. She poured it into the box. Then she sat down on the porch beside the doctor, and began to roll the end of her apron between her fat fingers.

"When did ole Nicholas take down?" she began.

"I don't know that," said the doctor. "Jonas Black was crossing the mountain about noon, an' old Nicholas called to him

and told him to tell me to come and see him. I went up last night."

"It's a wonder you went," said the miller. "Ole Nicholas wouldn't pay you, would he?"

"If he didn't pay me, I wouldn't go," replied the doctor, "you can depend on that. I've quit bringin' 'em in or seein' 'em out unless I get the cash in my hand."

"I didn't think he had any money. He was always buyin' wild lands of the State."

"I don't know how much money he had," replied the doctor, "but I do know that it was always there on the table for me when I went. If it hadn't a-been, I wouldn't have darkened his door."

"Did he die hard?" said the woman.

"Everybody dies hard," replied the doctor.

"Did he want to go?"

"None of us want to go."

"How long did he live after you got there?"

"He lived until daylight."

"You must have had a bad night of it."

"It was awful!"

"It must a-been terrible if you thought so. You are used to seein' people die."

"I'm not used to seein' them die like old Nicholas died," replied the doctor.

"He must a-been in powerful pain."

"It wasn't so much pain. I could stop the pain."

"Was he out of his head then?"

"I don't know."

"Couldn't you tell by the way he talked?"

"He didn't talk."

"Did he see things?"

"I don't know what he saw."

"What was it that made his dyin' so awful?"

"It was *fear,*" replied the doctor.

"That he'd be lost?"

"No," said the doctor, "that he'd die before he could tell me something that he was tryin' to tell me."

"Goodness! Was he tryin' to tell you somethin' all night?"

"All night," said the doctor.

The woman sat for a moment in silence, her fat hands clasped together in her lap, the muscles of her face tense, her eyes fixed on the mountain, then she spoke.

"Did he ever tell you?"

"Yes."

"Was it somethin' he'd done?"

"No," replied the doctor, "it was not anything he'd done."

"What was it?"

"I did not understand it," replied the doctor.

The woman rose.

"Good Lord!" she said, "a man on his deathbed a-trying all night to tell you

somethin' an' then you didn't understand it!"

"No, I didn't understand it," said the doctor. "He kept whisperin'—'He's comin,' he's comin'. He's to have my things,' an' I kept askin' him if he meant some of his kin folks, but he always shook his head. I never saw a man in such mortal agony to speak. Finally just before he died, he got it out. He said, 'The Teacher.' Now, what did he mean?"

"I know who he meant," replied the woman, "he meant the School-teacher."

"What School-teacher?"

"Why, the new School-teacher, the one that come last night. He was goin' to stay with Nicholas."

The horse had now finished with his breakfast, the doctor got up.

"I didn't know you had a School-teacher," he said.

He went over to the horse, put the bit

into its mouth, took up his leather saddle-bags and thrust his foot into the stirrup.

"See here, Sally," he said, "old Nicholas wanted me to get up at his funeral and say that he had left everything to the 'Teacher.' I suppose he meant this new School-teacher. I told him I'd see to it. Now, I don't want to come back here; couldn't you do it? The country will likely gather up and bury him this afternoon."

He swung up into the saddle and hooked the bridle rein over his crooked arm.

"Yes, I'll do that," said the woman. The doctor clucked to his horse, and disappeared down the little valley; his arm rising and falling with the regular motion of the swinging walk.

The woman remained standing in the road, her hands spread out on her hips. She had suddenly remembered that the

guest of last night had said that Nicholas Parks was going away!

At noon the miller and her little girl set out up the mountain.

They did not go by the road that wound tortuously through the forest to the summit. They followed a path that ascended more directly, crossing the road now and then, and climbing up steep ascents to the top, where it ended in the road running along the high ridge, through the little mountain farm.

The farm was inclosed on either side by a rail fence. Below it was a cornfield of several acres, above a bit of fertile meadow, in which, on the very ridge, stood two gigantic trees lifting their branches eighty feet into the sky.

A dozen paces of beautiful green turf lying between the great shellbarks.

Farther out stood a log house with a

clapboard roof and a chimney built half-way up with stone and finished with crossed sticks, daubed with yellow clay. Behind it was a garden inclosed with palings split out of long cuts of hickory timber. Midway between the garden and the house, opposite the door, was a whitewashed well curb. From a long pole, suspended in a forked tree on a round locust pin, hung a sapling fastened to a bucket. Everything about the little farm was well kept. The chimney and the palings were whitewashed, the fence was well laid up, the bit of land was clean. Midway in the meadow, a path entered through wooden bars and ran along inside the rail fence to the house.

There was a little crowd of some half dozen men standing about these bars, when the woman and child came up.

The woman stopped in the road.

"What are you all standin' around for?" she said.

The men did not immediately reply. Finally one of them answered.

"We're waitin' for the preacher to come."

The woman looked at the apparently vacant house. The door open. The sun lying on the threshold.

"There's a-plenty to do, till he gits here," she said. "Somebody's got to dig a grave, an' somebody's got to make a coffin."

The man leaning against the bar post, who had spoken for the others, now jerked his head toward the meadow.

"It's dug," he said.

The woman looked in the direction he indicated; a pile of fresh earth lay heaped up in the meadow, not between the two trees, but below them, some paces from the summit.

"Well," said the woman, "you didn't pick out the place I'd a picked; I'd a put it on the ridge between them two trees, that's the natural place for it, there couldn't be no grander place. Who did you think you was savin' that place for? It looks like you was puttin' ole Nicholas so he'd be at the foot of somebody else that you was a-goin' to bury."

"We didn't pick the place," said the man.

"Who done it?"

"We don't know who done it, the grave was dug when we got here."

The conversation was interrupted by the little girl.

"There comes the preacher," she said.

The woman turned and looked down the road in the direction from which she had just come.

## CHAPTER V

MAN driving a country buggy was approaching. He was a tall, spare man, in a suit of black ready-made clothes that seemed not to fit him in any place, and to be a cheap imitation of a clergyman's frock suit. He wore cotton gloves. At his feet was a shiny handbag made of some inexpensive material to imitate alligator skin. His hair and his heavy, drooping mustache were black. His face was narrow, the cheek bones high, the mouth straight. One of the man's eyes was partly grown over with a cataract, and his effort to see equally with that eye gave him a curious, squint-

ing expression. He pulled up on the roadside, got out, tied his horse to a fence rail with one of the lines, took out his handbag, and came over to the little group waiting by the bars.

"Good evening, brethren," he said. "The doctor told me that Nicholas Parks had been called to his account, so I came up to give him Christian burial."

"He died sudden, I guess," replied one of the men.

"It's God's way," said the preacher. "The sinner is taken in the twinkling of an eye."

He drew off his cotton gloves and put them into his pocket.

"Have any preparations been made for the burial?" he inquired.

"The grave's dug," said one of the men.

"How about the coffin?"

"We don't know about the coffin, we haven't been to the house."

"Is any one up at the house?"

"We think the new School-teacher's up there. Little David went up to see, but he ain't come back."

"I didn't know the new School-teacher had come."

"He got here last night," said the miller.

"What kind of a man is he?"

"He's a man that the children will like," replied the woman.

"Children," said the preacher, "are not competent judges of men. Let us go up to the house. Is he elderly?"

"I thought he was mighty young," said the woman.

"The young," replied the preacher, "are rarely impressed with the awful solemnity of God's commandments."

"I think he's a good man," said the

woman. "Martha loved him right away, an' I'd trust him with anything I've got."

"Our Mother Eve trusted the serpent," replied the preacher.

And he extended his right arm, the fingers stiffly together, the thumb up.

"The youth of the community ought to be brought up in the fear of God."

During the conversation, the miller's little daughter had gone on to the house.

Something vague, intangible, undefined had stopped the men in the road below the house, and made them await the arrival of the preacher. But that thing had not affected the children. The little boy David and this child had gone on without the least hesitation.

The preacher threw down one of the pole bars and went through into the meadow. The others followed him along the path to the house. As they drew near they heard the voices of the children. At

the threshold the preacher stopped, and those behind him crowded up to look into the house.

The door was open. The sun entering, filled the room with light.

On chairs in the middle of this room stood a coffin made of the odds and ends of rough boards, but marvelously joined. Beside it stood the School-teacher, and at either end was one of the children; the three of them were fitting a board on the coffin for a lid, and they were talking together.

When the minister entered, the School-teacher removed the board and laid it down on the floor, and the two children, as by some instinct, drew near to the man, on either side, and took hold of his hands.

They became instantly silent.

The minister went up to the chair, looked a moment into the coffin and took

his place at the head of it. The others followed.

The dead man lay in the rough box like one asleep. There was in his face a peace so profound that the hard, mean, ugly features of this old man seemed to have been remodeled under some marvelous fingers.

The minister, with his bad eye, seemed not to observe this transfiguration, but the others marked it and crowded around the coffin.

The minister took out his watch, looked at it, and snapped the case.

"If you will find seats, we'll begin the service," he said. "The stranger here seems to have made all necessary preparations for the burial."

The crowd drew back from the coffin, the School-teacher went and sat in the doorway in the sun; the little boy stand-

ing up by his knees, the little girl beside him on the doorstep.

The minister began a discourse on the horrors of an eternal hell.

But the attention of the audience moved past him to the man seated in the door. The harmony, grouping the man and these two children, seemed to enter and fill the room. A certain common sympathy uniting them, as though it were the purity of childhood.

The man sitting in the door did not move.

He looked out toward the south over a sea of sun washing a shore of tree tops. A vagrant breath of the afternoon moved his brown hair. He seemed not to hear the minister, not to regard the service, but to wait like one infinitely patient with the order of events.

When the preacher had finished, the

miller, sitting in a chair by the window, rose.

"Just before ole Nicholas died," she said, "he made the doctor promise to git up here at his funeral an' tell everybody that he left all his things to the School-teacher. The doctor couldn't come back, so he asked me to git up an' tell it for him."

The minister turned toward the woman.

"Left his property to this stranger?"

"Yes," said the woman, "he tried all night to tell the doctor, an' he was mortally afeard that he would die before he could tell it."

The School-teacher was now standing in the door. Beside him, and framing in his body, dust danced in the sun, making a haze of gold.

The minister addressed him.

"Why did Nicholas Parks leave his possessions to you?"

The School-teacher did not reply.

He went over to the coffin, lifted the lid and began to fit it on the box. The men standing around the room came forward and took the coffin up. They carried it out of the house, their hands under the bottom of it. The preacher picked up his satchel and followed. Outside he stopped, pointed to the grave in the meadow, and spoke to the School-teacher.

"You didn't put that grave where old Nicholas wanted it. He wanted to be buried on the top of the ridge between those two trees. It was a place he had picked out. He told me so at the last quarterly meeting."

The School-teacher lifted his face and looked at the two great hickories marking the spot on the summit of the little meadow. His eyes filled with melancholy shadows, the smile deepened and saddened about his mouth. But he did not reply.

Then he walked away to where the two children stood, some distance from the path.

The minister followed the coffin to the grave, but the School-teacher went with the two children through the meadow to the spot of green between the two hickories. He sat down there in the deep clover, the children beside him. Below came the sound of the earth on the coffin, and the high-pitched nervous voice of the minister. The School-teacher talked with the children.

After a while a shadow fell across the grass.

The minister was standing beside them. He had come up from the filled grave and the carpet of the meadow had hidden the sound of his approach. He spoke to the School-teacher.

"Do you think that you are old enough to teach the children the fear of God?"

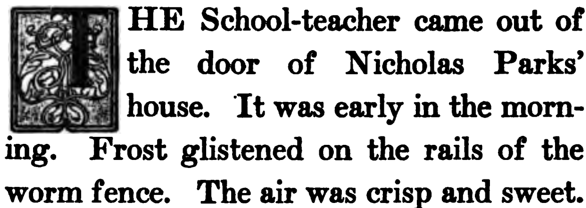
"I shall not teach them the fear of God."

"Then I don't see how you are going to give them any Christian instruction."

The man sitting among the deep clover blossoms, looked up at the minister's face.

"Isn't there something growing over your eye?" he said.

# CHAPTER VI



THE School-teacher came out of the door of Nicholas Parks' house. It was early in the morning. Frost glistened on the rails of the worm fence. The air was crisp and sweet.

There was a smell of faint wood smoke.

The door of the house was fastened with a wooden latch on the inside from which a black leather string, tied in a knot, issuing from a worn hole, hung on the outside of the door. The man drew the door close and, pulling the string, dropped the latch into place. Then he left the house, walking slowly.

In the direction that he moved there

was no path. He crossed the little meadow, south of the house, climbed the rail fence and entered the forest. There was still no path, although the man moved like one who followed land marks that he knew.

He descended through the forest for perhaps half a mile in the deep leaves.

Then he came abruptly on a path that entered a little cove and continued around a shoulder of the mountain. A spring of water issuing here from a limestone strata trickled into a keg buried in the earth. On the broken branch of a dogwood sapling, beside the spring, hung a mottled gourd.

The School-teacher stopped, dipped the gourd into the crystal water, and drank.

At this moment three figures came into view along the path from the opposite direction: a child about two years old, a woman, and a rough-haired yellow dog.



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The child came first. He walked with the uncertain tottering gait of very little children. He wore a clean, white, muslin dress, a tiny apron and cheap baby shoes, such as one sees hanging on a string over the counter of mountain stores. He was a sturdy little boy, with soft yellow hair, burnished at the tips like that of the School-teacher, and big gray-blue eyes. He was laughing, stopping now and then to look back at the dog following, and his mother; and then running along ahead.

The woman was young and slender. Her face, tanned by the weather, was a deep olive. Her hair was black, lustrous and heavy, and hung down her back in a thick plait. Her eyes were dark and big. The whole aspect of the woman was that of one untimely matured, and permanently saddened. Her blue dress was of a cheaper material than that of the child's.

She carried a tin bucket with a wooden handle.

The woman and the dog stopped when they saw the School-teacher standing by the spring. But the child greeted the stranger in his baby dialect.

"How-da-do man," he said. He went on, the little feet tottering over the uneven path. When he reached the School-teacher, he spoke again.

"Up-a-go," he said.

The man stooped and lifted the child into his arms. The sunny smile that lighted the baby face seemed to enter and illumine his own. Something of it, too, moved into the face of the woman, but the cast there of perpetual melancholy seemed loath to depart, as though the muscles were unaccustomed to a change.

The child turned about in the man's arms, and pointed his finger toward two

catbirds that were fluttering in a neighboring bush.

"Giggles," he said.

The manner in which the woman's big melancholy eyes followed every motion of the little boy indicated how her heart enveloped him. He was evidently her one treasure. The smile, struggling to possess the woman's face, seemed to descend and sweeten her mouth.

"He means them birds," she said. "He's got a kind a talk of his own."

"I understand him perfectly," said the man.

"Do you?" said the woman, the smile gaining in her face. "I thought nobody could understand him but me. You must take to little children."

"I love little children," replied the School-teacher.

The child put his hand into the pocket of his apron and drew out a battered toy

—a cheap, little, painted, wooden toy, so broken and worn that no one could tell what animal it was originally intended to represent. He held it up for the School-teacher's admiration.

"Gup," he said.

"He means a horse," the woman explained. "He's heard folks down to the mill say 'git up' to horses they was ridin', an' he thinks that's the name of it, but he's got names of his own. Now he calls a bird an' a fish an' a mouse a 'giggle.' I don't know why. Because a bird ain't like a fish, an' neither one of them ain't like a mouse."

"I believe I understand why he gives them all the same name," replied the School-teacher.

The woman came closer to the man and the child. Her eyes took on an expression of deep inquiry.

"What do you reckon is the reason? I've thought about it often."

"I think it's because a bird, a fish and a mouse all appear to him to have the same motion, to wiggle."

The woman's face cleared. "I never thought of that. I reckon that is it. But now, he's got names that ain't like the things at all. Because he calls milk 'bugala' and there ain't no such word as 'bugala.' An' if it's sour or anything he calls it 'nim bugala.' "

The woman recalled with the word, the morning when, to wean him, she had blackened her breast with charcoal, and the child had pushed away the blackened breast with his little hand and said, "nim bugala."

"And he calls everything else to eat 'A B.' Now why would he call milk 'bugala' an' bread an' butter 'A B'?"

The School-teacher saw that this mys-

tery attaching to the child was dear to the woman, and he could not disturb it.

"Little children are very wonderful," he said.

"They are wonderful," the woman continued. "Just think of the things they learn when they are real little."

She jerked her head toward the dog remaining behind her in the road.

"Why, he learned Jim's name when he was awful little. He called him 'Nim' an' that's purty near right."

Her face again became deeply thoughtful.

"I'd like to know if his word 'nim,' like he says 'nim bugala,' has anything to do with Jim's name. It sounds like it, but I don't see how it could be, because 'nim' means something that he don't like, an' he does like Jim. He's powerful fond of Jim."

The School-teacher thoughtfully considered the problem.

"It might be that he has watched you give Jim the things that you did not want to eat yourself, and so he came to the conclusion that all such food belonged to Jim. It would not mean that he did not like Jim. It would only mean that the things that did not taste right to him ought to be given to Jim. They were not good things, they were 'nim' things."

The woman's mouth opened.

"Dear me," she said, "just think of him putting things together like that, an' him so little?"

Then she looked up at the man with a sort of wonder.

"Why, you understand him better than I do, an' I'm his mother. Maybe you're married an' got a little boy of your own."

"I was never married," replied the man.

"Then maybe you've got a little baby brother."

"No."

"Was there never any little children at your house?"

"My father's house," replied the School-teacher, "is full of little children."

"Just little children that he takes care of?"

"Yes."

"Then you've been with 'em a lot."

"I am always with them," replied the School-teacher.

"I could a-told that," said the woman, "by the way Sonny takes to you. I could a-told that you was used to little children, an' that you liked them." She indicated the tiny boy with a bob of the head. "He knows it right away; babies and dogs allers knows it right away."

She regarded the man for some minutes

in silence. Then she spoke like one come after thought to a conclusion.

"I 'spose you're the new School-teacher?"

"Yes."

"An' you're goin' down to the school-house now."

"Yes."

"Then if you'll wait till I git a bucket of water, I'll show you the way down. The path goes out by our house."

She went over to the spring and dipped the bucket into the keg. The dog that had been lying down in the path, his head lowered between his paws, now crawled up to the man and began to lick his feet.

The little boy looked down and shook his tiny fist at the dog.

"Ge-out, Nim!" he said.

The woman rose with the bucket of water.

"You don't have to carry him," she said, "he can walk real well."

"I would rather carry him," replied the School-teacher.

And he followed the woman along the path, the dog at his heels.

They turned the shoulder of the ridge and came out on a flat bench of the mountain. Here stood a little cabin, built of logs and daubed with clay. It was roofed with rough clapboards. Before it was a porch roofed like the cabin. The door, swinging on wooden hinges, stood open. On the puncheon floor was a piece of handmade carpet—a circular mat, hand-plaited out of rags, a primitive cradle with wooden rockers, a bed covered with a pieced quilt, a rough stone fireplace, an iron pot with a lid and a black iron kettle. On the porch stood a split-basket full of beans in the hull, and beside the basket two chairs, the seats of plaited

hickory bark. One of them was very small, a chair in miniature, made for the little boy. Near the path was an ax, a hacked log and some lighter limbs of trees, such as a woman might carry in from the forest. Beside the chimney was a primitive hopper made of clapboards, holding wood-ashes, and under this was a broken iron pot in which lye, obtained from the ashes by pouring water on it, dripped.

Beyond the cabin was a bit of garden and a little cornfield, where the ripened corn stood in yellow shocks bound with grapevines. The shocks were small, such as a woman could reach around. About, on the bench, were a grove of sugar trees, scarred with the marks of an auger, and among them, here and there, a great hickory. Beyond the grove one heard the faint tinkling of a bell where a cow moved in the forest.

The woman set the bucket of water on the porch and turned to take the child.

"Come, sonny."

The little boy drew back in the man's arms.

"No," he said.

"But, sonny," the woman continued, "the Teacher's goin' away down the road."

"Baby go wif him down woad."

The woman coaxed, "Won't sonny stay with Jim and mother?"

"Nim an' muvver go woad."

"No," said the woman, "Jim an' mother ain't goin' down the road. Will sonny go an' leave Jim an' mother?"

The little boy looked over the man's shoulder at the rough-haired yellow dog. Jim was his housemate and his brother. A decision was a sore trial, but he finally made it. He turned about in the man's arms.

"Baby go woad," he said.

The man now entered the conversation.

"Let him go with me."

"But he's too little to go to school."

"He is not too little to go with me."

"But he'll bother you, won't he?"

"No, he will not bother me. He will help me."

"He can't help you."

"Yes, he can help me."

"I don't see how he can help you."

"He will remind me of the little children in my father's house."

"Keep you from gettin' homesick?"

"Yes," replied the School-teacher, "that is it. He will keep me from getting homesick."

"Well," said the woman, "if I let him go, you'll take care of him, won't you?"

"I will surely take care of him."

"An' you'll bring him back before sundown."

"Yes."

"Well, it'll be powerful lonesome, but I reckon I can finish gatherin' the beans. I will fix him somethin' to eat. You can put it in your pocket."

The woman went into the house, got a flat bottle, such as a cheap sort of liniment is sold in at the mountain stores, scalded it out with water and filled it with fresh milk. Then she cut some thin slices of a white bread called "salt rising" and spread it with butter. She stopped with the knife in her hand, considered a moment, and then cut two larger pieces of bread, buttered them, and wrapped them all in a piece of homespun linen towel. She went out to the man with the folded towel and the bottle in her hand.

"Here's his milk an' here's his bread. I put in two pieces for you."

The man put the bottle and the bread

into his pocket. The light of his great gray-blue eyes deepened.

"You also thought of me," he said.

"I didn't see you carryin' any dinner," replied the woman, "an' the bread's nice. I had powerful good luck yesterday. I don't allers have such luck, but everything turned out right with the bakin' somehow."

The man went on with the little boy in his arms, but the dog remained. He sat miserably in the path, his tail moving in the leaves, his eyes fixed on the woman's face. For a time the woman, watching the disappearing figures, did not notice the dog. Then she saw him, knew his distress and spoke.

"You can go along, Jim," she said.

The dog ran barking after the man and little boy. He overtook them and went on ahead. At the point where the path entered the forest, the man turned and

looked back at the woman. She did not move, but the smile, struggling all the morning to conquer her face, finally possessed it.

The School-teacher, the little boy and the dog continued to descend the mountain. The child addressed every object with which he was familiar. When they passed the brindle cow, cropping broom sedge beside the path, he hailed it with a salutation.

"How-da-do, boo," he said.

Leaves, burning red with autumn color, he explained, were "dowers."

Finally they came to the river, running shallow between the foot of the mountain and the farther bench on which the school-house stood. The child had not crossed this water, and he was afraid for the man to attempt it. He put his little hand firmly on the man's arm to stop him.

The School-teacher stopped, and the

child considered this new and unaccustomed peril. He sat studying the water, his restraining hand on the man's arm. Finally, the dog, growing impatient at the delay, entered the river and began to wade across. The child removed his hand. His fears were ended. The crossing was safe. He directed the man's attention to the proof of it.

"Nim walk in wat," he said.

## CHAPTER VII

N THE grove before the log schoolhouse, the Teacher was playing a game with the children. It was a game in which every child to the tiniest one could join. Two, standing opposite, with raised arms and the fingers linked, formed a sort of arch, through which the others passed in a circle, holding one another's hands. They all sang as they marched some verses of a mountain song, ending with the line, "An' catch the one that you love best."

When the song came to this line, those forming the arch brought their arms down over the head of the child passing at that

moment, and he left the circle and took the place of one of those forming the arch. As each child wished to catch the School-teacher, the man remained standing while the children changed.

The little boy David had just been caught. The child, standing with the School-teacher, had taken his place. The circle had begun once more to move, the song to rise, when the miller's daughter, Martha, stopped, disengaged her hand from the child before her and pointed to the road.

"There comes Sol an' Suse. I wonder what's the matter, for Sol's got his arm tied up."

The School-teacher stood up and looked over the heads of the children. A man was approaching. The sleeves of a red wammus were tied around his neck, forming a sort of rude sling in which his right arm rested, held horizontally across his

breast. A woman, carrying a baby, was walking beside him.

The School-teacher spoke to the little girl.

"Martha," he said, "you and David take the children into the schoolhouse, I am going out to meet these people."

When the children had gone in, and the door was closed, the man went down into the road. He waited there until the two persons approached. He saw that both the woman and the man were young, the baby but a few months old—a little family beginning to found a home in the inhospitable mountain.

The man was evidently injured. The woman was in distress. Her eyes were red. The muscles of her mouth trembled. The baby, in her arms, wrapped in an old faded shawl, wailed.

The School-teacher spoke to the woman.

"What has happened?" he said.

"My man's got hurt."

"How was he hurt?"

"He was choppin' in his clearin', an' his ax ketched in a grapevine, an' throwed him. I reckon his shoulder's all broke. He can't use his arm none."

The School-teacher addressed the man.

"How does your arm feel?"

"I suppose the jint's smashed."

The tears began to run down over the woman's face.

"I don't see why we have such luck," she said, "an' just when we was a-gittin' sich a nice start. Now, he can't work in his clearin', an' if he don't git his clear-in' done this winter, we won't have no crop, an' I don't know what'll become of us."

The man began to chew his lip.

"Don' cry, Susie," he said.

"Yes, I'll cry," replied the woman, "for here's me an' the baby with nothin', and you laid up."

"Maybe I ain't hurt so bad," the man suggested.

The woman continued to cry.

"I know better'n that, you're hurt bad."

"Where were you going?" said the School-teacher.

"We were a-goin' to the doctor," replied the woman. "We thought we'd make as far as the mill, an' he could wait there, an' I could git Sally to keep the baby while I went after the doctor."

"How far is it to the doctor?"

"It's a-goin' on fourteen mile from the mill, an' that ain't the worst of it. He won't come unless he gits the money, an' we ain't got no money to throw away on a doctor."

She opened her hand and disclosed a crumpled, greasy note.

"That there five-dollar bill is the very last cent that we've got. An' when it's gone I don't know where we'll git any more, with him hurt, an' me with a little sucklin' baby."

The woman began to sob.

"I'm jist ready to give up."

The School-teacher's big gray-blue eyes filled with a kindly light.

"Don't cry," he said, "perhaps I can do something for your husband's shoulder."

He went over to the man. What the School-teacher did, precisely, these persons were never afterward able to describe. The event in their minds seemed clouded in mystery. A wonder had been accomplished in the road, in the sun, in the light before them, but they could not

lay hold upon the sequence of the detail. The voice of the School-teacher presently reached them as from a distance.

"It's all right now," he said.

The man doubled the arm and extended it. The woman came running up.

"Kin you use it, Sol?"

The man continued to move the arm.

"It 'pears like I kin," he said; "it 'pears like it's well."

"Kin you use it good?"

"It 'pears like I kin use it good as I ever could."

"Well, sir!" ejaculated the woman, "if I hadn't a seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't never a-believed it."

The School-teacher remained standing for a moment in the road after the mountaineers had gone.

Then he went back to the children, waiting in the schoolhouse. He called them out into the grove before the door,

and took his place in the game, bending over to hold the hands of the tiniest child. The circle began once more to move. The song to rise.

"An' catch the one that you love best."

## CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS not the only adventure that the School-teacher was destined to meet with on this day. As he was returning along the mountain road, with the little boy on his shoulder, at the first ascent, beyond the river crossing, he met two men in a buckboard. The horses were gaunt as from hard usage. The man who drove them was known to the School-teacher. The other was a big man with a heavy black beard. He sat leaning over in the buckboard. His head down. His shoulders rising in a hump. He had gone stooped for so long that the hump on his shoulders was now a sort of permanent deformity.

They drew up by the roadside as the School-teacher approached. The big, hump-shouldered man spoke, without taking the trouble to preface his remarks with any form of salutation.

"Do you claim old Nicholas Parks' estate?"

The School-teacher regarded him with his deep, tranquil, gray-blue eyes.

"It belongs to my father," he said.

"Is your father related to old Nicholas?"

"No."

"Has he got a deed from old Nicholas?"

"No."

"Then how does he claim under him?"

"He does not claim under him. Nicholas Parks had his possession from my father."

"You mean that your father owned it first?"

"Yes."

"Did he sell to Nicholas?"

"No."

"Then how did old Nicholas come to own it?"

"He never owned it; my father permitted him to use it."

"Then your claim is that old Nicholas was just a tenant for life."

"Yes," replied the School-teacher, "that was it, a tenant for life."

"Did your father give Nicholas any writing?"

"No."

"Did Nicholas pay anything for the use of the land?"

"No."

"Did he ever recognize your father's title while he was living?"

"No."

"Then he never knew that your father owned these lands?"

"Yes," replied the School-teacher, "in the end he knew it."

"How did he know it, if he did not find it out while he was living?"

"He found it out while he was dying," replied the School-teacher.

The big humpback looked out sidewise at the man standing in the road, with the child on his shoulder, its little arm around his neck, its little fingers on his face.

"Didn't you come into these mountains about the time that old Nicholas died?"

"On the very day that he died," replied the School-teacher.

"I see," said the humpback, "then he found it out through you."

"No, man," replied the School-teacher, "ever finds out anything about the affairs of my father except he find it out through me."

"Then you're here to look after your father's business?"

"Yes," replied the School-teacher, "that is it, I am here to look after my father's business."

"An' so you moved in when old Nicholas died?"

"Yes."

"I see," said the humpback, "now I want to ask you another question. These lands belonged to the state. Old Nicholas bought from the state, and the state made him a deed. Do you contend that your father's title is older than that of the state?"

"Yes."

The humpback compressed the muscles of his mouth and nodded his head slowly.

"I see," he said, "your father claims the lands of Nicholas Parks under some old patent that gives him a color of title and he has sent you here to get into possession. A color of title is not good at law without possession. Well, I can tell you, the

state's not going to lie by and allow you to acquire adverse possession. Old Nicholas Parks died without heirs, and, by the law, his property escheats to the state. So you can make up your mind to get off."

He reached over, caught the whip out of its socket, and struck the horses. They jumped and the buckboard went clattering down the mountain, the wheels bouncing on the stones.

The little boy raised his hand and pointed his tiny finger at the departing horses.

"Man hurt gups," he said.

The School-teacher stood in the road watching the humpback lash the half-starved team. His face was full of misery.

## CHAPTER IX

HE School-teacher had been helping the miller.

He had taken the shirts which she had offered to him, but he had refused to put upon her the labor of making up the big piece of linen that remained.

"Keep it," he said, "until I need it."

All of Saturday he had been at work mending the wooden water wheel. In the evening he set out to return to Nicholas Parks' house. He took the short way up the mountain. When he came out on the great hickory ridge, the sun was not yet down. He stopped where the path en-



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tered the two roads, one turning along the ridge to his house, the other winding down the mountain, eastward, toward the far-off lumber mills, sometimes faintly to be indicated by a tiny wisp of smoke on the horizon.

There had been a gentle rain, and now under the soft evening sun the earth seemed to recover something of the virility of springtime, as though the impulse of life waning in the autumn were about to reconquer its dominion. Here and there, in the moist earth, a little flower crept out, as though tricked into the belief that it was springtime—a white strawberry, a tiny violet.

The sap seemed about to move under the bark of the beech trees, the buds to issue from the twigs.

In the forest the wren and the catbirds fluttered as under a nesting instinct, the gray squirrels fled around the rough shell-

bark trees and from one tree top to another, far off a pheasant drummed, and farther off a mountain bull lowed as he wandered through the forest.

The road descending the mountain was decked out in color, banked along its border with the poison ivy and the Virginia creeper, now a mass of scarlet. Above the beech and hickory leaves were yellow, the clay of the road below was yellow, and the soft sunlight entered and fused the edges of these colors. The forest for this hour took on the ripe expectancy of springtime.

The School-teacher stood where the path emerged from the forest

Presently from below him, beyond the turn of the road, a voice arose, a voice full, rich and sensuous—a woman's voice singing a song. It carried through the forest, swaggering, defiant melody. The words could not be determined. Indeed,

there seemed to be no words. The song was a thing of sounds—of tropical, sensuous sounds. As though all the love calls of the creatures of the forest had been fused into one great, barbaric symphony.

A moment later the singer came into view.

She was a young, buxom woman, and she walked, singing, in the middle of the road, with a defiant swagger. Her hair was heavy and yellow like wheat straw. Her lips, colored purple from the wild grapes which she had been eating, were full, the under one drooping a little at the middle. Her face was whitened with a cheap powder to be had at the village store. Her bodice and her petticoat were of bright vivid colors. There was a crimson handkerchief tied around her neck, a cheap glittering bangle on her wrist, heavy, gilded earrings hanging in the lobes of her ears, and at her throat a

breastpin of jet set in a lattice work of brass.

The School-teacher remained motionless. He watched the woman approaching in the middle of the road, her body swinging loose in her swaggering stride, and the full volume of her voice abandoned to her song.

She was halfway up the bend of the road before she realized that another was within sound of her voice. Then she saw the School-teacher and stopped.

The song ceased.

Her head went up and her eyes opened wide. She remained as though the power to move had been on the instant stricken out of her. Her foot advanced, her heel lifted, her mouth shaped to sing. Then, slowly, her face changed to an expression of profound astonishment.

The School-teacher did not speak. He did not move. The sun descending behind

him slowly crept up the road to his feet, as though, bidden to withdraw from the world, it were loath to leave him.

The woman's face again changed. It became troubled. She moved now a few steps closer, softly, on tiptoe. Then, suddenly, with a swift gesture, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. Her body shook as with a convulsion. The tears streamed through her fingers.

Until now the School-teacher had not moved. Now he came slowly along the road to where she stood. As he approached, the woman sank down huddled together, her face covered, her bosom heaving, her hands wet. He stood before her in the road looking down at the bowed head.

"Poor child!" he said.

The woman continued to sob. The eyes of the School-teacher deepened with a

profound sorrow. He stooped over to put his hand on the coarse yellow hair, redolent with a cheap perfume. But before the descending fingers touched her, the woman sprang up and flew like a wild thing into the forest.

The sun was now gone.

The tropical colors of the leaves, the vines, the yellow earth, departed with it. The gray twilight began to descend. The School-teacher walked slowly to the top of the ridge, and returned along the little meadow to Nicholas Parks' house. As he approached he saw a figure moving off down the mountain along the rail fence.

When he came to the house he stopped.

There was a paper tacked on the door. He looked at it for a moment, but he did not touch it. The four corners of the paper were doubled under and a tack at each end held it. He pulled the worn leather string, lifted the wooden latch and

went in, leaving the paper fastened to the door.

The night had descended.

The house was dark. But when he entered it, on the instant, as though the opening of the door had made a draft through the fireplace, a log smoldering shot up a red flame that illumined the house.

The School-teacher went over to a table that stood by the wall.

On this table were a homemade cheese and the half of a loaf of bread. Beside them was a knife with a wooden handle and a thick china plate chipped at the rim. Before this table was a hickory chair, the seat of roughly plaited bark. The School-teacher sat down and ate his supper.

Everything in this house remained as Nicholas Parks had left it.

This chair, this table, a larger hickory

chair with arms and a ragged cushion by the fireplace, a fourpost bed in the corner covered with a patchwork quilt. When Nicholas Parks died there had been, as now, a log on the fire, a cheese and a loaf of bread on the table.

There were, however, now on this table, before the School-teacher, some objects that had not been there. There was a little worn, broken toy that had once been a wooden horse; there was a top whittled out of a spool with a hickory pin through it. There was a Barlow knife with an iron handle, the blade broken at the point; there was a brass ring tied to a cotton ribbon; and there were little bunches of wild flowers, the stems of which were primly wrapped with black thread. These were laid out on the table beyond the cheese and the loaf. And before he sat down to eat, the School-teacher touched them.

When he had finished his supper, the

School-teacher went over to the fireplace and sat down in the armchair. He sat beside the hearth where he could see the door. He remained for a long time without moving, except now and then he looked toward the door, and when there came to him any sound from the night outside, he listened.

The night advanced. He remained in in the chair before the fire. The log continued to burn among the ashes in the fireplace. But it no longer flamed. It burned with a deep crimson glow that flooded the hair, the face, the hands of the School-teacher. The glow thus reflected seemed to take on a deeper crimson.

It became like the crimson of blood.

The School-teacher hardly ever moved except to raise his head to listen, but he was not asleep; there was no sleep in him. The glow of the smoldering log, chang-

ing on his face, gave it an expression of agony.

The night continued to advance; the hours passed. The vagrant sounds of the world outside ceased. The profound silence of midnight arrived and passed. The temperature changed.

But the School-teacher did not go to bed.

He sat in the fantastic glow of the fire, with its agony on him. Now and then, when the playing of the light seemed to convulse his features—seemed to distort them with a deeper agony, he turned his face toward the table standing along the wall, near the door, and his eyes rested on the broken toy horse, the top, the Barlow knife, the ring and little bunches of flowers; and turned thus out of the glow of the fire, his features no longer presented the aspect of agony. Moreover, when his head was turned like that, the glow of the

fire, that had been thus distorting his face, passed by him and streamed over the objects on the table, bringing them into vivid contrast with every other object in the room.

The body of the night passed.

The morning began to arrive. And still the School-teacher waited. No one came. The room was profoundly silent. The breath of the morning entering, distilled a faint perfume out of the little bunches of wild flowers, a vague odor that arose and sweetened the room. The night was dead. The day was beginning to be born. Then it was that the one for whom the School-teacher waited finally came.

There was a faint sound outside, as though one approached walking softly on the grass, as though a hand passed gently along the door.

The School-teacher rose.

The latch of the door moved, the door

turned noiselessly on its hinges, and the woman who had fled from the School-teacher into the forest entered.

The whole aspect of the woman was changed.

The purple stains on her mouth, the powder on her face, were gone. Her hair, too, had been cleansed of its cheap scent. It clung in damp strands about her face. The swagger, the defiance, the loud notes and color had gone out of her. And that which remained after these things were gone, now alone existed—as though the whole fabric of the woman had been washed with water. The woman put her hand swiftly to her face, to her hair; she caught her breath.

"Oh!" she said, "I thought you were asleep."

The School-teacher's voice was incomparably gentle.

"No," he said, "I have been waiting for you."

"Then you thought I would come?"

"I knew that you would come."

"I had to come," she said. "I could not go back to—to—the other!"

"No," he said, "you never could go back to that."

"An'—an'—I had nowhere else to go."

"I know that," replied the School-teacher, "there is no place that you could go, except to me."

## CHAPTER X

HE children had bought the School-teacher a hat. It had been a large undertaking, and the cause of innumerable secret conferences in the grove behind the schoolhouse. The purchase of so costly a thing as a hat required a certain sum of money. To raise this sum of money, the children had been put to the most desperate straits. Every tiny store that any child possessed had been brought forward and contributed to the common fund. The difficulty did not lie in the drawing on this store. Although every contribution meant a sacrifice to the donor, no child had hesitated. There

had been no question about what each should give, and no inquiry as to a holding back of resources. Every child had simply given all he had.

Ancient two-cent pieces with holes in them, worn nickles, one or two long-treasured ten-cent pieces, and one-cent pieces thumbed with counting, were withdrawn from snuffboxes, essence of coffee boxes, pill boxes, holes in the wall, from under the loose stones of the hearth and other safety deposit places—wherever the child had deemed it expedient to keep his treasures. Sometimes, however, this treasure was in the custody of older persons, and the obtaining of it had presented difficulties.

The whole school had often gone into counsel on these cases, ways and means devised, a proper motive constructed, and the child strengthened and drilled. When the device succeeded, the whole school for

that day rejoiced, when it failed, the school was depressed, but it was not defeated, and some other plan was brought forward. Some of the plans were exceedingly ingenious, and, as a rule, the school prevailed.

However, when the whole store was finally collected, or as much as could be had, the children were confronted with a staggering disappointment; the entire fund, for all the counting and recounting of it, could not be made to exceed sixty-four cents. A wholesale borrowing, right and left, had added only eleven cents. Now, it was well-known that a hat could not be purchased for less than a dollar, and when it became evident that the fund must fail by a fourth of that sum, the children were in despair.

For a day or two almost the whole school was in tears.

Then, individually, it resorted to des-

perate devices. One whose grandfather had been accustomed to present him with ten cents on Christmas day endeavored to secure an advancement. A small child had hailed the doctor as he passed along the road, and had offered to work for him all the remainder of his life for ten cents paid down in cash. Another had approached the minister, after the Sunday collection, and endeavored to borrow a twenty-five-cent piece out of the hat.

These ventures had failed, and the latter with the perilous result that the minister had all but extracted the secret for the money, and his withering commentaries on a teacher who inculcated the spirit of avarice into little children had so stricken the child with terror that it had been afraid to tell the school what it had done.

This brief lapse into madness, the practical leadership of Martha, the miller's

little girl, and the small boy, David, was presently able to check. They pointed out what it was useless to do. But for the present they were not able to bring forward any plan that it seemed worth while to undertake. At this season the only natural product of the mountain that could be exchanged for money was hickory nuts, and the value of this product was in doubt. Sometimes, early in certain seasons, the storekeeper had been known to give twenty-five cents for a bushel of choice hickory nuts, not the gross shellbark nut, but the small, round, sweet-kerneled nut of the smooth-bark hickory.

The school had considered this, but had come always against two serious difficulties. To secure a bushel of these small nuts would require a considerable searching of the mountains, and, despite the fact that the children were very small, each had duties at home that occupied

Saturdays, and the evening fragments of the day. On Sundays, an austere theology imposed by the minister compelled them to attend the Sunday sermon and to practice the most rigorous inactivity under pain of hideous consequences. The insurmountable difficulty, however, lay in the fact that they could not get a bushel of hickory nuts over the long distance to the country store.

An unexpected event suddenly removed this difficulty. Coming breathlessly to the school on a Friday morning, little David announced that his father was going to the country store on Tuesday with the wagon to bring home a barrel of salt, and that he had obtained permission to accompany him. At once the school took up the possibility of securing the bushel of hickory nuts. It was immediately evident that within so brief a time the thing could not be done unless

the whole of Sunday were devoted to the labor of it. The school promptly decided.

This expedition did not arise from any failure to appreciate the perils of the decision. Corporal chastisement under the home roof was certain to follow; and the hideous tortures vividly presented by the minister, awaiting at the threshold of his future life, that one who broke the Sabbath day, was scarcely less certain. Nevertheless, not a child of the whole school hesitated.

The complete success of the venture strengthened the school to bear the immediate consequences.

Corporal chastisement in the mountains was not apt to be a thing lightly administered. But it was a hardship which even the smallest children had come to regard as one of the inevitable conditions of life. As to that other penalty, which awaited them at the hands of an outraged and vin-

dictive deity, they were somehow of the opinion that this malignant god could not inflict his punishments except through some overt act of the minister who was his executive agent. Thus, if they could outwit this dangerous penal vicegerent, the thing could be turned aside. In travail of this problem, they hit upon the plan of going over the head of the minister and claiming a direct authorization for their act. When approached for an explanation of their conduct they solemnly announced that an angel had come down through the roof of the schoolhouse and directed them not to attend the religious services on this Sunday.

Transported by the success of their undertaking; by the exquisite pleasure of making this presentation to the Schoolteacher; by the joy which his evident happiness in it carried to every heart; they had neglected to perfect the details of this

story. Fortunately they agreed upon the personal aspect of the angel, since every child, when driven to describe this divine messenger, simply followed the guidance of his affections, and presented the School-teacher. But upon a close and seaching examination there had been a divergence. How had the angel been clothed? Some of the children, put upon inquisition, had replied that he had nothing at all on; and others, feeling the need for appropriate vestments, had declared that the angel wore a red coat and blue breeches.

Seizing upon this point, as a protruding limb, the minister had finally drawn up the whole hidden body of the incident. And he was now on his way to confront the School-teacher with this piece of outrageous conduct. It was evening when he arrived. The school was coming through the little grove down into the

road. The School-teacher walked among them. The grove was full of voices—the laughter of children. The School-teacher wore his new hat, and every now and then he took it off and held it in his hand that he might the better admire it. From the day that he had received it, he had never ceased to express his appreciation of it. He continued always to regard it, as if in it were merged, as in a symbol, all the little sacrifices of every child, and all the love that had strengthened each one to bear what the thing had cost him.

This never-ceasing appreciation of the School-teacher for his present had transported the school with pleasure. This acute happiness the children were not always able to control. Sometimes pride overcame one, and he would tell how much he had contributed.

And always the smaller children wished to hold the hat in their hands, so that it

quickly gathered a border of little finger-prints.

Even the tiny boy, who had been too little to help in the purchase of the present, but who somehow dimly understood that all had given something toward this article, had brought forward a rooster feather, which he had found, and insisted that it be added to the hat. And the School-teacher had very carefully pinned this crimson feather to the band.

Moreover, the habit which the School-teacher had acquired of taking off his hat in order to admire it before the children, seemed to adhere to him when he was by himself. Of late, those who had watched him as he passed along the mountain roads, had observed him at this habit and had marked how his face, profoundly sad when he was alone, always immediately brightened.

The school trooping about the School-

teacher was emerging from the grove when the minister got out of his buggy.

He tied the horse to a sapling with one of the lines. Then he drew his cotton gloves a little closer over his hands, buttoned his long black coat down to its last button, and stood out in the road to await the coming of the School-teacher. The children and the School-teacher stopped when they saw him. The pleasant laughing voices ceased. The children gathered around the School-teacher. The smallest ones came close up and took hold of his hands.

The minister addressed the School-teacher. His voice was high and sharp.

"Do you know what the school children have done?"

The School-teacher regarded the minister with his deep, calm, gray-blue eyes.

"Yes," he said.

"Did you know that they were going to do it?"

"Yes."

"Did you try to prevent it?"

"No."

The lines in the minister's face hardened.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "It is now perfectly evident that you are no fit person to have charge of school children. The community must get rid of you."

He turned about in the road, untied his horse, got into his buggy and took up the lines. He raised one of the lines in his cotton-gloved hand to bring it down on the horse's back, but he paused with his arm extended, and turned about toward the School-teacher. He thrust his head to one side. His defective eye straining to see.

"Do you have any fear of God at all?" he said.

The School-teacher's calm, gentle voice did not change, it did not hesitate.

"No," he said, "none at all."

## CHAPTER XI

N SATURDAY morning the miller hailed the doctor as he was passing the mill.

"Are you goin' over to Black's?" she called.

The doctor stopped his horse.

"Yes," he said, "they sent me word to come."

"By Jonas the first of the week?"

"Yes."

"For to see old Jerry's eye?"

"Yes."

"Well, it ain't no use for you to go."

"Did his eye get well of itself?" inquired the doctor.

"No, it didn't git well of itself," replied the woman. "It never would have got well of itself. Ole Jerry's been settin' around with that eye tied up ever since the day that he thrashed out his wheat. He'd a-been blind in it all the rest of his life if it hadn't a-been for the School-teacher."

The doctor turned around in his saddle.

"What did the School-teacher do to him?" he said.

"He cured him," replied the miller.

The doctor had ridden past the mill before he stopped. Now he rode back. The miller stood on the porch before the door. The doctor sat on his horse in the road, the loose bridle rein over his crooked arm, his good hand resting heavily on the pommel of the saddle.

"How did he cure him?" inquired the doctor.

"I don't know how he cured him," replied the miller.

"Didn't you hear?" said the doctor.

"Yes, I heard," replied the miller.

"Well," said the doctor, "what did you hear?"

"I heard that he took ole Jerry to one side an' he asked him if he could see anything with that eye. An' ole Jerry said that he couldn't tell a man from a tree with it. Then the School-teacher put his hands on his eye, an' he made him look up an' and when the School-teacher got through ole Jerry could see. But he complained that his eye felt hot an' the School-teacher told him to hold a piece of wet clay against it—you know that's awful good to draw out soreness—an' the next morning ole Jerry's eye was well. Now, how do you suppose he done it?"

"I don't suppose how he done it," replied the doctor. "I know how he done it.

Ole Jerry got a wheat husk in that eye when he was thrashing, and it stuck against the lid back of the ball. The fools that looked into his eye by pushing the lid up couldn't see it. But when anybody come along with sense enough to turn the lid back he got the husk out and the eye got well."

The miller crumpled the corner of her apron in her hand.

"I don't know about that," she said. "Did you hear how the School-teacher cured Sol Shreave's shoulder that he smashed in his clearing?"

"Yes, I heard it," replied the doctor. "I was pretty apt to hear it."

"Well, what did you think about that?" said the miller.

"I thought it was a piece of meddling with my practice," replied the doctor. "It kept me out of a five-dollar fee."

"But it was wonderful," said the miller.

"No, it wasn't wonderful," replied the doctor.

The miller spoke slowly. She nodded her head between each word.

"To cure a man's shoulder that was smashed, just by takin' hold of his arm, wouldn't that be a wonder?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "that would be a hell of a wonder."

"Well," said the woman, "didn't the School-teacher do it?"

"No, he didn't do it," replied the doctor.

"Then you don't think it's so, about the School-teacher fixin' Sol's shoulder?"

"Yes, I know it's so," replied the doctor.

"Then what makes you say it ain't a wonder?"

"Because it's a thing anybody could do," replied the doctor.

"Charm a smashed shoulder well?"

"No," replied the doctor, "rotate a dislo-

cated joint into place. When Sol Shreave caught his ax in the grapevine he twisted the ball on the big bone of his arm out of the socket of the shoulder, and when the School-teacher took hold of his arm and rotated it around in the right way it went back into place."

The miller crossed her hands over her apron. She took hold of the palm of her left with the fingers of her right. She gave her head a little jerk. Her eyebrows contracted.

"I don't know about that," she said.

She remained for a moment looking down at the mill porch, then she looked up.

"Doctor," she said, "did you ever hear of anybody that was dead bein' brought back to life?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I have heard of it ever since I could remember."

"Then it has happened?"

"No," said the doctor. "It never has happened. When you're dead, you're dead."

The doctor took a watch out of his pocket. It was a heavy, old, silver watch, tied to his waistcoat buttonhole with a buckskin string. He opened it, examined it for a moment, then snapped the lid and thrust it back into his pocket. When he looked around the miller was standing in the roadside beside the horse.

"Doctor," she said, "I'm a-goin' to tell you somethin' that I never told anybody."

"What about?" said the doctor.

"About what I've just said," replied the woman.

The doctor reflected for an instant, then he remembered. He shifted his position in the saddle. His voice showed annoyance.

"What cock-an'-bull story have you got a-hold of now?" he said.

"It's no cock-an'-bull story," replied the miller. "It's the God's truth."

The doctor made a deprecating gesture with his crooked arm.

"Now, look here, Sal," he said, "I haven't time to listen to all the tales you've heard."

"It ain't anything I've heard," replied the miller.

"What is it, then?"

"It's something I saw."

"Did you see it yourself?"

"Yes, I did."

"Now, Sal," said the doctor, "don't begin to tell me something you thought you saw."

"I'm not a-goin' to tell you somethin' that I thought I saw. I'm a-goin' to tell you something that I did see."

"All right," said the doctor, "go on and tell it. What did you see?"

The woman drew a little closer.

"Well," she said, "one Saturday the School-teacher come down here to help me, an' he brought Mary Jane's little boy with him. He's awful little. He ain't two yet. The School-teacher left him with me while he went down under the mill to fix one of the wheel paddles. Well, Martha was gone an' there was nobody here but me to 'tend things. An' I got to movin' around and forgot the little boy. An' when I went to look for him—I hope I may die!—if he wasn't a-layin' drownded at the bottom of the millrace. Lord-amighty! I was crazy. I jumped in an' got him out, an' begun to holler for the School-teacher to come. But he was dead. I knowed he was dead. His little lips was blue, an' his poor little hands was cold."

The tears came into the woman's eyes at the memory.

"Lordy, Lordy!" she said, "I knowed

he was all that Mary Jane had in the world. I knowed her soul was wrapped up in him. I knowed it would kill her."

The woman stopped and wiped her eyes with her apron.

"Well, the School-teacher come a-runnin' an' took him out of my arms, an' carried him into the house. An' I just stood there in the road like I was dazed. But after a while I sort a come to myself, an' I tiptoed up on the porch, an' I looked in the door. An' the little boy was layin' on the bed, an' the School-teacher was a-bendin' over him. Then I thought of Mary Jane again. An' Lord-a'-mighty! I thought I'd die. I went down off the porch. An' I reckon I was crazy, because I started out, an' I run just as hard as I could right up the road. I reckon I run for half a mile. Then I thought I heard the School-teacher callin' me. An' I come back with my apron

over my head a-cryin'. An' when I got right here in the road, I did hear him, an' he said, 'Don't be distressed, for the child's all right.' An' I took my apron off my head, an' I looked in the door, an' there set the School-teacher by the stove with the little boy wrapped in a blanket —an' he was *alive*."

The woman stopped, lifted her shoulders, and took in a deep breath, like one who has concluded a violent exertion. She wiped her face with her apron.

"Well, he told me to make haste, an' dry out the little boy's clothes—he had nice, little, white clothes, Mary Jane's awful particular about him—an' I did, an' I ironed them so they'd be just like they was before he fell in. Then we put the clothes back on him. An' the School-teacher took him home. An' he was just as well as he was before he was drownded. An' the School-teacher told me not to tell

anybody. I suppose he didn't want Mary Jane to find it out. It would only distress her for nothing."

The woman folded her arms across her bosom, and looked up at the doctor.

"Now, then?" she said.

The doctor sat back in his saddle. He dropped his crooked arm by his side. He addressed the woman, speaking with a perceptible pause between each word.

"So you thought he raised the dead, did you?"

"Didn't I see him do it?" replied the woman.

"Well," said the doctor, "if you're that big a fool, there's no use to talk to you."

He turned around in the saddle, gathtred up the reins, and kicked the horse with his heel. He passed out of sight in the direction of Jerry Black's house. The miller remained standing in the road.

## CHAPTER XII

ERRY BLACK'S house was beyond Hickory Mountain, in the direction of the far-off lumber mills.

It was afternoon before the doctor returned. He rode hard in anger. He had gone on to Black's house, determined to make the old man pay him for his visit. But the mountaineer, now that his eye was healed, had refused. The doctor stormed and threatened, but the mountaineer was obdurate. The School-teacher had cured him. He owed nothing. He would pay nothing.

The doctor was compelled to return empty-handed, and he rode hard.

A deep resentment against the man who thus interfered with his practice moved within him. When he came to Hickory Mountain, instead of following the road around by the mill, he took the one leading across through the lands of Nicholas Parks. It was mid-afternoon when he stopped in the road before the School-teacher's house. He called. A woman came to the door, her heavy hair the color of wheat straw. The doctor made an exclamation of profound astonishment.

"Yaller Mag!" he said. "Now what's that hussy doin' here?"

When the woman saw that the person in the road was the doctor, she went back into the house and presently came out with a brown earthen crock. She walked down the path from the door bearing the crock in her hand. When she came out into the road, she held the crock up to the doctor.

"The School-teacher told me to give you this money when you come," she said.

There was a handful of silver coins in the crock.

Again the doctor was astonished.

"When I come!" he echoed. "How did he know that I was coming?"

"I don't know how he knew it," replied the woman.

"What did he tell you to give it to me for?"

"He didn't tell me."

The doctor looked at the pieces of silver.

"I suppose this is money that the people have paid him. How much did old Black pay him?"

"He never paid him anything," replied the woman. "Nobody ever paid him anything."

"Who give him this money then?"

"Nobody give it to him," said the

woman. "It was in that crock on the shelf when old Nicholas Parks died. It ain't been touched."

The doctor looked at the dust-covered handful of silver.

"If nobody pays him, an' he hasn't used any of this, where does he get money to buy things with?"

"He don't buy anything."

"What does he live on, then?"

"Well," said the woman, "when Nicholas Parks died, there was flour in the barrel. It ain't run out. It looks like it never would run out. Now, will you take the money, so I can get some feed for the horse?"

Again the doctor was astonished.

"How do you know that the horse hasn't been fed?"

"I don't know it," replied the woman.

"Then what do you want to feed him for?"

"I want to feed him," replied the woman, "because the School-teacher told me to."

"Told you to feed my horse?"

"Yes, he told me to give you this money and to feed your horse. Are you goin' to take the money?"

"No," said the doctor. "I'm not goin' to take it. I want to see the School-teacher himself. Where is he?"

"He's down at Mary Jane's house."

"Is she the one that's got the woods-colt?"

"She's the one that's got the little boy," replied the woman.

"Huh!" said the doctor. "What's he doin' there?"

"He's huskin' her corn."

"So he spends his time helpin' the women who have no men folks about, too, does he?"

The woman looked up at the doctor. Her face undisturbed by the taunt.

"Yes," she said. "He spends his time helpin' those who have nobody else to help them."

The doctor did not reply. He gathered his bridle up in his hand. The woman moved around in front of the doctor.

"Ain't you goin' to let me feed the horse?"

"The horse can stand it just as well as I can," said the doctor.

"But you can help it," replied the woman, "an' the horse can't help it."

"It won't hurt him to wait till I eat."

"Would it hurt you to wait till he eats?"

"It wouldn't do me much good, if any-body was to see me waitin' here," said the doctor.

A flush of color sprang into the woman's face.

"I only wanted to feed him," she said, "because the School-teacher told me to."

"Get out of my way," said the doctor. "This School-teacher has interfered with my business just about as much as I'm going to put up with."

He clucked to his horse, and rode around the woman. When he had gone forward a few paces, he made a gesture with his crooked arm.

"Is there a path over the mountain this way?" he called without turning in his saddle.

"Yes," replied the woman, "it runs down past the house."

She remained standing by the gate with the crock in her hand.

The doctor entered the forest.

The colors lying far down the mountain in the sun were like those of an oriental carpet. Soft shades of green, of yellow, of crimson, kneaded into a harmony of

low, unobtrusive tones that the sun warmed and illumined. Near at hand, along the path, where the doctor rode, the sumacs stood a dull red, the chestnut bushes yellow, the wild cherry leaves turning on their edges, the oaks crimson like a flame, the water beeches green, the hickory leaves curling on their twigs like shavings of gold.

The scene lay out below the doctor in the sun, incomparably painted, but he did not see it. He rode looking down at the pommel of his saddle. Now and then, when the horse stumbled, he brought it up with a wrench of the bit. The horse was tired. It went forward with its head down. Dust lay around its eye-pits. There were gray bands of dried sweat running parallel with the leather of the headstall, and beyond the borders of the saddle blanket.

At a turn of the path a dog appeared,

his yellow hair rising on his back. As the doctor came on, the dog slowly retreated, growling, holding his place in the road until the horse was almost upon him, then springing back, his teeth flashing, his eyes on the doctor. The dog did not bark, he made no considerable sound, he refused to attack the horse, but he continued always to menace the approach of the doctor.

They passed the spring and came out before the house and the little cornfield. Then the dog began to bark, and a tiny voice arose.

"Ge-out, Nim!" it said.

This patch of clearing, lying within the many-colored garden of the forest, seemed illumined with a warmer sunlight. The effect doubtless arose from the carpet of coarse brown fox-grass grown up over the cornfield, into which the sun seemed to enter and remain. Two or three small

maple trees, abundantly leaved, stood about, flaming scarlet.

Under one of these trees the School-teacher was at work.

A corn shock, unbound, lying on the ground before him. He was on his knees, bareheaded, without a coat, ripping the husk from the ear with a wooden "peg" bound to his middle finger, snapping it at the socket and tossing it out on a heap before him.

The ears coming from the School-teacher's hands were long, full-grained and of a deep yellow.

The two children, Martha and David, were gathering this corn into a split basket and carrying it to a crib made of rails and roofed with clapboards. Near the School-teacher, sitting on his coat spread out on the ground, was the tiny boy who had called to the dog. He was shelling

a red ear of corn into the School-teacher's hat.

A brush fence inclosed the cornfield.

The doctor pulled up in the path beside the fence. The School-teacher arose. He stood bareheaded in the sun under the canopy of flaming leaves. He looked past the doctor to the horse, standing with its legs out, its head down.

"I understand you're practicin' medicine," said the doctor.

"Your horse is tired," replied the School-teacher.

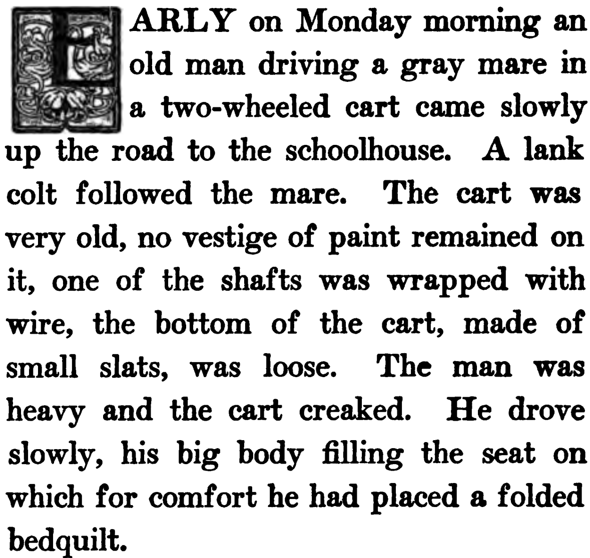
"There's a law against practicin' medicine without a license," said the doctor.

"Your horse is hungry," continued the School-teacher.

The doctor, riding on, replied with an oath.

"You're going to get into trouble," he said.

## CHAPTER XIII



EARLY on Monday morning an old man driving a gray mare in a two-wheeled cart came slowly up the road to the schoolhouse. A lank colt followed the mare. The cart was very old, no vestige of paint remained on it, one of the shafts was wrapped with wire, the bottom of the cart, made of small slats, was loose. The man was heavy and the cart creaked. He drove slowly, his big body filling the seat on which for comfort he had placed a folded bedquilt.

He stopped in the road below the schoolhouse and got slowly out of the creaking cart.

One of his legs was swollen with scrofula, and stiff to the knee. He moved it with difficulty. He left the mare standing in the road, the colt beside her, and came through the grove to the schoolhouse door. The stiff leg gave his heavy body an awkward swing. He supported himself with a stout stick.

When he came finally to the schoolhouse, he sat down on the step before the door. He had evidently moved faster than he was accustomed to do, and he remained for a moment breathing heavily, his big bulk covering the step. Then he got a memorandum book and a pencil out of his pocket. The memorandum book was one of those cheap advertisements of patent medicine which are given away at the country store. It contained a few pages blank on one side and printed with virtues of the medicine on the other. The pencil was a little more pretentious than

the ordinary one. It consisted of a tin case containing a long, thin core of purple lead, the end of which could be made to protrude for writing by pressing the thumb on the opposite end of the case.

The old man turned the leaves of the memorandum book, wetting his forefinger in his mouth, until he found a blank page. Then he laid the book on his knee, pressed the case of the pencil, touched the tip of the lead to his tongue, and laboriously wrote.

"This schoolhouse is closed, by order of P. Hamrick, Trustee."

He tore the leaf out, rose and pinned it to the door.

It was some distance through the grove of ancient trees to the road, and he started to return. In spite of his bulk and his stiff leg he endeavored to hurry. He thrust his stout stick out before him on the path, and swung forward, his weight forc-

ing the point of the stick into the earth. In order that he might not fall, and to find each time a safe place for the stick, he moved with his eyes on the ground.

Presently the end of the stick slipped on a pebble, and he lurched forward. He saved himself from falling by grasping the crook of the stick with both hands, tottered a moment, then he regained his balance and looked up.

The School-teacher stood before him.

The old man remained holding to the stick, breathing with difficulty. The School-teacher was some distance away, motionless in the path. He had evidently seen the man coming from the schoolhouse door, and had stopped there in the path to observe him.

The School-teacher spoke.

"Have you been to the schoolhouse?" he said.

"Yes," replied the man, "I've—I've been out to the schoolhouse."

"To see me?" said the School-teacher.

"Well, no," replied the man, "not exactly to see you."

"To see the school?"

"Well, no, not exactly to see the school." Then he added, "I'm the trustee. I've been looking over the schoolhouse. I think I'll be goin' on."

"Why do you hurry?" said the School-teacher.

"I must be gettin' home," said the old man.

He reached forward with his stick, but again the point of it slipped and he nearly fell.

The School-teacher looked past the man toward the schoolhouse.

"What is that on the door?" he said.

The old man turned around. The leaf from the memorandum book, fastened

with the pin, fluttered on the door, as though it were a living thing struggling to free itself.

"That's a piece of paper," said the old man.

"Who put it there?"

"I did."

"What for?"

"It's a kind of notice."

"A notice to me?"

"A notice about the schoolhouse."

"Is there anything wrong with the schoolhouse?"

"Well," said the old man, "I don't think it's just exactly safe."

"Not safe for the children?"

"Well, no, it mightn't be safe for the children."

"What is wrong with the schoolhouse?" said the School-teacher.

The old man began to talk. "Well," he said, "it's got a good roof. Old Dix

put that roof on. Every one of the clap-boards is planed with a drawin' knife. An' the weatherboardin' is good. It was seasoned weatherboardin'. But the floor might be bad."

"I have mended the floor," replied the School-teacher.

"It ain't so much the floor," continued the old man. "It's the sills. The sills might be rotten."

"I have examined the sills," replied the School-teacher. "The sills are sound."

"Well," said the old man, "fallin' weather's comin' on. I think the school had better stop anyway."

He turned a little and put his stick out on the path into the leaves as though he would go down the hill a shorter way to the road.

The School-teacher read his intent in the moving of the cane.

"You would better stay in the path,"

he said. "If you get out of the path you will fall."

The old man turned back into the path before the School-teacher.

There was come now a certain dogged expression into his face.

"If you want to know," he said, "there's been some complaint about you."

"Who has complained of me?" said the School-teacher.

"Good men have complained."

"What good men?"

"Why, men as good as the minister. Why, men as good as the doctor."

Then he looked out sharp at the School-teacher.

"Ain't that hussy, Yaller Mag, up there with you at Nicholas Parks' house?"

The School-teacher regarded the old man standing before him.

"Do you think this woman ought to be sent away?"

"Yes, I do," replied the old man.

"Then some one ought to tell her to go."

"Yes, they ought."

"It's a difficult thing to do," said the School-teacher.

"To find some one to tell her?"

"Yes," said the School-teacher, "that is it, to find some one to tell her."

"If that's all," said the old man, "I'm goin' home by Nicholas Park's house, that's my shortest way. I'll stop an' tell her myself."

"But have you thought how difficult it will be to tell her?" inquired the School-teacher.

"What's the trouble about tellin' her?"

"Well," replied the School-teacher, his eyes resting on the old man's swollen scrofuletic leg, "the trouble is that the one who goes to tell her ought to be bet-

ter than she is. He ought, himself, to have lived a clean life. . . . Perhaps you have, perhaps you can tell her."

The old man thought that the School-teacher saw something lying on the ground, for he stooped over and his finger moved in the dust of the path. And while he remained thus, the old man hurried along to the road. The mare stood facing in the direction of the way over the mountain by Nicholas Parks' house.

The old man took her by the bridle and turned her around in the road.

Then he climbed slowly into the creaking cart. He looked back when he had got his big bulk on the folded bedquilt. The School-teacher was standing upright where he had passed him in the path. The old man put his hand on the corner of the seat and turned heavily about.

"There's another thing," he said. "I'd

like to know why you're always carryin' that bastard brat around with you."

Then he drove away, but not on the road that crossed the mountain by Nicholas Park's house.

## CHAPTER XIV

LL day long the little boy was with the School-teacher. The child and the dog watched for the man to come out of the forest in the morning. When the dog barked, the little boy would say:

"Nim, see Teacher."

The woman standing before the door watched for the three of them to come out of the forest in the evening. She listened for the laughter, the voices, the barking of the dog. The sense of perfect understanding among the three of them was to her a perpetual wonder. The child had only a few words, the dog had none. How

could the man know so well, what they meant? It was a wonder that she turned about, and at last, out of the deeps of her own feelings, she got an answer that she held to.

"If you love a thing enough, it's goin' to understand you."

The relation of the School-teacher to this tiniest child was also that of his relation to every other one. The sense of it spread throughout the school. This school became a family. What the cheerless home withheld, it gave. No child could have told one what that was.

The teacher understood him, would have been the answer.

The School-teacher required no built-up explanations, he required no justification of one's act by the unfamiliar standards of another, he required no trick, no artifice, no pretending, to get on with.

To the question, "What is he like?" a

little boy had answered, "Why, just like me."

For some time there had been a secret in the school.

The School-teacher had talked with every child apart. The talk had been confidential. The School-teacher had spoken with each one, even the tiniest, as with an equal. He had spoken with him from day to day as the occasion arose. It was the way of this secret to make the child with whom he talked for a time unhappy. But as the School-teacher continued each day to strengthen him, to show him how much he depended on him, and to blow on the embers of his courage, he came at length to carry the secret with equanimity.

On Thursday evening this secret became the common property of all. The School-teacher was going away! There would be no more school!

On this afternoon the School-teacher

had again talked with each child apart, told him that the time of which he had spoken had now come, and called upon him for the evidence of his courage. But, in spite of all, when the hour arrived, the school broke down. It left the little benches and gathered around the School-teacher. For a moment the School-teacher hesitated, before the group of wet faces, then, one by one, he took each child up in his arms, carried him to the window and told him something. Something which he had not told him before. No one, outside of the school, knew exactly what it was. But each child coming from the School-teacher's arms was strengthened, and set out for his home, the tears drying on his sturdy little face. An idea of what this something was, afterwards arose. A little boy had said, "Everybody's a-goin' to live at the School-teacher's house." But he was in

the extremity of illness when he said it, and they thought he spoke in delirium.

It was mid-afternoon when the School-teacher left the schoolhouse. He was accompanied by the two children, Martha and David. The dog Jim went before him and he carried the tiny boy on his shoulder. They went along the road to the river, crossed on the stones and ascended the mountain. The little boy fell asleep, his arms around the School-teacher's neck.

The two children walked beside the man.

For the most part they were silent. Finally they came to the little clearing. The children stopped in the road, and the man went up onto the cabin porch, the little sleeping boy in his arms. The woman at work in the kitchen, hearing the footsteps, came out to the door. When she saw who it was, she was surprised.

"School's out early to-day," she said.

"Yes," replied the School-teacher.

"What's the matter?"

"It's the last day of the school."

"Won't there be any more school?"

"No."

The woman's lips trembled. "Then, then . . ." she said, and she began to cry.

"Mary," said the School-teacher, "have you forgotten what I told you?"

The woman sobbed,

"But it's come so soon."

Then she looked at the little boy sleeping in the School-teacher's arms and the tears streamed down her face.

"Now, what'll I do?" she said. "Now, what'll I do? He'll set there by the door, him an' Jim, an' he'll look for you every morning, an' whenever Jim barks he'll say 'Nim see Teacher,' but he won't never see you."

"Yes," replied the School-teacher, "he will see me again."

"Then you won't be so awful far away?"

"I shall never be very far away from him."

Then he put the sleeping child into the woman's arms.

"Don't wake him," he said, "and don't cry. Remember, Mary, that if he should go with me, then he could not stay with you."

He went down the road, and with the two children beside him, passed on along the path. They went by the spring, with its keg sunk in the earth, and up the mountain to Nicholas Parks' house. There, in the road, they found the woman with the yellow hair, feeding the chickens, a measure of corn in her apron.

"You're back early," she said.

"It's the last day of the school," replied the School-teacher.

The woman's whole body was convulsed. The corn spilled out of her apron. Then she fled along the road, and up the path to the house. At the door she stopped, turned about, and then huddled down by the steps, her apron over her head.

The School-teacher bade the children await him, then he went up the path. He passed by the woman and entered the house. Within the house, he went over to the table by the wall, on which lay a little, worn, broken toy, that had once been a wooden horse, a top whittled out of a spool, a brass ring with its cotton ribbon, a Barlow knife, and little bunches of wild flowers. These he took up, one by one, and put into the bosom of his coat. Then he came out and closed the door. As he passed, the woman put out her hand and touched him. And he stopped. For a moment he stood looking down at the woman sobbing at his feet,

the apron over her head. Then he spoke.

"Margaret," he said, "is this how you will keep your promise to me?"

Then he went down the path, and, accompanied by the two children, followed the road along the ridge to the little path descending the mountain toward the mill. As the School-teacher walked he endeavored to strengthen and encourage the two children. He bade them remember what he had said, and not to cry. They managed not to cry when he left them at the point where the path entered the road below. But when he was gone out of their sight and hearing, in the direction of the schoolhouse, they held to each other and wept.

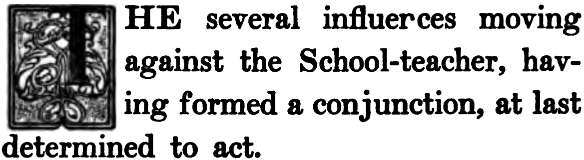
They stood for a long time, there, in tears, holding to one another. Then they heard sounds approaching and hid themselves. Two men rode past in the direction of the schoolhouse. One of them car-

ried a rifle across the saddle before him.

A great fear fell on the two children and they followed at a distance. They saw the two men dismount before the school-house, knock on the door and enter. After a while they came out with the School-teacher.

They got on their horses and, with the School-teacher walking between them, set out along the road in the direction of the town.

## CHAPTER XV



HE several influerces moving against the School-teacher, having formed a conjunction, at last determined to act.

On Wednesday night, in the church at the county seat, two persons attended the minister's mid-weekly meeting, who were not members of the congregation. These two persons, the sheriff and the doctor, sat on the last bench nearest the door. When the service was concluded and the congregation withdrew, these two persons remained with the minister. The three of them moved up to the table before the altar, where there was a small oil lamp.

They remained for a long time in conference around this table.

It seemed that the minister's efforts to get rid of the School-teacher by prevailing on the trustee to close the schoolhouse, had not succeeded.

The school went on in spite of the notice.

And now some more effective measures must be found. The sheriff, when the minister informed him of the occupancy of Nicholas Parks' estate by this stranger, had caused a proceeding to be instituted in the circuit court, and had obtained an order restraining any one from entering on the lands of Nicholas Parks until the right of the state thereto could be determined. This order had been posted on the door of Nicholas Parks' house. But this order, like the one on the door of the schoolhouse, the stranger had not regarded.

It was evident that a firmer step must be taken.

Two plans were available. As the School-teacher had continued to remain on Nicholas Parks' lands after the restraining order had been posted on the door, the sheriff could apply to the circuit judge for a *rule* and cause him to be brought before the court and imprisoned for contempt. The second plan was for the doctor to go before a justice of the peace and take out a warrant against the School-teacher charging him with practicing medicine without a license.

These two plans were now under discussion in the empty, dimly lighted church.

The little hand oil lamps had been put out except one on a wooden bracket by the door, and the one smoking on the table before the altar. The silence, the empty

church, or something in the atmosphere of the place, caused the men to draw together and to discuss the matter in undertones.

The minister sat with his back to the altar.

On the bench beside him was his hat containing the money which he had collected from the congregation at the close of the service. On either side were the doctor and the sheriff. The latter's big hump now prominent as he leaned over the table. The minister led the discussion, and they remained for some time thus, in conference. The minister's defective eye, batting, the doctor's crooked arm on the table, and the sheriff's back throwing its humped shadow against the wall.

Finally it was determined that the sheriff should go before the court on Thursday and obtain the *rule* upon which the School-teacher could be arrested and

brought down out of the mountain. At the same time the doctor should take out his warrant before the justice of the peace, so it might be available in case the circuit judge should not commit the School-teacher upon the proceeding for contempt.

This plan having been settled upon, it became necessary to consider how the arrest should be made.

The sheriff could send his deputy, who served legal papers in the county, but the deputy had never seen the School-teacher and did not know him. And, besides this, if the School-teacher resisted, and those about him should come to his support, there might be considerable trouble to take him. One man conducting a prisoner through the mountains in the night might easily be compelled to release him. Moreover, the deputy, knowing the danger of making an arrest in the mountain dis-

tricts, could not be got to go up alone.

A discussion of who should be found to assist the deputy then arose. No one could be thought of except Jonas Black, a worthless hanger-on about the village. This man was the son of Jerry Black, whose eye the School-teacher had cured.

He had been the sheriff's driver on the occasion of that official's interview with the School-teacher. He was familiar with the mountains, and it was thought less likely to be resisted, since he was one of the mountain people. He knew the School-teacher. It was said that for a time he had hung about him, hoping to be employed to go from house to house and collect the School-teacher's salary, until he discovered to his astonishment, that this stranger was charging nothing for his service.

The sheriff rose and went out into the village to seek this man, while the others

awaited his return. The sheriff was not gone very long. He presently entered the church with another. This man had a curious deep red birthmark covering the entire side of his face. He came up the church aisle behind the sheriff, stepping softly and glancing furtively about him. He slipped into a seat before the table facing the altar, and remained there shifting his hat in his fingers.

The sheriff took his place at the table.

"I found Jonas," he said.

The minister looked across the table at the man.

"Will you go?" he inquired.

"Yes, I'll go," replied the man, "if I git paid enough for it."

"How much do you want?" said the minister.

"Well," replied the man, "it ought to be worth about five dollars."

The three men at the table protested.

The sum was excessive. The sheriff would provide a horse. The journey would not take longer than one night. Besides, there was no way by which the fees of a deputy, for such service, could be made to aggregate that sum. The man persisted, and, while the sheriff considered how the sum allowed under the law could be augmented, the minister bargained. The man finally reduced his demand to three dollars. And the sheriff, seeing now a plan by which an additional charge could be officially added, said:

"There are a couple of bad characters in the jail, held to the grand jury for breaking into a store. They may try to give me some trouble. Now, if you would watch the jail for a few nights, I might manage to get that fee for you."

"Well," replied the man, "I'd sorter keep an eye on the jail for a night or two. I wouldn't mind doin' that. But I won't

wait for my money. I won't take it in costs."

"How soon will you want it?" inquired the sheriff.

"Right now," said the man.

"I couldn't give it to you to-night," replied the sheriff.

The man got up.

"Then I won't go," he said.

An idea occurred to the minister. He turned around, picked up his hat, containing the recent collection, and placed it on the table. He whispered a moment to the others, then he spoke to the man.

"I'll pay you the money," he said.

He began to count it out on the table. The money from the collection was in small silver coins and he selected the largest of them. He leaned over the table, his fingers in the hat, his defective eye close to the lamp.

And the man standing before the altar,

one half of his face in the shadow, one half discolored by the crimson birthmark dimly in the light, received the money. Two dollars and sixty cents in ten-cent pieces, three five-cent pieces, and one twenty-five cent piece.

## CHAPTER XVI

HEY took the School-teacher into the courthouse early in the morning.

The county seat of this mountain county was nothing more than a village, lying in the foothills. The courthouse stood in a grove of oak trees, in the middle of the village. It was a two-story structure. On the ground floor was the jail in the custody of the sheriff.

The second floor was the courthouse.

This second story was entered exclusively from without. Broad stone steps led up to a portico, on which stood round, plaster-covered pillars supporting the

projecting roof. On either side, entering between these pillars, were the offices of the county and circuit clerks. Beyond was the court room filled with benches. A portion of this room at the farther end was separated from the benches by a railing. Within it were chairs and two tables for attorneys, a desk for the clerk, and a raised platform, ascended by steps on either side, for the judge.

It was the custom of the judges traveling on these mountain circuits to open court as early as eight o'clock in the morning, and before that, if they were come into the court room, to hear informally motions and the like.

When they brought the School-teacher into the courthouse, the sheriff, the doctor, the minister, the old trustee who had ridden down out of the mountains in his cart, were already there.

The deputy and Jonas led the School-

teacher inside the railing. Then they sat down. The School-teacher remained standing.

The hearing before the circuit judge followed the informal custom of these mountain circuits.

The School-teacher made no defense.

He stood before the bench. The early sunlight of the morning, entering through the high windows, fell on his face, on his soft brown hair, on his deep gray-blue eyes, on his clothing covered with the dust of the road.

The judge heard the oral evidence in open court. He inquired into the service of the restraining order, and the prisoner's subsequent disregard of it. But he was not convinced. The prisoner's conduct seemed inconsistent with an intent to resist the State's title to these lands. Moreover, the silence, the calm demeanor, the strange personality of the

prisoner, profoundly impressed him. He felt that some ulterior motive lay behind the cover of this accusation.

At this moment a woman appeared at the door of the courthouse and sent in a note to the judge. This note was sealed in an envelope and addressed in a fine hand. The judge opened it at once. When he had read it, he sat for some time looking down at the prisoner. He did not believe in dreams; but the insistence of his wife impressed him.

He turned to the sheriff, and inquired if there was a man in the courtroom who knew anything about the prisoner.

The sheriff indicated the others near him.

"Yes, Your Honor," he replied, "the minister, the school trustee of that district, and the doctor here, all know about him. He seems to have made himself generally troublesome to the community. I believe

the justice of the peace had issued a warrant against him for practicing medicine without a license."

When the circuit judge heard of this action of the justice, he ordered the School-teacher to be taken before that official. He said that if the justice of the peace has issued a warrant antedating the *rule,* he would yield to him the custody of the prisoner.

They took the School-teacher out of the courthouse and across the village street to the office of the justice of the peace.

The justice was greatly pleased when the deputy and Jonas came in with the prisoner. A good many stories had drifted down from the mountains to him concerning the miraculous cures which this man had effected, and he was anxious to see him. He removed his spectacles, put them carefully into a tin case, set his feet on

the rounds of a chair and, after having thus made himself comfortable, he requested the School-teacher to explain to him in detail, exactly how he had accomplished the marvels of which he had heard.

The School-teacher did not reply.

He remained standing as he had stood before the circuit judge. His head lifted. The features of his face unmoving. His deep gray-blue eyes filled with a tranquil, melancholy light.

When the justice of the peace saw that his curiosity was not likely to be gratified, he, at once, sent the prisoner back to the circuit judge. He took this act of the judge to be a delicate courtesy, a tender regard for the jurisdictional rights of an inferior tribunal, and he was not to be outdone. In several instances the circuit judge had recently curtailed his jurisdiction, and he had been smarting under it. This act was a friendly over-

ture, and he hastened to evidence his appreciation of it.

He returned the prisoner, saying that as his warrant had not been served, his jurisdiction had not attached, and the prisoner was exclusively in the custody of the circuit court. Moreover, that he would hold his warrant in abeyance until the circuit court had disposed of the case.

When the School-teacher came again before the circuit judge, that official no longer hesitated to indicate his opinion. He said that the prisoner did not seem disposed to contest the state's title to these lands, that he appeared to have taken up his residence in Nicholas Parks' house anterior to the date of the order, and upon some verbal direction of the decedent; that while there was here perhaps a technical contempt, he was not certain that it was intended, and consequently that he was disposed to dismiss the prisoner.

The minister, the sheriff, the doctor, the old school trustee, under this informal procedure, came forward with a protest. They said that the School-teacher was a person dangerous to the commuity; that he had set himself against the authority of the state in disregarding the order of the court; that he had set himself against the authority of the county by disregarding the notice placed on the schoolhouse door; that he had openly violated the law in practicing medicine without a license; that he harbored immoral persons, and encouraged the children in acts of irreverence.

The judge endeavored to compromise with this opposition. He said that he would reprimand the prisoner, suspend sentence and release him on his own recognizance.

The general protest now took on a definite form. The minister spoke for the others. He was little accustomed to the

diplomacy of the advocate and he thinly disguised the threat that was the tenor of this speech. He said that one in the position of a circuit judge ought to sustain the better elements of the community in their efforts to get rid of an undesirable person; that the will of the people was not lightly to be disregarded; that the object of making offices elective was that one who refused to consider what the people desired might be replaced by another; and the like.

The judge came up presently for reelection. It was notice to him that the powerful elements which these protesting persons represented would hold him to account. The strength of his political party lay in these mountain counties. He required the support of these elements. And he especially feared a sectarian sentiment against him. He knew the danger of such a sentiment; and how little, once

on its way, explanations would avail. This covert threat angered the judge, but he feared to resist it. He dipped his pen into the inkpot before him, and wrote an order committing the prisoner to the county jail. Then he handed it down to the sheriff.

The persons standing about the sheriff drew near to him and read the order. The minister and the school trustee objected to something in the body of the writing, and the sheriff went with them to the judge.

They pointed out that the order directed the commitment of the "School-teacher of Hickory Mountain District," that this term was incorrect, that the prisoner had not been employed by the trustees, that he was not the School-teacher of Hickory Mountain District, and that the order ought not so to designate him.

But the judge, smarting under the lash that had been laid on him, was in no mood to receive a further dictation.

He refused to change what he had written.

## CHAPTER XVII

HE several persons who had forced the judge to commit the School-teacher to the county jail, having gone down from the courthouse, remained throughout the day in conference. It was evident that the circuit judge had acted against his own inclination, and that he could not be depended upon to hold the prisoner in custody. Some other method for ridding the community of this undesirable person must be found. Finally, after long reflection, they hit upon a plan.

Night descended.

In the village saloon, beyond the grove

of oak trees behind the courthouse, the man who had received the money from the minister sat playing at cards. A rifle stood in the corner behind him. From time to time he arose, took up the rifle and went to the door. Keeping thus, in his fashion, an agreement which the sheriff had forgotten.

The night advanced.

At twelve o'clock the sheriff went down into the jail. He carefully unfastened the door opening into the grove of oak trees. Then he came along the corridor to the one iron cage that the jail contained. The door to this cage he likewise carefully unlocked. On a bedtick filled with straw, two men, convicted of larceny, were apparently asleep beside this door. On a bench against the wall behind them sat the School-teacher. His hat with its little crimson feather lay beside him. He sat unmoving, looking at something in

his hand. When he observed the sheriff, he put the thing which he held in his hand back into the bosom of his coat. It was the broken toy horse which the little boy had given him. The sheriff beckoned with his finger.

The School-teacher lifted his head and looked at the man, but he did not move from his place against the wall.

The sheriff stepped delicately past the men, whom he believed to be asleep, and approached the School-teacher.

"The door's open," he said, "you can get out of the county before it's daylight."

The School-teacher did not reply, and the sheriff went noiselessly out. Presently the two men got up from their pretended sleep and slipped out of the cage. The School-teacher rose and spoke to them. But they crept down the corridor. He followed. He came upon them as they opened the door leading out of the

jail into the grove, stepped between them in the door and thrust them back. The act saved the men's lives, but it cost the School-teacher his own.

There was the flash of a rifle from the saloon beyond the oak trees, and the School-teacher fell forward, his arms outstretched.

. . . . .

In the evening some women and children from the mountains came to the circuit judge and asked him for the body of the School-teacher. He gave it to them, and at night they took it away.

An ox, led by a little boy, bore the body, and women walking beside it supported it with their hands.

They traveled back into the mountains.

And at daybreak they laid the body in a grave which they had made between the two great hickories on the ridge beyond Nicholas Parks' house. They lined the

grave with bright-colored leaves, and wrapped the body in that piece of linen which the School-teacher had bade the miller keep for him until he should need it. The hands of women and children filled the grave with earth. Then they went away down the mountain, toward the mill, leaving a woman crouched beside the grave. Her apron covering her yellow hair. Her body rocking.

It was morning.

They went down the mountain, the boy and the ox, the little girl, the two remaining women—one of them carrying a tiny sleeping boy wrapped in a shawl, a dog beside her.

On a bench of the mountain below, where a tree, uprooted by the wind, lay with its broken trunk pointing toward the ridge, they stopped and looked back. As they looked, the sun arose, a disc of gold between the two great hickories.

With a wild barking, the dog leaped onto the fallen trunk, ran out to the projecting end of it, and stood there looking toward the sun.

The tiny boy moved in his mother's arms.

"Nim see Teacher," he said.

(1)

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