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THE STUMBLING SHEPHERD

By H. A. CODY

AUTHOR OF "THE KING'S ARROW," "THE TRAIL OF THE GOLDEN HORN," "THE TOUCH OF ABNER," ETC., ETC.

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"That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

To all who have found the Light;
To all who see the Light;
And to all who are groping through
the mists toward the Light
This Book
Is Affectionately Dedicated.

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE NIGHT CALL	3
II. AFTER MANY YEARS	9
III. THE STRUGGLE	18
IV. THE STRENGTH OF LOVE	25
V. UNDER COVER OF NIGHT	32
VI. A MORNING CALL	42
VII. HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE	51
VIII. A BRUTE OF A MAN	59
IX. THE BISHOP'S LETTER	69
X. BY THE WAYSIDE	78
XI. A DAY'S OUTING	87
XII. THE PARSON'S DELEMMA	95
XIII. COMPANY FOR TEA	104
XIV. REVISING VALUES	112
XV. THE STREET PREACHER	121
XVI. A CHILD IN THE MIDST	130
XVII. STARTLING NEWS	137
XVIII. CROWDING GROWTH	145
XIX. THE TOAD AND THE EAGLE	153
XX. A MOTHERLY SOUL	163
XXI. JIMMY'S THREAT	171
XXII. WITHIN THE LITTLE ROOM	180
XXIII. UPON THE LAKE	189
XXIV. "ANT HANNER"	198
XXV. DESPAIR	208
XXVI. NIGHT AND STORM	218
XXVII. "CRAZY" PAUL	227
XXVIII. GOOD NEWS	237
XXIX. REVENGE	247
XXX. WAITING	256
XXXI. RETRIBUTION	266
XXXII. A MODERN MIRACLE	274
XXXIII. THE BISHOP	282
XXXIV. THE WEDDING	293

THE STUMBLING SHEPHERD

CHAPTER I

THE NIGHT CALL

His trouble seemed to begin the evening he found that book out of its place. It startled him as he sat before the bright wood-fire. He had not noticed it at first, so intent was he upon watching the flames and enjoying the big comfortable chair after his long drive. But as his eyes turned at length to his beloved books, and he noticed that one of them was out of its usual position, he rose to his feet and stepped swiftly forward.

The other volumes stood like perfectly-trained soldiers on dress-parade. They were a goodly collection, chosen through long years with considerable care. Writings of the early Fathers of the Church in their sombre bindings occupied the lowest shelf. Above them, rank upon rank, were marshalled Church histories, ancient, modern, and medieval, with homiletics, apologetics, dogmatics, and liturgics. There was nothing light or frivolous in the entire array. They were all grim and stern weapons in the armory of him whose hands had placed them there, and whose eyes had studied their pages with the master's keen interest and delight.

But one was askew, and the man wondered as he pushed it back until it was in line with its companions. He was worried.

"I am getting careless. I must have left it that way while preparing my sermon last night. I am certain that no one else here would have occasion to use my Greek dictionary. Yes, I must have done it myself. It is most unusual."

He glanced about the room as if to find any other sign of his carelessness. But everything in that study was in its proper place. All the articles on his writing-table were arranged according to his liking. Paper, pens and ink were in mathematical order. The few books on the centre-table were lying just as he had left them. Nothing could be observed to cause him the least worry. He gave a sigh of relief as he once again sat down before the fire. The tongs and poker immediately attracted his attention. Rachel must have moved them while lighting the fire. When he had straightened them up he felt more satisfied. But not entirely, for the thought of that book was still in his mind, and several times his brow wrinkled in annoyance.

Complete system and order were vital factors to the Reverend Daniel Landrose, Rector of Green Mount. They formed part of his nature, and after forty years in the Ministry they were most deeply rooted.

"Order is one of God's great laws," he always argued. "He delights in it, and sets us the example. If the inanimate things around us obey His behest, should not we who are made in His image?"

And this idea he applied not only to his own life but to his dealings with the members of his flock, and in his instructions concerning the one great Cause in which he was so earnestly engaged.

At the sound of a small bell he left the fire and went to the dining-room. The table was neatly set, and his eyes shone with pleasurable anticipation at the supper his housekeeper had prepared.

"This is very nice," he praised, after he had bent his head in a silent grace and taken his seat at the table. "It is good of you, Rachel, to light that fire for me in the study. It is unusually raw for this time of the year, and I was quite chilled after my long drive."

A slight smile of amusement overspread the woman's face at these words of commendation. They were most familiar to her, as she had heard them so often before. There had not been an evening for months past that she had not had the fire lighted for him upon his return home. She always heard him as he drove into the stable, and knew almost to the minute when he would enter the house after he had stabled his horse. It was his systematic habit of years.

As the parson ate his supper, Rachel busied herself in the kitchen, coming in occasionally to attend to his wants.

"By the way, Rachel," he said as she came back for the third time, "was anybody in the study to-day besides yourself?"

"Why, no, sir, not to my knowledge. What makes you think there was?"

"Because I found one of my books, my Greek dictionary, to be more exact, removed from its accustomed place. Are you

sure you did not do it?"

Rachel thought for a minute, and then her face brightened to a smile as she noticed the worried expression in the parson's eyes and surmised its meaning.

"I believe I did move several of those books this morning," she at length acknowledged.

"You did!" There was an eagerness in the old man's voice, and the anxious look vanished. "Are you sure?"

"I am, sir. I was chasing a moth and it alighted on top of one of those books, and I had to take down several before I could catch it. I may have left one somewhat out of place."

Parson Dan gave a deep sigh of relief as he folded his napkin and placed it in its ring.

"You have lifted a weight from my mind, Rachel. Forgetfulness in little things has always given me much worry, as you well know. It not only tells of negligence, but it is sometimes a sign of mental decay. I would not like to think that the latter condition applies to me. Although I have been a long time in the Ministry I feel physically as strong as ever. I also believe that my mental faculties are unimpaired, and, in fact, are in their prime. I have heard that old men are not wanted in the Ministry, and that only young men can do effective work. That is wrong. I am sure that I can give better service to-day than forty years ago. Surely my long experience, knowledge and study should far outweigh the advantages of youth about which so many prate. I never had the least doubt until I found that book partly removed from its place. I then feared that I had been laboring under a delusion, and that mental decay had already set in. Your explanation has lifted a weight from my mind. I was not forgetful, after all."

"If you were not, then I am," Rachel replied. "I have forgotten to deliver the message which came for you this evening. How stupid of me! You are wanted at the hotel as soon as possible. A sick woman is anxious to see you."

"At the hotel!" the parson exclaimed in surprise. "I did not know it was open yet for visitors, as it is too early for them to come here."

"I know it is, but an old woman and her daughter came there a few days ago. Mrs. Wickham told me about them when she brought the message. Susie Wickham is working at the hotel, so she told her mother about the old woman."

"What is her name, Rachel?"

"I cannot remember, although Mrs. Wickham told me. I am getting very forgetful."

"Never mind about her name, Rachel. I suppose it wouldn't mean anything to me if I did hear it. What did Susie say about her? I like to be somewhat prepared when I call upon a stranger."

"She is very odd and worries her grand-daughter almost to death, so Susie said. Until she was taken suddenly ill yesterday, she asked many questions about this parish. She seems greatly interested in you, too."

"In me!" the parson gasped. "Why should she be interested in me? What did she want to know about an old parson?"

"How long you have been here, and what you look like."

"Ho, ho! She must think I am a curiosity. Perhaps that is why she wishes to see me. Does she expect to find me a dried up fossil or a curio of some sort such as tourists are always seeking? Is it possible that my long years here have made me a special attraction? I have half a mind not to go."

"But she is very ill now, so Mrs. Wickham said," Rachel reminded. "Our own doctor has been to see her, and another has been up from the city for special consultation. She is very wealthy, so Susie told her mother."

"Well, if she is ill it is my duty to go, Rachel. I have never refused such a request yet, and I am too old to begin now. But I do not like to go merely to satisfy a morbid curiosity."

The clergyman rose slowly from the table, and Rachel noticed that he was very weary.

"It is too bad that you have to go out again to-night, sir."

"Do not say that, Rachel. Although I am somewhat tired, and the study is very alluring, yet I must let nothing interfere with my duty. I cannot consider anything 'too bad' in my Master's service. I have learned through long years of experience that there is a purpose in everything. What we consider a nuisance, or 'too bad' as you say, often turns out for the best. I have never known it to fail yet, and I am sure it will not to-night."

Rachel helped him on with his overcoat and handed him his cane. After she had closed the door behind him, she went back into the dining-room and began to clear off the table. She was in a thoughtful mood and twice she paused in her work.

"I wonder how much longer that good man can go on like this?" she asked herself. "He has aged greatly during the last year, and he tires so easily. He never spares himself, but is at the beck and call of every one. And yet his people are not satisfied, but want a young man. They are only waiting for some excuse to get rid of him. He knows nothing about this, and it will almost break his heart when he does hear. Poor man! I pity him."

CHAPTER II

AFTER MANY YEARS

The Maples was situated upon a gentle elevation overlooking the broad and noble Saint John River. It was one in a chain of hotels about to be built for tourists during the summer months. Its location was ideal. Excellent boating and bathing, trout fishing in the many lakes and brooks back in the hills, and an expansive golf course which had been laid out brought people of wealth to the place. Three years had passed since the building had been opened, and the prospects for this season were better than ever.

Parson Dan looked upon the hotel as a menace to his work in the community. The presence of so many strangers at Green Mount proved most disturbing. The seclusion of the village as he had known it for so many years was gone. The indifference of most of the people to the sacredness of the Day of Rest was hard for him to endure. Many of his flock, especially the young, were strongly affected and influenced by the new and careless mode of living, and the attendance at the church services was steadily declining. He was no longer able to hold his people together as in former days. Although he tried his best to win the wandering ones back during the winter months, he met with but scanty success. And now another summer was here when more harm would be done.

He sighed as he thought of all this while walking along the road through a fine grove of maples from which the hotel had received its name. The place was almost deserted now, but soon it would be teeming with life, with the quietness and mystic charm gone. He felt unusually weary and discouraged this night. He had worked hard through long years, but all his efforts now seemed in vain. The changing conditions of the parish made his task more difficult, and he did not feel equal to the burden of responsibility. Perhaps he should retire and allow another to take his place, a young man who would be more in touch with modern thought and ways.

These gloomy ideas vanished, however, as he reached the hotel and was ushered by Susie Wickham up a winding stairway. The girl had been awaiting his arrival with considerable interest. She longed to know more about the sick woman and her grand-daughter, and why the former had asked so many questions about the Rector of Green Mount.

"Are you working here all the time, Susie?" Mr. Landrose asked as he followed her slowly up the stairs.

"I have been on night duty, sir, since the old woman took sick," the girl replied. "She needs a lot of attention, and I seem to be the only one who can suit her. She won't have anyone else."

"That speaks well for you, Susie. You were always very capable."

"Oh, it's not that, sir, that makes her want me. It's because I know so much about this place, and can answer most of her questions. Until she took to her bed she was a terrible nuisance."

Susie did not like to confess that nearly all of the invalid's questions had been about the clergyman himself and his work in the parish. But she had told her mother, and they had often discussed it together. So now with the rector's arrival, she was hoping to learn something to satisfy her steadily-increasing curiosity.

"This is the room," she whispered, when they had ascended the stairs and walked a short distance along the hallway and stopped at one of the doors.

Giving a gentle tap, the door was almost immediately opened by a young woman who evidently had been waiting for them.

"Here he is at last, Miss," Susie announced. "I thought he would never come."

"And so did I," was the low reply. "Granny is very impatient. Come in, Mr. Landrose," she invited. "Thank you, Susie. You may go now."

This dismissal was not altogether to Susie's liking. She was very anxious to learn more about the sick woman and her grand-daughter. That there was some mystery connected with their presence at the hotel she felt certain. She stood for a few minutes outside the door hoping to hear something of importance. She even listened for a while at the key-hole. But hearing nothing, she reluctantly left and went downstairs.

Parson Dan found himself in a comfortably-furnished room. A large shaded lamp, suspended from the ceiling, cast its soft glow around the room. Pictures adorned the walls, while a profusion of photographs, mostly of young people, were displayed on the mantelpiece over the fireplace. All this the parson noted in one swift glance while the girl was dismissing the maid. Then when she stood before him, erect and defiant, he became somewhat embarrassed. He never felt at ease in the presence of young women, notwithstanding his long years in the Ministry. They always seemed to him to be creatures apart from his world of knowledge and experience. With men and elderly women he was on more familiar ground, and felt perfectly at home. He could enter readily into conversation with them, being more in harmony with their thoughts and feelings. But with the young women it was different. He had often endeavored to overcome his diffidence when in their presence, but all in vain. Long ago he had come to the conclusion that he did not understand them and that they did not understand him.

And he felt this now more than ever before as he stood there, hat in hand, waiting for the girl to speak. He would have been more than human had his heart not quickened at the fascinating picture she presented with the light falling upon her dark wavy hair, and touching with a soft gentle radiance her face of more than ordinary beauty. Her present attitude of defiance seemed foreign and unnatural to her. Such eyes as she possessed were intended to sparkle with joy and animation, and those compressed lips were made to part in happy wreathing smiles. What was the cause of her hostile attitude toward him? he wondered. And as he waited those lips parted.

"You have come to see my grandmother, I suppose, Mr. Landrose?"

Her voice was low and musical, but icily formal.

"She sent for me, I understand," the clergyman replied.

"This way, please," and the girl moved toward a door on the right.

She paused, however, when part way across the room, and turned to the clergyman.

"Granny is very low," she whispered. "I am sure she is dying. You must be very careful not to overtax—"

"Doris, Doris," a wailing voice interrupted from the adjoining room.

"Yes, Granny," the girl replied, hurrying forward. "What is it?"

"What are you talking so much about, Doris? Has Mr. Landrose come? He is so late."

"He is here now, Granny, so don't worry."

Parson Dan was again the parish priest, intent only upon ministering to the sick woman. Intuitively his hand moved to his pocket for his "Pastor In Parochia", the little manual of prayers and comforting words of Scripture which for years had been his constant companion. At once an expression of consternation passed over his face. The book was not there! Forgotten was everything else as he tried to think what had become of it. He had used it that very afternoon while praying by the side of bed-ridden old Mrs. Brown. He must have left it there. What carelessness! His mind turned to that misplaced book in his study. Had Rachel really moved it? Perhaps he had left it that way himself. Was this second lapse of memory, then, another proof of his failing mental powers?

These thoughts passed through his mind with lightning rapidity as he stood just outside the bed-room. How could he minister to the sick woman without his manual of devotions? He had never done so before, and how could he do it now? He was groping for some way out of his perplexity when he felt a light touch upon his arm. He started from his reverie and looked absent-mindedly at the girl.

"Granny is waiting for you, sir," she reminded, wondering somewhat at the clergyman's peculiar manner.

"Excuse me," he apologized, "but I have forgotten my 'Pastor In Parochia.' Have you a Prayer Book? It will have to do instead."

"Granny has one. I shall get it for you."

With a sigh of relief, Parson Dan followed his fair guide. As he entered the little chamber his eyes rested at once upon the white and shrunken face of the sick woman. Her hair, too, was white, as white as the pillow upon which her head

reposed. Her wide staring eyes were turned toward the door in a mute appeal. Seeing the clergyman, she made a faint effort to rise, but sank back again exhausted.

"You must not do that, Granny," the girl reproved. "You are too weak."

"But I want to see him, Doris. Is it really Mr. Landrose? Are you sure. My sight is poor. What is the matter with the light?"

"Hush, hush, dear. You must not talk so much. Yes, it is Mr. Landrose, and he will have prayers with you."

"Oh, I am so glad. You can go now, Doris, for I wish to see him alone. You need some fresh air. But mind, do not stay too long."

The girl, however, hesitated. But seeing that the invalid was becoming agitated, she did as she was ordered. The sick woman listened with strained attention, and when at last she heard the outer door close, she turned her eyes full upon the clergyman's face.

"Daniel, don't you know me?"

"Startled beyond measure, Parson Dan took a quick step forward and peered down keenly upon the woman lying before him.

"Martha!" He merely gasped the word, so great was his agitation.

"Ah, you know me now. I have changed greatly, and so have you."

Taking her thin outstretched hand in his, the clergyman knelt by her side. Emotions which had been hidden in his heart for years were strongly stirred, and memories of other days came in like a flooding tide.

"And you forgive me, Daniel?" the woman asked in a low voice.

"Yes, yes, I forgave you long ago. But what are you doing here, Martha?"

"I came to be near you, and to look upon your face once more before I die."

"Why, I thought you had forgotten all about me."

"No, no. You have been in my mind ever since that last—"

She ceased abruptly, and a slight expression of fear came into her eyes.

"Daniel, I am a great sinner. Can I ever hope for forgiveness?"

"Certainly. The Lord is ever ready to forgive. He can save even to the uttermost."

"But will He, do you think?"

"I am sure of it."

"Why, then, doesn't the Church forgive me? Why has it hounded me for so many years?"

"In what way?"

"Don't you know? Wasn't I excommunicated by the Bishop? Didn't you and all the other clergymen receive orders not to give me the Holy Communion?"

"Yes, yes, Martha, I remember now. I had almost forgotten."

"But I have never forgotten. I did wrong, I admit, in divorcing my first husband and marrying another man whose wife was living. Oh, my life has been a terrible failure, and the Church will not help me now."

"Have you ever asked to be forgiven, Martha? I am sure that the Bishop would be willing to consider your request."

"No, I have never asked him."

"Why not do it, then?"

"It is too late, Daniel. I am a dying woman, and have but a short time to live."

"Suppose I write to the Bishop on your behalf?"

"The time is too short, I tell you, and I want the Communion now. Will you give it to me?"

The clergyman started at these words, and his face turned pale. This the woman noticed, and again made an effort to rise.

"Daniel! Daniel!" she cried. "Don't refuse me! For old times' sake, for Martha Benson's sake, do not deny my dying request!"

Parson Dan was in a great quandary. He rose to his feet and stood looking down upon the troubled woman. The years vanished and they were both together again, dreaming and planning of the future. How fair Martha Benson was then, and what love had filled their hearts. He had often thought of this during the years of his Ministry, but the vision had never been so real as now. And this was Martha lying before him. How could he refuse her dying request? But what would the Bishop say should he give her the Communion? Would he be true to his sacred Office? A spirit of rebellion welled suddenly up in his heart. Why should he not give this woman the Communion? What right had he to refuse? Christ was always merciful when on earth to the sinning ones who repented. But what about the Church's command? The perspiration came out upon his forehead as he stood there fighting his lone battle.

"Daniel, will you do it?"

The weak voice aroused him. How white and frail Martha looked. Suppose she should die while thus pleading with him? Could he ever forgive himself?

"For my sake, Daniel, won't you do it? For the love that you once had for me. Give me the Journey Food."

"Martha, I must think this over. I shall go home now, and come again with my answer."

"Don't go! Don't!"

"But I must. If I give you the Communion, I shall need my robes and the sacred vessels. I shall return as soon as possible."

He turned abruptly and left the room. Following him was the sound of the invalid's voice, weakly pleading for him to make haste.

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE

When once outside the hotel Parson Dan regained his former self-possession. The night air cooled his hot brow, enabling him to think more calmly. He then realized the full force of the temptation that had come to him, and how he had almost given way to the pleading of the sick woman. Why had he been so weak? he asked himself. Not for a second should he have hesitated in the line of rectitude. Martha had been excommunicated. The Church had given the order, and it was his duty to obey. All through his long Ministry not a shadow of a doubt concerning the rightness of the Church had ever entered his mind. His trust had been complete. She was the body of Christ, and when she spoke through the Apostolic line of Bishops it was with divine authority. This had always been a great comfort and a tower of strength in his daily tasks.

As he walked slowly along the road this night he did not feel altogether contented. His former trust was not so strong now. That doubt which had come to him while standing by Martha's side was subtly affecting his soul. It came to him again. Was it right for the Church to forbid a dying woman the Holy Communion, no matter how great had been her sin? He tried to banish the idea, to force himself to feel that the Church was right in what she did. But the more he reasoned so much more the doubt grew.

Pausing beneath a large tree, he took off his hat and wiped his brow upon which beads of perspiration had again gathered. He was fighting his fierce battle alone there in the darkness with silence all around him.

"God help me!" he murmured. "What am I to do? How can I refuse to give Martha the Journey Food? And yet I must be true to the vows I took at my ordination. I must obey the Bishop."

And as he stood there, two young people, a man and a woman, came toward him, walking slowly side by side. Their voices were low, and so intent were they with their talk that they did not notice the dim silent form beneath the tree until they were almost at his side. Then they gave a slight start and quickened their steps toward the hotel. At length they paused and looked back, but the clergyman was no longer visible.

"It must be Mr. Landrose," the girl whispered. "He is the man I was telling you about. I wonder why he is standing there, John?"

"Planning, no doubt, how he is going to manage you, Doris," was the laughing reply. "He will have some job ahead of him, if I am not mistaken."

"Indeed he will if he agrees to Granny's crazy plan. I can't understand her at all. She has talked so much to me about that old clergyman that I almost hate him. I found it hard to be civil to him when he came to see Granny to-night."

"But you must be civil, Doris. There is a great deal at stake, remember. If you annoy the old fellow, it is hard to tell what might happen. Get on the good side of him, and be extra nice until we have tried out our scheme. If it works, as I think it will, he will be only too glad to get you off his hands in a short time."

"I shall do the best I can, John. But I am sure it is going to be most difficult as I have taken such a strong dislike to him already."

Leaving the dark shade of the tree, Mr. Landrose again moved homeward, utterly unconscious that he was the subject of the earnest conversation but a short distance away. He had hardly noticed the young people as they passed, so engrossed was he with his own worry. And this worry instead of lessening, increased. He could not get Martha out of his mind. No matter how much he thought about his duty, a vision of her as he had known her years before would return clearer than ever.

In the midst of this perplexity he came to the store at the corner of the main highway and the road leading to the hotel. The storekeeper's house was nearby, and from the open window came the sound of a gramophone. At first the clergyman paid little heed to the music so intent was he with his serious thoughts. But presently he stopped abruptly as a singer's voice welled forth in the opening verse of a familiar hymn.

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay

In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away
Far off from the gates of gold;
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the Shepherd's tender care."

Never before had Mr. Landrose been so stirred by any words. He had always disapproved of hymns of this nature, considering them too sentimental and savoring of revival meetings. He favored the dignified hymns, especially the ones with a distinctly Church tone and teaching. But now it was different, and he stood silently on the road listening eagerly until the singing ended. It was his thought of Martha that caused this change. She was like that sheep, away from the fold. Surely the Good Shepherd had such a one in His mind when He spoke that beautiful parable. And what would Christ do now were He on earth? Would He refuse to grant a dying woman's request? No, certainly not. Would He not have gone to seek her long ago to bring her back to the fold? Would He not heed her pleadings for mercy and gladly take her back to Himself?

These thoughts brought a new thrill to the clergyman's heart. He quickened his steps and hurried along the road. He had the Great Master's words and example, and he would follow Him, no matter what the cost.

Reaching at last the rectory, he opened the door and entered. His housekeeper was nowhere to be seen, and for this he was most thankful. He was in no mood for any questions she might ask about the sick woman at the hotel. And, besides, he could not altogether suppress the guilty feeling that stole into his heart, and he was afraid that Rachel's keen eyes might detect something amiss. The glamor of that hymn was not so strong upon him now, and he did not feel so sure of himself. After many years of strict rectitude in the line of duty, it was not easy for him to remain long under the power of a sudden emotion.

As he passed into his study he began to waver in his resolution. Everything there was in accord with his firm settled mode of life and thought. The atmosphere of the room was in harmony with his habits of years and affected him now most strongly. He stood in the middle of the room and gazed around with a strange bewildering sense. It did not seem possible that he was the same man who had left it barely two hours before. Yet in that space of time a new force had taken possession of him which was on the verge of causing him to be disloyal to his Church. He glanced toward his writing-desk and saw lying there the first page of his sermon he had been preparing for next Sunday. Quickly he stepped forward and peered down upon the text he had chosen: "Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep which I had lost." His body trembled as he read these words, and a feeling of awe swept upon him. How strange that his text should be the same theme as the hymn which had affected him so strongly that night. Was not this more than a coincidence? he asked himself. Was it not divinely ordered? He had chosen the text that he might prove to his people the great joy of the Father over the wandering ones, such as heretics and others, when brought into the fold of the Church. The sin of heresy and schism was what he had in his mind then. This was a favorite subject upon which he had preached many sermons in the past. But now he had a revulsion of feeling. Reaching swiftly out, he seized the sheet of paper in his hands, tore it into several pieces and threw them into the waste-basket at the side of the table. Furtively he glanced around, and his face flushed. He then sank down into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

"What is the matter with me?" he whispered in a hoarse voice. "I am beside myself. But I could not finish that sermon as I began. I have seen Martha since, and have listened to her voice pleading for the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. She has sinned, and for such a one Christ gave that parable. I see things in a new light."

For a few minutes he remained silently there with his white head bowed upon his hands. At length he rose to his feet, looked around the room, and carefully drew down the window-blinds. This done, he returned to the table, brought forth a bunch of keys from his pocket, and selecting one, unlocked a drawer on the right. With trembling hands he lifted out a small black tin box and laid it upon his writing-pad. This he unlocked, and as he raised the cover, he paused and gazed thoughtfully upon the contents. They were merely a little package of old letters tied together with a string, and a folded envelope lying by itself. Again he glanced around the room, especially at the windows. Feeling sure that no prying eyes could see, he drew forth a small photograph of a girl in the full flush and beauty of radiant youth. For years he had not looked upon that picture, although he had often been tempted to do so. Memories crowded thick and fast upon him as he sat there. Forgotten was everything else as he thought of Martha Benson as he had known and loved her in olden days.

At length he closed, locked the box and replaced it in the drawer. He then rose to his feet, crossed the room and opened

the door of a little closet. Here hung his robes, and on a shelf was a small private Communion case. It took him but a minute to fold up his surplice and stole and place them in a grip nearby. He then opened the case, lifted out the little round silver bread-box and carried it with him to the pantry off the kitchen. Here he cut a small portion from a loaf of bread, prepared it to his liking, and deposited it into the box. Although he had often done this before, he now listened somewhat nervously lest Rachel should be near. He did not wish her to see him just then, as he did not want to explain where he was going. He felt unusually guilty and his hands trembled as he placed the box back into the case and closed the cover. Never before had he experienced such a feeling. It had always been a joy to prepare the bread and wine, and the fair white linen cloth ere hastening off to some sick or dying person. Now, however, it was different. He knew that he should be loyal to the command of his Church. And yet there was something drawing him irresistibly in another direction. It was the plant of love, deeply rooted in the past, which, although kept under subjection through the years, had at last enmeshed his heart with its subtle, tendril-like influence. Through ever-recurring thought of Martha Benson, and through countless prayers on her behalf, he had steadily nourished his love for her which only needed an occasion such as this to test its overmastering power.

CHAPTER IV

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE

"Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee." Slowly and impressively Mr. Landrose uttered these words as he held the chalice to the lips of the invalid woman. He knew that he had now crossed the Rubicon and that there could be no turning back. Calmly and in a low voice he continued the service to the end. After he had pronounced the benediction, he knelt and remained longer than usual upon his knees, so long, in fact, that he was at last aroused by the touch of a hand upon his shoulder. Looking quickly up, he saw the woman leaning toward him with a new expression in her eyes.

"Daniel," she whispered, "why don't you speak?"

Rising to his feet, he removed his surplice and stole, carefully folded them up, drew a chair close to the bed and sat down.

"Why should I speak, Martha? Has not this deed of mine spoken louder than words?"

"That you care for me—love me still?"

"Have you any doubt of it now?"

"No, no." The woman gave a deep sigh of contentment as she sank back upon the pillow. "It is wonderful."

"In what way?"

"That you should do this for me. It is a certain proof of your love."

"But it has caused me to commit a great sin, Martha. How can I ever face my Bishop after what I have done to-night?"

"Oh, don't worry about that, Daniel. You need not tell him."

"I must, and just as soon as possible. My conscience would give me no peace if I keep this from him."

"And what will that mean?"

"That remains to be seen. However, the deed is done, so I must bear my punishment no matter what that may be."

The clergyman rose from his chair, lifted his surplice and placed it back into the grip.

"Daniel!"

He started and looked around, so intense was the sound of the woman's voice.

"What is it, Martha?"

"Don't leave me yet, Daniel. I have something to say to you."

"But you are too weak, Martha. You have tired yourself too much already. You must rest."

"No, no, I cannot rest. I am stronger than I have been for days, and I must speak to you now. Will you listen?"

Mr. Landrose felt that he could not refuse this request. He was quite sure that this sudden animation was but temporary owing to the woman's excited condition. If she did not tell him now what was on her mind, she might never have sufficient strength again. That it was something of considerable importance there could be no doubt. Once more he drew forward the chair and sat down by her side.

"Very well, Martha, I shall listen to what you have to say. But be as brief as possible lest you exhaust your strength."

A slight smile, almost of triumph, overspread the woman's face. For about half a minute she lay very still, as if thinking deeply. Then she turned her eyes full upon the clergyman's face.

"You have been wondering, I suppose, Daniel, why I came here?"

"Didn't you tell me? You wished to be near me."

"Did you think that was the only reason?"

"Was there anything else?"

"There was, and a very important one. Doris thinks that I came here for my health."

"Does she know anything about the—the past?"

"Nothing. She only knows that I have appointed you as her guardian when I am gone."

"Guardian!" Mr. Landrose gasped the word, and his face turned pale. "Guardian to your grand-daughter!"

"That's just it. Who else should undertake the charge but you? I know you will not refuse."

"But I must, Martha. I am not a suitable person to look after your grand-daughter. What do I know about the ways of young women?"

"You will have no trouble, Daniel. Doris is a good girl, though a little headstrong at times. She doesn't like the idea of my appointing you as her guardian. But she will get over that in time."

"So that is the reason, I suppose, for her coolness to me when I came here this evening. She has evidently taken a dislike to me which will make my task all the more difficult."

"So you agree, then?" the invalid eagerly asked.

"Oh, no, not yet. I must have time to think this over."

"But there is no time, Daniel. I am a very sick woman, and I must know before I die that Doris will have someone I can trust to look after her when I am dead. Surely you will not refuse my request."

"And was it for this that you came here, Martha?"

"It was, and that I might see you again."

"So you did not forget me, then?"

"Forget you! Why, you have been seldom out of my mind since that night we parted—oh, you remember, do you not?"

"Indeed I do. Please say nothing more about it."

"I cannot help it, Daniel. What a difference it would have made to both of us if I had not been such an idiot. I thought only of money then, and position in society. What a wreck I have made of my life."

"You obtained your heart's desire, though."

"I did, and found it nothing but gall and worm-wood. You know what my life has been, don't you?"

"I have not been altogether ignorant of it, for the newspapers have kept you well in the lime-light. I always hoped that you were happy with so much attention."

"Happy! It was unhappiness which drove me on. It was the demon of unrest which forced me from place to place always seeking for some new excitement. I have been flattered and fawned upon everywhere. And why? Simply because of my money. People cared nothing for me, but for what I had in worldly goods."

"And so you came at last to this quiet spot after your many adventures. You must have found it lonely here."

"I have found it a haven of rest. I envy you, Daniel, for the good you have been doing in this parish while I was wasting my life."

"How do you know of my work?"

"Oh, I know something, but not all. Susie, my maid, has told me much, and I have imagined the rest. You are loved by everyone, and your good influence is felt far and near."

"I am afraid Susie has been exaggerating," and the clergyman sighed. "She is a good girl, and I am fond of her. But she does not know how I have failed, and now that this place has been turned into a summer resort, I am losing my hold over my flock. It is very sad, and I am too old now to cope with the problem. People are becoming very indifferent to religious matters."

"I know they are, Daniel, and for that reason I want Doris to be brought under your influence and have the benefit of your instruction. She is almost entirely ignorant of religious things, although she attends church because I compel her to go."

"But suppose she should refuse to obey me, if I agree to act as her guardian?"

"Then she will not get a cent of my money. It is all arranged for in my will. Everything is in the hands of The Golden Trust Company, and they are to take their instructions from you. Any money that Doris receives until she is of age must be upon your order."

"And what will become of your money if your grand-daughter disobeys me?"

"I have arranged for that. It will go to several charitable institutions, and to you."

"To me!"

"That is my wish, Daniel. It may atone somewhat for the past. I have specified that you are to receive a certain amount as long as you live."

"Martha, I cannot—"

"Just a minute, Daniel. Please do not interrupt me. My strength is failing rapidly, and I have something more I wish to say. But first promise that you will act as Doris's guardian. The papers are all made out, so you will have little or no trouble."

"Let me consider this just for to-night, Martha."

"No, no, it will be too late. Promise me now. Take my hand, Daniel, like you used to do, and promise me. Don't refuse."

Quietly the clergyman took her cold right hand in his. His heart was stirred, and a mistiness came into his eyes. The glamor of her influence was still strong upon him, and he could no longer resist her pleading.

"I promise, Martha," he at length murmured in a trembling voice. "May God help me to do my duty whatever that may be."

"Thank you, oh, thank you, Daniel. My mind is now at rest."

Gently the clergyman withdrew his hand from hers and rose to his feet.

"I must go now, Martha. You are very weary."

"Just a minute, Daniel. I have one more request to make. When I am dead, I want you to bury me at night."

These words caused Mr. Landrose to stare at the woman in amazement.

"Martha, what do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Daniel. I want to be buried at night. It will be in keeping with the darkness of my life. And, besides, I cannot bear the thought of my body going into the cold ground when the sun is shining. And I do not want people to come just for curiosity to see me buried. Promise me, Daniel, that you will do this for me."

"I suppose I must, Martha. You have forced me already to agree to several things against my will. This, anyway, will be no offense against the Church. But it is a strange request, for all that."

To these words the invalid made no reply, and as the clergyman looked upon her he was deeply impressed by the stern dignity of her face. Although time had wrought great changes, yet there remained the evidence of the beauty that once was hers. Her hair, formerly as black as the raven's wing, was now as white as the driven snow, and in harmony with the pallor of her face.

"Good-night, Martha, I must go now."

"Kiss me, Daniel, and I shall be happy."

It was her last request, and for the rest of his life he was thankful that he did not refuse her dying wish.

CHAPTER V

UNDER COVER OF NIGHT

Mr. Landrose was at breakfast the next morning when he received word of Martha's death. It was an unusually late breakfast for him, but the excitement of the night had kept him awake for hours after his return from the hotel, so he did not sleep any until near morning. Rachel answered the door-bell, and when she returned to the dining-room she told him the news.

The clergyman started, and with a trembling hand set down the cup of coffee he was in the act of lifting to his lips.

"Who told you this?"

"Mrs. Wickham, sir. She stopped on her way to the store, thinking we might like to know."

"When did—did the woman die?"

"At midnight, so Mrs. Wickham told me. Susie was with her to the last."

Mr. Landrose said nothing more, but sat very erect and still, staring straight before him. The food on his plate remained untouched, and his coffee became lukewarm. Rachel moved to and fro between the kitchen and the dining-room, not knowing what to say or do. She was puzzled at her master's strange absent-minded manner, and also a little frightened at the peculiar expression in his eyes.

At length the clergyman rose slowly to his feet, unconsciously bent his head, and then walked wearily toward his study. Rachel heard him close the door behind him and then all was still.

"I wonder what is the meaning of all this?" she asked herself. "I never knew the parson to act in such a strange way before. Who is that woman, anyway? I hope Mrs. Wickham calls here on her way home."

But Mrs. Wickham did not call, and all through the morning Rachel kept listening for the clergyman to come from his study. She prepared his dinner as usual, but with little hope that he would eat anything.

To Mr. Landrose, seated at his writing-table, the passing of time was unnoticed as he filled page after page of his sermon paper. Lying before him was the little package of faded envelopes. He had read every letter that morning, and had then remained for some time in thought. After a while he began to re-write the sermon he had been working upon the first of the week. It was the parable of the Lost Sheep, but what a change had come over him since he had first begun it. In this he was putting nothing of the doctrine of the Church, but only ideas which came flaming from his heart. It was in this manner that he could best give expression to the thoughts that were surging within him. For long years they had been held sternly in check. But now an opening had been made, the barrier had been rent, and they poured forth in tumultuous order.

"When that sheep went astray," so he wrote, "the Good Shepherd did not condemn it to eternal perdition. He did not give orders that henceforth it would be beyond the pale of the fold. He did not pronounce the ban of excommunication and say that it should no longer be given the food and water which nourished the ninety and nine which went not astray. He did nothing of the kind. Instead, he went forth to search for the wandering one, and did not cease for darkness, cold, flooded streams, nor dangerous mountain steeps until he found it and brought it home rejoicing. And when He reached home, nothing is recorded of any punishment meted out to the erring one. And why? Because of the love of the Good Shepherd. His heart was overflowing with pity and sympathy. Surely the Master meant that story for every one who goes astray."

Thus on and on he wrote. There seemed to be no end to the ideas which flooded his mind. Just as soon as one was developed, he was off on another, now the love of the Father, now the lost sheep, now the duty of seeking and finding, now the simplicity of the search, with no mention of special forms and ceremonies.

He was at last aroused by Rachel's gentle tap upon the door. Like a guilty person caught in the act of some crime, Mr. Landrose hurriedly gathered up the many sheets of paper and thrust them into a drawer of his desk. He felt safer now, and much relieved. He had poured out his soul upon paper, although he knew that he would never deliver that sermon. But how could he henceforth preach as he had in the past? What he had formerly considered of the greatest importance seemed now to be nothing but mere skeletons. The teaching of the Master must have life. "The Word was made flesh and

dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." This text flashed into his mind with a new meaning, stripped of all theological bias. He had been preaching the Word for many years, so he thought. But now he knew that he had missed the mark, and instead of giving his people the true food of life, he had been meteing out to them nothing but hard cold stones.

Mr. Landrose ate but little at dinner, and Rachel was worried.

"You will starve, sir, unless you eat more than you have to-day."

"I do not feel hungry, Rachel. The death of—of that woman at the hotel has been a shock to me, coming so soon after my visit to her last night."

"When will the funeral take place?"

"Funeral! Why, I have forgotten all about it. But I suppose I shall have to bury her."

A slight shiver shook his body, and he looked very pale. This Rachel noticed, and she felt a sudden alarm.

"You are not well, sir. You should see the doctor."

"No, no. I am all right. But the thought of burying that woman in the cold ground, away from God's beautiful sunshine, has unnerved me. Although I know it is only her body that will be buried, yet somehow it seems terrible to me to-day."

"Did you know the woman, sir?"

"No, I never did. I thought I knew her, but I was mistaken. I never really knew Martha Benson."

Parson Dan was not lying intentionally. He was thinking of other things of which Rachel knew nothing. In fact, he did not realize the meaning his housekeeper might take from his words until an hour later as he was walking toward the hotel. It came upon him with a startling suddenness, causing him to stop right in the middle of the road.

"Rachel asked me if I knew the woman," he whispered. "I told her I never did. What will she think of me if she ever knows the truth? I did not intend to deceive her. But how can I explain? What shall I say to her?" He was much worried, and thought about it as he continued on his way.

When he reached the hotel, he was shown at once to the room where the dead woman was lying. There was no one present, and the blinds were partly lowered. But there was light enough for him to see the face of the woman lying in the casket. He gave a slight start as he looked upon it. In the repose of death all traces of care and suffering were gone, and what he saw was a face calm and serene with the semblance of a smile lurking about the corners of the mouth. He beheld there the Martha Benson as he had known her years before. She seemed about to speak to him, to utter his name.

"Martha," he whispered, "tell me something about your life now. Are you asleep, or are you living joyously and free in that land where pain and sorrow are unknown?"

The sound of some one approaching aroused him. Glancing quickly and nervously around, he saw the grand-daughter standing near. She was very calm and formal.

"Excuse me, sir. I hope I am not intruding. I did not know that you were here."

"No, no, it's all right," and the clergyman sighed. "I was merely waiting for you. Please accept my sincere sympathy. I would have been here sooner had I known of your grandmother's death. Is there anything I can do?"

"You will conduct the service, of course."

"Yes, if it is your wish, Miss Randall."

"It was Granny's, so that settles it."

"I suppose so."

"And the grave must be dug. Will you arrange about that, sir?"

"I shall attend to it. But perhaps you would like to go with me and select a spot."

"No, thank you. I shall leave that to you. And the funeral is to be in the evening, I understand."

"So your grandmother wished."

"Very well, then, to-night. How will that do?"

"But why so soon, Miss Randall? Why not wait until to-morrow night?"

"It will make no difference to Granny, Mr. Landrose. And, besides, the undertaker thinks we should not wait so long. That is all, I think. Thank you, sir. Good day."

Surprised and bewildered, the parson left the hotel and made his way back along the road. He had expected to find the girl somewhat softened by her grandmother's death. Instead, she was more rigidly formal than ever. She had not exhibited the least sign of emotion, but had discussed the funeral arrangements in a matter of fact manner and as briefly as possible. And he was now her guardian! A slight groan escaped his lips. What was he to do with such a creature? But he had promised Martha, and he must be true to his word. He would do his duty to the letter. But why did the girl act so strangely toward him? He had done nothing to her, and it was not his fault that he had been appointed her guardian. A feeling of anger welled up in his heart. He was a mild, peace-loving man. But when necessity demanded he could be very firm. And he was determined now that he would use a firm hand in dealing with the girl. She was under his control, and if she did not wish to obey him, she would have to abide by the consequences. Did Martha know of her grand-daughter's strong and wilful nature which caused her to make such provisions in her will? It seemed so. Perhaps the girl had given her much trouble in the past, and she had thus endeavored to provide for her future welfare.

Reaching at length the grave-yard, he went at once to a large maple tree standing in the north east corner.

"Martha would like this spot. There is no grave near, and here the flowers will bloom and the birds will sing. This tree will shade the grave in summer and shelter it from the fierce winds of winter. Dear me! how little I thought that I should be doing this for Martha Benson. And when I die I want to be buried right by her side. It cannot be long now, and the sooner the better. But, there, I must go at once and get Joe Blake to dig the grave. He will have little enough time."

Joe was not at home, but his wife explained that he was at the undertaker's getting the right measurements.

"It's a queer thing, I call it," she declared, "to have a funeral after dark. Joe's been diggin' graves for the last twenty years, an' he never had to attend a buryin' by night. It doesn't seem at all right, to my way of thinkin'. Why that woman should want to be put in the ground at night is more'n I kin understand."

"No doubt it is, Mrs. Blake," the clergyman quietly replied. "There are many things we cannot understand."

"I hear strange stories, too, about that grand-daughter of hers. She's a flighty one, all right, that's what she is, goin' about so much while her grandmother is lyin' dead."

"What stories have you heard, Mrs. Blake?" There was a note of sternness in the clergyman's voice which caused the woman to hesitate.

"Oh, nuthin' in particular, parson. But I hear she goes off to dances with the manager of the granite works. She was away last night, too."

"To a dance!"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't like to say that. But it doesn't look right, as I said, with her grandmother—"

"There, that will do, Mrs. Blake. It is only hearsay, after all, and I know very well how people will talk, especially in this place. I wish they would attend to their own affairs, and not bother about what other people are doing. But, there, I must get along. Be sure to tell Joe to dig the grave right under that big maple tree in the north east corner. I hope he will get it done in time."

"Oh, Joe'll have it ready, parson. He hasn't dug many graves of late, more's the pity. Times are hard these days, an' we are in need of money. I suppose the pay'll be all right, sir?"

"It will. I shall see to that, so don't worry."

Mrs. Blake stood watching the clergyman as he walked toward the rectory.

"I wonder what's comin' over the parson? I never saw him so solemn an' stern. I believe he knows something about that dead woman accordin' to what Susie Wickham told her ma. He was with her the night she died, an' had Communion. I'm goin' to that funeral even though it is at night. I wouldn't miss it fer anything."

And more than Mrs. Blake decided to attend the funeral, and some gathered at the grave-yard before dark. When Mr. Landrose arrived he was surprised to find so many people present.

"What are all these folks doing here?" he asked Joe.

"Jist waitin' to see the funeral, parson. It isn't every day we have a funeral at night."

Mr. Landrose robed in the little vestry by the light of an oil lamp, and went to the churchyard gate, holding his book in his hand. Slowly he walked before the casket which was borne by several men. In a clear voice he read the opening sentences of the Burial Service, and as the words "I am the resurrection and the life" sounded forth the voices of all were hushed in an awed silence. By the clergyman's side walked Joe, with a lighted lantern to illuminate the narrow path. When the grave had been reached, the people drew close and watched everything that was taking place. At the head of the grave stood Doris Randall with a young man by her side. Calmly she watched as the casket was lowered into the ground, apparently unmoved. But at the words "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," she gave a low moan and leaned somewhat for support against her companion. But no other sound did she make, and as soon as the service was ended she left the grave.

Mr. Landrose remained until the last shovelful of gravel had been placed upon the mound. The crowd had dispersed, so he and Joe were alone.

"Good job, that, sir."

The clergyman started at these words, and looked around.

"Have they all gone, Joe?"

"Why, yes. We've been alone here fer some time. Guess we can't do no more now. Say, parson, I don't want a job like this ag'in."

"Why, Joe?"

"Oh, I can't very well explain, sir. But I had a creepy feelin' all the time I was shovelin' in the earth. It seemed as if that dead woman was standin' by my side watchin' to see that I done the work right."

"Nonsense, Joe."

"It may be so, that's a fact. But I had the feelin', anyway, an' who kin reason ag'inst a feelin'? I can't."

"Let us go home, Joe. Come to me in the morning and I shall pay you for your work."

"A'right, parson. But I hope t'goodness that woman doesn't appear to me ag'in when I go to bed. I done a good job, now didn't I, sir?"

"You certainly did, so don't worry any more. Your conscience should be clear. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

A MORNING CALL

The morning sun gleamed down pleasantly upon the garden at the back of the rectory. It was a garden good to look upon, for Parson Dan attended to it himself. He was proud of the straight rows of vegetables which he had planted with his own hands. Potatoes, beets, carrots, onions, radishes, peas, beans, corn, cucumbers, were all there in their proper places. Nothing was out of line, and order was as much the rule here as in the study. It was a sheltered spot, surrounded by a growth of young birch trees, interspersed with pines and firs, which formed a striking contrast to the silver color of their more numerous companions. Where these trees stood the ground had once been tilled. But steadily they had encroached upon the clearing as the clergyman's strength decreased through advancing years. For a time he had fought bravely against this crowding growth, but he was at last forced to yield to the inevitable and content himself with a smaller space for his garden. He might have hired help, but he did not want careless and indifferent workers among his beloved vegetables. Here he liked to be alone to think out his sermons, free from all interruption. He was happier in this place than anywhere else, except in church.

And so on the morning after the funeral it was but natural that he should seek the quiet solace of his garden. He had not slept well, and had been restless through the night. Recent events had greatly disturbed the hitherto even tenor of his ways. The discovery of Martha at the hotel, her death and burial, together with his sin against the Church, bore heavily upon his soul. And in addition, there was his responsibility as guardian to Martha's grand-daughter. Over and over again during the night he had chided himself for his weakness, and the betrayal of his sacred trust. And what fitness had he to be the guardian of a girl not yet out of her teens? But he could not retrace the false step he had made in giving Martha the Communion, neither could he go back on his word of honor. He gave a deep sigh as he cut the weeds in the row and hilled up the potatoes. His one desire was to be left in peace with his parochial work and his garden. He was too old, so he believed, to be worried about matters which were foreign to his nature. But these troubles had been forced upon him, and he wondered if they were intended for his good.

He paused and leaned upon his hoe as this thought came into his mind. He looked toward the rectory in an absent-minded manner for a few seconds. Then he became conscious of two persons standing near the building. Immediately he recognized them as Rachel and Doris Randall. They were talking and apparently waiting for him to finish the row. This was an awkward predicament, as he did not wish the visitor to see him in his rough working clothes. He longed to hurry into the house that he might make himself more presentable. There was no opportunity for this, however, so continuing his hoeing, he at length came to the end of the row.

"Do you need any help?"

The question caused him to look quickly up, and his eyes met the smiling face of the girl. A great change had come over her since he had last seen her. For a few seconds he made no reply, but stood very still looking at her in undisguised admiration. She was so fresh and neat, akin to the flowers blooming around the building. He was visibly embarrassed, and this the girl noted. Again she smiled, and stepping forward, held out her hand.

"I hope you do not mind my coming to see you this morning. I want you to give me something to do."

The clergyman looked at her clean hands, and then at his own soiled ones.

"I cannot very well shake hands with you. Mine are too dirty. I must wash them first."

"I like them that way, Mr. Landrose. They are much nicer than so many soft white ones; mine, for instance."

Mr. Landrose was surprised at these words. He was pleased, as well, and looked keenly into the girl's bright face. He lifted his hat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Suppose we sit down, Miss Randall. Rachel, please bring out a couple of chairs. Ah, I see she has gone back to her work."

"You sit on that nice rustic chair," Doris suggested. "The grass at your feet is just the place for me. There, that is nice," she continued when the parson had complied with her request. "Everything is lovely around here. I did not know you had

such a wonderful garden. Do you do all the work yourself?"

"Why, yes. This is where I am so happy. I like my vegetables and flowers. I suppose you have seen my garden in front of the house."

"Indeed I have. Your housekeeper told me how beautiful it will be in a few weeks. I hope I shall be here to see it then."

"And so do I, Miss Randall, for I want you to see my roses when they are in bloom. I am very proud of them."

There was such a youthful eagerness in the old man's voice and such a glow in his eyes that the girl was agreeably surprised, for she had expected to find him little more than a dry ecclesiastical fossil. It had meant a great struggle to overcome her dislike of him, and to visit him this morning with the outward appearance of cheerfulness.

"Why do you not speak of flowers sometimes in your sermons, Mr. Landrose?"

"Flowers in my sermons, Miss Randall! Why, how could I do that? What have flowers to do with Church doctrine?"

"A great deal, I should say. They are beautiful, and didn't Christ tell the people to 'consider the lilies'?"

"Yes, yes, I know He did. But what would my people think if I talked to them about flowers?"

"Perhaps they would like it for a change. I know I should, anyway. And I believe you could do it so well, for you love flowers so much."

"But I must give my people solid food, Miss Randall. There is too much sentiment preached to-day, and it is a very poor substitute for real substantial truth."

"Perhaps you know better than I do," and the girl gave a slight sigh as she gazed thoughtfully out over the garden. "But I have often wished that clergymen would speak more about the bright beautiful things of life, and less about the sad, and the dry bones of doctrine."

"But we must have doctrine, remember," Mr. Landrose defended. "Didn't the Apostle Paul say 'Take heed to the doctrine'?"

"Did he? I never heard that before. But I want to know more about the love of God. That touches my heart. But, there, I must not argue with you who know so much while I am very ignorant."

"But I like to talk with you, Miss Randall. Your words are refreshing. I have never known any of my people to talk to me so candidly. I wish they would."

"Perhaps you would resent it if they did. I am not of your flock, so can say what I think."

She paused abruptly, and a peculiar expression came into her eyes.

"Oh, I forgot for the moment that you are my guardian, and have full control over me." There was a tinge of bitterness in her voice, which the clergyman noticed.

"That should make no difference."

"But it does make a difference. I want to be free and happy, to think my own thoughts, and to follow the dictates of my heart. But all my life I have been bound down to hard rigid rules."

"Why, wasn't your grandmother good to you, Miss Randall?"

"Yes, good in a way, in supplying me with food, clothes and shelter. But, oh, how she kept me under her thumb. Why, I was allowed hardly any freedom at all, and scarcely knew that my soul was my own."

Her flushed face and flashing eyes told something of her emotion. Mr. Landrose was much embarrassed. What should he say to this girl so anxious to be free from all restraint? How could he ever control her?

"No doubt your grandmother did it all for the best."

"Perhaps so. Most likely she did not want me to follow her example."

"You know about her life, then?"

"Something, but not all. There was a mystery in her life at which she used to hint, but would never explain. Something must have happened years ago, I am sure, which affected her whole life. I have often wondered what it was. It caused her to do queer things at times such as—"

She paused abruptly, slightly confused.

"Appointing me as your guardian? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, you have guessed correctly."

"And it made you rebellious?"

"It certainly did. I hated you, although I had never seen you until I met you at the hotel. It was hard for me to be civil to you."

"You feel differently now, I hope, Miss Randall."

"Somewhat. But, please, call me 'Doris'. I am not used to 'Miss Randall'. It makes me feel too old."

"Very well, I shall comply with your request. But as I am your guardian I must have your help, for I am very ignorant about my duties."

An expression of triumph appeared in the girl's eyes which the clergyman did not notice. Her task was going to be easier than she had imagined. This old man would be as clay in her hands. This was at once succeeded by a feeling of sympathy for the man she disliked but a short time before. Why should she worry and trouble his heart? But she was not sure how far she could go with him. Susie Wickham had told her of his strong will in the discharge of his duties, and she partly surmised that his quiet manner might cover a surprising firmness.

"I am afraid that I can do very little, sir. Granny always did everything for me, and I feel perfectly helpless now. As you are my guardian you will have to take her place."

"And what is the first step?"

"To do some shopping for me. There are several things I need right away. Here is the list," and she handed forth a piece of paper she had been holding in her left hand.

The clergyman slowly unfolded the paper and looked intently at the writing. Then his face became very serious.

"And you want me to buy these things!"

"Certainly. Granny always did, and who else but you should do it now?"

"But, Miss Rand—Doris, I should say, I never did such a thing in my life. Buy a girl's clothes! Why, it's ridiculous."

"No, it is not, Mr. Landrose. It is a very simple matter. You have only to go to Reed & Langton's and purchase the things. You will have no trouble, I am sure. Granny never did. She always liked shopping."

"But this is a woman's work, and not a man's. Why can't you do this yourself?"

"Because I have never done it, and as my guardian I expect you to do it for me. You promised Granny that you would take her place, didn't you?"

"I did, I know I did. But never for an instant did I imagine that I should be called upon to buy your clothes."

Again the parson brought forth his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Once more he stared at the paper he was holding in his hand. The expression upon his face almost caused the girl to relent. She did not explain that she had always gone with her grandmother when shopping, and had really chosen the things she needed. She was strongly tempted to offer to go with her guardian or to release him altogether of the responsibility. She dismissed this,

however, as it might spoil the plan which had been so carefully thought out the evening before. No, he must go through with it alone, and find out by bitter experience into what a net he had allowed himself to become enmeshed.

She rose to her feet and brushed several blades of grass from her dress.

"I must go now. It is too bad I have disturbed you in your work."

"I don't mind that at all. But this," and the parson tapped the paper with his finger, "is what troubles me. I am sorely puzzled. However, I shall see what can be done."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Landrose. I am sure you will do all you can."

The clergyman rose from his chair and looked earnestly into the girl's brown eyes.

"Listen, you are the only woman, except one, who made me do something against my will and judgment. But as you have so strangely influenced me, you will have to abide by the results. I bid you good-morning."

There was something about these words which deeply impressed Doris Randall. Her former feeling of triumph vanished, and a sense of humiliation and defeat pervaded her soul. As she made her way slowly from the rectory she felt ashamed of the mean trick she was playing upon an innocent old man, and a clergyman, at that. What would he think of her should he ever know the truth? The scheme had really seemed amusing at first, for by means of it she would attain her purpose and get rid of the fossil of a guardian. Now, however, she viewed it differently. She had been mistaken in him, and so had John. The thought of the young man brought the glow back to her cheeks. He would laugh her out of the notion, she felt sure. Yet deep in her heart she knew that no words could change the favorable impression she had that morning received of Parson Dan.

CHAPTER VII

HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE

Mr. Landrose sat down again upon the rustic seat after Doris had gone and remained for some time in deep thought. He looked out over the garden, but his mind was not upon the vegetables. He was in no mood for further hoeing just then. The quiet tenor of his morning's work had been disturbed, and the zest had vanished.

At length he arose and went into the house where he found Rachel in the kitchen preparing dinner. He glanced at the clock and was surprised to find that it was near noon.

"Dear me, how the morning has gone! I had no idea it was so late."

"Miss Randall must have been a pleasant companion, sir. She was so charming that I fell in love with her at once. What a host of admirers she will have this summer when the young men arrive. She will need some older one to look after her."

The clergyman started at these words. He had never thought of this before. It was a new problem which now confronted him. How could he do his duty in watching her and protecting her from undesirable suitors?

"Rachel, I am that girl's guardian," he confessed in a low voice.

"You are!" The housekeeper paused in her work and looked at her master. "You Miss Randall's guardian!"

"Yes, Rachel, I am. I gave her grandmother my solemn word that I would do my duty to the best of my ability. I was very weak to make such a promise."

"I don't envy you your job, sir. You are not a suitable person to be the guardian of such a girl. She needs a capable, steady woman instead of an old man who knows nothing about the ways of a young woman left alone at a summer hotel. Excuse me, sir, if I have spoken too plainly."

"I like to hear your opinion, Rachel, for I am in a great quandary. Now, look at this," and he showed her the paper he was holding in his hand. "Here is a list of things Miss Randall wishes me to purchase for her."

The housekeeper took the paper, and as her eyes rested upon the contents an amused expression overspread her face.

"This is really funny, sir."

"It isn't funny to me. It is a most serious matter. I never bought such things in my life."

"And do you intend to buy them?"

"What else can I do? The girl knows nothing about shopping, so she told me. Her grandmother did all that for her. I suppose I might as well go to the city this afternoon and get it over with as soon as possible."

"But this is not a man's job," Rachel reminded. "A woman should do it."

"I know that. But I am Miss Randall's guardian, you see, so how could I entrust the task to another? No, I must do it myself, and not shirk my duty. I have promised, and that promise must be fulfilled."

"But—"

"That will do, Rachel. I know you wish to turn me aside from my purpose. But it must not be. Please keep this a secret, for there are many in this parish only too ready to make my guardianship of a young girl a matter of vulgar gossip. Have dinner ready as soon as possible, for I must catch the 2.30 train."

Rachel smiled to herself as she went about her work. She knew far better than her master what it would mean for him to buy the articles mentioned in that list, especially to an inexperienced old clergyman.

"I would really like to see him in the store," she said to herself. "Poor man! I pity him. But he is so determined to go and do what he thinks is his duty that he will have to find out for himself. He will not listen to reason."

And only too truly did Mr. Landrose learn that afternoon what it meant to do a girl's shopping. As soon as he reached the city he went at once to the office of the Golden Trust Company and spent some time with the manager going carefully over a number of details connected with Martha's will, and learning about the duties which devolved upon him as guardian of her grand-daughter. All this was not difficult, for the Trust Company would look after the estate, allowing Doris such money as the clergyman considered sufficient for her needs, and would pay all bills which had his initialled signature of approval. If these were his only duties his task as guardian would be easy. How he wished that the Trust Company could manage the personal care of the girl in such a clear and business-like manner as they did the money.

This he realized more fully as he entered Reed & Langton's big store. He had often been here before, but had not the slightest knowledge of the Women's Department. It seemed to him that the store was full of women and that they were all looking at him as he spoke to a clerk. He was directed to the elevator, and this, too, happened to be crowded with women and girls. As he told the elevator girl where he wished to go, he felt the eyes of all fixed upon him. And truly the old clergyman from the country with his shovel-hat, faded clothes, worn and wrinkled face, did present a striking contrast to the well-dressed persons around him. He longed to get away from his crowded position. Although the day was not hot, he felt it very warm here, and his one desire was to be back to the quietness of his own parish.

And this desire was increased ten-fold when at last he reached the fourth floor and entered the Women's Department. If there were many women downstairs, their number seemed much larger to him here. They were everywhere, some walking around, and others sitting placidly at the counters. Timidly he walked forward, and then stopped. His courage was rapidly disappearing. He did not know what to do. The women were all looking at him, so he thought. The perspiration came out in beads upon his forehead, and his knees trembled.

And as he stood there, a young woman appeared before him and courteously asked what she could do for him. He looked at her, and then glanced once more fearfully around the room.

"P-please show me the way to the street," he gasped.

"Take the elevator. It is just over there."

And back to the elevator he hurried, and not until he was out again on the street did he feel safe. He stopped and mopped his hot forehead. Never again would he undergo such an ordeal, so he decided. One experience such as that was enough.

He looked at his watch, and found that he had an hour and a half before the next train left the city. Across the street was his favorite book-store, and hither he made his way. Among the books he was at home and his calmness returned. But his nerves had been severely shaken, and more than once he glanced through the window at the store across the street from which he had so fearfully escaped. This soon passed, however, as his attention became fixed upon the books before him. Only works of a theological nature appealed to him. Fiction he passed by as unworthy of consideration.

At last he bought one book, "The Golden Ministry," which name was most attractive and suggestive. The author, unknown to him, had set down in a fascinating manner the story of his fifty years in the Ministry. He began the first chapter with the words uttered by the famous Dr. Johnson, and recorded by his faithful Boswell:

"I would rather have Chancery suits upon my hands than the care of souls. No, sir, I do not envy a clergyman's life as an easy life, nor do I envy the clergyman who makes it an easy life."

Mr. Landrose liked these words which were new to him, and he believed that in this book he had found a treasure of considerable value. Neither was he mistaken, for on his homeward journey he read several chapters with a great deal of pleasure. The writer had come into close contact with life, especially among humble, hard-working people. He wrote with deep sympathy and understanding, and in chapters such as "Harnessed Souls" and "The Sacrament of Dust" he gave full expression to his thoughts about the beauty and dignity of common toil. In one chapter, "Commanding the Morning", he wrote about youth, its freshness and opportunity. His work among the young had been the most inspiring part of his ministry, and his love for children was unmistakable. But he was forced to sound a word of serious warning. Looking upon developing youth from the elevated position of age and experience, he saw a menace which threatened the young people of to-day. He believed that too much was being done for them, and that they were not depending enough upon themselves. He admired the zealous spirit of workers on behalf of the young, but questioned whether their efforts would prove effective of the most lasting good. He believed that it was better for the young to be trained to work and make their own way in life rather than have everything done for them. Struggle and difficulties developed character. The tendency

of youth to-day was to seek for ease and luxury. Instead of commanding the freshness of the morning of life, making good use of its glorious opportunities, so many were wasting their years in profitless rounds of giddy pleasure.

To all this Mr. Landrose agreed, and as he finished the chapter he closed the book, and gave himself up to meditation. He thought of Doris Randall and his responsibility as her guardian. With all the money that would be eventually hers, what would her future life be like if she were not properly trained now? And as he thus mused, a plan gradually took shape in his mind. He would take her in hand at once, so he decided. She must learn to work, to be able to do something useful, so that she could earn her own living, if necessary. A mere smattering of learning would not do. He wondered if she understood anything about house-hold affairs. It was hardly likely, as her manner of living had no doubt prevented her from acquiring such knowledge. But she should learn, and while under his care he would provide that she should not be ignorant of the practical and helpful things a woman ought to know.

Supper was ready by the time he reached the rectory. He was tired after the trying visit to the city, and he gave a sigh of relief as he took his seat at the table. Several letters were lying by his plate, but he left them unopened.

"I hope you made out all right this afternoon," Rachel remarked after she had brought in his supper. "Miss Randall left another list of things she needs, which she overlooked. Here it is," and she laid the paper upon the table by his side.

"You keep it, Rachel. And you may have the other one, too. I have no more use for it. To tell you the truth, I made a dismal failure this afternoon. The purchasing of a young woman's clothes is no business for a man, especially an old bachelor. You must arrange to go to the city with Doris when she is ready."

"You found it a difficult undertaking, then, sir?"

"Too difficult for me, Rachel. And, by the way, I did not know that only women patronized Reed & Langton's."

"Neither did I. Men go there, too, do they not?"

"I thought so until this afternoon. But I only saw women. And there was something else that seemed very remarkable to me. Perhaps you can explain why they have such large sales-ladies in the Women's Department?"

"Do they? I never noticed that they were extra large."

"But they are, Rachel. The ones I saw this afternoon were exceptionally large, almost like Amazons, in fact."

Rachel was about to express her surprise, when she paused. Then an expression of amusement appeared in her eyes as the light of understanding dawned upon her mind. She wanted to laugh outright, and afraid lest she should do so, she went quickly out into the kitchen. It was easy for her to picture her master in the Women's Department, and how in his confusion he had seen everything in a distorted light.

"Poor man! What a terrible time he must have had. But, oh, it is funny about the women."

CHAPTER VIII

A BRUTE OF A MAN

In the morning Doris Randall came again to the rectory. Mr. Landrose was in his study preparing his Sunday's sermon, so Rachel informed her. She then told the girl of the clergyman's visit to the city the day before and of his failure.

"I thought it very amusing at first, but it seems pathetic to me now. That dear man is so anxious to do what is right, that it is really wrong for anyone to laugh at him. He is very headstrong, though, and hard to convince. I never saw him so badly defeated before. He was much downcast when he came home, and from the look in his eyes this morning I am sure he did not sleep well last night. His new duties are worrying him a great deal. He knows so little about the ways of women that he feels perfectly helpless with such a charge as you on his hands."

"So he has told you, then, that he is my guardian?"

"Yes he has. And he has asked me to help him."

"Oh, I am so glad. I know that we shall get along splendidly together. I can talk to you much better than to a man. And you will help me buy my clothes?"

"That is what Mr. Landrose asked me to do. We shall go to the city whenever you are ready."

Doris was silent for a few minutes while Rachel went on with her work. Her mind was very active. What would John say to this new arrangement? she asked herself. Would it not interfere with the plan they had worked out so carefully? Anyway, for the present she was glad that Rachel was going with her to the city.

All through the morning Mr. Landrose sat at his desk trying to work out his sermon. But most of the time he remained lost in thought, gazing through the window on his left. He had not slept well during the night, as Rachel had truly surmised. He was feeling more and more the burden of responsibility that had been so suddenly placed upon him. He could not get the thought of Martha out of his mind, and the sin he had committed in giving her the Communion. Parson Dan looked upon his office as did the ones in ancient days who bore the Ark of the Covenant. His was a most sacred trust, and he had tried to be worthy of it in the past. But he had fallen. He had been untrue to his high and holy calling. And for this he was now being punished. He recalled what had happened to the man who had touched the Ark and had been smitten with death. It had seemed right to him to do so to keep it from falling. Surely that man must have felt justified in what he did. Yet he was stricken down. Did the Lord intend to teach that although He wanted the assistance of men in His work, yet there was a limit beyond which they must not go, and that He was able to protect His own? Had he, Daniel Landrose, overlooked that, and had been too presumptuous in taking matters into his own hands? But the ancient Law had passed away, and Christ had come bringing mercy and not sacrifice. And had Christ ever forbidden anyone from giving the Holy Communion to a dying woman? Martha had been excommunicated. But who had spoken the words which barred her from the Sacred Feast? Was it Christ? No, it was a Bishop of the Church. Would Christ have done that?

This thought agitated him, and he tried to banish the idea from his mind as another temptation of the evil one. But over and over again there came to him Christ's own words, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

As usual the clergyman went for his mail just before dinner. There were only two letters, one for himself and the other for Rachel. As he glanced at the one for him, he recognized the handwriting. It was from his Bishop! At once his heart sank within him, and his hands trembled. There could be but one meaning to that letter. It had been months since he had heard from the Bishop, and then in connection with his Confirmation visit. It must, therefore, be something of considerable importance which would cause him to write to him now, for the Bishop was a very busy man and had no time to write mere friendly letters. This one he felt was in connection with Martha, the excommunicated woman. The Bishop must have heard what had taken place, and had written for an explanation from the rector himself. He was anxious to know what the Bishop had to say, and yet he dreaded to open the letter. He would wait until he reached home, so he decided. He preferred the seclusion of his study where he could best bear whatever the message might be.

Placing the letters in his pocket, he walked slowly homeward. His heart was heavy, for he felt that he had at last come to the parting of the ways. He had committed a grievous offence against the Church, and nothing but shameful disgrace

awaited him. He would be an outcast for the rest of his life, and branded in his old age as a man who had fallen in the discharge of his sacred office. He met several people, but hardly noticed their words of greeting, so intent was he upon his own worries.

No sooner had he reached the rectory than he found there Mrs. Tim Bendle, who had been anxiously awaiting his coming. Of all the women in his parish she was the last one he desired to meet just then, for her visit was a certain sign of trouble in her home.

"Tim's broke out ag'in, parson," she announced, as the clergyman drew near and bade her "good-day". "He's jist awful this time an' is breakin' up the furniture and threatenin' to kill me. He threw a dish at me which jist missed my head. Oh! oh! I don't know what to do with sich a turrible man."

"What started the trouble, anyway, Mrs. Bendle?" the rector asked, while an expression of sternness came into his eyes.

"It's all on account of Tim's laziness, Parson. He hasn't done a tap of work fer weeks, so when I told him to git a hustle on, he got mad an' started on his rampage. I can't live with that man no longer. I am goin' to Bob. I wish he was here now, fer he's the only one who kin handle Tim. But Bob's too fer away, so I've come to you."

"Suppose I go home with you, Mrs. Bendle. Tim took my advice the last time he was in a tantrum, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir, he did. But that won't work on him ag'in. He's very superstitious, Tim is, an' he thought that you might bring a curse upon him if he didn't do as you told him. But he's changed durin' the last year, an' talks awful ag'inst parsons an' churches. It makes my blood run cold to hear him."

"He does! What is the reason of that?"

"Oh, he's been readin' books that are all ag'inst the Church an' religion. An' he says the Bible is all bosh, full of mistakes, an' that there is no hell an' no devil. Jist think of that!"

The clergyman's face grew very grave and he drew a long breath as he straightened somewhat his stooped shoulders. Although a timid man when trying to buy a woman's clothes, he had the courage of a lion in defence of the Faith.

"Come, Mrs. Bendle, I want to have a talk with Tim."

"But he won't listen to ye, parson. He might kill ye, he's so desp'rate."

"Let him kill me, then. But I don't think he will go that far with his rashness."

It was not far to the Bendle house, which they reached in about fifteen minutes. The building was a poor ramshackle affair, unpainted, and with a clutter of rubbish about the dooryard. As they drew near, Mrs. Bendle paused and clutched the clergyman's arm.

"He's at it yit," she whispered. "Can't ye hear him smashin' things an' swearin' awful? It isn't safe fer you to go in."

Paying no heed to the woman's words, Mr. Landrose moved swiftly forward, and only stopped when he had reached the open door. And in truth, the sight which met his eyes was enough to deter the boldest. Like an infuriated demon Tim was smashing the stove with an axe. Everything else in the house had been demolished. Chairs, tables, cupboard and dishes were scattered around in the wildest confusion. Not thinking of the risk he was running, the parson sprang forward and caught Tim's right arm as it was raised for another blow. The axe came down with a bang upon the battered stove, and with a startled and savage oath, Tim wheeled fiercely around. Seeing the clergyman, he raised his clenched fist as if he would knock the intruder down. But before Mr. Landrose's steady and reproving gaze, he drew back a step and his arm dropped to his side.

"What is the meaning of this, Tim?" the parson asked.

"It's none of yer d—— bizness. You git out of this house or I'll smash every bone in yer body."

"Tim!"

A complete silence followed this one stern word. It caused the angry man to look up into the clergyman's face. But his eyes again dropped and he shuffled uneasily on his feet.

"Well, what is it?" he growled.

"Do you call yourself a man or a beast?"

"Aw, none of that stuff. You git along out of this before I hurt ye. I don't want nuthin' to do with parsons."

"But you will need one some day, Tim, and very soon at that if you allow your passions to get the better of you like this. Your heart can't stand such a rage much longer. Stronger men than you have dropped dead in wild tantrums."

"Aw, I'm strong as a moose. Ye needn't think ye kin scare me with sich twaddle."

"If you are so strong, then, why don't you go to work?"

"Work! me work! I can't git a job."

"Yes, you can. The Norton Company wants men in their quarries. There has been a notice in the post office for several days."

"Huh, I wouldn't work in a hole like that. It's not safe with them d—— blasts. They might kill a feller."

"You'd rather stay home, it seems, smash things up here and threaten to kill your wife."

"Well, that's my bizness, not yours. You git along before I throw ye out of the door."

"No, you won't."

"Yes, I will. I won't have a sneak of a parson orderin' me around in me own house. Ye can't frighten me. I'm not under yer thumb, an' ye can't cram any of yer silly Gospel pap down my throat. Git off about yer bizness of scarin' people about the devil an' hell-fire."

Tim paused for breath and glared fiercely at the clergyman.

"Ye know there's no devil an' no hell-fire. Ye only preach that to frighten people into goin' to church. But ye can't fool me. I've had me eyes opened to sich nonsense."

"If I ever had any doubt about the devil and hell-fire it would be entirely removed by watching you," Mr. Landrose quietly replied. "Your actions are all the proof I would need. But I see it is hopeless to talk to you any longer. There is only one thing left for me now."

"An' what is that?"

"To have you arrested. The Law must step in to protect your wife and save you from yourself."

At this announcement Tim's face grew livid with rage and he took a quick step toward the clergyman. He lifted his right arm to strike, but ere the blow could fall he uttered a shriek of pain, clutched his left side, and fell heavily to the floor. In an instant his wife was by his side, bending over him.

"I knew it would come," she cried. "I knew if ye laid hands on the Lord's anointed something dreadful would happen."

"It's his heart, no doubt. Let me feel his pulse," and the clergyman stooped over the prostrate man. "Bring some water, quick."

After Tim's face had been bathed, he opened his eyes and stared blankly around.

"What's the matter? Who hit me?"

"The Lord hit ye, Tim Bendle," his wife replied. "An' it's a wonder he didn't strike ye dead fer attemptin' to lay hands on the Lord's anointed. Ye'll be all right in a jiffy, so jist lay still. Guess he'll pull through," she continued, turning to the clergyman. "This'll learn him a lesson he won't soon fergit."

"Did he ever have an attack like this before, Mrs. Bendle?"

"Never like that, sir. But often when he's had his tantrums I've seen his face turn suddenly pale an' he had to set down."

But he soon fergot all about it."

"And so he will this."

"Deed he won't, sir. This is the Lord's doin's, an' it's a sign of His anger ag'inst him fer the way he's been goin' on about religion an' the Church."

"It's his heart, Mrs. Bendle, which could not stand such a violent rage. See what Tim's done to this house. How will you ever get it cleared up? You will need new furniture, too."

"Oh, I'm done with Tim, parson. He kin go his way an' I'll go mine. D'ye think I'd live with him any longer after the way he's acted to-day?"

"Oh, no, you must not leave him, Mrs. Bendle. He will need you now more than ever. You must take care of him."

"Me take care of Tim! Ye might ask me to take care of a ragin' tager right from the jungle an' I'd undertake the job quicker'n I would take care of Tim. I'd put the tager in a cage an' keep it there. But I can't do that with Tim. No, I'm goin', so that's the end of it."

At these emphatic words Tim opened his eyes, and attempted to rise.

"Don't go, Becky!" he pleaded. "Don't leave me! I'm dyin'!"

"Now, jist listen to him, parson. He doesn't want me to leave him. What in the world am I to do?"

"Stay with him, of course."

"But he won't behave himself. Jist as soon as he gits well, he'll act the same as before."

"I swear I won't, Becky," Tim declared. "I'll never raise sich ructions ag'in."

"Will ye swear that, then, before the parson, Tim?"

"Deed I will, Becky. I'll swear right now that I'll never git into sich a tantrum ag'in. Ye kin bring the Bible an' I'll kiss it."

"That will do," the clergyman ordered. "Don't go too far. You're a very much frightened man now, and willing to do and say anything. But I haven't much confidence in that kind of repentance. It isn't fear the Lord wants, but faith and love. You need a new heart, Tim."

"Yer quite right, parson. I sartinly do need a new heart. But as that is out of the question, I'll have to see the doctor an' git this old one patched up."

"That's not what I mean, Tim. It's not a new heart of flesh you need, but a spiritual heart which the Lord will give if you ask Him."

"Will He, now! Well, I must 'tend to that. In the meantime, I must see the doctor."

CHAPTER IX

THE BISHOP'S LETTER

Mr. Landrose walked slowly home, lost in deep thought. He was not the least encouraged by Tim's sudden repentance. During his ministry he had seen too many people turn very religious when they were sick, and then they became sick of their religion when they were well again. And he felt the same would be true of Tim. The man was a brute by nature, and such a person was not likely to be changed in a short time. Had there been any solid foundation it would have been different. But Mr. Landrose had known Tim for so many years that he believed he was hopeless.

There was something else that troubled him. For forty years he had been rector of Green Mount, and after that long period it was most discouraging and humiliating to have a man like Tim Bendle so close to the very church in which he had served and had given such careful instruction in the Faith. How often he had preached about the heathen in far-off lands, and the importance of giving to Missions. And yet right at home there were men, and women, too, for that matter, right in his very parish who were worse than the heathen. And whose fault was it? He had often soothed his conscience in the past by the thought that they themselves were to blame. The call went forth, but they closed their ears and would not heed. They had no desire for spiritual things, but were content with their low manner of living.

But now he did not receive any comfort from these ideas. What was he, a minister of the Church, doing for such people? Was not his message divine? Yet it had not affected Tim Bendle and others like him. Why? He paused abruptly in the road as something flashed into his mind. Had he been giving them the true Bread of Life? Had he been dealing out husks instead of food? He recalled some of his sermons which he had prepared with such care. How ineffective they seemed to him now. They had failed, and so had he. His work in the Ministry had been in vain.

"Woe! woe to me!" he murmured. "The sheep have looked to me for food, and I have not fed them. They are spiritually starved."

Reaching at length the rectory, he entered his study and sank down wearily into his desk-chair. Rachel presently entered and informed him that dinner was ready. He ate in silence, and the woman wondered what was troubling him.

"Miss Randall was here this morning, sir," she told him as he finished his meal.

"Was she? I had forgotten all about her. What did she want?"

"To talk with you on a matter of business, so she said. I am going with her to the city this afternoon to do some shopping. You asked me to do so, did you not?"

"I did. So you are going to-day?"

"Miss Randall is quite anxious to get some clothes as soon as possible, so if you do not mind—"

"No, no, go whenever you are ready. I shall be away all the afternoon myself. I must go to Mapledale to see poor old Mrs. Wedder, who is ill. Help Miss Randall all you can."

"Did you get the mail this morning, sir?"

"Why, yes. There was a letter for you which I forgot all about." He thrust his hand into his pocket, and as he brought forth the two letters a worried expression overspread his face.

"Dear me! what is coming over me? Here is your letter, Rachel, and mine, too. I forgot all about them."

Hurrying back to the study, he closed the door and again sat down at his desk. He laid the Bishop's letter unopened before him, and gazed thoughtfully upon it. Strange that he should have forgotten all about it. But that encounter with Tim Bendle had driven everything else out of his mind.

And what did that letter contain? Had the Bishop heard what had taken place at the hotel, and had written a letter of inquiry? He picked up the letter and held it in his hand. Yes, he must open it. There was no sense in delaying the suspense any longer. He might as well know the truth at once. But what a difference that letter might make in his life.

Slowly he tore open the envelope and drew out the neatly-folded paper. Then as his eyes rested upon the words written therein, they grew wide with intense astonishment. At first he thought that he had not seen aright, or that there had been some mistake. But, no, it was from the Bishop, and addressed to him.

"My dear Landrose," so the letter began,

"I am writing to inform you that a Canonry in our Cathedral Church has become vacant through the removal of Canon R. J. Westrang from this Diocese. As it is desirable that his place should be filled by a fit and proper person, and having full confidence in your integrity, morals, and dutifulness to the Church, as well as your long and faithful service as Rector of Green Mount, I would like to nominate and appoint you a Canon of the Cathedral. If you decide to accept this position, let me know as soon as possible, and I shall have the proper forms drawn up at once, and arrangements will be made for your installation.

"With kindest regards,
"Affectionately yours,
"Charles Nottingham."

Mr. Landrose read this letter through twice, and then laid it upon the desk. He was in a great quandary. If that message had come to him a week or so ago what pleasure it would have brought him. For years he had cherished the hope that one day such an honor would come to him. But he had long since given up the idea. He had seen other men receive honors in the Church, and had written them letters of congratulation. That he had been passed by caused no bitterness to rankle in his heart. He was content to go on his quiet way and let others receive preferments. He knew that a high position meant a greater responsibility and no little jealousy from some. And, besides, he was rector of a country parish where the main current of life passed him by. He had never been in the public eye, and his name had seldom appeared in the newspapers. This was to his liking, and as a humble parish priest, tending to his flock, he found the greatest happiness. But he was human, for all that, and as he thought over the Bishop's letter, he sighed. He longed to accept the Canonry, and a week ago he would have written an immediate acceptance. But how could he do so now? He had proven untrue to his holy office, and he had disobeyed his Bishop, as well. He had not been "dutiful and faithful", as the letter stated. He longed to write and explain everything. But he shrank from doing so. He would wait until he saw the Bishop, and then he could more easily tell him the truth. What that would mean he could only guess. And yet deep in his heart he felt that he had done right in giving Martha the Communion. What were all the positions the Church had to bestow compared with his undying love for her? Had he not acceded to her request, his conscience would have given him no peace for the rest of his life.

But he must write to the Bishop, and what was he to say? He must refuse the Canonry, of course, but how could he explain? What reason could he give? Anyway, he would wait and consider the matter. In a day or two he might see things in a different light.

A light knock sounded upon the door, and Rachel entered.

"Excuse me, sir. Miss Randall is outside, and would like to see you for a few minutes."

Mr. Landrose found Doris standing near the flowers at the front door. She presented a most pleasing appearance, and as he looked at her he saw again Martha Benson as he had known her in her youth. So striking was the resemblance that the girl became a little embarrassed at his searching scrutiny.

"I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Landrose," she apologized. "But I want to ask your advice about our shopping expedition."

"You have not interrupted me," the clergyman replied. "But when I saw you standing here I was reminded of someone I knew years ago. So you are going to the city this afternoon?"

"Yes, and Rachel is going with me. Will you give me an order? I have never bought anything in my own name, and as I have no money, everything will have to be charged."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so." The parson placed his hand to his head, a sure sign of his perplexity. "I had forgotten all about that. I shall write it at once. Please excuse me for a few minutes. And you must have spending money, as well."

When he returned he handed Doris a letter.

"Perhaps this will serve your purpose. I think that is all I can do for you at present."

"Oh, thank you so much," Doris replied, and there was such a grateful note in the girl's voice that a peculiar thrill smote the clergyman's heart.

He stood watching her as she walked along by Rachel's side after they had left the house for the station. Suppose she were his own grand-daughter! And in reality she might be but for what had happened so long ago. Anyway, he was her guardian, and the thought brought a glow to his face. And she was not proving so intractable as he had been led to believe from what Martha had told him about her. In fact, she was a most agreeable young person, unaffected, beautiful, and easily pleased. He wondered how it would be when he began her religious education. Martha had told him that she was sadly ignorant about Church doctrine. But he would wait until he knew her better and had won her confidence which would, no doubt, make his task much easier.

He was about to go to the stable to harness his horse, Pedro, when he saw Mrs. Bendle coming toward him. He frowned slightly, for he was in no mood to see the woman who only came to him when she was in trouble. He noticed that she was carrying something in her hand wrapped in a newspaper.

"Well, Mrs. Bendle, any more trouble with Tim?" he inquired.

"Nuthin' as bad as that last one, Parson. But Tim thinks his heart's so bad that he can't work. We haven't a bite in the house to eat, an' all Tim does is to read them books I told ye about. I've brought this one over, so ye kin see fer yerself."

She unwrapped the book, and handed it to the clergyman.

"Jist look at that, sir. The awful things inside are enough to make one's blood run cold."

Mr. Landrose took the book and looked at the title, "Broken Fetters." He then opened it and glanced at the table of contents. His face grew stern as he read some of the chapter headings, "The Myth of Religion," "The Pulpit the Coward's Castle," "Priestcraft," "The Church the Trail of the Serpent," and others of a like nature.

"So this is Tim's mental food, is it?"

"It is, sir. That's all he reads, an' he keeps his nose stuck into sich books most of the time."

"Since he had that heart attack?"

"He reads more'n ever."

"He soon got over his fright, then?"

"Oh, no, he'll never git over that. But he's tryin' to find out in his books that there's no God an' no hell, an' that what the Church says about sich things is all wrong. He's so bad himself that he reads them fer comfort."

"Very poor comfort, I should say, Mrs. Bendle. Does he ever read the Bible?"

"Only when he wants to find mistakes which them books say are there. Oh, I don't know what I'm goin' to do!"

"May I keep this book for a while?" the parson asked.

"Sure ye kin keep it. An' I hope ye'll burn it when yer through with it. It'll burn great, fer there's enough brimstone in it to make a wonderful blaze."

"But what will Tim say if he knows I have it?"

"He'll say a hull lot. But I don't care. I guess he won't dare to go too far, as I'll leave him in a jiffy, an' he knows it. He'll have to depend upon me fer his grub after this, so he'll have to strut mighty careful."

"Have you any work in view, Mrs. Bendle?"

"I'm to go to the hotel the first of the week. They pay purty well there. But to git enough to eat in the meantime is my

worry now."

"And you have nothing in the house you say?"

"Not a scrap of anything."

"Well, then, here's something to tide you over," and Mr. Landrose handed her some money he had brought forth from his pocket. "I don't mind helping you, remember, but I do dislike giving anything to Tim. This isn't the first time you have turned to me for aid. Why doesn't your husband go to the ones who rail so much against the Church and religion?"

"Ugh! they wouldn't give us a cent. An' they talk awful ag'inst people who do help. I've told Tim so time an' time ag'in, though it makes no difference. But God bless ye, sir. Ye've allus been good to us, an' I shan't fergit it, if Tim does."

When Mrs. Bendle had gone, the parson walked to the stable in a most thoughtful mood. His responsibilities were daily increasing, and he felt quite unequal to the burden. He longed to get away, anywhere, that he might rest. But there was no chance for that now. And, besides, there was the Bishop's letter waiting to be answered.

CHAPTER X

BY THE WAYSIDE

It was evening when Mr. Landrose returned from Mapledale. When a short distance from the rectory he stopped to water Pedro at an overflowing barrel at the side of the road. It was a beautiful spot, with a rich background of young cedars and firs. Luxuriant ferns grew in abundance, owing to the moisture of the soil.

As the horse was about to lower his head to the water, he started suddenly back in fright.

"Come, come, Pedro! What's wrong?"

At once a young man, who had been reclining among the ferns, rose to his feet and stepped forward.

"Excuse me, sir," he apologized. "I am the cause of the trouble, so it seems."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Norton," and the clergyman held out his hand. "Resting, eh?"

"Yes, and studying the Imperial Kingdom at the same time. Look at that," and he waved his right hand off toward the placid river and smiling meadows. "Where can you find anything finer!"

"It is beautiful," the parson agreed, as his eyes viewed the magnificent scene. "But it is not the real Imperial Kingdom. It is the world, earth earthy, so to speak. There is another, young man, which surpasses that."

"So you said in your sermon a few Sundays ago."

"Ah, you heard my sermon about the Church?"

"I did, and I wish that I could agree with you in all you said."

"Why, why, did I not state the exact truth?"

John Norton hesitated a little before replying. He was a manly young fellow and did not wish to say anything to displease the clergyman for whom he had considerable respect. His tall straight figure was drawn to its full height as he stood by the carriage. His hatless head was crowned with a wealth of dark tousled hair, and his clothes and rough boots showed signs of much wear. His steady gray eyes contained a serious expression as he thought over the parson's words.

"I did not intend any offense, Mr. Landrose. We only see things from a different point of view, that is all."

"But there can be only one point of view, young man, when it comes to the question of the Church as the Kingdom of God."

"You may be right, sir, and I shall not dispute what you say. But don't you think that you limit the Kingdom of God too much?"

"Limit it, man! Why, who can place any limit to the Church! Did not Christ Himself say that it was to extend throughout the world?"

"Quite true. But isn't that a part of His Kingdom?" and he motioned toward the river and fields. "Didn't Christ live much in the open? And how He loved the birds and flowers."

"Ah, but they are material things; not spiritual."

"The Church, then, considers spiritual things only?"

"Certainly. She is the body of Christ in a spiritual sense."

"Do you look upon human beings in the same way, sir? Are they spiritual or material?"

"Both. They have material bodies, but living souls in which dwells the spirit of God."

"But does not the Bible say that 'the temple of God is holy,' and by 'the temple' is meant the body?"

"True, true. The body is a sacred thing, of course, but only in relation to what it contains."

"And may not that be the same of the world of nature around us? In the trees and flowers can we not see the handiwork of the Master, His love, beauty, and strength? It is a wonder to me that you do not sometimes mention such things in your sermons. I am sure that your people would be greatly inspired by an occasional reference to the marvellous works of the Creator."

"I have never done so, Mr. Norton, and do not consider it advisable to begin now. There is too much of the flowery and sentimental preached to-day. What people need is solid food."

"But do you give them that, sir?"

The clergyman started slightly at these words, for he had asked himself the same question that very morning.

"W-why, don't you think I do?"

"I should say not, judging by the sermons I have heard you deliver. You dwelt mostly upon the history of the Church, its doctrine, authority, and obedience. Do you think such subjects are inspiring?"

"But the people must be taught. They must know the reason for the faith that is in them."

"I am aware of that, sir. But they need something more. When I am hungry and go to the table, suppose I am forced to listen to a long address about the history of food, its value, and what the ancient Fathers said about it? Would that satisfy me? No. It is food I need more than a lecture about food."

"Is that what I have been doing, Mr. Norton?"

The expression of concern that appeared in the clergyman's eyes was pathetic. Norton was strangely affected by the earnestness and child-like simplicity of this old man.

"Is there not something wrong, Mr. Landrose?" he asked in reply. "I notice how few people attend church. If they obtained what they desire, would they not come?"

"Ah, but do they desire instruction?"

"Perhaps not. But suppose they desire food, and do not get it?"

"What kind do you suggest, young man?"

"Spiritual food. They need the True Bread to strengthen them in the battle of life. Some, no doubt, do not care for such things. But there are many who do, and I am one of them. I have my trials and temptations, and seek God's House for help. Do you really know the needs of your people, Mr. Landrose? I have a number of men working for me, and sometimes I overhear what they say, and judge accordingly. I hope you will pardon me for speaking so plainly. But I am much interested in the deep serious things of life, and I am glad of this opportunity of talking with you."

"And so am I, Mr. Norton. Your words are stimulating. You have given me much to think about. I confess that I do not know my people as I should. I administer to the best of my ability, but I find it difficult to get close to them in friendly and intimate conversation."

"Perhaps they are not as much interested as you are in deep theological matters. Their minds are so filled with their daily affairs that they can think of little else. Now, what do you talk about, sir, when you visit a house?"

"Why, that which concerns us all, of course. I try to impress upon the members of the family the great truths of the Church, and catechise the children. I would not be true to my sacred calling if I neglected any opportunity that offered."

"I thought so. And all the time the people were dreading your visit, and longing for you to go."

"You astonish me, Mr. Norton."

"No doubt I do. But it is the truth, so far as I can learn. Suppose you leave the Church and religious matters alone the next time you make a visit. Find out about the cares of the family, enter into their interests, and discuss farm work. I feel sure

that you will get to their hearts in that manner better than in any other way."

"Do you speak from experience, Mr. Norton? You are a young man yet, and how have you been able to understand things of which I am ignorant?"

"Because I have lived and worked with men. And there is something else which might interest you. I was destined from my youth for the Ministry. My parents desired it, and I entered college with that aim in view. But the sudden death of my father made it imperative that I should take his place. He had several large contracts on hand, and it was my duty to see that they were carried out. I, accordingly, left college three years ago with my course unfinished."

"But you will go back, will you not?" the clergyman eagerly asked, more interested now than ever in the young man. "You will not throw aside the work you began for mere worldly gain?"

John Norton smiled as he gazed thoughtfully out over the fields upon which the shades of evening were deepening.

"I am afraid that I cannot go back," he quietly replied. "There are circumstances which compel me to carry on my father's business."

"Is it money, Mr. Norton? Think of the rich young ruler and his great refusal. Remember the Master's words, 'What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul'."

"But I have not gained the whole world, Mr. Landrose, and I do not see why I should lose my soul. I firmly believe that in some ways a man can do more good outside the Ministry than in it."

"You do! Why?"

"Because he has more freedom. He can work among men as one of them, but just as soon as he becomes a clergyman a gulf is fixed. He belongs to a class apart from men in general, and they either avoid him or are uneasy and restrained in his presence. They do not show their real selves in his company, but act parts which are not natural. Oh, I know from experience."

"But Christ lived among men, and drew them to him," the parson defended.

"I know He did. But He was one of them, a carpenter by trade. And besides, there was no ecclesiastical system in His Kingdom such as we have to-day. And Christ understood men, their many sorrows and temptations. He drew all to Him by love and sympathy. And it is Christ, with all that He can give, what men need to-day. They may not say so in words, but there is a longing, a hunger in their hearts which He alone can satisfy."

"But people do not seem to act as if they desire spiritual food, Mr. Norton."

"You think so? But if you study men as I have you might think differently. They are restless, dissatisfied. I see it on every hand. Notice the expression in the eyes of most people, and what do you find there? A mute, pathetic appeal for something they cannot find. Watch a crowd on our city streets, see them moving restlessly to and fro, seeking for something they cannot find. It is the soul urging them on, driving them here and there. They work, but under compulsion. They play, but there is something lacking in their pleasure. The truth is, that not until they find Christ will they find rest and satisfaction for their souls' needs. It is only waste effort to talk to such people about the Church, its history and doctrine. It is something else they want, and until that great want is supplied, little can be accomplished."

"How do you understand all this?" Mr. Landrose asked in surprise.

"Because I know my own needs, sir. During the last few years I have experienced what I have tried to describe. I was restless, seeking for something I could not find. When I began to study for the Ministry I thought I should find what I needed. At college the studies did not satisfy me. Church history, patristics, and the various books on theology, while filling my mind with a certain amount of information, did not give me what I desired. A dull despair settled upon me, and at one time I felt that religion was all a hollow sham, pretending to give what it could not really supply. To tell you the truth, faith had almost left me until—"

"Until what?" the clergyman asked, leaning forward, his eyes fixed intently upon the young man's earnest face.

"Until I happened to hear some burning words uttered by a street-preacher. I was about to pass by in disgust, but stopped

to listen out of amused curiosity. To my surprise I became strangely moved. The man had something I did not have. I cannot remember now what he said. But it was his manner, the intense earnestness of his voice, and the wonderful glow in his eyes which affected me so strongly. As I left the place I knew that I had found something which I had been seeking. But, there, I must not weary you any more."

"And you have cast aside the Church, I suppose?" the parson queried, and there was a note of sadness in his voice.

"Indeed I have not, sir. The Church is all right, but in my humble opinion she is being wrongly interpreted. Too much emphasis has been placed upon outward things, and not enough upon the great truths she contains. Forms and ceremonies, history, and such things, are helpful. But to consider them as all-important is a serious mistake. I like to have all things done decently and in order, but too often the spirit is sacrificed to the letter. I believe that the Church is the greatest organization in the world to do the Master's work. But it must have the life-giving spirit burning freely within."

"I am glad to know that you have not cast off the Church," and Mr. Landrose breathed a sigh of relief. "Have you found it difficult to reconcile the letter and the spirit?"

"Not at all. My vision has become much enlarged, and I am learning something new and wonderful every day. Only this evening while resting here and meditating upon the Imperial Kingdom I have received new light and strength. All is beauty, and yet all is law and order. Say, Mr. Landrose, I wish you would spend an afternoon with me in the woods. You have not had a holiday for years, so I understand."

"Only when I go to the Synod. But I cannot call that a holiday, as it always wearies me."

"Well, come with me to-morrow, and I feel sure you will not regret it. And besides, there are many things I wish to talk about. It has been a long time since I have had such an interesting conversation as this."

The clergyman hesitated about acceding to this unusual request. And while he was thinking it over, a motor truck drove up and stopped nearby.

"This is the truck I have been waiting for," Norton explained. "But you will go with me, will you not, sir? Go for my sake, at least."

"Very well, I suppose I must," was the somewhat reluctant reply. "I think I can spare the time."

"Thank you so much, sir. I shall come for you, and we shall have the time of our lives together. Good-bye, and forgive me for keeping you here so long."

CHAPTER XI

A DAY'S OUTING

Mr. Landrose drove home in a most thoughtful mood. His conversation with John Norton had been quite disturbing, and yet interesting. He liked the young man for his straightforward talk, and he had to acknowledge that there was considerable truth in what he said. He felt that it was so with himself, anyway, and it saddened him to recall that during the whole of his ministry he had laid such stress upon externals.

After he had stabled and fed Pedro he went into his study. Rachel was nowhere to be seen, and he wondered if she had returned from the city. Seating himself at his desk, he began to work upon his sermon. He was tired after his drive that day, but Sunday was drawing near, so he could not afford to rest. And, besides, he would be off upon that tramp with Norton the next day.

With his sermon before him and pen in hand he found it very difficult to write. Formerly it had been no trouble to set down on paper the weekly message he had to give his people. He had always been so sure of what he should say and what they needed that he had never hesitated. Now, however, it was different. His views were undergoing a radical change and he was seeing things in a new light. But he could not relinquish the old without a struggle. What he had taught for forty years was not easily laid aside. With an effort he aroused himself and tried to write as in the past. But all in vain. While the pen was forming the customary words and sentences, his heart was pleading for something else. "Tell your people about the Master," it urged. "Speak to them of His love, purity and truth. Present to them a winning picture of the Man who came to save from sin, and to lead them to higher things. Show them that religion is not in mere observance of certain rules, but it is life and is as vital to the soul as air, food, and water to the body. Teach them that worship should not be considered as a mere duty, but as an act of love. Instil in them a desire for communion with the Master, and then prayer and worship will become a joy."

"God help me!" he groaned, laying aside his pen, and bowing his head upon his hands. "How can I do all this when I have it not in myself? How can I give them what they need when I do not possess it? Oh, for a vision such as that young man Norton had?"

He was aroused by the arrival of Rachel and Doris. The latter came at once into the study to see him. She had no idea that she was disturbing him in his mental struggle. Had Rachel, or anyone else, in fact, done so he would have resented the intrusion. But he was pleased to see the girl, for her presence brushed away the clouds that had settled so heavily upon him. She was very animated, and as she stood before him he thought that he had never beheld such a beautiful type of radiant womanhood.

"Oh, Mr. Landrose, we have had such a wonderful afternoon!" she exclaimed. "Rachel is a dear, and helped me so much with my shopping. She has such nice ideas."

"I am glad you enjoyed yourself," the clergyman replied. "But you must be tired after all your excitement. Won't you sit down and rest awhile?"

"Oh, no, thank you. Rachel is preparing tea, and I want to help her. She was so worried about you. But we missed the early train, so that is why we are late. You must be nearly starved. I know I am."

"I had my tea out in the country, so I am not hungry. But may I come and sit at the table while you eat?"

"Oh, that will be splendid! I shall go at once and tell Rachel."

With a light buoyant step she left him, and soon he heard her cheery voice talking with Rachel in the dining-room. What a change her presence made in that quiet house. She was the sunshine flooding the rooms with a bright gladness. And yet she was wofully ignorant in religious matters, so Martha had told him. And he had intended to teach her. But could he do so? What could he add to what she already possessed? He might teach her Church history, and Church doctrine, but would not that be giving of his poverty? Would such things enrich her young life? Once, such a doubt would have seemed to him like the rankest heresy. But now he saw otherwise, and realised that she could teach him better than he could teach her.

He sat in his accustomed place at the head of the table, but ate little. He was content to watch Doris, and listen as she told about her experiences that afternoon. It really had been a wonderful adventure to her, as it had been the first time she had ever been allowed to do her own shopping.

"I hope you will like my new dresses," she said. "You must see them when they come."

"I am a very poor judge of such things," Mr. Landrose smilingly replied.

"But you like for women to wear nice clothes, do you not?"

"I have never thought much about it. But as I am your guardian, I want you to be well-dressed, that is, neatly and decently. However, I shall wait and see how you look in your new finery before I give my judgment."

The next day John Norton came for the clergyman. He had a man with him to take the car home.

"I am sorry I am somewhat late," he apologized. "But I could not get away any sooner."

In another minute they were speeding on their way out into the country. Mr. Landrose enjoyed the drive in the big high-powered car and compared it with his slow-moving horse.

"This is very pleasant, Mr. Norton," he remarked as they were moving over a fine level piece of road. "It is quite a luxury after my old waggon."

"You need a car, sir. It would be a great help in your work."

"I suppose I do, though I fear I could not learn to drive one. It is difficult for me to accustom myself to new things. That is one of the penalties of old age."

"Why, it would make you young again, Mr. Landrose. I wish—"

Before he could finish the sentence the car stopped at a place where a winter road led off into the woods.

"We shall get out here," John explained. "I think you will enjoy the walk along the woodland way."

"It does look pleasant," the parson replied as he alighted from the car and entered the cool retreat. "It is nice to get away from the highway with its dust and heat."

"Nature is always soothing to the nerves," Norton remarked as he walked along by the clergyman's side. "See how the trees bend as if to protect us from all prying eyes. I often come this way and find it good for quiet meditation."

"I have never been here before, Mr. Norton."

"And you have lived here for forty years, and passed this way every week!"

"Yes, and more often than that at times."

"There are other such roads which lead to wild meadows, brooks, and lakes. I have been over quite a number already, and always find something new and inspiring. It is better than any tonic, and it keeps a man young."

"You said the same thing about driving a car, Mr. Norton. You were about to express a wish when we stopped at this road."

"Oh, I was going to say how I wish that you could enter into the spirit of driving a car. I am always thrilled when at the wheel by the thought of the great power that is under my control, and obedient to my will. At a touch all the force in the engine is aroused to mighty action. Then at another touch that force is stayed and the car becomes as gentle as a child. It is really a God-like thing, for only God in man could dare conceive and fashion like to God."

"You have a keen perception, I see," the clergyman remarked. "It is a valuable faculty."

"But all have it, sir, if they will only make use of it. If we see merely with the outward eyes how much better are we than the animals around us? But to have the inward vision, ah, that is what makes life valuable and worth while. I like to develop the ideas which come to me. For instance, I spoke about the power and gentleness of a motor engine. But do we

not see the same around us? Behold the greatness of the Almighty, His power shown in all the tremendous forces of Nature, and His gentleness in fashioning the tender leaf or the delicate flower. And I like to believe that in the heart of each one of us there is a God-like power if we will only make use of it—a power to give us strength, and yet as gentle as the falling of a beam of light upon the eye of a little child. We are but instruments to be touched by the Master like that engine, for example. Did not St. Paul say, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthenth me?' And it is true."

Norton seemed to be talking to himself as he moved forward. In fact, he had almost forgotten his companion, who was struggling to keep up with him. Presently he realised his speed, and a smile illumined his face as he looked around at the panting clergyman.

"Excuse me, sir. I became lost in meditation and was walking too fast. But here we are at this beautiful little lake. Did you ever see anything more entrancing than that?"

They stood for a few minutes looking across the water lying like a burnished mirror amidst its setting of dark green trees which lined the banks and were reflected in the clear depths beneath.

"That is worth coming to see, is it not?" Norton questioned as he lifted his hat. "I always uncover my head in the presence of such peace and beauty."

"And well you may, young man. And I shall follow your example. Suppose we rest here a while, for I am quite tired."

Beneath the shade of a large spruce tree they sat down and watched the water before them. Both were silent, wrapped in thought. To Mr. Landrose it was a novel experience to be away in the woods, free from all parochial cares, and he enjoyed it. He knew now that he had missed much during his life by not living more in God's great open spaces, holding communion with the beautiful and helpful things of Nature.

For some time they remained in this quiet spot ere continuing their journey. But all along the way they found much of interest, sometimes a fern or flower, and again a brook bubbling down through its canopy of leafy boughs. Time sped by unheeded. They were like children who had wandered away into fairyland, rejoicing in their wonderful discoveries.

"This has been a great afternoon to me," Mr. Landrose declared as he at length paused on the top of a wooded hill and looked down upon a valley below. "I am sorry it is drawing to a close. Perhaps we had better go back."

"Not yet, sir. The Quarries are quite near, and you must have supper there with me. I know you will like to meet the men. I shall drive you home this evening in my car."

"But I am not properly dressed," Mr. Landrose protested. "Why, look at my hands. See how dirty they are. And so are my clothes and boots. It would never do for me to go this way."

The young man laughed at his companion's worry.

"Oh, you're all right, sir. You will not find the men critical about your appearance. I believe that they will be pleased to see you just as you are, that is, like themselves."

It did not take them long to reach the Quarries, where they found the men at supper in the big mess-house. They took their places among them, and it was a novel experience to the clergyman. He watched the men curiously as if they were beings from another world. Their rough manners did not appeal to him. But they were orderly, and after the meal was over, they went outside for their after-supper smoke.

"Say, Mr. Landrose," Norton suggested, "this is the first time a clergyman ever came here to my knowledge. Suppose you have a short service. I know the men would enjoy it, for they are a fine lot of fellows."

"A service here, and now!" the parson gasped. "Why, I am not prepared. I have no Prayer Book."

"I have one which you could use."

"But I have no sermon or robes, and I could not think of conducting a service without them. It would be most undignified to do."

"Very well, sir. It was merely a suggestion. It seems too good an opportunity to miss."

"You will have to excuse me now, Mr. Norton. But I will come again prepared and conduct a service in a proper manner. How will that do?"

"Very well, sir, do as you think best. If you are ready now I shall take you home. You must be tired after your long tramp."



CHAPTER XII

THE PARSON'S DELEMMA

The next day, being Saturday, Mr. Landrose spent part of the day at his sermon. But as he wrote, an uneasy feeling possessed him. He thought of the men at the Quarries, and his refusal to hold a service for them. Had he been right? Should he not have had a few prayers and given them a short address? But he had never done such a thing without his robes of office and a written sermon. He had always disapproved of carelessness in praying and preaching, considering set forms and written sermons as alone proper. There were too many men going about leading people astray by sensational methods, so he believed, and he had ever endeavored to warn his people against such interlopers, as he termed them. But now he was not altogether sure that he was right. He knew that all things should be done decently and in order, but might there not be exceptions, such as at the Quarries, for instance? Had he really become so enslaved to an ironbound system that he could not escape? He sighed as he mused upon all this, and once more centred his attention upon his sermon.

But all day Sunday his mind would return to those men at the Quarries. His conscience gave him no rest. On Monday, about noon, he was more disturbed than ever. He had just returned from the post office, when John Norton arrived at the rectory, who informed him that a man had been killed at the Quarries that morning.

"It was a premature blast," he explained, "and Tom Hidson was caught, while several others narrowly escaped."

"My! my!" the parson exclaimed. "This is very unfortunate."

"Indeed it is, sir, and the first serious accident we had had for some time. There was carelessness somewhere, and there must be a thorough investigation. An inquest will be held to-night, and the funeral will be to-morrow at St. Alban's Church, if you have no objection. Hidson was one of your flock, was he not?"

"He was, and a very decent man, but somewhat careless about attending church."

"He was one of my best workmen, and he never gave me any trouble. I feel sorry for his family."

"I shall have to give a sermon, I suppose, Mr. Norton. It is the custom in country parishes, although I consider it quite unnecessary. It is not done, as a rule, in cities. A funeral is considered an event of outstanding importance here. And, by the way, we shall need someone to play, as our organist, Miss Needbury, is away from home at present."

"I think that I can get someone to take her place, Mr. Landrose, so you can leave that to me. But I must get on my way now, as I have much to do to-day. The funeral will be at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, if that will suit you. I shall come for you in my car. So you will have an opportunity of speaking to my men, after all, and sooner than you expected."

A troubled expression came into the clergyman's eyes as he glanced up into the young man's face.

"I shall never forgive myself for missing that chance last Friday," he solemnly declared. "Perhaps a few prayers and some words might have done much good for poor Hidson. And now it is too late. But, there, I must not detain you any longer."

Mr. Landrose shut himself up in his study, and after he had chosen a suitable text he began to write out his sermon. He knew that there would be many people at the funeral, and he wished to make most of the opportunity that would be thus afforded to speak strong words of warning about the shortness and uncertainty of life. He knew that all would be deeply affected by the accident and would listen to advice on such an occasion better than at any other time. Men would be there, too, who very seldom attended church, so it would be a good chance to speak to them. He put special care upon his sermon, and the next morning he read it over most critically, revising and polishing up the rough uneven places.

"I like this sermon," he told himself, as he at last laid the manuscript upon the desk and leaned back in his chair. "I do hope and pray that it will have the desired effect. I am somewhat doubtful, though, about the sentiment, and I trust it does not savor too much of the popular religious cant of modern times. I suppose people like it, though they should not always get what they like, but what they need."

When John Norton arrived at the rectory that afternoon he had Doris with him in his car. The clergyman was surprised as

he was not aware that they knew each other.

"I have an organist, you see," Norton remarked.

"I didn't know that you are a musician," he said to Doris, as he stepped into the car.

"John says I am," was the smiling reply, "so he has dragged me off to-day. I never played at a funeral and I am certain that I shall be very nervous."

"Oh, you'll make out all right," Norton assured, as he speeded up the car. "I have heard you play and am not one bit worried as to how you will make out."

"But that was on the piano, John. I am not accustomed to an organ. It's not a pipe-organ, I hope, Mr. Landrose."

"Dear me, no. It is merely a small harmonium. We have no pipe-organs here."

Doris was with John in the front seat, so the clergyman was alone behind. He leaned comfortably back and watched the two in front of him. They seemed to be on excellent terms, and called each other by their Christian names. They must have been acquainted for some time, he thought. It was strange that neither had mentioned the fact to him.

Thus Mr. Landrose mused as the car sped on its way. When they reached the church they found many people gathered about the door waiting for the service to begin. The funeral procession was just arriving, so the clergyman hurried into the vestry to robe. This did not take him long, and when he was through he put his hand into his grip for his sermon. To his surprise and consternation it was not there. He had left it on his study desk! What was he to do? Never before had he made such a blunder. How stupid he had been to forget it, and on such an important occasion as this. For a minute he was stricken with a nameless fear. He felt helpless. But there was no time to go back for the sermon, and without it the funeral service would be a dismal failure, according to the idea which prevailed in the parish. Not to have a sermon would be considered a slight by the relatives of the dead man. All the apologies and explanations he might make would be of no avail. The family would look upon it as a disgrace, and the news would spread far and wide.

And as he stood waiting, wondering what he should do, Norton came into the vestry to inform him that the people were waiting for him to begin the service. With trembling hands he seized his Prayer Book and walked to the church door. Then up the aisle he slowly moved, reading the opening sentences of the Burial Service. But he hardly knew what he was saying, for his mind was greatly perturbed. Doris was at the organ, and while the first hymn was being sung, he racked his brain for some solution of his difficulty. But none came, and he went through the Service and read the Lesson like a man in a dream. Never in the many years of his ministry had he ever undergone such agony of soul at any service. The church was filled to the door, and many were standing. The day was moderately warm, but to the unhappy man that crowded building seemed oppressively hot. The perspiration stood out in beads upon his forehead, and as he gave out the second hymn a feeling of faintness came upon him. With a great effort he aroused himself and glanced down at the open door. How he longed to be out in the fresh air under the shade of the friendly trees, away from that place of torture.

And as he looked he noted the earnest expression upon the faces of the men and women before him. They were all hard-working people, grinding out their daily tasks, some on the farms and others in the Quarries. They were now deeply affected by the hymn, and the eyes of some were misty with tears. A feeling of deep compassion for these people came into his heart. He was their leader, the one appointed to minister to them in spiritual things. And what had he to give them? Nothing now because he had left his carefully-prepared written sermon at home. A sense of shame and humiliation swept upon him at the thought. Here was an opportunity to speak words of comfort and warning, and he was not equal to the occasion. Suddenly a voice seemed to whisper to him, "Speak, and it shall be given unto you what to say."

The last verse of the hymn was now being sung, and he had to do something. From force of habit he moved toward the pulpit, climbed the few steps, and stood before the people. The singing ceased and the organ died softly down to the closing notes. After Mr. Landrose had uttered the brief words of the Invocation, the congregation settled down into their seats with their faces turned expectantly up to the white-haired man in the pulpit. Quietly the clergyman announced his text: "Be ye also ready." He paused and looked around the church. An intense silence ensued, for all were surprised at the expression upon his face. Instead of fumbling with a sermon, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the written words, he was looking at the people before him. This was so unusual that those who had listened to him for years stared in amazement. But when he began to speak, at first in a somewhat faltering manner, they were thrilled by the words which fell from his lips. Eagerly they leaned forward, held spell-bound not only by what he said but by the remarkable glow in

his eyes and the earnestness upon his face. He truly seemed inspired that afternoon, and the impression that he made upon his hearers was profound. There was nothing of a sensational nature about what he said, but every word he uttered was vital and laden with a deep spiritual meaning.

The sermon was not long, and as he drew near the close, he hesitated and then paused for a few seconds.

"Brethren," he continued, "I am an old man now and cannot expect to have many more years to speak to you. Now is the time for us to get ready, for the Great Call may come sooner than we believe. And the getting ready should be a true growth and a matter of joy. We all know how the preparing for a journey to some distant place occupies our hearts and minds for days, and sometimes for months. And there is joy in the preparation. How foolish it would be for anyone to start upon a journey without due preparation. And yet many never think of getting ready for the future, but live carelessly from day to day as if this life were to be always their home. Therefore, 'Be ye ready, for we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man may come'."

Slowly the clergyman left the pulpit, went back to the reading desk and gave out the closing hymn. While preaching, a strange power and exhilaration had possessed him such as he had never experienced before. But now there came a reaction, and he felt very weak and wretched. From the heights of glory he had suddenly descended to the valley of humiliation. He had departed from the custom of a life-time, and had spoken without a written sermon before him. And words had come easily, without any apparent effort on his part. Perhaps it was the work of the evil one, seeking his downfall. He tried to recall what he had said, but everything seemed like a mere jumble to him now. This worried him, and caused him considerable embarrassment as he walked down the aisle at the close of the singing. Had he made a fool of himself? he wondered. Was that the reason why the people watched him so intently while he was preaching? Were they so surprised at what he said that they could only stare at him in amazement? But after the service at the grave, his mind was somewhat relieved when several men and women came and thanked him for his sermon. One woman, especially, told how much help she had received. People had never done that before, so far as he could remember. Perhaps there was something of value in what he had said, after all.

"That was a fine sermon you gave us to-day," John Norton remarked as they drove away from the church.

"I am glad you liked it," the parson replied.

"I enjoyed it very much," Doris declared. "It was wonderful. Why don't you preach like that all the time?"

"W—why, I never did such a thing before, and I am really ashamed of myself. I am afraid I made many sad blunders. But I wish to congratulate you upon your playing. It was excellent."

"It certainly was," John agreed. "With exceptionally good music and sermon the funeral went off well. That was what old Mrs. Spicer told me, and she is an authority, if anyone is."

"Yes, poor Mrs. Spicer attends every funeral, and so does her husband. It's about the only time he ever goes to church, and he boasts that he hasn't missed a funeral in the parish for fifty years."

This amused the young couple and they laughed heartily. The parson noticed how happy they were together, and as he crouched back wearily in his seat, he became much interested in watching them talking to each other.

"How good it is to be young and full of abounding health," he mused.

His mind went back to other days when he and Martha were young with the future all before them. But how little did they know what the years held in store for them both. And now her grand-daughter was sitting before him, while he himself was an old man, worn out and lonely.

He was aroused at last from his reverie by the stopping of the car at the rectory door. He thanked them both for their great assistance, and then stood and watched them as they drove away.

"They are a fine couple," he murmured, "and so happy. It is the old old story, I see. God grant, it may turn out more happily than——"

He did not finish the sentence, but his eyes were misty as he turned and entered the house.

CHAPTER XIII

COMPANY FOR TEA

Breakfast was over at the Rectory and Parson Dan was seated at his desk, writing. It was a beautiful morning with scarcely a breath of wind stirring the air. Through the open window on his left came the incessant buzz of bees wallowing among the grape vines over the porch, and the twitter of birds in the branches of the maples and elms. The delicate harmonizing perfume from dew-washed fields and smiling gardens drifted softly into the room. Nature was employing her most alluring charms to stir the soul of the silent man and draw him forth from his quiet retreat.

But such enticements had no effect upon Parson Dan. He was not at all devoid of the sense of beauty, but through long years of training he had steeled himself to resist all influences of the world when they interfered with his Church duties. And his duty now was the making out of his report to be presented the coming week at the meeting of the Synod. In it he summed up the work in his parish for the past year, the money that had been raised, the number of families under his care, the visits he had made, the services he had held, and the activities of the various societies. For many years he had performed this task, using almost the identical phrases, and making his report always the same length. It was a dry matter-of-fact record, unilluminated by any touch of imagination or the rosy touch of sentiment.

When this had been completed to his satisfaction, he carefully folded the paper, wrote the name of the parish across the top, and laid it upon the desk. He then turned his attention to his sermon lying unfinished before him. It was for next Sunday, and the subject was "Church Authority." He had it partly completed, and in it he had set forth some of the arguments he had used in many former addresses. He was preparing this now as a matter of duty, with none of his old-time spirit and enthusiasm. He had written about half the sermon the middle of the preceding week, and before the funeral. Carefully now he read over what he had written, and as he did so, a repellant spirit swept upon him, for into his mind came the funeral sermon he had delivered the day before. He thought of the eager upturned faces of the men and women in the little church as he talked to them so earnestly about the eternal things of life, and pointed them to Him who is their only refuge and hope of salvation. What connection had the cold facts of history and doctrine such as he had been teaching in the past with the needs of human souls and the spiritual life of the Great Master? He shuffled uneasily in his chair. Was it the voice of the evil one, to be resisted at all cost? Were all his long years of teaching of no avail? Had he been in the wrong? Surely not. He would repel the temptation and continue his sermon. He must not give way to such a sentimental mood.

Turning again to his manuscript, he tried to write. But words would not come, so he was at length forced to lay down his pen in despair. It was no use; he lacked the fervor that had animated his soul in the past. He leaned back in his chair and tried to reason out the strange mood that had come upon him.

He was suddenly aroused by a ripple of joyous laughter from out of doors. Startled, he turned and glanced through the window on his left. And what he saw there held him spell-bound. It was Doris Randall standing by the bird-cage which Rachel had hung outside the dining-room window. The forefinger of her left hand was thrust through the bars, thus disturbing the canary within. Her face was aglow with animation as she talked and chirped to the little feathered creature. Parson Dan was certain that he had never beheld such a scene of loveliness, and his heart thrilled with pleasure. He noted the charm of her face and form, the rich tinge of health in her cheeks, and the wealth of her dark-brown hair, becomingly trimmed, leaving her full-rounded neck exposed above the white collar of her neat, cream-colored dress. The unconscious and unstudied simplicity of her attitude appealed strongly to the silent watcher. She made him long to be young again, and brought back memories of far-off days. And he was the guardian of this radiant being! To him she had been committed for instruction and guidance along the paths of rectitude. He had planned to fulfil his promise, and had only been awaiting a favorable opportunity to begin his teaching in the history and the doctrine of the Church. But now his resolution suddenly weakened. In fact, a spirit of rebellion welled up in his heart at the idea. Why should he try to force such a joyous nature to conform to his dry-as-dust doctrines? It seemed more proper that she should teach him, and breathe into his soul something of her own healthful and life-giving spirit. The next minute, however, he crushed back this thought and rose abruptly from his chair. It was the voice of the evil one again tempting and luring him from his path of duty. He would atone for his weakness by going to the girl and endeavoring to lead her thoughts away from the attractions of the world to higher and nobler things.

Crossing the room, he stood looking up thoughtfully at the volumes arranged so neatly upon their various shelves.

Presently he brought down a little book and looked at the title. Ah, it was just the thing, "Plain Instructions on the Church," with a sub-title, "A Manual of Doctrine for Young People." He would give her that to read. It would be a start in the right direction, at any rate.

With the book in his hand, he went to the front door and stepped outside. But Doris was not there. She was with Rachel who was peeling potatoes under the shade of a big apple tree a short distance from the kitchen door. Parson Dan gave a sigh, more of relief than of regret, as he returned to his study and replaced the book upon the shelf. He then put on his hat, picked up his cane and left the house. He would go to the post-office for his mail. With such an excuse he tried to soothe his conscience. But he felt uncomfortable. The tempter had come to him that morning, and he had yielded. He was a coward, and as a priest of the Church he had shirked his duty. But never again would he be so weak, he decided, as he strode rapidly forward.

The next day Doris made an afternoon visit to the rectory. She played for a while with the canary, and then chatted with Rachel of whom she was becoming very fond. Parson Dan had been called to visit a sick parishioner, a duty he never neglected. He was caught in a thunder storm on his way home, and when he entered the house he found Doris in the dining-room arranging some flowers in a vase upon the table. She looked up from her task, and a smile overspread her face when she saw the clergyman.

"You are to have company for tea, sir," she announced. "I am to be your guest, and you may thank the storm for that."

The parson smiled, although he was somewhat taken aback by such words. It was not the way young girls behaved when he was young. Anyway, it was good to see the girl standing by the table, and her presence added a refreshing charm to the room.

"It will be a great pleasure, I assure you," he replied. "I shall be ready for tea in a few minutes."

In less than half an hour both were seated at the table, the clergyman in his customary place at the head, with Doris opposite where she insisted upon sitting.

"I like this," she declared, after Grace had been said, and Rachel had served them with fresh fried salmon and warmed-up potatoes. "It is much nicer than at the hotel. They never say Grace there, and there is always such a confusion and senseless chatter. It is so peaceful here."

"I am glad that you enjoy it, Doris. It is surprising, though, that you can find any pleasure in the company of old people."

"You do not seem old to me, Mr. Landrose. You are always so bright and pleasant. And as for Rachel, she is a darling, and talks so much about her life, especially when she was a girl. It is wonderful how she keeps so cheerful when she has had so much trouble."

"Yes, she is a faithful soul and has done her best to take the place of my dear sister."

"Your sister! Did she live here?"

"This was my first and only parish, and my sister came with me. She died ten years ago. She was a rare musician, and that is her piano in the parlor. The young people often came here in the evenings for practice, and what a pleasant time they always had. There is no music here now, and the piano has been closed ever since she went away. She was a dear good sister to me, and was such a wonderful assistance in my work. The people loved her, for she was ever doing some deed of kindness."

The parson's eyes were misty and his voice low. As Doris noticed his emotion, a strange sympathy for this lonely man came into her heart. He seemed grayer and more wrinkled than ever as he sat there with his head bent forward. He needed to be cheered up, and she wondered what she could do.

"I understand now why you never married," she at length said. "You had your sister with you, and she took the place of a wife."

"She did. But I often longed for a home with children of my own to be a comfort to me in my old age."

"Let me be a grand-daughter to you, then, Mr. Landrose," Doris impulsively suggested. "Since Granny left me I have no one to look after, and I feel certain that I can be of some comfort to you."

The parson looked at the animated face before him, and his heart was deeply touched. What would he not give to have such a girl as his grand-daughter. And she might truly be that now but for what happened years ago. But it could not be. It would only cause people to talk.

"I am afraid that is impossible, Doris. I could not very well announce that you are my grand-daughter. I can easily imagine what people would think and say."

"I do not care one bit what they say. It is none of their business."

"But they would make it their business, my dear. So while I am rector here I must put no stumbling-block in the way of the Lord's work."

"You are my guardian, though, and if people want to talk, they can do so about that. Isn't it strange that Granny should have chosen you, of all men, to look after me. I had no idea why she was so anxious to come to this little place. But she often talked about it and was so happy when we at last arrived. And to think that she lived such a short time. I knew she was not well, but I never for a moment imagined she was going to die so soon."

"Did your grandmother ever speak about me?" the clergyman asked as indifferently as possible.

"Oh, yes, she often told me that she knew you well, and that she went to school with you. Perhaps that was the reason why she wished to come here that she might see you again. Anyway, she took it for granted that you would be my guardian."

Parson Dan made no reply. He folded up his napkin, and pushed his chair back a little from the table. He was certain now that Doris had no knowledge of her grandmother's early life so far as he was concerned. In a way he was glad, and yet if she only knew he could talk to her somewhat about what was so near to his heart. The past to him was as fresh as ever. Time had made no difference in his love for Martha Benson. He had always thought of her as she appeared that night they had parted, not to meet again for many long years. But he had never lost track of her from the time she was separated from her first husband. She had become prominent in the world of Society, and he had followed her doings in the newspapers and from the gossip which he occasionally overheard. But she had turned to her first lover, and had placed her only grandchild in his keeping. Of all the friends she had made in her gay career there was none she could trust with the child's welfare as the man she had so heartlessly cast aside years before. It was strange, and as he mused upon it all he became oblivious to time and place.

He was aroused by the sound of music, and looking quickly around, he saw Doris seated at the piano in the adjoining room. She was playing an old familiar tune, in keeping with the thoughts that had been occupying his mind. Slowly he rose from his chair, bent his head in a silent Grace, and went into his study. Here he sat down by his desk, closed his eyes, and gave himself up to the joy of the music. Piece after piece Doris played, sometimes singing the words in her sweet soprano voice. After a while he heard someone singing with her, a man's voice, strong and vibrant, which he recognized as John Norton's.

CHAPTER XIV

REVISING VALUES

Next morning Parson Dan was early at work in his garden. This was a great relief as it gave him an opportunity to consider several things that were uppermost in his mind. Chief of these was the Bishop's letter. It had not been answered, and he knew that he could not put it off any longer. He would write that very day. But first of all he wished to be sure of what he should say, so out among the rows of beets, carrots, beans, and other vegetable friends, he could think more clearly than anywhere else.

Since the funeral he had never been in any doubt as to the reply he should make to the Bishop. He saw matters in a new light now, and he still felt the exhilaration of that sermon in the little church. Honors seemed very trifling compared with the strange thrill that possessed his soul. No longer did he believe it to be the work of the evil one trying to effect his ruin. He was surprised that his eyes had not been opened before to the quickening power of the spiritual life.

Before noon he went for his mail, and on his way home he stopped at the store to order some groceries needed at the rectory. Jerry Crumples, his old friend, was seated at his desk behind the counter working at his accounts. He was a patriarchal-looking man, with long beard, white hair, and kind twinkling eyes. He looked up as the clergyman entered.

"Busy as usual, I see," Mr. Landrose accosted, as he stepped forward and leaned against the counter for support.

"Oh, doing a little, parson. It's necessary to keep the rust from forming, you know."

"Well, the rust will never settle where you are, Jerry. I wish I could say the same of all in this parish."

"So do I, so do I," Jerry agreed, laying down his pen. This was a favorite subject of his, and one in which he knew his visitor was also interested. "If all the people would keep busy and pay their bills I would not have to be working so hard all the time. You would be astonished if I told you how many people owe me, and some will never pay one cent."

"Can't you collect it?"

"Humph! How could I collect it, when there's nothing to collect? Some of those accounts in that book have been running on for years. I suppose I should revise my whole system as I do my price-lists at times. My wife keeps at me to start in, but I haven't done so yet. When people get as old as we are, parson, it's mighty hard to change our ways of working."

"Indeed it is, Jerry. But if it's for the best why shouldn't we do it?"

"That's just what my wife is always saying. But now look here, parson, you've been working according to a certain system ever since you came to this parish forty years ago. Could you change now, even though you wanted to?"

There was no chance for further conversation, as Jerry's attention was taken up with two customers who had entered. Mr. Landrose left the list of groceries to be sent to the rectory, and walked slowly homeward. But in his study after dinner he thought over what the storekeeper had said. It was hard to revise the price-list of life and to make a decided change. At one time, and only a short while before, he would have considered it impossible. But now it was different. It was that very thing he himself was trying to do.

He leaned back in his chair as this current of thought swept upon him. He recalled St. Paul's words, "What things were gain to me I counted but loss for Christ." Ah, that great and noble champion of the Faith knew whereof he spoke. He, too, had been fast bound by the cords of formalism and the mere letter of the Law. But the new life, the revivifying spirit coming into his soul had rent them asunder, and St. Paul had come forth to a new and glorious freedom. For him old things were done away, and all things had become new. He thought, too, of the Apostles, St. Matthew, the tax-gatherer, St. Peter, the man of impulse, changed so wonderfully when Christ entered into their lives. They had revised the value of the things of life. What once had meant so much to them seemed of little importance when filled with the spirit of the Master. They were born again into a new life of freedom, peace, and joy.

This was much in his mind that afternoon as he called upon several of his parishioners. He preferred to walk, as the houses were quite near. On his way he passed the school house just as the children were enjoying recess. Some were running about, engaged in various games, while the boys were wrestling and tumbling over one another in great delight.

The parson stopped to watch them for a few minutes, and spoke to several who were seated in a grassy spot. As he continued on his way he meditated upon what he had seen. How necessary it would be for those children to revise their value of life in the future. What gave them such keen enjoyment now would seem stale years hence. New and larger interests would occupy their hearts and minds. St. Paul's words came to his mind, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things."

"How truly St. Paul understood life," he mused. "What an experience he must have had."

Coming to a wooded portion of the road, he sat down under the spreading shade of a large maple tree. With such thoughts in his mind he was not anxious to reach the next house where he would have to listen to Mrs. Betson's complaining chatter about the petty things which filled her mind. This was far more congenial, and in such a restful spot, with the birds twittering among the branches he could think to his heart's content.

He meditated upon the Apostle's words. "The putting away of childish things is not a hardship. The child outgrows them gradually and naturally. He enters upon a fuller life where there are so many real things to take the place of his toys and little games. And it is so with education. As the mind expands, the simple primary lessons are no longer interesting or necessary, for the student has reached those expansive fields of knowledge where he partakes of the thoughts of the wise and great. This is no hardship, but a privilege and a joy. He has put away childish things for richer and more enduring possessions. And should not the same be true of spiritual things? Why should one cling always to the rudiments of the alphabet of religion? Was it not intended that the soul should develop and expand as naturally as the body and the mind?"

Mr. Landrose paused and an expression of deep concern came into his eyes. "Is it possible that I have been devoting all my ministry to mere rudiments? And have I been dwelling upon the importance of the letter to the neglect of the spirit? Have I been so blind that I have overlooked what St. Paul says, that 'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'? What a stumbling shepherd I have been."

Gradually the reason dawned upon his mind why he had not been more successful as a clergyman. He had been too much taken up with instructing people in head knowledge about church matters, that he had neglected the supreme importance of the heart. He had laid great emphasis upon duty, but not enough upon love. He had urged the duty of attending church, but had not inspired his people with a desire to go. If he had stressed more of the spirit and less of the letter, that desire might now animate their souls. Attendance, then, at church would be a joy and an inspiration instead of a disagreeable task which must be done, and a relief when the service was over. Suppose his people were all like that, what comfort and happiness it would be.

At once he thought of himself, and the truth which he was forced to acknowledge was startling. Had he always found the services a joy? Had they not, as a rule, been performed in a perfunctory manner, as a mere duty? He recalled how often he had wearied of the same prayers he had repeated Sunday after Sunday for forty years. Had he not said them in a parrot-like fashion? Where was the desire in his own heart which had caused him to attend the services with gladness and come away inspired and strengthened? He knew that such was not the case. And if he had not the living fire of the Master in himself, how could he impart it to others?

For some time Mr. Landrose remained under the tree, unheeding the cars which sped along the road. He was too much concerned with vital matters to pay any attention to worldly things. He was searching the depths of his own soul, and what he discovered was not at all satisfying.

At length he rose to his feet and walked thoughtfully homeward. He was in no mood for any more visiting that afternoon. No longer did he wish to make his calls a matter of duty alone. He desired to go in the spirit of the Master with an ardent longing for the spiritual welfare of his flock. That he had not fully done this in the past he was well aware. He now saw the shallowness of his work. He had visited in season and out, but it had all been done in a mechanical manner, a routine which he had followed as a priest of the Church. But he had given no inspiration, and he now realised how glad his people had been when his visits were ended.

He was aroused from his reverie by a pleasant voice accosting him. Looking quickly up, he saw Jerry Crumples standing in the door of his store.

"You startled me, Jerry," the parson remarked. "I did not notice you."

"Lost in thought, eh?"

"I certainly was," Mr. Landrose acknowledged as he stepped upon the platform.

"Sins of commission or omission?" the storekeeper queried, while an amused twinkle shone in his eyes.

"Both, Jerry. And they are worrying me a great deal. I am revising my price-list of life. It was suggested by our conversation this morning."

"Not satisfied with the old one, eh?"

"I am not. But at my age it is difficult to make a change. Yet it must be done if I am to remain here any longer."

Jerry looked keenly at the clergyman, and wondered what was troubling him.

"Not thinking of leaving us, are you, parson?"

"It has not come to that yet. But I feel that my work here has been in vain. You know as well as I do how indifferent many are to religious matters. So many never attend church, and I have lost my hold upon the young. My influence is almost gone."

"I am sorry you think that way, parson. But it is the times, and not you. There are so many attractions these days to draw people away from religion and church attendance."

"But why should not religion be attractive, Jerry? It is the most vital thing in life, and which alone can give real satisfaction. Yet people throw it aside for some passing fancy or amusement which can give no lasting pleasure."

"But how can it be made more attractive, parson? What do you suggest? Would something of an exciting nature help, such as moving-pictures instead of sermons? I believe such things are being tried to-day in some places."

"No, no. It is not religion that is at fault. It is ever the same, and its attraction rests with the individual. The attraction of food, for instance, depends upon the desire for food. There must be a hunger, a longing, or else the most daintily-cooked meal will have no appeal. And so with spiritual food. There must be first of all a desire in the soul of people to be drawn to religion. I see it all now as I never saw it before."

"But how can that desire be obtained, parson?"

"There is only one way, Jerry. 'They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick'. Yes, it is the Great Physician of souls who alone can give the desire. And that is just where I have failed. I have not brought my people to the Physician."

Mr. Landrose sighed as he uttered these words, and Jerry noticed that he was very worn and weary.

"Come in, parson, and sit down," he invited. "You are tired."

"I know I am, but I must get on my way now, as I have considerable work to do to-night. I am not concerned about my bodily welfare, but how I have neglected my flock. The Master Himself said, 'If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me'. Now, I have not lifted Him up before my people. I have lifted up everything else instead of Him. That is, I have placed more importance upon forms and ceremonies. I have held up before them the fact of Church history and the reason why they belong to the Church. Such things are important, I admit, but to me they were the great essentials. Oh, how blind I have been! I see my mistake now when it is too late."

"Why too late, parson? You have years ahead of you yet for good work. Don't give up, man."

"Perhaps I shouldn't. But, Jerry——" The clergyman paused for a few seconds and looked intently into the eyes of his companion. "Jerry, I have nothing to give to my flock. My own soul is dried up, so how can I impart to others what I do not possess myself? That is the tragedy of it all."

He stood very still for a minute, and then without another word he walked slowly and wearily away, leaving Jerry staring after him in amazement.

"What in the world has come over the parson?" he muttered. "I never saw him in such a state before. Hope to goodness he's not sick."

CHAPTER XV

THE STREET PREACHER

Attending the annual meeting of the Diocesan Synod had always been a joy to Mr. Landrose all through his ministry. He had never missed one session, and on each occasion he had returned home refreshed and inspired. The uplifting services, and the companionship of his brethren brought him great pleasure. It was a welcome change in his routine of parochial work.

This year, however, it was different. There was no pleasurable anticipation as in the past. In the first place, he dreaded the meeting with his Bishop. He had not written the letter as he had planned, but had decided to wait and speak to him while at Synod. But as the time drew near he became more worried than ever. What could he say to the Bishop? How could he explain his refusal of the Canonry? If he did, it would mean the telling the story of his past life and what Martha Benson meant to him. No, no, that could not be. It was too sacred a thing, and he shrank from speaking about it to anyone. But he must tell of the sin he had committed in giving an excommunicated woman the Holy Communion. The Bishop might forgive him if he understood all the circumstances connected with the affair. But that could not be. He sighed as he thought of this, and his heart was very heavy, for he knew that he could not bring himself to the point of telling even the Bishop why he had committed the sin.

And besides this, he was not so anxious now to attend the services of the Synod and meet his old friends owing to the change that had come over him. Would there be the same sense of confidence as in the past? Would he not feel guilty when among the clergy? They were all men who held no doubts about the Church, so he imagined, and should he express his own views they might look upon him with marked disapproval. He would be generally discussed and deemed weak in the Faith.

He thought of all these things the morning he made ready for his departure. Rachel was very careful about his clothes, and had his surplice washed and ironed. It was a big event at the rectory, and Doris was on hand to help. She was to stay with Rachel during the rector's absence, and this gave her much pleasure.

"Rachel and I are going to have such a happy time together," she declared. "We have planned several little picnics out to the brook and down by the sandy shore."

The girl looked very becoming, so the clergyman thought, as she stood before him at the door of the rectory. There was such a glow of youthful health in her cheeks, and her eyes were bright with animation.

To Mr. Landrose's surprise John Norton was waiting outside with his car.

"Like a lift to the station, sir? I happened to be passing, so you might as well drive as walk."

"This is certainly kind of you, Mr. Norton. I expected to walk to the station."

"And carry that, heavy grip, sir!"

"I have done it for many years, though I must confess that it seems heavier now than it used to."

Doris went along, too, and in a few minutes they reached their destination. The train was late, so Mr. Landrose told the young couple not to wait. He bade them good-bye, and watched them as they sped away. How happy they were in each other's company. He sighed and a feeling of great loneliness came upon him. Once he was young and happy, too, with the future lying golden before him. But how little he realised what the years held in store for him. Now he was an old man, worn out, and a great sinner against his Church.

The evening of the main Synod service Mr. Landrose was wending his way toward the Cathedral. He was ahead of time, but it was always his habit to be early that he might robe before too many of the clergy arrived. There was generally much confusion at the last minute which was not at all to his liking. He could not understand why some men were always late, arriving breathlessly, and scrambling into their robes. To such a methodical mind as his it was inexcusable.

He was about half way to the Cathedral and was in sight of a small public park, when he saw a crowd of people gathered around something of special interest. As he drew nearer he discovered that a man was giving an address. He

could hear his voice although he could not distinguish what he was saying. As he approached closer he saw that the man was a street-preacher. He had heard about him, and had read accounts of his doings in the newspapers. He had often feared lest he should come to Green Mount and excite his people and draw them away from the Church. He could never see any good in such a person holding forth in public places and elsewhere. He had not been properly ordained and had received no commission from the Church. And why was it necessary for him to preach on the streets? There were churches where people could go, where all things were done decently and in order. It was not right that any man should make a burlesque of religion, so he believed.

He was of this opinion now, and he was about to cross the street that he might evade the crowd, when something in the speaker's manner arrested his attention. It caused him to advance until he could see the man's face quite distinctly and hear every word he uttered. He was a man of medium height, poorly dressed, and bearded. But the clergyman could only notice his eyes, and the wonderful glow he saw there made him forget everything else. They held him spell-bound, and he listened attentively to the words which fell from his lips. There was nothing new about what he was saying, for he simply appealed to his hearers to take heed while there was time, to follow the Master, and to make their lives worthy of Him. There was no wild ranting, and very seldom did the speaker make any gesture with his hands. Like John the Baptist of old he simply called upon all to repent and lead new lives. Such he seemed to Mr. Landrose as he stood listening.

For a few minutes he remained there, and then glanced quickly and furtively around, afraid lest some of his parishioners might be near. If they should know that he had been listening to a street-preacher what would they think and say? A guilty feeling stole into his heart as he moved away from the crowd. The influence of years of thought could not be shaken off in a short time, and he wondered if he had done right in stopping there even for a few minutes. Should he not have closed his ears and hurried along?

Presently he saw a clergyman just ahead of him, whether a Bishop, a Dean, or an Archdeacon he could not tell. But he was some dignitary of the Church, judging by his hat and gaitered legs. Evidently he, too, had been listening to the street-preacher, and the thought gave Mr. Landrose much comfort. Had he also been impressed by the speaker, and was now ashamed of himself? Perhaps so, and he wondered if there were others in the Ministry whose hearts were yearning for more of the real spiritual life, more of the Christ of experience, and less of the Christ of history? Were they earnestly seeking for something they did not possess? He had a great desire to overtake the man ahead that he might question him and learn the truth from his own lips. But his timidity restrained him, and, besides, there was no time for the Cathedral was right near.

There was a large congregation at the service, and the procession up the aisle was a long one. The choir led with the clergy following, singing one of the Church's triumphant hymns. Yet to Parson Dan, walking well to the rear with several of his old clerical brothers, it did not bring the same thrill as formerly to his soul. That white-robed advancing throng seemed too precise. Everything was in perfect order, with nothing to jar the aesthetic sense. And the same was true of the service. It was intoned by a man with a clear strong voice and one of the best workers in the Diocese. But it did not appeal to Mr. Landrose, and over and over again as the service proceeded there came to his mind that scene in the street where the shabbily-dressed man was speaking to the crowd. He tried to banish the picture, thinking that it must be a temptation of the evil one trying to draw him away from the wonderful service. But all in vain. He glanced around at the other clergy and noted their rapt attention. It was not the fault of the service but his own that he was not in harmony with what was taking place, so he believed. What was the reason? Ah, he knew. It came to him like a flash. It was his great sin in giving Martha the Communion which was disturbing his peace of soul. It could be nothing else, for since that night he had become greatly changed. Even now in this fine Cathedral, and at such a grand service he could find no rest. He bowed his head in distress and deep humiliation. He himself was the cause of his mental agony. He had done what was wrong, and now he was paying the price.

He was aroused from his meditation by a deep silence which followed the hymn that had just been sung. He glanced toward the pulpit, and saw the special Synod preacher standing there. The eyes of all were fixed upon him. And in fact, he was worthy of more than a passing notice, for besides being one of the outstanding Bishops of the Church, he was noted for his great saintliness of life. Well advanced in years, with hair as white as snow, and possessed of a commanding stature, he presented an attractive appearance as he faced the people, and announced his brief text, "He could not be hid."

Mr. Landrose leaned forward so as not to miss a single word. He had read much about Bishop Strathroy, and now he had the opportunity of hearing him. In the past, as a rule, the Synod sermon had been a masterly exposition of the teaching and

history of the Church, more in the form of an essay than a sermon. It had always appealed to Mr. Landrose, for it had been along his line of thought. Now, however, he longed for an address of a different nature, something that would appeal to his heart and be in harmony with the state of his mind. The text led him to believe that such would be the case, and in this hope he was not disappointed. It was of the Master of life that the Bishop spoke, not in profound theological terms, but in simple language as if he were speaking to children. His unaffected words went straight to the hearts of his hearers.

"Christ cannot really be hidden for long," he said after his opening remarks. "When He comes into a heart His influence shines forth in Christ-like words and actions. When He comes into a house His influence is felt in the changed tone of that house. Love, peace, purity, and harmony abound there which all will notice. When Christ comes into a community His presence is at once apparent by the manner of life the citizens lead. You cannot hide the light of the sun nor the perfume of a flower for any length of time. Neither can you hide the light and fragrance of the Master of life. At times in the history of the Church He has been hidden for a while under a mass of rubbish, tradition, superstition, and a burden of forms and ceremonies. The latter are important, but they must never be allowed to interfere with Christ. The history of the Church is important, but it must be subservient to the great message we have to deliver. It must not take the place of Him, and of Him we must constantly speak. An historic Christ can never take the place of the Christ of personal experience."

Mr. Landrose started at these words for they expressed exactly what had been in his own mind that evening.

"I may study and know a great deal about the history of poetry, its technique, and various forms," the Bishop continued. "But what do all such things amount to unless there is the true spirit of poetry in the soul? The same is true of love. A man may compile a history of love, and write a great deal about its symptoms, and how it affects different people. But what does he know about love if he has never experienced it in his own life? Parents and young lovers need no long treatise about love. They have love in their hearts, and that is all-sufficient. And so with our religion. To have Christ dwelling in us is more important than anything else. To experience His love and power in our hearts will transform our lives and make our tasks a joy beyond measure. Think of what St. Paul said, 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.' Brethren, let us be very careful lest we hide the Master under mere perfunctory service and a multitude of forms. Let Christ be all and in all, and then He cannot be hidden."

Then to Mr. Landrose's surprise the Bishop told how he had listened to the street-preacher on his way to the Cathedral that evening.

"I was not ashamed to stand there and hearken to the words which fell from that man's lips, for they were the outpouring of a noble soul afire with the spirit of Christ. In a way, I envied that man, for he felt that he had a wonderful message to deliver. He was not hampered by theological views, but spoke from the depth of his soul that he might uplift and save others. His methods of working are not ours. But it is well to remember the Lord's words, 'Forbid him not; he that is not against us is for us.' I love the Church to which I have always belonged, and I believe in her divine commission. But I want to see her doing a more effective work than in the past. And this will only be done when clergy and laity alike become filled with the spirit of Christ. I am an old man now, and cannot expect to work much longer. But if I had to live my life over again I should place less emphasis upon outward things, and give more attention to the great essentials, especially to the all-transforming power of Christ in the soul. All else pales into insignificance before this. Our religion must be vital, a joy, a power. It will only be that when Christ is all and in all."

In this manner the Bishop spoke to the end, and Mr. Landrose paid rapt attention to every word. At times he imagined that he must be dreaming, as he had never before heard such a Synod sermon. It filled his heart with a sense of joy, so much in harmony was it with his own state of mind. The Bishop's views were his. That was a great comfort. He could go back to his parish with a renewed spirit, and teach as he had never taught before about the wonderful transforming power of the Master of life.

CHAPTER XVI

A CHILD IN THE MIDST

Mr. Landrose did not remain to the end of the Synod. The long sessions, with the reading and the discussion of many reports, wearied him. So much time was also taken up with financial matters, dealing largely with the efforts of a number of parishes to raise their assessments. Some of the querulous statements and petty reasons which were given annoyed him. After he had listened during an entire morning, he decided that what was needed was more spiritual life. He had come to the conclusion that when hearts are stirred with the spirit of the living God, offerings are then made freely and gladly. Lack of money to carry on the Lord's work was a want of His spirit in the hearts of the people. This had come to him gradually during the last few days, and it became overwhelmingly strong as he sat and listened to what was being said. Several times he felt like rising to his feet and expressing his thoughts. But his diffidence restrained him. He had always remained silent at the Synod sessions, preferring to let others do the talking. And now when he desired to speak his courage failed him. He knew that he would hesitate, and his words would not come freely. If he had his ideas written out, he would have no trouble. But to speak for any length of time without proper preparation would involve him in disaster and make him appear ridiculous. He almost envied the ability of the younger clergy to express their opinions so fluently and without any apparent embarrassment. He knew that he was a failure, and he felt very much humiliated as he sat and listened to the weary discussions.

There was something else that worried him. He had not explained to the Bishop his reason for not accepting the Canonry. Twice he had been on the point of doing so when he had met the Bishop. But the latter had been so busy that he hesitated each time. He knew that he should have gone up boldly and spoken to him, but again his cowardly spirit restrained him, so he left the Synod with his duty undone. He would write, so he decided, and perhaps that would be better, after all.

The train was late, and it was dark by the time he alighted at Green Mount station. There was no team or car going his way, so he was forced to walk and carry his grip. There was a short-cut from the main highway to the rectory, across an open field and through a grove of trees. He had often travelled this path, so he was quite familiar with every foot of the way. He walked slowly, and when he at length came to his own garden he stopped to rest. Glancing over at the rectory he saw a bright light shining from the kitchen window. The night was dark, and a keen wind was sweeping over the land, presaging a storm. He was glad to be so near home, for he was tired, and his own cosy study would be a very pleasant place after the excitement of the last two days.

He made his way along the side of the garden, and was but a short distance from the house when he suddenly stopped in surprise. At the brightly-lighted window he saw the face of a man peering into the room. Mr. Landrose was greatly puzzled. He was alarmed, as well, for what business had any man there? That he had some evil design in his mind he was certain, and this made the parson angry. No sense of fear came into his heart, and he stepped quickly forward to catch the man ere he could escape. But a twig snapped under his foot which caused the intruder to start and look around. As he did so, the light fell full upon his face, and at once Mr. Landrose recognized the man. It was Tim Bendle! Instantly he darted back and disappeared in the darkness. The parson could hear his retreating footsteps, and knew that he was running at full speed. He waited until the last faint sounds had died down, and then walked cautiously up to the window to learn the cause of Tim's presence there. At the first glance he started back in astonishment at what he beheld. In the kitchen, near the table, he saw Rachel kneeling on the floor by a small bath-tub, holding a towel in her hands. Before her sat Doris, with a small baby on her lap, which had just been bathed. The clergyman was puzzled at what he saw, and stood for a few minutes staring into the room. He stepped back a little from the window lest he should be observed. What was that baby doing there? he asked himself. And why had Tim Bendle been peering through the window? There seemed to be something sinister about this, and a feeling of apprehension stole into his heart. The wind howling around the house and shaking the trees, caused him to glance somewhat fearfully around. But nothing could he see in the intense blackness of the night.

Leaving at length the window, he walked around to the front door, which he opened and entered. Placing his grip upon the floor, and hanging up his hat and overcoat, he went into the kitchen. His sudden and unexpected appearance startled Rachel, and she became a little confused. Doris, however, was not the least embarrassed. As soon as she saw the clergyman, she held up the baby for his inspection.

"Isn't he a darling!" she exclaimed. "And we are so fond of him."

"B-but where did it come from?" the parson asked, looking keenly at the child.

"He was left here this afternoon," Rachel explained. "A young woman who came from the city by the steamer asked me if I would look after the child for a little while. She said that she had a call to make up the road, and the baby was so heavy to carry. She did, indeed, look tired, worn out, in fact, and so haggard. I could not very well refuse such a simple request, so I took the child. It was asleep when it came here, and only awoke about half an hour ago."

"But where is the woman who brought it here?" the parson demanded.

"I do not know. She has not come back, so Doris suggested that we give the baby a bath, which he really needed."

"It certainly did," Doris agreed. "And now that he is clean, he is so sweet and lovely. I wish we could keep him, for I love babies. Look what wonderful eyes he has, and such plump cheeks, and his hair is just like silk."

Doris was so enthusiastic about the child that Mr. Landrose was loth to say anything that would mar her happiness. Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks were aglow with animation. He thought that he had never beheld a more beautiful scene. How charming she looked sitting there with the little one on her lap. To his mind came another woman with a babe in her arms, surrounded by rude shepherds, drawn from the fields, to pay their tribute to the Christ child. And here was this little babe, an outcast, from all appearance, who needed help. He must be looked after. And yet it was necessary that careful inquiries should be made for the woman who had left him there.

"There is something strange about this," he at length remarked. "I must go over to the store to see if I can learn anything about that woman. Some one must have seen her when she landed from the steamer. She was very weak, and looked worn out, so you told me, Rachel. Perhaps she has fallen by the roadside."

"That may be so, sir. But you must have something to eat before you go. You look very tired yourself. It will not take me long to make a cup of tea, as the water is hot. I did not expect you home this evening."

"I left early, Rachel, and I am glad now that I did. A cup of tea will refresh me, I am sure. But I must go and try to find that woman. She may be lying out there in the night and the cold. In the meantime, we must keep the child and do what we can for it."

Doris was delighted at the idea of having the baby with them that night. While the clergyman ate his hasty meal, she dressed the little one, and then took it into the dining-room for the parson's inspection.

"What do you think of him now?" she asked. "Did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

"He is certainly a fine child," and Mr. Landrose patted the little fat cheeks. "I wonder how old he is?"

"Rachel thinks he is about eight or nine months old. But he seems older than that to me. Look how he is smiling at you. He has taken a fancy to you already. He does not miss his mother one bit."

"But we must find her, Doris. Something must have happened to her or she would have been back before now."

"But if she cannot be found, suppose we keep the baby. It would be such a pleasure looking after him."

"We shall think about that later," the parson replied as he rose from the table. "Anyway, it seems as if you will have him for to-night, so that will be something."

Leaving the rectory, he went at once to the store. As he opened the door and entered, he found several men gathered there who suddenly ceased their conversation at his appearance. An awkward silence ensued, and the clergyman had the feeling that their talk had been about something which they did not wish him to hear.

"I am afraid that I have interrupted you," he began. "But I am much worried about a woman who left a baby at the rectory this afternoon. Rachel told me that she looked very weak and haggard, so I fear she may have fainted on the road. Have you men heard anything about her?"

"We were just talking about her when you arrived," Jerry explained. "It seems that Tim Bendle saw her. She stopped at his place, and his wife gave her a bite to eat."

"I am glad to hear that, Jerry. But did Tim say what happened to her?"

"I think that he did say she went up the road. I was busy when Tim was here, so cannot remember all he said."

"But did he learn her name, and where she came from?"

"I did not ask him, parson, being very busy, as I told you."

One by one the men rose to their feet and sauntered out of the store until only Jerry and the clergyman were left. This the latter noticed and it surprised him.

"Don't they like my company, Jerry?" he asked.

The storekeeper smiled, and felt somewhat relieved at the clergyman's interpretation of the men's departure.

"I am glad that your presence chased them out, parson. It is hard to get rid of them. They never know when to go home."

"A clergyman is of some use in the world, then, Jerry. I might drop in more often at night if it would help you out any. But I am in a quandary about that woman. We have her baby, so she must be found."

"Oh, she'll turn up, all right, parson, never fear."

"I hope so. But if you hear anything, let me know. Good-night, Jerry."

The storekeeper stood for a while lost in thought after Mr. Landrose had gone.

"I hope he doesn't hear what those men were talking about," he mused. "Tim had no business starting such a report as that. I believe he made the story up out of his own head. And if he has, it won't be well for him. He hates the parson for some reason or other, and this is one way he's trying to knife him. The villain! He deserves to be horse-whipped, and I'd like to do it myself."



CHAPTER XVII

STARTLING NEWS

The next day startling news spread throughout the parish. It passed from person to person, increasing in interest each time it was repeated. At first it was only cautiously whispered by a few, but ere long it became common property and was discussed openly. It was a choice morsel, the most delicious that had come to the place in many years. In homes, fields, along the road, at the blacksmith shop, and in the store it formed the one main topic of conversation.

"Have you heard the news?" Mrs. Rundle asked Mrs. Wright, her next-door neighbor. She was bubbling over with excitement as she sat in the kitchen where Mrs. Wright was at work.

"I have," was the reply. "It's all over the parish. But there may be some mistake. Perhaps Tim was lying. He's noted for that."

"But he swears this is the Gospel truth. The girl who left that baby at the rectory told him that Doris Randall is its mother."

"Has the girl heard Tim's story?"

"Not likely. She'll be the last one to hear. I wouldn't mention it to her for the world."

"She has always seemed a nice quiet girl," Mrs. Wright defended. "She goes to church regularly, and minds her own business."

"Ah, that may be only a put-on. Still water runs deep, remember. Anyway, she is treating the baby as her very own."

"How do you know that?"

"Tim saw her giving it a bath last night. He was watching through the kitchen window, and he saw her dancing it on her lap. She hugged and kissed it, too. Now, would any girl do that to a strange baby? Indeed she wouldn't. Mark my word, there may be more truth than fiction in Tim's story, judging by all appearance. And, then, what about that girl's grandmother? There's some mystery about her. And why was she buried at night? I believe the parson could tell a great deal, if he had a mind to."

"No doubt he could," Mrs. Wright agreed. "But he has sense enough to hold his tongue. He can keep a secret, which is more than most people can do."

"But why shouldn't he explain about that night burial?" Mrs. Rundle demanded.

"Has anyone asked him?"

"Why, no, not to my knowledge. But surely he has heard what folks are saying."

"It is hardly likely he has heard a word. Who would say anything to him? I am sure I wouldn't, and I guess all in this parish are of the same mind."

And while the women talked, the men did their share. It was remarkable how many of them had errands to the store that day. Joe Steffins needed a file to sharpen his buck-saw. Henry Marks was short of nails to mend his barnyard gate, and Jerry Finch suddenly found that he had lost a bolt out of his whiffle-tree. And others came for something else, and stayed after their simple purchases had been made. They were not quarrelsome men, and were considered good neighbors. But their curiosity had been aroused, and they were anxious to hear the latest bit of news. Ever since that burial by night they had puzzled their brains as to its meaning, and had often discussed it among themselves. And now new fuel had been added to the mystery, and the baby left at the rectory greatly increased their interest.

Parson Dan was almost the last to hear the report that was in circulation. He reached home that evening, tired after his visitation to an outlying portion of his parish. Supper was ready, and as he entered the dining-room he noticed that his housekeeper's face was unusually grave.

"What is the trouble, Rachel?" he asked as he seated himself at the table. "There is nothing wrong with the baby, I hope."

"Not with the baby, sir. But I am afraid something has happened to Doris."

The clergyman dropped his partly-unfolded napkin, and looked keenly at the woman.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I hear that she has disappeared from the hotel, and no one knows where she has gone."

"Disappeared from the hotel! Who told you that?"

"Oh, everyone knows about it. But it was Mrs. Wickham who told me this afternoon."

"And Doris hasn't been here to-day, Rachel?"

"No. I was wondering what was the matter until Mrs. Wickham came."

"But I do not understand the meaning of all this," Mr. Landrose declared. "Why should Doris go away without saying a word to anyone? Has Mrs. Wickham any suspicion?"

There were tears in Rachel's eyes, and she was much agitated. This the parson noticed.

"What is really back of all this? You are keeping something from me. Tell me what you have heard."

"I don't believe the story, and no one can make me," Rachel cried. "It is a base lie. Doris is as innocent as a child. It is terrible for people to say that the baby we have here is hers."

At these words the clergyman rose from the table. His face was pale, and his eyes shone with anger.

"Who said that?" he demanded. "Who spread such a report?"

"Tim, of course. He said that the woman who left the baby here told him so herself."

"And who is the woman?"

"Tim won't tell."

"Ah, he cannot. He's made up that lie to hit back at me. And he's willing to blacken the character of an innocent girl to do so. May the Lord help us!"

He slumped down into his chair and buried his face in his hands. Rachel went out into the kitchen, her heart very heavy. She pitied her master, for she realised how keenly he resented Tim's story. She wondered what she could do. Ah, there was his supper. When he had eaten something, perhaps he would feel better.

The parson lifted his head as she returned to the dining-room.

"Do you think that was the reason why Doris left?" he asked. "She may have heard Tim's lie."

"Perhaps she did. What else would have caused her to leave without saying a word to us?"

"Quite true, Rachel. And yet I am not satisfied. If Doris is innocent, and I am sure she is, why has she gone away? I am her guardian, so why didn't she come to me? It is all very strange. But, there, I must think it all over, and see what can be done."

He ate but little supper, and when he at length went into his study, he sat down by his desk. He was more depressed than he had been for years. His whole life's work seemed to him an utter failure. He thought of Tim and his contemptible revenge. The man was a brute. The evil in him had been growing stronger year by year. The law should have laid hands upon him long ago and compelled him to behave himself. Now he was worse than ever, and in addition to his other misdeeds he had circulated an evil report about an innocent girl. He must be taught a lesson. He would go to the magistrate, lodge a complaint, and have him arrested. There was no other way, so far as he could see. And it would be for the welfare of the community to have such a man checked. It would be a lesson to others, and teach them to be more

careful about what they said. There was too much injurious gossip in the parish, anyway.

As he thought of this, there came suddenly into his mind the Bible story of the man possessed with a legion of devils. He wondered why he should think about that now. Was there any special message in it? Opening his Bible, he read the old familiar story of the madman among the tombs. The chapter ended, he leaned back and remained for some time in deep thought. He had found a meaning there he had never noticed before. It was so applicable to his own case as to be most startling. Men had tried in various ways to control that demon-possessed man. They had tied and shackled him in vain. Not until he had met Christ was he cured and restored to his right mind. It was only the Master Himself who could help him.

Mr. Landrose saw it all now. Tim was possessed with evil spirits. He was a devil in human form. The law might restrain him for a time, tie and shackle him, but it could not change his heart and make a new man out of him. It was only Christ who could do that. And what had he, Christ's minister, done to bring such a thing to pass? Nothing. He had scolded and threatened Tim, but he had not brought to him the living message of the Master. He had met violence with violence, like the people in the Bible story. And what he had done to Tim, he had done all through his ministry. Instead of bringing the Olivet message of love and peace, he had brought the Sinai law with its thunder and wrath. He had taught about the Church, its history, Apostolic succession, and such like. He had given his people the cold terms of the law, but he had overlooked the constraining love of Christ. His message had been of fear and duty, instead of love.

Parson Dan was compelled to face the stern truth of his failure, and he did not spare himself. He had meant well, but he had been mistaken. He might have won Tim and changed his entire life. Now it was too late. He sighed and looked out of the window before him. The western sky was radiant with departing day, and the whole land was hushed in a calm repose. Gradually the darkness deepened, and the colors in the sky changed and softened. Between him and the window stood his study lamp. The glow of the fading evening rested upon it. As the light faded, only the stark form of the lamp could be seen. Of what use was it now? It was intended for the night, to illumine and interpret. But it could do this only when it was glowing with a light from within.

This truth came to him with a startling intensity. For many years he had been more concerned with the outward form of the Church than with the light. He had taught the doctrine, its beauty, and history, but he had omitted the vital part, the personal illumination. His people had been taught the reasons for their faith, but of the comforting and life-giving power of Christ they were ignorant. He had given them the letter instead of the spirit.

Tremblingly he rose to his feet and lighted the lamp. At once the large globe became glorified, and the figures upon it stood out clear and distinct. It was due to the light from within. So only by the inner light in the souls of men and women could the Church become beautiful and a blessing to the world. In his younger days in the Ministry he had been fond of arguing, bringing forth proof after proof of the divine claims of the Church and its Apostolic Order of Ministry. But the greatest proof of all he had left almost untouched. He saw it all now. Christ did not say, "Be careful about the outward form of the Church." But He did say, "Let your light shine before men." And the shining light of pure lives and loving service was the best and only proof needed. And all this he had neglected. He had given his people outward things, husks instead of the life-giving spirit. No wonder they had become indifferent to religious things. Religion had become to most of them a matter of mere outward observance. It did not mean life to them, something to satisfy the longing of the soul. If he had held up Christ, the light of the world, what a difference it might have made. How the hearts of all would have been touched, and what an effect it might have had upon Tim Bendle.

He thought, too, of how much he himself had missed. He recalled the wonderful thrill that had come upon him the day he had forgotten his sermon. What a freedom and joy had been his as he had looked into the upturned faces before him. He had spoken to them from the depth of his heart. He had not been bound by the restraining letter, but had been guided by the spirit alone.

At once there came into his mind the street preacher he had heard in the city a few days before. How earnest the man had seemed, and what a joy had illuminated his rugged face as he addressed the people around him. To him Christ was a living presence, and not a mere historical figure.

For a long time Mr. Landrose sat there. His heart was deeply stirred. A mystic presence seemed to surround him. A new peace possessed his soul, and a new vision of life opened up before him.

CHAPTER XVIII

CROWDING GROWTH

After breakfast next morning Mr. Landrose went out to his garden behind the rectory. He had passed a restless night for many things had disturbed his mind, and had driven sleep from his eyes. Among his vegetables, working in the soft mellow soil, he had always found relief and refreshment. And so he did this morning. Here his worries slipped away, and in his care for the plants he found much comfort. A verse of Holy Scripture kept running through his mind, "Yea, as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him." He was stooping to support a feeble plant by strengthening it with an extra supply of earth when this text came into his mind. "Yea, as a father pitieth —" He paused in his work and lifted his head. The thought was encouraging. "God will be merciful to us, His children," he murmured, "although we cannot always understand now the way He is leading. But I feel sure that 'all things will work together for good to them that love Him.' That is His promise, and it is very inspiring."

After he had hoed for about an hour, he felt unusually weary. The morning was hot, and he was glad to seek refuge in the shade of a large maple tree. Here upon the ground he rested. The birds sang and twittered around him, and a noisy squirrel scolded on the bough of an adjoining tree. Butterflies zig-zagged through the air, and the hum of innumerable insects sounded on all sides. Abounding life was everywhere. All of nature's creatures were full of activity, keenly interested in their various tasks. They seemed tireless, while he was so easily wearied. Years ago he was able to work for hours at a time without resting. What a garden he had then! And how small now his plot of ground. Once it was the pride of the people for miles around. His vegetables had been the finest raised in the parish, and he had carried off many prizes at the annual exhibition held in the city. But he had not the strength now as of old, so year by year his garden had become smaller. This had been humiliating to him at first, but there was no remedy, so far as he could see.

And as his garden decreased, the bushes began to grow upon the neglected land. At first they were small birches, firs, and pines. Now they were good-sized trees, standing like an army at the back of his garden. Steadily they kept crowding up, just waiting for an opportunity to spread out over the cultivated patch. There was something sinister in their appearance this day. They were so silent, and in their silence there was a sense of awe. Never before had they affected him so strongly.

"They are certainly crowding me," he mused. "It is crowding growth, and if I am not careful they will crowd me out completely. But what else can I expect? I am getting old. If I were young again I would soon beat them back and clear the whole land."

He paused and stared hard at the trees as a new idea came into his mind. What was taking place in his garden was happening in his life. It was crowding growth. But what kind of a growth? Was it a form of lawlessness like the forest? This was startling. He knew that barbarism is only a few steps away, ready to sweep in when civilization abandons her task.

"I see it in my own life," he uttered aloud. "The younger generation is only waiting to undo the work of cultivation which has been made, and set up a reign of indifference and lawlessness. The patient work of men and women through the centuries is in danger of being overthrown. I see it in this parish, and I am unable to prevent it. It is the crowding growth similar to what is taking place in this garden. A younger man is needed here who has strength of body and mind to influence the young people. It is quite evident that my work is done. And what a failure it has been!"

He rose to his feet, picked up his hoe, and walked slowly toward the house. At the back door he stopped, looked at his garden, and then off at the menacing trees. Warm though the morning was, a slight shiver passed through his body.

"The wild things are crowding me out here," he murmured. "And they are also crowding me out of my parish."

As he entered the house, he came face to face with John Norton. The young man was greatly excited. His hair was dishevelled, his clothes were torn, and there was blood upon his face. The clergyman was startled by his wild appearance.

"Why, Mr. Norton, what is the matter?" he asked.

"Everything," was the terse bitter reply. "Doris is lost!"

"Come into the study," Mr. Landrose invited. "We can talk better there."

After he had closed the door, he turned toward the distracted visitor.

"When did you hear the news?"

"Only this morning. I had been to the city on business, and when I arrived on the early train, I was told about the disappearance of Doris."

"But what have you been doing since your arrival? You look as if you have been fighting."

"And so I have. When I learned that Tim Bendle had started that base lie about Doris, I drove to his place and we had it out right in front of his house. He's in a mighty bad shape now, for I nearly killed him."

"My! my! this is serious," the parson exclaimed. "You should have let the law deal with Tim. You may get into trouble over this."

"How could the law punish a thing like Tim? He would be tried, perhaps, and let go with a warning. No, Tim needed a different dose, and he got it. And as for getting into trouble, I am not worrying one bit. But what has happened to Doris, is what I want to know. And where is that woman who left the baby here?"

"Didn't Tim tell you?"

"No. The thing just laughed at me, and told me to go to h—. Excuse me, sir, but you might as well know what he said. That was more than I could stand, so I landed upon him. He will think twice after this before he starts another lie about an innocent girl."

"But does he think he is lying, Mr. Norton? He declared that the woman who left the baby here told him the story, so I understand."

"Yes, he told me that, and swore it was the truth. But why does he refuse to tell me what he knows about that woman? If I knew, I could go to her and find out what she has to say. I believe Tim is afraid of that. He has some scheme in his mind, I feel sure."

"There is no doubt about it, Mr. Norton. He wants to injure me because I have opposed him in his villainy for years. And he has hit at me by injuring Doris's character."

"He can never injure her, sir," Norton stoutly declared. "She is as innocent as a child, and I shall prove it. Nothing can make me believe such a lie as that. But I must find Doris. What have you heard, sir? Tell me everything. The smallest information might help me in my search. Oh, if I had only known about this yesterday!"

"I know nothing more than you do, Mr. Norton. Doris was here that evening she and Rachel had such a happy time with the baby. It was dark when she left for the hotel, and no one has seen her since."

"But where could she go and no one would see her, Mr. Landrose? The news of her disappearance is all over the parish now, and if anyone had seen her he would surely mention it."

"That is what is puzzling me. No one saw her at the hotel after she left here, so Rachel told me. She did not go by train, neither was she seen along the road."

"She must be lost, then. Perhaps she wandered off into the woods and has not been able to find her way out. That heavy forest extends all the way from the rectory grounds ten miles to the back settlement. I have cruised through it several times, and once I was lost there for a whole night. Now, what could Doris do in a region like that? Yes, I fear she is out there. We must get search-parties off at once to scour the forest. What a pity some one didn't think of this yesterday. It may be too late now. There is no telling what might have happened to Doris. Just think of her wandering helplessly around, bewildered and calling in vain for help."

"Yes, I have thought of all that," Mr. Landrose replied. "But perhaps she is safer there than here. How often I myself have longed to be hidden among those great silent trees where the trials and criticisms of the world of men would not trouble me. If Doris is there, she does not know what people are saying about her. How strange it is that one is often

safer among the creatures of the wild than with his own kind. And it is only too true of this place. After my long ministry here it is humiliating to be forced to make such a confession. How often I have wished for a little cabin away in the depths of the forest where I could withdraw for a time from the busy and cruel tongues of men and women. And when my life's work is done to be laid to rest out there, with those grand old trees chanting their requiem over my resting-place. I hope that will come to pass some day."

John Norton hardly heard these closing words, for another great fear had come into his mind. It was almost too terrible to think about. He ceased his pacing up and down the room, and turned impulsively toward the clergyman.

"Do you suppose Doris heard that lie Tim told?" he asked.

"I do not know. If she did, she never mentioned it to Rachel. It is not likely that she knew anything about it when she left here that night."

"Then somebody must have met her between the rectory and the hotel and told her. Tim is contemptible enough to do a thing like that. And if he did tell her—"

He paused, his hands clenched hard together, and his eyes blazed with fire. Mr. Landrose laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Keep calm. Do not lose control of yourself. I think I know what is in your mind. But I do not believe that Doris would make away with herself. She is too sensible a girl for that."

"I know she is very sensible, sir. But she is so innocent of the vile ways of the world that such a story would break her heart. She is most sensitive, and the thought of meeting people who believe Tim's lies would be unbearable to her. She would rather die than do so. Oh, the thought is almost more than I can stand. We must end this uncertainty. Tim must be made to tell what he knows. I shall go at once to the magistrate and arrange to have him arrested. That is the only way, so far as I can see, to bring him to his senses."

"I have heard of girls being kidnapped," the parson replied. "Doris is very attractive, and in beauty such as hers lies her danger. No doubt longing eyes have been cast upon her, and it must have been known of her visits here and how she often went back to the hotel alone after dark. In these days when so many cars are on the roads what an easy thing it would be for villains to carry off a girl alone at night. I can hardly bear to think of such a thing, and yet it is done at times, so I see by the papers."

"It has never happened here, though it has elsewhere," Norton replied. "But I am only wasting time now. Talking will not find Doris. I love her with all my heart, and don't mind telling you, sir. There is no other girl like her in all the world."

At any other time Mr. Landrose would have smiled at such a sweeping statement. All he did now was to grasp the young man by the hand.

"I sympathize with you," he quietly said, "for Doris means a great deal to me, too. I hope you will succeed in finding her. May God guide and direct you."

CHAPTER XIX

THE TOAD AND THE EAGLE

Mr. Landrose walked slowly down the road for his mail. His mind was greatly disturbed. He was worried about Doris and his own helplessness. His only hope was in John Norton. He would find her if anyone could. He liked the young man now more than ever. But he felt that he had been remiss in his duty toward him. He should have checked and reproved him for his anger and what he had done to Tim Bendle. But what else was there to do with a fellow like that? There came to his mind the story of the maniac among the tombs, and how Christ had cured him. What would Christ do with a man like Tim? he wondered. The madman of long ago wished to be freed of the evil spirits. But Tim gloried in his devilish deeds. Ah, there was the difference. But Christ would have found a way to overcome Tim's antagonism, he was certain. But what could he do? He felt his own inability to do anything. As a professed minister of the Gospel, and a teacher of his people, he had no remedy to change the heart of one who had gone astray. And there were others who also needed to be renewed. What was he to do to win his flock, and to draw souls to the only One who could supply them with things worth while? It was life more abundant they needed, the life that could come only from the Master Himself. And he had miserably failed. He had been holding up the dry bones of religion in place of the living Bread. He saw it all now, and it filled his soul with an agony of remorse. Oh, to live his life over again! If he could only go back and begin his ministry again how differently he would teach and work. Now it was too late.

There were two letters for him at the post-office. One was from the Bishop in reference to the Canonry that had been offered and not accepted. The Bishop asked for a reply as soon as possible.

"He shall have it at once," the clergyman decided. "I have no hesitation now about the course I should take. I could not very well accept the Canonry with a clear conscience. And, besides, such an honor appeals to me no longer. What good would a title like that be to a man who has made a failure of his life's work? Had it come sooner it might have been a great inspiration. But it is too late now. Yes, I shall write to the Bishop to-day."

The other letter caused him to stare in amazement. It was merely signed "A Friend." It had been dropped into the office box during the night, so the postmaster informed him. He had found it there that morning.

"Dear Sir," so the letter began, "I feel that you should be advised that some people in this parish are scheming to injure you. A nasty report is now in circulation about your connection with that woman who died at the hotel and was buried by you at night. Since the strange disappearance of the woman's grand-daughter the whole parish is much excited. It is even said that you and the girl had something to do with the woman's sudden death that you two might get her money. This is just a note of warning from one of your few true friends who do not believe what is being said. We do hope that you will speak out and silence these rumors, and explain, especially, about that night burial."

Mr. Landrose could hardly believe his eyes. Twice he read the letter, the second time very slowly. He felt that it must be all a horrible dream. Could it be possible that people were telling such a story about him and Doris! That they had something to do with Martha's sudden death! And to get her money! And he was asked to explain about the burial. His brain reeled as he thought of all that was involved in such a request. How could he unveil the past and tell about Martha Benson? No, he would not do so. It was too sacred a thing to be bandied about from person to person, to be joked about wherever people assembled together. And that report about the money. How had it started? Some evil-minded person must have done it to injure him and Doris. This was a serious matter, and the thought of what it might mean made him weak. He lifted his shovel-hat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. Why was this burden placed upon him? What had he done to incur it? Could it be possible that he was being punished for disobeying his Church and giving Martha the Communion? He traced his troubles back to that very night. Before that his life had moved on in peace and harmony. Now it was agitated like a storm-tossed sea, and he could see no haven in sight.

He made his way back toward the rectory along the dusty road. He did not know what to do. He longed to flee away from it all, and hide somewhere in the wilderness. He felt that he could not face his people with such reports abroad. What would they think of him if he made no word of explanation? His silence would be a sure sign to them that he was guilty.

He had reached the store, and was about to pass when a voice hailed him. Looking quickly to the right, he saw Jerry

Crumple standing at the door.

"What's your hurry, parson?" he accosted. "Come in for a minute. I have something to tell you."

Mr. Landrose was in no mood for conversation just then. But he could not very well refuse this friendly invitation.

"What is it, Jerry?" he asked, as he walked to the door.

"Come inside, parson. I can speak to you better there. And it's cooler, too."

The clergyman at once did as he was bidden, and sat down wearily upon the only chair the store contained. Jerry drew up an empty box and sat down by his side.

"You have heard the reports, I suppose, parson?" he began.

"I have, Jerry, and my heart is well nigh broken. Miss Randall is perfectly innocent, and so am I. Why will people say such things about us?"

"But you will explain everything, parson, so that will set things right."

"I can't explain, Jerry. I must remain silent."

The storekeeper looked at the clergyman in amazement. He felt that he had not heard aright.

"But you must explain," he insisted. "The charges are very serious."

"I know they are. But that makes no difference."

"Then all will think you are guilty, your friends as well as your enemies. Have you considered that?"

"I have, Jerry, I have. But how can I reveal the secret of a life-time? It concerns no one but myself now."

"But how about that night burial? Can't you say something that will explain that?"

"Nothing that would satisfy people. I merely followed that woman's dying request. It is nobody's business, anyway. If she wished to be buried by night, why should so much fuss be made about it?"

"People have made it their business, though, parson. It was such an unusual thing that it aroused some suspicion from the first. Now that the matter is being investigated the suspicion has greatly increased."

The clergyman started and looked keenly into his companion's face.

"What do you mean, Jerry?" he asked. "Who is investigating?"

"I don't know for sure, sir. But there was a stranger around here yesterday making inquiries. He asked a whole lot of questions, especially about that dead woman."

"Is he a detective, Jerry?"

"I can't say, parson. I only met him once, and he was mighty mysterious. He did let drop a few words, though, about being a friend of that dead woman's son. He said something, too, about having the grave fixed up and a tombstone erected. But I think he is here for some other reason."

"And so do I, Jerry. But it is news to me about that woman's son. I never heard of him before. It's a wonder he didn't come to the funeral."

"I believe the man did say that the son has been away in some foreign country for years, and did not hear of his mother's death until sometime later."

Mr. Landrose sat staring straight before him, lost in thought. Why had not Martha said something to him about her son? What was the cause of her silence? Perhaps he was the son of her first marriage. No doubt he had sent the detective to make a thorough investigation. He sighed as he thought of the troubles that were confronting him.

"It looks to me as if you're in for a lot of worry, parson," the storekeeper remarked.

"It certainly does, Jerry. I never expected anything like this in my old age. But surely my people know me well enough not to believe the reports that are in circulation. My life has been blameless so far."

"Indeed it has, sir. We all know how you have lived and worked among us, and have been as one of us for forty years. But it does not take much to make people change. They are as fickle as the wind. Think what they did to the Master Himself. One day they cried 'Hosanna', and the next shouted 'Crucify Him!' I guess human nature hasn't changed much since then. If they did it to Him, you must expect that they will do it to you."

"I know it, Jerry, I know it. You and I have been friends for long years, and it is a comfort to talk with you. But my heart is very heavy, and I feel ashamed of my lack of faith. For years I have preached it to others, and now when I need it so sorely myself I do not have it. But, there, I must get on my way home."

The sound of a car stopping outside caused the storekeeper to rise to his feet and look out of the window.

"It's the detective!" he exclaimed. "He's coming in here."

Mr. Landrose also rose from his chair, his face paler than usual. He felt that an ordeal was now before him. He had never faced a detective, although he had read about interviews with such men. He longed to be away in the seclusion of his own study. But in another minute the door opened, and the visitor entered. Mr. Landrose observed him closely. He was a slight young man, self-confident, with a parrot-like nose, and eyes like a hawk. So he seemed to the clergyman, and he aroused in him a feeling of dislike, akin to disgust. When Jerry introduced him, he found it difficult to be civil. He merely inclined his head, but uttered no word.

"Ah, Mr. Landrose, I am delighted to meet you," the visitor began. "I am Peter McPrentiss, and I am anxious to have a talk with you. You are the rector of this parish, so I believe."

"I am," was the quiet reply.

"Then you can give me some information about the cemetery near your church. You have a record, I suppose, of all the burials that have taken place there?"

"I have, Mr. McPrentiss. Why do you wish to know?"

"You buried a Mrs. Martha Strowbridge there, so I believe, and I wish to be sure of her grave."

"And why do you wish this information?" There was a sternness in the parson's voice which McPrentiss noticed.

"Oh, merely that I might have the grave put in good order, and a suitable tombstone erected."

"Are you a relative, sir? By what authority are you undertaking this work?"

"Mrs. Strowbridge's only son gave me orders to come here and attend to the job."

"Why did he not come himself?"

"He is away from home at present, so he sent me in his stead."

"And how long have you been here, Mr. McPrentiss?"

"About two days."

"Are you charging for your service by the day?"

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Two days seems a long time to find out about the grave. Why did you not come to me at once? You must know that I keep the records."

This was something for which McPrentiss was not prepared, and it annoyed him. The storekeeper was delighted, and only with difficulty repressed an audible chuckle. He was surprised at the stand the parson was taking.

"I see you are silent," the clergyman continued. "You do not care to explain the reason for your presence here. Neither is it necessary, for to me it is quite evident. You are a spy sent here to find out something about that woman's death and burial. But you will learn nothing from me. Had you come to me like a man at first, it might have been different. You have been sneaking around the parish trying to find out from my people something upon which to base a charge against me. And as for the grave, that has been already attended to. I have looked after it myself. You will find it well sodded, with fresh flowers placed daily upon it. A suitable tombstone is now being made in the city, which should be here shortly. Good-day, sir."

Before the astonished McPrentiss could reply, Mr. Landrose had left the store. The parson was much excited, and the surge of battle thrilled his soul. He was determined now to stand his ground and defeat whatever plot might be formed against him. He stepped aside to avoid a toad that had been crushed by an auto. Then he stopped and looked down upon the mangled creature.

"Poor little thing," he murmured. "You were innocent, and harmed no one, yet you have been cruelly treated. Such is the way of the indifferent world. And I, too, shall be destroyed if I simply permit people to ride over me. But they shall not do it. I am innocent, and right will prevail every time."

He lifted his head, and off in the distance he saw a large bird cleaving the air on strong wings. It fascinated him.

"It is an eagle!" he exclaimed. "The Lord must have sent it for my special benefit, to arouse me, and to teach me a much-needed lesson. I am to be like that eagle, and not like the toad. I must rise on wings of faith and prayer, and be strong. And there is the promise, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' Ah, I see it all now. I must put more dependance in Him, wait upon Him, and He will sustain me, and give me strength."

Greatly encouraged by what he had seen, he moved on his way. As he entered the rectory, he met Rachel, who handed him a letter.

"A boy left it here this morning," she explained. "He said it is very important. I do believe it's from Doris."

CHAPTER XX

A MOTHERLY SOUL

When Doris left the rectory that night after the baby had been bathed and put to bed, she walked slowly along the road toward the hotel. Her heart was filled with a new feeling of happiness. The little child had come into her life just when she needed it the most. Ever since her grandmother's death there had been so little for her to do. Her days had been spent in idleness when she longed for activity. Around her she saw people busy at their various tasks, women in the houses, and men in the fields, while she was doing nothing. And in another week the hotel would be full of people as idle as herself. And this would continue all through the summer. She had thought much about this and dreaded the idea of meeting so many strangers and mingling with them. Her one hope now was in the baby. She could spend the days at the rectory caring for it, and need only come back to the hotel at night. Thus in having something to occupy her hands and mind she would be happy.

Then she thought of John, and longed to see him again and tell him about the baby. She knew that he would be greatly interested in the little waif, and sometimes they would take it out in his car. What a joy that would be. So guileless was her heart, and so pure her life, that never for an instant did she imagine how people would misconstrue her acts of loving care. She missed John this evening and wondered when he would return from the city. It was easy to talk to him, and she always felt so strong when he was with her. To her John was the true ideal of manhood. She knew that he loved her, and she loved him. But she did not wish to be married for a while. She wanted to be free for a year or two, at least, to go her own way and to do as she liked. But she had no definite plan in life, and that worried her. She did not have to work to make a living like most people. But she was anxious to be doing something to benefit others. She had seen too much of people with more money than was good for them, wasting their lives in idleness, and always seeking for some new thrill to satisfy their cravings for pleasure. She knew how sick and disgusted they were with life, simply because they thought only of themselves and what would give them the greatest amount of happiness. She did not wish to be like them. Her grandmother had been like that, and Doris shuddered at the thought of the last few years of her life, the futility and staleness of it all, moving from place to place, seeking and never finding rest for her soul and mind. And yet thousands were doing the same, with little or no thought of anything else. No, she would not be like her grandmother. She would be of some use in the world.

Thinking thus, she was about half way from the main road to the hotel, when she heard the rattle of a car behind her. Then a gleam of light illumined the gravelly way, and she stepped aside to let the car pass. To her surprise it stopped when near, and a woman spoke to her.

"Excuse me, Miss, but is this the way to the hotel?"

"Yes, keep right on," Doris explained. "It's only a short distance."

"Thank ye kindly, Miss. But would ye mind tellin' me if Miss Randall is livin' at the hotel yit?"

"I am Miss Randall. What can I do for you?"

"Well, bless my heart!" the stranger exclaimed. "Did ye ever know the beat of that, Jimmy? We've run across the very one we're lookin' fer at the first slap."

"Looking for me?" Doris asked in surprise.

"Sure. We've come all the way from Glen Hollow to git ye. Poor Christie Rixton is breakin' her heart to see ye."

At these words Doris started, and then stepped forward to the side of the car. Owing to the darkness she could not see the woman's face. But that did not matter.

"Did you say Christie Rixton?" she asked.

"Ay, Miss, that's what I said, an' I'm mighty glad ye remember her. It'll save a lot of explainin'!"

"But she can't be the same Christie Rixton I knew," Doris protested. "She is not living here."

"She is now, Miss, an' no mistake, fer she's at my house an' wants to see you. How could she be anyone else?"

"How far is it to your place?"

"Oh, about twelve miles, though it doesn't seem that fer now since we've got the car. It was a mighty long jant when we had to come with horse an' waggon. Now we kin do it in a jiffy."

"And you want me to go back with you?"

"It's you we're after, Miss. It'll be mighty hard on poor Christie if ye don't go with us. Jimmy'll bring ye home in the mornin' if ye want to come. He won't mind the run in. Guess he'd spend the hull time in the car if I'd let him."

"I'll go, then," Doris declared. "There is really nothing to keep me."

"I'm glad to hear ye say that, Miss. It'll mean a great deal to Christie to see ye. So climb in here by me. Jimmy likes to have the front seat all to himself when he's drivin' so he kin have plenty of room fer his elbows. It's a caution how they do stick out when he has his hands on the wheel."

Doris acted upon the impulse of the moment. She took her place in the back seat, and listened to the mother giving instructions to her son about turning the car.

"Be keerful, Jimmy," she warned. "We don't want to be upsot."

When the turn had been safely made, and they were speeding down toward the main road, the mother leaned back and gave a deep sigh of relief.

"Jimmy does handle this car well, if I do say it myself. I was scart most t' death to drive with him at first, but now I don't mind one bit. He's stubborn as a mule, jist like his pa was, but he's got his good pints, fer all that. I don't know how in the world I'd git along without him. He's my mainstay now since his poor pa left me."

"Where is your husband now?" Doris asked, as she struggled to maintain an upright position as the car bumped on its way. They were now on the rough road leading to Glen Hollow.

"I'm not jist sure where Sam is, Miss," the woman replied. "He wasn't very religious as fer as church goin' was consarned. But the Lord is merciful, so mebbe He won't be too hard on him now."

"Oh, your husband is dead! I did not understand that."

"Yes, Miss, he's been dead fer three years now, an' me an' Jimmy have kept the place goin' ever since. The neighbors thought we couldn't run the farm, but we've shown 'em what we kin do. It was only last week that Pete Morrison sez to me, 'Mrs. Bristol,' sez he, 'you an' Jimmy have done fine, better, in fact, than when Sam was livin'!' That's what he said, an' it was the——"

Another bump caused the woman to leave her words unfinished. She clutched the side of the car in a frantic effort to keep in the seat, while Doris was thrown over against her.

"Fer pity's sake, Jimmy, be more keerful!" she cried. "Ye'll have us all killed if ye don't go slower. It's no wonder Christie is laid up in bed if this is the way ye treated her."

Jimmy made no reply to his mother's remonstrance. In fact, Doris had not heard a word from his lips. She longed to see her companions, and she wondered what they looked like. She knew that Mrs. Bristol was a large woman judging by the amount of seat she occupied. She enjoyed her talk, and believed that she was a motherly soul.

"Is Christie related to you?" she asked.

"No, Miss, Christie is no blood relation of mine. But I've done more fer her than them who are. She's had a hard life of it, poor dear, an' was banged around from place to place until I took her under my wing an' made a home for her with us. Then she went out into the world to make a livin' on her own account, so that's where I s'pose ye met her, Miss. She often wrote to me an' said how kind ye was to her."

"Yes, Christie was with us for two years, and I became very fond of her. She was a good girl and looked well after my

grandmother. She left us when we went abroad for a trip and I did not know what had become of her. What is the matter with her, anyway?"

"I do not know, Miss, fer she won't tell me. Jimmy was comin' home one evenin' this week from the shore an' he found her settin' by the road right near that old waterin' trough we passed a little way back. She was all fagged out an' could hardly git into the car. I put her to bed as soon as she got home, but she couldn't sleep, an' wouldn't eat a thing. She jist lay there, with wide-starin' eyes as if she saw something awful. Why, she's failed to a shadder, an' not one bit like the Christie she used to be. I'm at me wit's end to know what's troublin' her. She'll die if she don't eat something. An' she can't last long without sleepin'."

While Mrs. Bristol was speaking a sudden idea flashed into Doris's mind, which caused her heart to beat fast. She tried to banish it as improbable, but it persisted in returning, each time stronger than before.

"When did Christie come to you?" she asked as calmly as possible.

"Only night before last, Miss. Ye see, it was when Jimmy was comin' home from the wharf."

"Did Christie come on the steamer?"

"I don't know. Jimmy didn't see her until he picked her up on his way home. But she might have come ashore without Jimmy seein' her. He was on the lookout fer a butter tub, an' when he's got his mind sot on one object he can't think of anything else. He's jist like his pa fer all the world. Sam, poor soul, had only room in his brain fer one thing at a time, an' it was generally a mighty small thing at that. It's the way with some men, I guess."

Doris was thinking hard. She felt sure now that it was Christie who had left the baby at the rectory. And was it her own? The thought of this made her suddenly weak. Was it possible that Christie, bright happy Christie, had been cruelly betrayed? She longed to ask Mrs. Bristol if the girl had told her anything. She desisted, however, hoping to find out later from Christie herself. Her heart felt unusually heavy, and she shivered.

"Are ye cold, Miss?" Mrs. Bristol inquired. "I felt yer body tremble. Here, let me put this shawl around ye. It was stupid of me not to think of it before."

"I am not cold," Doris replied. "I was merely thinking about Christie, and wondering what could have happened to her."

"That's what I'd like to know. It's not like Christie to be all run down to a shadder an' so sad. She was allus chipper an' happy. She's got something on her mind, mark my word. A suspicion will keep poppin' up, no matter how hard I try to keep it down. May the Good Lord fergive me fer even thinkin' of that about her."

"But suppose your suspicion proves to be true, Mrs. Bristol, what would you do?"

Doris felt the woman by her side start at this question, and heard her give a slight gasp of dismay.

"Do! What would I do, Miss? Jist the same as I've allus done, of course. I took her in when she had no real home, an' my house will be home to her still as long as I'm in charge. She'll be Christie to me, no matter what has happened."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mrs. Bristol. And I shall help you all I can. We must help Christie."

Mrs. Bristol's only reply was to seize her companion's hand in hers and press it firmly. It was a big hand, and it gave Doris the assurance that the woman's heart was big, too. She was anxious to see the face of this motherly soul who had done so much, and was willing to do more for an unfortunate girl.

And thus they sat with their hands clasped while the car lurched on its way. Their hearts were deeply touched, and on the common ground of loving sympathy these two women, in many ways so different from each other, were as one.

CHAPTER XXI

JIMMY'S THREAT

Lying upon a little cot in the parlor Christie Rixton was fast asleep. A shaded lamp on a nearby table cast its faint light upon the girl's white face and jet-black hair. Her hand pressed her heart, and the silent watchers at the door knew that it was there her great trouble lay. Quietly they turned and went back to the kitchen. Doris could not restrain her tears, and Mrs. Bristol was visibly moved.

"It's the first sleep she's had since she came home," she whispered. "It will do her good, an' we must not disturb her."

"I hardly knew her, she has failed so much," Doris replied. "Do you suppose she will tell us what is the trouble?"

"I hope she will, Miss. That made me anxious to go after you when she wanted to see ye. But ye look tired yerself, me dear. I'm goin' to make a cup of tea. That'll freshen us all up. Jimmy, bring in some good dry wood, an' I'll have the water bilin' in a jiffy."

Mrs. Bristol was all that Doris had expected her to be. She was a stout middle-aged woman, of medium height, with a full beaming face and sparkling dark eyes. She radiated health and strength by her very presence and cheery manner. She was a new type to Doris, who seated by the table watched her as she stirred up the fire and then poured water into the kettle. What an active life she must lead, the girl thought. She noticed her hands, so toil-worn and rough from working in the house and out-of-doors. Furtively she glanced down at her own soft ones. She felt rebuked for her selfish life of indolence and ease. She could not help recalling the many women she had met, weary and languid, with nothing to do, humored in every whim, and yet not satisfied. But here was a woman in a back settlement, pulsing with energy, working hard early and late, and yet bright and happy through it all.

She glanced around the kitchen. Everything was spotless, and the stove shining like a burnished mirror. And how comfortable and homelike Mrs. Bristol made the room seem. She had donned her big apron and was replenishing the fire with some of the wood Jimmy had dumped into the wood-box. The boy was altogether different in appearance from his mother. He was about seventeen years old, tall and lanky, with a generous shock of light-brown hair. He had a bright open face, and his eyes, like his mother's, were dark. He was visibly embarrassed by the girl's presence, and kept as close to the door as possible.

"Come, Jimmy, git washed, an' yer hair brushed," his mother ordered. "We're goin' to have a bite to eat as soon as the water biles."

The boy gave a quick furtive glance toward Doris, and then shuffled over to the wash-stand.

"You are a good driver, Jimmy," Doris complimented, anxious to force him to speak. But Mrs. Bristol forestalled him.

"Isn't he, now? Why, he took to drivin' like a duck to water. When Christie gits around, we're goin' off on a picnic. But I'm afraid it'll be some time before the poor girl feels like goin' anywhere. I hope t' goodness she'll tell ye what's the matter. If she doesn't, I don't know what in the world to do."

"Perhaps Mr. Landrose might be of some help," Doris suggested. "She was always fond of going to church when she was with us."

Mrs. Bristol stood for a while lost in thought. This seemed to be a new idea to her. Then she slowly shook her head.

"No, I don't think Parson Dan had better see her jist now, Miss. He's as good a man as ever walked, but——" She paused and turned toward the stove.

"Wouldn't Christie confide in him, Mrs. Bristol? It might give her great relief, and he would be able to comfort her."

"I have me doubts, Miss. Ye see, what that poor girl needs is real spiritual help. The parson would begin with the Church, an' ask her no end of questions, if she had done this an' that. He was allus at her when she was livin' with me, an' she used to git frightened whenever he came to the house, so kept out of his way if she could. It was the same all over the parish, I guess. The parson never spares himself, an' is on the go mornin', noon, an' night. He visits the sick like clock-

work, an' as fer helpin' folks who are in need, why he'd give his last cent an' the very clothes off his back, I do believe. But fer all that, he doesn't seem to have the hearts of his people, an' I hear rumors about gittin' another man in his place."

"What is the reason?" Doris asked. "I am sure that Mr. Landrose is a good man. He has been very kind to me, anyway."

"Oh, there's no doubt about his goodness, Miss. He is deadly in earnest, as all know. But sometimes I think he doesn't really understand the needs of poor hard-workin' people. When we go to church we like to hear somethin' right from the heart, a word of cheer an' comfort, the same as the Great Master Himself gave when He was on earth. Now, I believe in the Church to which I belong an' love, but it does git on me nerves to hear Sunday after Sunday nuthin' but docternal things about what the Church teaches concernin' Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, an' sich like. It's all right, I s'pose, to teach about 'em at times so our young people will know what to believe, but a steady diet of that gits rather tiresome. We have a purty little church jist up the road, but dear me, only a handful of people goes. The young folks stay away, an' I have an awful time on Sunday to git Jimmy to go with me."

"Doesn't Mr. Landrose feel badly about the small attendance?" Doris asked.

"He does, Miss, but somehow he can't git his eyes opened to the truth. He thinks the fallin' off is due to the times, an' the giddy ways of the world. I have talked to him as plain as I'm talkin' to you, but he won't heed a word I say. He's mighty stubborn when it comes to what he considers Church principles."

"But surely all that wouldn't interfere with Mr. Landrose coming to see Christie," Doris persisted. "A man of his long experience must know what to do and say."

Mrs. Bristol turned her attention to the stove as if she had not heard the girl's words. She prepared the tea, and then went into the pantry and brought forth a piece of frosted cake. This she placed upon the table, and cut off several generous pieces.

"Come, now, Miss, an' help yerself," she invited. "An' Jimmy, pull up a chair an' be sociable. My lands! some young fellers I know wouldn't have to be asked to come to the table, 'specially when a purty girl is settin' there. But Jimmy is much like his pa in that respect, so bashful, an' not one bit like me. Hope yer tea's all right, Miss? Help yerself to the cream. It's right from our Jersey cow, Blossom. Ye must see her t'morrow, fer she's a fine critter, an' so gentle. An' oh, Jimmy, did ye fasten the barnyard gate good an' solid? I don't want the cows to git out like they did last night."

Jimmy merely nodded and went on quietly with his eating. The girl's eyes twinkled as she noticed his embarrassment. She felt sorry for him, as well, for he did look so uncomfortable. She wondered if he ever replied to his mother's flow of words, or was he so accustomed to her that he paid little attention to what she said? She did long, though, to make him speak.

Suddenly a change overspread Jimmy's face. The hand that was lifting a piece of cake to his mouth was arrested. He straightened himself up in his chair, and looking toward the parlor, listened attentively.

"What's the matter Jimmy?" his mother asked.

"Christie's callin'. Guess she wants ye."

Dropping the knife she was holding in her hand, Mrs. Bristol hurried out of the kitchen. At once Jimmy hitched his chair closer to Doris. His bashfulness had vanished, and he seemed an altogether different person.

"Is Christie goin' to die?" he whispered.

"Oh, I hope not," Doris replied.

"So do I. But she ain't Christie no more. She's changed awful."

"I know she has. But what can we do?"

"Dunno."

Into the boy's eyes came an expression of anger, and his face clouded. He leaned over toward Doris.

"If she does die, I'll kill somebody."

This fierce declaration was startling. Instead of the long lank and embarrassed lad who had slouched up to the table a few minutes before, Doris beheld a youth aroused to wild passion. What was the cause of it? she asked herself. She noticed his white strained face, and the tenseness of his doubled fists lying motionless upon the table. Something had aroused him, and she wondered what he knew. Before she could reply, his body relaxed, and he jerked away his chair as his mother came back into the kitchen.

"Christie was jist talkin' in her sleep," Mrs. Bristol explained. "I hope t' goodness she won't wake until mornin'."

"May I watch by her side to-night?" Doris requested. "I should like to do it."

"No, no, you mustn't, dear. I'll sleep in the little bed-room off the parlor, so will be handy if she wakes. You need a good night's rest, so you're goin' to have Christie's room upstairs. It's all fitted up jist as she left it. I've allus kept it fer her so she could have it whenever she came home. But now as she's not well, it's better fer her to be in the parlor where I kin keep an eye on her. An' besides, it saves me from so much runin' up an' downstairs."

"But I did not come prepared to sleep here," Doris protested. "I expected to be with Christie all night, and go home in the morning."

"I know ye did, me dear. But as she's asleep, there's no sense in you stayin' up. Ye want to feel fresh an' chipper in the mornin' when ye go in to see Christie. Come, now, an' let's go up to the room. Her things are all there, so ye kin use 'em."

Half an hour later Doris stood alone in the little room and looked out of the window facing the east. She was fascinated by the scene before her. A small lake lay like a gem among the hills not far from the back of the house. The moon riding over the tall trees in the distance cast its bright beams in a long silvery path across the surface of the placid water. On the farther side of the lake a valley could be dimly discerned, reaching back among the wooded hills. Through the partly-raised window came the chorus of croaking frogs. Insects of the night, especially the belligerent mosquitoes, hummed outside, vainly trying to find an entrance through the close-meshed window screen. All this was a new experience to the girl standing there, and she enjoyed it. She thought of how often Christie must have looked forth from that same window, and dreamed of the great world beyond. Perhaps she had considered her life dull in this quiet place, and longed for the lights and stir of the city. With what hopes she must have gone forth, and now she had come back ruined and heart-broken. She sighed as she mused upon this. Would the lake, the hills, and the trees be the same to her now? Not likely. Something had gone from her life which could never be restored.

Then suddenly there came into her mind the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall. How often she had heard that read in church, but had never comprehended its meaning. It had been a wonderful tale to her, and she had felt that Adam and Eve had been unjustly treated by their expulsion from the Garden. But now she understood, and it caused her heart to quicken. It was really the story of life, and in poor Christie she had a good example. Never again could the girl return to the same life of innocency and joy. It was closed to her forever. And who was the serpent that had betrayed her? Was he going on his way careless and indifferent to the sorrow he had caused? She thought of Jimmy's fierce words, "If she does die, I'll kill somebody." What did he mean by that? Did he have any suspicion? It did seem so. And standing there, she wondered what Christie really meant to Jimmy. They had known each other in the bright happy days before the dark shadow of trouble had fallen. They had been like brother and sister, and no doubt had often played on the shore of the lake, and had wandered through the fields and the woods. And how much he must have missed her when she had left home, and looked eagerly forward to her return when they would be together again as in the past. And now she had come, but not as he had expected. Her life had been wrecked. Little wonder, then, that the lad should be roused to fury at the thought of the harm that had befallen the girl he loved with all the intensity of his being. She, too, could sympathize somewhat with him, but at the same time she knew that he must be restrained from any wild deed of rashness.

As she at length drew down the blind, and turned away from the window, she wondered what she could do to help Christie, and also prevent Jimmy from committing any crime.

CHAPTER XXII

WITHIN THE LITTLE ROOM

When Doris awoke in the morning the sun was shining brightly into the room, and the birds were chirping and singing cheerily in the trees outside. Hurrying to the window she looked out, and gave a little exclamation of delight at the scene which met her eyes. The lake was like glass, and the trees and hills were mirrored in its quiet depths. A few wreathes of land fog were hanging tremulously over the surface, and gradually vanishing beneath the rays of the mounting sun. To the left was a large field, partly tilled, and nearby was an orchard. Down to the right was a swamp, covered with a thick growth of alders. It was the lake, however, which held her attention. How she longed to be out upon it in the small boat she saw drawn up on the shore. If she could induce Christie to go, she would take her for a row, for surely the charm of that quiet water would soothe the girl's troubled heart.

Quickly she dressed, then made her way downstairs and out the back door into the open. How fresh and invigorating was the air, and how like fairyland everything seemed. Mrs. Bristol was feeding the chickens, which were clustered around her. When she saw Doris, she made her escape from the little clamoring creatures and came toward the house.

"Good mornin', Miss," she accosted. "I'm afraid the noise of them chickens woke ye. But it's impossible to keep 'em quiet when they're hungry. They're jist like many other two-legged critters that wear clothes instead of feathers."

"Oh, the chickens didn't disturb me," Doris smilingly assured her. "But I am afraid I slept too long as it is. I never saw such a wonderful morning. And isn't the lake beautiful? Perhaps I can induce Christie to go for a row with me. How is she, anyway?"

"Jist about the same. She's all fixed up, an' has had her breakfast, sich as it was, fer she didn't eat more'n a mouthful, an' took only a sip of tea."

"I must see her," Doris declared. "Perhaps she will tell me what is troubling her, and that will relieve her mind."

"But ye must have yer breakfast first," Mrs. Bristol insisted. "It's all ready an' waitin'. Jimmy had his over an hour ago, an' he's gone to the shore. He said he had to git the car fixed. But I don't believe it was that which took him this mornin'. There's somethin' on his mind which is worryin' him. He's not been one bit like himself since Christie came home. He's mighty fond of her, he surely is, an' he's taken her trouble very much to heart. But, come, Miss, an' have a bite to eat."

Breakfast ended, Doris went at once to Christie. She found her lying with eyes staring straight before her. Going to her side, she took her right hand in hers.

"Don't you know me, Christie?"

"Yes, I know you, all right," was the low response. "You are Miss Randall."

"Don't call me that, Christie. Call me 'Doris' like you used to do when you lived with us."

Very intently Christie looked into the girl's eyes as if trying to recall something she had forgotten. She then withdrew her hand, and hid her face in the pillow.

"What is the matter, dear?" Doris asked, seating herself on the side of the bed. "Call me anything you like. But talk to me. I want to hear your voice."

For a few minutes there was no response. Doris was puzzled, not knowing what to say or do. At length Christie turned her face toward her, and reached out her hand.

"I am glad you have come, Doris. It is good to see you. But, oh, how can I talk to you?"

"You wanted to see me, didn't you?"

"I did. I wished to tell you something, but now I am afraid."

"Do not be afraid to tell me everything, Christie. I want to help you, remember."

"I know you do. But if I tell you what I have done, you will have nothing more to do with me. I have been so bad."

"Now, look here, Christie, don't talk that way. Won't you trust me?"

"I want to, and yet I am afraid."

Doris rose to her feet, walked to the window, and drew back the curtains.

"There, that lets in more light and makes the room brighter. It is so beautiful out of doors this morning, I wish you could be there."

"I know what it is all like, Doris. The lake is like that mirror over there, isn't it? And the trees are reflected in the water, and everything is calm and peaceful. I have often seen it that way."

"Wouldn't you like to be out there, Christie? The boat is on the shore, so suppose we go. It will do you good."

"Yes, I'd like to be out there. It's the only place where I want to be. I would be at rest, then."

"I am glad to hear you say that, dear. Get up, and I will help you to dress."

Christie, however, shrank back, and again turned away her eyes. Doris, watching her, was deeply touched by the expression of agony that was depicted upon her face.

She wondered what she could do.

"So you won't go with me?" she at length asked.

"No, not now. When I go, I must go alone. I want no one with me. It will be better."

Even then Doris did not understand the meaning of these words. So unaccustomed was she to life's tragedies that she had no idea of the desperate plan that was lying hidden in Christie's mind.

"Well, never mind now," she replied, again taking the girl's limp hand in hers. "We can talk just as well here. Tell me everything. What is troubling you so much?"

"My great sin," was the low reply. "When I left you, I fell, and now I am paying the penalty. I went astray, and am lost. I am very bad."

"No, no, you are not, Christie. No one can make me believe that."

"But what about my baby, Doris? Doesn't it prove how bad I am?"

This unexpected confession was startling, but Doris remained calm. She knew now that her suspicion had been correct.

"What baby?" she asked, desirous that Christie should explain everything.

"Why, the one I left at the rectory, of course. You surely have seen it."

"I have, Christie, and a dear little fellow he is. I love him so much. How you must miss him."

"I do, I do. It nearly broke my heart when I had to leave him there. But I was desperate, and there was no other way."

"Why didn't you bring him with you here? I am sure Mrs. Bristol would have given him a hearty welcome."

"Hush, don't talk so loud, Doris. Mrs. Bristol doesn't know. Neither does Jimmy. If they did, I believe they would turn me out. That is the way with the world, and that is why I left the baby at the rectory. People don't want an unmarried woman with a baby. She is disgraced, and no one will have pity on her. Oh, I know, for I was turned out on the street, and had no where to go."

"But why did you leave the baby at the rectory, Christie? Did you go there on purpose?"

"No, I didn't."

The girl paused and stared straight before her, evidently lost in thought. Doris believed that she had something more to tell, and longed to know what it was.

"Were you planning to bring the baby here, Christie?"

"No, I never intended to do that. But there was one place where I decided to take him, hoping that he would be well cared for. But I was turned away with curses, and told to take the 'brat' to the rectory. Yes, that was what my dear baby was called, a 'brat', and I was called something worse than that."

"You were!" Doris could hardly credit such words. Her face flushed with anger. "Who was it?"

"I must not tell you, Doris. It would do no good, but only make matters worse."

"It might do a great deal of good, Christie, if you tell me. Anyway, it would make matters worse for such a brutal person."

"What could you do?"

"I do not know for sure. But I would do something."

"And get yourself in trouble."

"Oh, I wouldn't mind that kind of trouble one bit. I am really in a fighting mood, though perhaps I do not look like it. When I think of the way you have been treated it makes me angry. I am only a woman, and have not had much experience of the rough side of life. But I have done considerable thinking, and am far from satisfied. There is something wrong with society in general which will cast out women who have made mistakes, and condone the crimes of men who are often more to blame. Isn't that so?"

"It is, it is, Doris. I know it is so from sad experience."

"Why don't you do something, then?"

"What can I do? I am helpless."

"Who is the man who betrayed you?"

"I do not care to tell you. And, besides, it would do no good."

"But it might. I would like to try, anyway. Has he helped you?"

"Helped me! No. He cleared out and left me. I begged him to marry me, and wrote him several letters."

"What did he say?"

"He never answered them."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"And would you marry him should he be willing?"

"I would, for I love him. I have loved him for years, and he is the only man I ever did love."

"And you love him so much that you will not expose him now? Is that it?"

"It is."

This was something Doris could not understand. But she knew Christie meant what she said. The expression in her eyes, and the fixed determination upon her face showed that she would die rather than betray her faithless lover.

"Did he promise that he would marry you?" she at length asked.

"Oh, yes. We were engaged for over a year."

During this conversation Christie had been plucking most of the time at the edge of the quilt. She was nervous and restless, and her words lacked animation. More than once she turned her eyes toward the door as if expecting some one. Not wishing to question her any more at present, Doris rose to her feet.

"I am going to leave you now," she told her. "You look tired. But before I go, I want to ask you a question."

"What is it, Doris?"

"How did you know that I was at the hotel, and spent much of my time at the rectory?"

"I was told so. That was my only hope, for I knew you would be good to my baby."

"Thank you, Christie, for your trust in me. You need not worry about the baby. He is well looked after, and Rachel loves him as much as I do. I am going to leave you now, so you can sleep. When you feel stronger I shall take you for a row on the lake. That will brighten you up."

Christie at once reached out and caught Doris by the hand with a firm grip.

"Don't go just yet," she pleaded. "There is something I must tell you. I can endure it no longer, and you must know."

"Suppose you wait until you feel stronger," Doris suggested.

"No, no. I must tell you now, no matter what happens. You will never forgive me, I know. But I must speak. I lied about you. I said that the baby is yours, and that I had been looking after it for you. There, now, I have told you."

Christie had nerved herself for this confession, and expected to see Doris greatly shocked. There was also defiance in her eyes as she watched intently the face of the girl standing before her.

But instead of words of reproach and indignation, she was surprised at her companion's merry ripple of laughter. Mrs. Bristol heard it in the kitchen, and was curious to know its meaning. She came to the door and looked in.

"Well! well!" she exclaimed, "what a great time you two are havin'!"

"Indeed we are," Doris smilingly replied. "Christie has just told me a wonderful joke."

"Is that so! I'm mighty glad of that, an' it lifts a big load from me heart. Keep up yer fun, me dears."

As she turned back to her work, Christie looked earnestly into Doris's face.

"And you are not mad at me?" she asked.

"Mad! No."

"Not for telling that lie about you? Just think what an awful thing it was, and what people will say."

"Oh, I am not worrying about that, Christie. What harm can it do me?"

"You don't know, Doris. You can't understand, for you are so innocent. But all will hear about it, and it will be a blot upon your character. That is what troubles me so much."

"Why did you tell that lie about me, Christie?"

"Because I was crazy, I guess. I did not know what to do, for a poor girl with a baby is helpless. Nobody would have anything to do with her. She would starve, and the baby, too. But I knew you had plenty of money, so could get along all right, no matter what people might say. So when I was told to take the baby to the rectory and say it was yours, I did so without thinking what it would mean to you."

"So you were told to do that, were you?" Doris asked in surprise. "Who was it? Surely there is no one who wants to injure me."

"I must not tell you, Doris."

"But I have a right to know. There must be some evil design back of this, and I am anxious to know what it is. You must tell me."

"No, no, I dare not. Please don't urge me, Doris."

"Why did you tell me this, then?"

For a while Christie remained silent. Then her right hand moved slowly to her bosom, and she brought forth a piece of paper, and gave it to Doris.

"That is the reason," she said. "Take it away and read it. But don't show it to anyone. I am tired now and want to sleep."

CHAPTER XXIII

UPON THE LAKE

Doris was glad to be once more in the fresh air, away from Christie's depressing influence. Her heart was heavy at the girl's mental suffering and she could do nothing to help her. Mrs. Bristol was busy in the kitchen, but Doris did not wish to talk to her just then. She wanted to be alone that she might think over all that Christie had told her.

Slowly she moved toward the lake, with the piece of paper in her hand. The boat was drawn up a little on the shore, and a pair of rough oars were within. She was accustomed to the water, and knew how to row. It took her but a minute to push off the boat and step in. Laying the paper on the seat by her side, she seized the oars and soon she was speeding over the placid surface straight for the opposite shore. The exercise exhilarated her, and sent the blood mantling to her cheeks. What a joy it was to be out in the open with the fresh morning air surrounding her instead of in that stuffy room. She thought of Christie and how often the girl must have revelled in such a pleasure. But she would never do so again. The peace and harmony of the quiet lake were lost to her for ever.

At length she stopped rowing and gazed thoughtfully before her. Why was such a shadow allowed to fall upon Christie? she asked herself. The question startled her, for never before had such a thought come into her mind. So protected had been her own life, with all the comforts that money could provide, she knew nothing of the great tragedies of the world. Now she was beginning to learn, and it worried her. Everything around her was so full of peace and beauty, with joy abounding, that she wondered why sin and sorrow should be like a terrible blot upon it all. Did Mr. Landrose know the meaning? He was an old man and had seen much of life, so surely he could explain the mystery. But how could she ask him? What would he think of her ignorance? Then she remembered what Mrs. Bristol had said about the clergyman. His people were drifting away from him, and did not attend church. He had evidently lost their sympathy. Why was that?

She was about to resume her rowing, when her right hand touched the paper lying on the seat. Annoyed at her forgetfulness, she quickly picked it up. It was merely a tract, about the size of many she had seen before in churches. They had never interested her, for they had all been about Church doctrine, such as Apostolic Succession, and similar subjects. At one time her grandmother had made a hobby of collecting tracts in the various churches she attended. She had never read them herself, but had always insisted upon Doris doing so, especially on Sundays. This had antagonized the girl until she hated the sight of a tract. This one, however, aroused her curiosity, simply because of its connection with Christie. It was much soiled, showing considerable handling.

The heading at once attracted her attention, "Redeeming Blood," and underneath was the text, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." With quickened heart, Doris read the tract from the beginning to the end. It was a message told in simple language of the need of all for the redeeming blood of Christ to wash away sin and to cleanse from all unrighteousness. She had never thought about that before, but now it came to her with a startling intensity as she thought of Christie. Where had the girl obtained the tract, and what did it mean to her? That she treasured it, was quite evident. Had she learned those words by heart, and had their meaning gone deep into her soul? That was what Doris longed to know, and she was anxious to hear the story from Christie herself.

With something new to think about now, she again picked up the oars and rowed swiftly toward the woods beyond. This took but a few minutes, and here in a shady spot where the branches of the trees almost touched the water she ran the bow of the boat upon the sandy shore. How restful was the place, and what peace surrounded her. But her heart was strangely disturbed. The thought of Christie and that piece of paper occupied her mind. She wanted to know more. Again she read the tract and began to understand something of what it would mean to a girl who had sinned. It must have affected her deeply, otherwise she would not have kept it. But she had asked Doris not to say anything about it. Surely she was not ashamed to have such a paper in her possession. Had the tract given her comfort, or had it added to her sorrow?

As she thus sat thinking, a splash in the water on her left startled her. Looking quickly around, she saw Jimmy leaving the other shore riding upon a single log. He was a little distance beyond where the lake narrowed into a creek leading to the valley down which the brook flowed. Straight as an arrow the log shot forward impelled by the long pole in the hands of the boy. Skilfully he balanced himself upon his precarious craft, and Doris watched him spell-bound. Never before had she seen anyone ride a log, and her heart thrilled and her eyes sparkled with interest and pleasure. Barefooted, light of clothing, and head bare, he seemed the very embodiment of suppleness and grace. She was fascinated by what she saw.

Then when Jimmy paused for an instant in his poling and waved his hand to her, she sprang to her feet and waved back to him. When near the shore, Jimmy turned the log downstream and headed straight for her. On it came, cleaving the glassy water like a thing of life, and leaving in its wake two long rows of sparkling ripples.

As the log grounded, Jimmy sprang nimbly ashore, and his mouth parted in a grin at the girl's look of admiration.

"My! you did that well," she complimented. "How in the world did you manage to stay on that log?"

"Aw, that's nuthin'," the boy replied, digging his right foot into the sand. "Ye should've seen me ridin' logs down the brook last spring when the Sanson drive came out. Why, this is nuthin' to that."

"I suppose not, Jimmy. But it's wonderful to me, for I never saw such a thing before. Do you think I could do it?"

Jimmy laughed outright. Then his face sobered.

"Ye'd better not try it with them fine duds on," he advised. "That log is as slippery as an eel an' rolls purty lively. Ye'd git a duckin' in no time. It takes practice."

"I am sure it does," Doris replied. "But I should like to try it. You must teach me some day."

"Gee! ye don't mean it, do ye, Miss Randall?"

"Indeed, I do. And look, Jimmy, I want you to call me 'Doris'. You and I are to be great friends, and I like to be called by my first name."

"A'right, I don't mind. 'Doris' is easier to say than 'Miss Randall'. I only git 'Jimmy'. Wouldn't it sound funny to hear me called 'Mr. Bristol'?"

"How old are you, Jimmy?"

"Me? Oh, I'm only sixteen, but I kin do the work of a man any day, an' I'm as strong as a moose. Why, I do most of the farmin', besides cuttin' cordwood an' logs in the winter. Last spring I helped bring out the Sanson drive, an' the boss said I done fine. So did A'nt Hanner. She praised me a lot."

"Who is she?"

"She's Mrs. Rosher, an' lives up the road. She's not me a'nt, but everybody calls her 'A'nt Hanner'. She's a wonder, a'right, though she can't walk a step. She knows a lot, too, all about poetry, an' sich stuff. Her an' the parson went to school together, an' she knows all about him. She's not one bit afraid of him, an' they talk jist like you an' me are talkin' now."

"Why, you are not afraid of the parson, are you, Jimmy?"

"No, I'm not 'xactly afraid of him, but I like to keep out of his way. Ye see, he is allus askin' me questions about the Catechism, an' I allus fergit 'cept the first one about me name. I know that, of course, but he allus asks it every time he sees me. Now, A'nt Hanner's not like that. She talks to me about things I'm interested in, sich as huntin', fishin', an' shootin'. Then on Sundays she reads an' tells me great stories from the Bible an' other books. Yep, she's a fine woman. She's human, a'right, an' understands boys."

"My, what a great time you must have here in the country, Jimmy. I should like to live here all the time. It is so quiet and beautiful."

"Mebbe ye'd git tired if ye had to live here twelve months in the year. I do, anyway, 'specially since Christie went away from home. Things ain't what they used to be now."

The sad tone in Jimmy's voice caused Doris to look up quickly into his face. He was staring straight before him out across the water. She felt sorry for him.

"But Christie has come back," she reminded. "Are you not glad?"

"Oh, yep, she's come back, a'right. But she is not Christie as she used to be. Something's happened to her."

The angry expression that suddenly appeared upon his face caused Doris to shrink back in fear. His eyes blazed with wrath, and his hands clenched hard.

"If I could git hold of the man that harmed Christie, I'd shoot him," he cried.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! do you know what you're saying?" Doris demanded. "That is terrible."

"I know 'tis. But it's terrible the way Christie's been treated. An' the brute who done the harm has left her. That's what makes me bilin' mad."

"Suppose you sit down and let us talk this over," Doris suggested. "There, that's better," she continued, when he had complied with her request. "Now, tell me what you know."

"I only know that Christie has a baby which she has no right to have."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, it's all around. Everybody knows it. Didn't you hear it?"

"No, I didn't."

"Ye didn't! What did ye hear, then?"

"That it is my baby. Christie said so herself."

"Huh, that's one of Tim Bendle's lies, but no one believes it. Anyway, Tim's stopped his gabbin' since he had his mouth shet good an' tight, an' says nuthin' now. I tell ye, his face is a fright."

"Why, what happened to him?"

"Oh, Mr. Norton, the man who owns the Quarries, landed on him. It must have been some fight, an' I wish I'd been there. Tim's no lamb when it comes to fightin', so Mr. Norton must be some hustler."

At these words Doris started, and her face flushed. She was eager to hear more.

"What was the cause of the trouble?" she asked as calmly as possible.

"It was the lie Tim told about you, of course. When Mr. Norton heard it he landed upon Tim right in front of his house, an' they had it out there an' then. That stopped Tim's gabbin', a'right, an' everybody else's, too, fer no one wants to git Mr. Norton after him. He must be a holy terror to fight if he kin lick Tim."

The girl's mind was not upon what Jimmy was saying. She was thinking of John and his nobleness in defending her honor. She longed to see him that she might thank him for what he had done for her. A feeling of pleasure came into her heart as she mused upon his action on her behalf. Presently she noticed that Jimmy was standing before her.

"Ma's wavin' to us," he announced. "Dinner must be ready. But before we go, I want to ask ye something."

"What is it?"

Jimmy, however, did not at once reply. He became suddenly embarrassed and rubbed his bare feet together and dug them into the sand. Doris waited for him to speak. At length he looked up into her face.

"Say, ye didn't do it, did ye?" he asked.

"Do what?"

"Make away with yer grandmother, so you an' the parson could git her money?"

At this question the girl's face became white and her body weak. Her appearance frightened Jimmy, and he laid his right hand timidly upon her arm.

"I didn't mean to make ye feel bad," he apologized. "But I wanted to know, that's all."

"And did you really hear that about me, Jimmy?" Doris asked in a low voice.

"Yep, I sure did. It's the rumor in at the shore, an' the detective's there now investigatin'."

"The detective! Investigating! Oh, there must be some mistake. Who in the world could have started such a lie as that?"

"I knew it was a lie," Jimmy declared, as his face brightened. "But I wanted to hear ye say so yerself. I'm satisfied now. I was sartin you an' the parson wouldn't do sich a thing."

"But who started the lie, Jimmy?"

"Dunno fer sure, though I have me s'picion."

"What reason could anyone have for saying such a thing?"

"Some folks don't need no reason, I guess, Doris, 'specially one skunk I know. Remember the lie that was told about you an' Christie's baby."

"But there was some foundation for that. She told it herself."

"Yep, mebbe she did, an' mebbe she didn't. But, ye see, people have been wonderin' a lot why yer gran'mother was buried at night. That started 'em gabbin', I guess, an' it jist needed some cuss to start the blaze."

"I have been wondering about that, too, Jimmy. I could never understand it."

"Couldn't ye! An' her yer gran'mother! Well, that's queer. D'ye s'pose Parson Dan knows anything about it?"

"I do not know. If he does, he never told me."

"Why didn't ye ask him?"

"I didn't like to."

"So yer afraid of him, then, the same as most of us. But A'nt Hanner's not, anyway, so she might ask him."

Doris made no reply, but stooping, picked up the oars. Jimmy pushed off the boat, and sprang lightly aboard. Then out across the water they moved straight toward the opposite shore. With long steady strokes Doris sent the boat forward. She needed this work as a relief to her agitated heart and mind.

CHAPTER XXIV

"A'NT HANNER"

Doris ate very little dinner, and this worried Mrs. Bristol.

"Why, I thought ye'd have a great appetite after yer row on the lake," she declared. "But dear me, ye haven't eaten enough to keep a bird alive. Jist look at Jimmy how he's stowin' the food away. He kin eat, a'right, an' it's some sense cookin' fer him."

"I had a late breakfast," Doris smilingly reminded. "But I am sure when I have been here for a few days my appetite will be like Jimmy's. I am going to take a walk right after dinner. That should do me good."

"Indeed it will, me dear. An' would ye mind doin' an errand fer me? I want to send a little basket of things to A'nt Hanner. She likes my cookin', an' I generally share some of me cookies, an' doughnuts with her. Jimmy was goin' to take 'em, but that would mean most of the afternoon fer him, an' he's got his hoein' to do. He lost the hull mornin', so he's got to make up fer it. People who live on a farm can't afford to waste much time."

Doris was pleased at this request, for she did want to meet Mrs. Rosher, and she had been wondering what excuse she could find in order to call upon her. The opportunity had come in a most unexpected manner. She did not wish to talk with Christie just then, as she had something of a very serious nature to consider. She was not so curious now about the tract, so it could wait until she returned.

As she walked slowly up the road, carrying the basket in her hand, she was lost in thought. The news Jimmy had imparted gave her deep concern. How could people say that she and Mr. Landrose had killed her grandmother in order to get her money? It was terrible, and the thought made her heart beat fast. And what would be the outcome? Would they be arrested and tried for murder? Who had sent the detective, and what had he learned? And what could she say in her own defence? And what could she tell about the night burial when she could give no satisfactory explanation? Did Mr. Landrose know anything? she wondered. And if he did, why had he not said something to her?

The more she thought of this, the more puzzled she became. Why had her grandmother come to Green Mount, anyway? She had often thought about this, and believed it was not altogether for the sake of her health. What had Mr. Landrose meant to her? She remembered how very much interested her grandmother had been about the clergyman and his work in the parish. Several times she had found her seated by the north window looking over at the church and the rectory. Doris had thought nothing about it at the time, although she had mused over it a great deal since then. And why had Mr. Landrose been chosen as her guardian? Surely her grandmother must have had a definite reason when she made her will and planned everything before her death. And, then, the burial by night. That was the climax to the mystery, which now was likely to cause very serious trouble. Would Mr. Landrose be able to explain?

The road she was travelling wound its way through a beautiful wooded region. Sturdy maples, birches, and other trees crowded close to the ditches and shaded the road from the hot sun. Birds flitted and chirped among the branches, while butterflies zig-zagged through the air. There was much to charm the eye and give peace to the soul, and at any other time Doris would have been delighted at the scene around her. Now, however, she was too much occupied with other things.

As she thought about the clergyman a feeling of rebellion rose in her heart, the same as she had experienced the first time she had met him at the hotel. What right had he to be her guardian? He was an old man, and although he had been kind to her, how could he understand the ways of youth? And why had he accepted the responsibility of looking after her? She almost wished that she had acceded to John's suggestion about making the office of guardianship so unbearable that Mr. Landrose would be forced to give up in despair. Anyway, she longed to be free, and to do as she liked with her own money. It was galling to think that she would be forced to wait almost two years before she would be at liberty. How could Mr. Landrose sympathize with the plans she had already made for helping Christie and Mrs. Bristol? But if she had possession of her own money she could do as she liked.

At length the forest thinned, and soon Doris noticed cleared land ahead. In a few minutes she reached the end of the woods and saw green fields on both sides of the road. Beyond was an orchard and nearby a house close to the highway. This she knew must be where Mrs. Rosher lived, for it was the first house on the left, so Mrs. Bristol had told her. Presently she was able to see clearly. It was an old fashioned building, gray and weather-beaten. It was a cosy place,

and seemed very homelike to the girl as she drew near.

In front of the house was a garden full of flowers, carefully tended. Through this was a gravel walk which led to a vine-covered porch. Here in an easy chair sat a woman, busily knitting, with an open book on her lap. She did not see Doris until she was part way from the road. As she lifted her head and beheld the girl approaching, a smile of welcome overspread her face. It was a face of singular beauty, and although time had stamped furrows of care and suffering upon it, yet it was devoid of the slightest sign of fretfulness or rebellion. Strength and repose were strongly stamped there, and her faded eyes were expressive of tender sympathy and love. Her head, covered with thin white hair, was adorned with a neat cap, and over her shoulders a light shawl had been spread. Doris paused when part way from the road, somewhat awed by the scene before her. It seemed almost sacrilege to intrude into that little sanctuary of peace and break the charming spell surrounding it. Why should such a woman be disturbed with the troubles of others? she asked herself.

It was while she hesitated that Mrs. Rosher looked up, saw her, and smiled.

"Come right in, my dear," she invited. "I have been expecting you. There is a chair all ready."

Too surprised to speak, Doris stepped forward, and took the hand of welcome held out to her. Eagerly and longingly the old woman looked into her eyes, and what she saw there seemed to satisfy her.

"Sit right down, now," she said. "You must be tired after your walk. It is good of you to come to see me."

"How did you know about me?" the girl asked, as she seated herself in the comfortable chair.

"Oh, I have heard about you quite often, for the parson has told me. And, my dear, I am not 'Mrs. Rosher', but 'A'nt Hanner'. That is what everybody calls me, and I like it."

"But how did you know that I am at Glen Hollow?"

"I hear everything that goes on in this place," the old woman smilingly replied. "You can't keep anything from the people here, and they always tell me what they hear."

"You know about Christie, then."

"Not all." Mrs. Rosher's eyes grew sad. "But what I do know worries me very much. I am longing to see the parson. Perhaps he knows."

"So Mr. Landrose comes to see you?"

"Yes, nearly every week. We were children together, and we have been great friends ever since. He has been so good to me. A brother, in fact, could not have been better. Look at my garden. He attends to that, and I wish you could see him working out there. He always seems so happy when digging in the ground and fussing with the plants. He is so much interested then that I believe he forgets for the time that he is a clergyman. The people in this parish would not stand in such awe of him if they knew him as I do."

"I can hardly imagine Mr. Landrose as a boy," Doris replied. "Did he play and laugh like other children?"

"Why, certainly. We had such great times together at school, and Daniel was always so full of mischief. Didn't your grandmother tell you something about those days?"

"She never did. But did you know my grandmother? Was she a playmate of yours?"

Mrs. Rosher was not surprised at the girl's astonishment, as she had surmised the truth from what Mr. Landrose had told her.

"Yes, Martha Benson, your grandmother, and I were close friends until she married and went away. I never saw her afterwards."

"But she wrote to you, of course."

"Oh, no. She lived in a different world from mine, among big people in society. My! what a gay life she led. The parson and I always kept track of her as much as possible through the newspapers. But she forgot all about me, I guess."

"She never said anything to me about her childhood days, Mrs. Rosher. I wonder why. Where was her home, anyway?"

"At Riddle Creek, a little country place, nestling among the hills a long way from here. I go there very often in imagination while I sit alone day after day. They were happy times. The parson went away to college, and I married and came here. I was delighted when he was appointed to this parish. But poor man, he was heart-broken when he first came here, and for a while he was so depressed that I was afraid he would give up the Ministry."

"What was the cause of that?"

Mrs. Rosher did not at once reply. She let her knitting fall into her lap, and looked out over the fields and the woods. Her eyes grew misty, and her hands trembled. Doris felt that she had made a mistake in asking the question.

"Forgive me," she said. "I did not wish to make you feel badly. There is something you do not want to tell me."

"I am not thinking of myself, dear, but of you," was the quiet reply. "There is a secret I think you should know. The parson will not tell you, as he is so diffident. You have often wondered, no doubt, why your grandmother made him your guardian."

"Indeed I have. I have thought so much about it, but could never understand."

"Ah, I thought so. It is too bad your grandmother didn't tell you that she and the parson were once engaged to be married."

At these words Doris rose from her chair and stood erect, with eyes aglow and cheeks burning. But not a word did she say.

"Sit down, my dear," Mrs. Rosher advised. "I knew it would astonish you. But it is all over now, and your grandmother is gone."

"But was it her fault?" Doris asked.

"It was. She was fond of life, and the thought of being a country parson's wife never appealed to her. She wanted to travel and live in fashionable places. She got her desire, poor soul, but she left a heart-broken man behind her. He never really recovered from the blow. I did what I could to comfort him. I can see him now in that room in there, overcome with grief."

"I suppose he loved her."

"He certainly did, and I know that she loved him. There was no doubt about that. But the attraction of the world was too much for her, and she sacrificed her love. It is a sad story."

"And grandmother's life was a sad one. I know something about that. She was never happy, and she was always hurrying from place to place for some new excitement. I could not understand her then, and I have often wondered why she came at last to this quiet parish. But I know now. It was to be near Mr. Landrose. I remember how she asked questions about him, and at times I found her seated at the window looking over at the church and the rectory. And she sent for the clergyman just before her death, and he gave her the Communion. I was very rebellious at the time, and could hardly be civil to him. I thought he had no right to be my guardian. I see things in a different light now."

"I am glad you do, dear," and Mrs. Rosher reached out and took the girl's hand in hers. "But it was for the best, I am sure, and the parson sees it now. Martha Benson would never have made a suitable parson's wife, and she would have given him a great deal of worry. He could not see it, however, at the first, and it nearly broke him down. But he recovered from the blow and threw himself into his work. He lived for the Church and the people in his parish. He never spared himself in ministering to his flock. But he needed a wife, if any man ever did. He became very much set in his way, and could not bear any interference with his work and teaching. When it came to the question of Church doctrine he was unyielding, and I really think he was unreasonable, as I often told him. But his heart was tender, and he was ever helping others. He thought nothing of himself, and visited houses where contagious diseases prevailed, and stayed sometimes days to help when the neighbors would not go near. And he gave most of his small salary to relieve the needy. I do not know what we should have done but for him when my husband was sick. And now he supplies me with many comforts which my son Tom cannot afford. He and Mr. Norton have both been so kind to us."

"You know Mr. Norton, then?" Doris asked as casually as possible.

"Indeed I do. He is a special friend of mine. We met for the first time last fall. He was hunting and stopped here to inquire the way to Square Lake where there is always excellent duck hunting. We became acquainted then, and he often comes to see me. He supplied me with books, and this is one of his I was reading when you arrived. It is 'The Roadmender' by Michael Fairless, although her real name was Margaret Fairless Barber, and an invalid. Perhaps you have read it."

"No, I have not," Doris acknowledged, as she picked up the book. "I am afraid that my reading has been neglected. But I am glad that Mr. Norton comes to see you. It must be nice to have visitors."

"It is, and I always like to see them. They are all so good to me. But Mr. Norton is somehow different from most. He has a fine mind and talks about things in which I am interested. Now, I like to hear the news, and a bit of gossip doesn't come amiss to an old woman like me. But, then, one gets tired of too much of that, so a change is very welcome. And Mr. Norton provides it. He likes to talk about the beautiful things of Nature, and of helpful books he has read. I always feel inspired after he has been here."

To hear John praised was pleasant to Doris. She had the suspicion, however, that Mrs. Rosher was saying these things for her special benefit. But the kind old woman showed no sign that she had heard any of the rumors that were afloat concerning the young couple. As the girl looked upon the sweet withered face she understood why everybody loved her and called her affectionately "A'nt Hanner". She loved her already, and there were several questions she wished to ask her. But just then the sound of an auto down the road arrested her attention. She looked and saw a car approaching at a rapid pace. In another minute it had stopped before the house, and John stepped out. From his movement she knew that something out of the ordinary had happened, and her heart beat fast as she rose to meet him.

CHAPTER XXV

DESPAIR

Christie was lying in her room with eyes closed as if asleep when Mr. Landrose arrived. But she was not asleep, neither was she unaware of his presence. She heard him talking with Mrs. Bristol outside and knew that he would soon be in to see her. A great desire came upon her to run away, for she did not want to meet him. The habit of childhood was still strong upon her. Then she had always shrunk from meeting the clergyman. His many questions about the Catechism had annoyed her. "My Duty towards God, and my Duty towards my Neighbor," "The Ten Commandments," and other instructions contained in the little manual had been like a night-mare to her. She had never learned them to the parson's satisfaction, and more than once he had scolded her. If he had been severe upon her then, would he not be full of wrath now over her great sin? He would sternly reprimand her, she was certain, and she felt that she could endure no more. Her cup of agony was already full to overflowing, and now the parson had come to increase, if such a thing were possible, her misery. Almost intuitively she fumbled for the little tract, and at once remembered that she had given it to Doris. She was sorry, for if she had it now it might give her some comfort and support.

She did not see the clergyman as he entered the room, but she heard every step he made to her side. She shivered slightly when he at length stopped near the bed.

"Christie."

The tone of the clergyman's voice caused the girl to open her eyes in spite of herself. She could not believe it was the parson she had known who was speaking to her. Surely it must be someone else. She had never heard him speak like that before.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, my child. I was very anxious to see you. How are you feeling now?"

Christie, however, made no reply. She kept her eyes fixed intently upon the parson's face. He could not understand the meaning of that look, so strange did it seem to him. It made him nervous, and he was at a loss what to do and say. If she would but speak, it would be different. But to see her staring up at him in such a peculiar manner was hard to bear. Drawing a chair up close to her bed he sat down and gently took one of her hands in his.

"What is troubling you, Christie?" he asked. "Tell me. You need not be afraid."

For a minute he waited for a reply. The silence was intense, almost unbearable. He was about to give up in despair and leave the room, when Christie's lips moved.

"Why have you come to torment me?" she asked in a low voice.

"Torment you, Christie! Why, what have I said and done that you should say that?"

"But you are looking at me, and that is more than I can stand. You are so good, while I am so bad. Your eyes burn my very soul. Oh, please go away. Don't come near me again or you will drive me mad."

"But I have come to comfort you, my child, and not to torment you. Surely you will believe that I am your friend and want to help you."

"How can you help me? You have never sinned and suffered. No, no, you can't understand. Please go away."

"You are wrong, Christie. I have sinned and suffered, so I can sympathize with you. Won't you believe me?"

"You have sinned!" The girl's eyes grew wide with amazement. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"The very truth. I have done wrong many times, but there is one sin, the greatest of all, which tortures me night and day. For it there is no forgiveness. I have been untrue to my sacred vows as a clergyman. I have disobeyed my Bishop."

Totally unprepared was Mr. Landrose for the result of his words. Instead of being horrified at such a confession, Christie laughed outright. It was a laugh of mingled scorn and amusement, which caused the clergyman to wince as from a blow. He knew at once that his sin meant nothing to this girl, and he regretted that he had mentioned it to her. A laugh

such as that was unanswerable. And while he hesitated as to what he should say in reply, Christie spoke.

"What does your sin amount to? No one will think anything of that. But mine will disgrace me for life, and all will despise me. You are a man, and men can sin and people think little of it. But I am a woman, and when women make mistakes there is no excuse for them. They are disgraced forever. Oh, no, you can't compare your sin with mine. You don't understand."

There was such a tone of bitterness and misery in Christie's voice that Mr. Landrose was almost in despair. Never before had he met with such a problem in dealing with his parishioners.

"Remember, Christie, that the Lord is merciful, and He will forgive even if people will not. That should give you some comfort."

"Comfort! It is now that I want comfort and mercy. But do I get them? No. I was turned out on the street because of my sin. And who did it? People who call themselves Christians and are great Church workers. Oh, I know. And it will be the same with your good Church people here. They will shun and despise me."

"You are wrong, Christie," the parson quietly replied. "All will not despise and condemn you. Mrs. Bristol and Doris will not. Neither will I. We shall do all in our power to help you. But, there, I must not tire you any longer with my presence. Only before I go, I am going to have a prayer."

Dropping upon his knees, Mr. Landrose offered up a simple prayer. He used no book, and the words he uttered came from a heart full of loving concern for the troubled girl. He had never done the like before, and he was surprised at the sense of strength that possessed his soul as he knelt there. He seemed to be endued with power from on high, and when he at length rose to his feet, the radiance upon his face caused Christie to tremble and avert her eyes. With a word of encouragement, and a sympathetic pressure of her hand, he quietly left the room.

For some time Christie lay very still, lost in thought. She could not account for the expression upon the parson's face. But she was annoyed at herself for the bitter words she had uttered. And the clergyman had not rebuked her! He had merely talked to her as a father would talk to his child. Why did he do that? she wondered. It was not like the Parson Dan she had known all her life.

As she thus mused, Doris entered the room and came at once to her side. Christie did not notice how tired the girl looked, nor how pale was her face.

"How are you feeling now?" Doris asked, as she sank wearily down upon the chair by the bed.

"Just the same," was the low reply. "The parson was here. Did you see him?"

"Yes, I was talking with him for a few minutes outside. Poor man, he is much worried, and so am I."

"What has he to worry about?" Christie contemptuously asked. "He's afraid of the Bishop, that's all."

"So he was telling you, then?"

"Yes, he said something about disobeying his Bishop. He thinks that is a great sin. But he doesn't know what sin means."

"But did he tell you that he is suspected of murder?"

With a startled cry Christie sat suddenly up in bed and clutched her companion's arm.

"Suspected of murder!" she cried. "Not Parson Dan! It can't be true. There must be some mistake. That man would never commit murder."

"I know it, Christie. But people are talking a great deal, and a detective has been sent to investigate. And I am suspected, too. It has been reported that we murdered my grandmother to get her money."

"Doris!" It was all Christie could say, so overcome was she. Her face which had been so pale, was now deeply flushed. She was breathing hard, and her hands were clenched firmly together.

"And didn't Mr. Landrose say anything to you about his trouble?" Doris asked.

"Not that one. Oh, if I had only known I would not have treated him as I did. But it is too late now. And he was so kind, and prayed for me as I never heard anyone pray before. God forgive me!"

Then she turned her eyes upon Doris's face.

"Have you that paper about the blood?" she asked.

"Yes, it is right here. Tell me about it, and what it means to you. Where did you get it, anyway?"

"From 'Crazy' Paul. You know about him, don't you?"

"Why, no, I never heard of him before. Who is he?"

"A street preacher. He goes everywhere, but always preaches in the open, generally on street corners. I have heard him often, and used to think it great fun to listen to him. He is a wild looking man, with long hair and beard. Crowds go to hear him, and one night when I was listening with several girl friends, I laughed at what he said about sin and the Judgment. He stopped at once and looked hard at me. Then he stepped forward and gave me that piece of paper, and went on with his talk. I nearly dropped from fright and left at once with that paper clutched in my hand. When I got home I read it, but it meant nothing to me then. I kept it, though, and when my trouble came I thought of 'Crazy' Paul and the paper. I read it over and over again until the words, 'Redeeming Blood', fairly burned in my mind. There, I have told you all about it."

Christie's face was as pale as death, and her eyes were staring straight before her. She was breathing heavily, and Doris realized something of what the confession had meant to her. She was moved with a deep compassion, and taking the girl's hand in hers she pressed it in loving sympathy.

"Thank you, Christie, for telling me your story," she said. "But you have not told all. What has that tract meant to you?"

"I cannot say, so please do not ask me. All I know is that it torments me night and day just like the parson's eyes when he looked at me. I am such a terrible sinner that goodness nearly drives me mad."

"Don't say that, Christie," Doris pleaded. "I can't bear to hear you talk that way. Isn't there something I can do for you? Remember, I want to help you."

For a full minute the unhappy girl lay very still with her eyes closed as if she had not heard. Then she aroused herself, and reaching out, caught Doris by the hand.

"Take care of my baby, please. I give him to you. Don't let his father have him. Promise me."

"But you will want your baby yourself, Christie, when you get well."

"Maybe so. But promise, anyway."

"Yes, I promise that I shall do the best I can. But nothing is going to happen to you. What makes you talk that way?"

"Oh, I've been thinking, that's all. I don't want to live, and I often wish that the baby would die, too."

"Christie! You must not say that. It is terrible."

"I suppose it is," and the girl gave a deep sigh. "But just think what the darling will have to endure, and through no fault of his. Wouldn't it be better for him to die now than grow up and learn that he is a—a—. Oh, I can't bear to say the word. But he will bear the stain all through life. People will never forget it, and it will hound him to the grave. My darling, darling laddie! How you will suffer for my sin!"

Christie's face was tense with mental agony, and her eyes glowed with a strange wild light. Doris had never seen her like that before, and she became alarmed.

"There, there, don't worry now," she soothed. "You must get well for the baby's sake. You have him to think of, remember, and you must be strong to protect him. And, perhaps, some day he will take care of you when you need him most. And who knows, his father may come some day and provide for you both."

"He'll never come back," was the hopeless reply. "He's too much taken up with other girls. They're crazy about him."

"Do they know what kind of a man he is?"

"Know? Certainly they know. But what difference does that make to them? A man can sin as much as he likes and people think nothing of it. But let a woman sin, and God help her! She is disgraced and an outcast forever. It is true."

"I am afraid it is, Christie. But suppose that man did come back would you be willing to marry him? Do you love him still?"

"Love him! I love him more than ever. He is the only man I ever did love."

"And after the way he has treated you?"

"Yes. I can't help it. I have tried to put him out of my heart and mind, but I can't."

"Won't you tell me his name, Christie? I might be able to do something to help you."

"No, I must not. It would do no good. Please don't urge me."

Despairing of being able to help the unfortunate girl, Doris left her. She had a long talk with Mrs. Bristol that night as they sat together in the kitchen. They were both greatly puzzled and worried over the invalid's condition. Before going to bed they went in to see Christie and found her much brighter, and almost cheerful. Some color had come back into her cheeks, and she asked several questions about Jimmy and the car. She even spoke of A'nt Hanner, and said that she was going to visit her as soon as she was able. Much encouraged, Doris and Mrs. Bristol left her and went to their rooms, feeling confident that Christie had taken a turn for the better.

Just before midnight the roll of thunder was heard off in the west. It grew louder as it swept toward them. Ere long it was crashing right overhead. The lightning was incessant, blinding. And with the thunder came the rain. It dashed against the windows and beat in fury upon the roof. It was one of those swift sudden storms which at times follow a day of intense heat.

In her room Christie heard it. Formerly such a storm had always terrified her. She welcomed it now, for it was in harmony with the agitated state of her mind. The raging of the heavens seemed to her like the wild outburst of long pent up emotion. And for this reason the storm appealed to her. For weeks, and even months, she, too, had been holding sternly in check the wild passions of her soul. No tears had brought a blessed relief, and in all her suffering, bodily and mentally, she had never given vent to her feelings. But now with the confusion reigning around her, the depths of her soul were stirred, deep responded to deep, and the long-restrained energy at last burst its barriers. With a wild shriek she leaped from her bed, rushed to the door, sped through the kitchen and out into the open. It took her but a minute to reach the lake, push the boat from the shore, and spring on board. Seizing an oar, she drove the craft reeling through the water. Never once did she hesitate in her movements. One idea only seemed to possess her mind, and unwaveringly she pursued it. The rain beat upon her and drenched her to the skin. But of this she paid no heed. She was now beyond all sense of feeling.

Reaching at length the deepest part of the lake, she dropped the oar, and stood for a few seconds like a statue. Then with another wild shriek, she hurled herself into the water, and sank beneath the surface.

CHAPTER XXVI

NIGHT AND STORM

Alone in her room that night Doris had much to think about. So disturbed was her mind that she knew she could not sleep. Moreover, the sun which had been beating upon the roof all day made the room very warm. It was a relief to sit at the open window and feel the cool refreshing air drifting in from lake, meadow, and forest. She thought over all that had happened during the day, of the startling news Jimmy had told her about herself and the parson, of her visit to A'nt Hanner's, of John's unexpected arrival, and of her talk with Christie. Never before had so much been crowded into one day of her young life, and she felt almost bewildered. The hope of what John would do was her only comfort. He would help her if any man could. A pleasurable and assuring feeling came into her heart as she thought of him. She recalled, too, what Mrs. Rosher had told her about John, and of his kindness to her in her loneliness. It revealed more of the nobleness of his nature, and she was glad of the discovery she had made.

Closing her eyes, she leaned comfortably back in her chair and remained for a while lost in thought. Why should she fear when she had such a defender as John? she asked herself. And the parson, too, was her guardian, so he would be in duty bound to protect her. She thought of what Mrs. Rosher had told her about the clergyman, and his life-long sorrow. And to think that her grandmother had been the cause of it! How much that good man had suffered so patiently through the years. She felt a great sympathy for him, and longed to do all in her power for him. It was not his fault that he had been appointed her guardian. It was due to her grandmother, and on account of his love for her the clergyman had undertaken the responsibility. She was sorry now that she had so unjustly judged him, and her face flushed with shame as she remembered the morning she had asked him to buy her clothes. He had tried and failed. It had seemed amusing to her then, but it brought only remorse to her heart now.

And since then Christie had come with her burden of sorrow. What could she do for the unfortunate girl! An idea which she had been thinking about that day again came into her mind. Why could she not get a snug little cottage near the river and live there with Christie? They could have the baby with them, and what a pleasure it would be to care for the little fellow. There need be no worry about money, so their lives could be happy.

Then John again came into her mind. Just why she should think of him then she did not altogether know. But a little cottage without him did not seem so fascinating. Her heart beat somewhat faster as she imagined living without the man who now meant so much to her. More and more was she coming to realize that life without him would be unbearable. She needed him, and she believed that he needed her. She had always liked John as a friend and a pleasant companion, but never before had she considered him as anything else. Now he was vital to her happiness. She was learning at last the meaning of a great love, and it thrilled her entire being. She could sympathize with poor Christie, whose love for the man who had deserted her was like an unquenchable fire. She would go to the girl in the morning and have a long talk with her.

She was at length aroused by a bright flash of lightning, followed by the rumble of thunder away to the west. She had never been greatly alarmed by a thunderstorm, but when it presently broke in all its fury she shrank back in dismay. Rising to close the window through which the rain was beating, she caught a glimpse of the lake as it was illuminated for a fleeting instant by a streak of lightning. The scene was of surpassing grandeur, and awe-inspiring. Not only the water, but the hills and woods stood forth etched for a flaming second across the blackness of night.

And as she stood there, Mrs. Bristol entered the room, and came close to her side. The presence of this woman comforted her. She looked so calm and strong.

"Are you afraid?" she asked, putting her arms around the elder woman, and clinging to her. "What a terrible storm!"

"It is, me dear, an' it does make the shivers run up an' down me spine. But it'll soon be over. My! this rain is great. The crops needed it in the worst way."

"What a comfort you are, Mrs. Bristol," Doris replied. "I do not feel so frightened now with you here. But I wonder how Christie is making out. Does she mind a storm like this?"

"Oh, she's all right. I peeked in at her before coming upstairs, an' she seemed asleep. Anyway, her eyes were closed an' she was as quiet as a mouse. Poor child! I really wish that something would arouse her. I can't bear to see her layin' there

with no interest in anything. I did hope that the parson might be able to do something to comfort an' cheer her. But he told me himself that he was helpless an' did not know what to do. He was feelin' very down-hearted when he went away."

"We all are helpless, Mrs. Bristol."

"We'll have to leave it to the Lord, I guess. He's the only one who kin help Christie now."

"Can't we find the name of the man Christie loves, and try to bring him back to her?"

"H'm, that's easier said than done. Christie won't tell who he is, and if we did know what could we do? No, I guess it's only the Lord who kin work sich a miracle as that, an' it looks to me as if He doesn't intend to do it this time. Oh! what's that? It's Christie!"

Rushing to the door, she hurried downstairs. Doris followed her, her face very white, and her heart beating fast. The wild shriek she had heard, mingled with the crashing of the thunder, almost unnerved her. Yet she kept on her way and hastened after Mrs. Bristol. The rain was sweeping over the land in great sheets, driven by the wind. But Doris never thought of it as she stepped out into the night. By the incessant flashes of lightning she could see Mrs. Bristol running to the lake. At the shore she stopped, and as Doris reached her side the two peered out over the water. At every flash they could see Christie standing in the boat, and a short distance behind a strong young swimmer, which Doris knew could be none other than Jimmy. She clutched her companion by the arm as she watched, although neither uttered a word. But when Christie at length threw down the oar and leaped overboard, they cried out in dismay.

"Oh! oh! oh!" Mrs. Bristol wailed. "Christie is drownin' herself! What kin we do?"

"Jimmy will save her. Look, he is almost to the place now."

At once Mrs. Bristol rushed into the lake, her arms stretched out over the water in a mute appeal to her son battling for the life of the drowning woman. The horror of the situation overwhelmed Doris as she stood motionless upon the shore. It all seemed to her like a terrible dream. She felt helpless, unable to move hand or foot. She saw Mrs. Bristol standing waist-deep in the water, and the little boat in the distance, empty now. The thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, and the rain fell. Inky darkness and vivid gleams followed one another in rapid succession. Her brain reeled. Her body grew weak and limp. She dropped upon the ground and buried her face in her hands to shut out the bewildering sight. But not for long. Some irresistible force compelled her to look again. As she did so, she saw the boat coming slowly toward her, and some one was clinging to the side. Could it be Jimmy? But where was Christie? Had he saved her? The flashes dazzled her eyes so she could not see distinctly. Mrs. Bristol was still standing in the water. What a wonderful woman she was to remain there so long. How strong she must be. Then she saw her reach out and lay her hands upon something and drag it toward the shore. It looked like the boat, but she was not sure. Then she noticed that Mrs. Bristol was coming out of the water carrying something in her arms. Could it be Christie! With a cry of joy she sprang to her feet, and as the woman reached the land, Doris clutched her by the arm.

"Is it Christie? Is she alive?"

"Out of the way," was the stern order, as Mrs. Bristol staggered along with her burden.

Doris shrank back as from a blow. Never before had she been spoken to in such a manner, and a feeling of resentment rose in her heart. This was followed immediately by a sense of humiliation at her own weakness. While she had been crouching on the shore Mrs. Bristol had been alert and ready to help as soon as possible. Her admiration for this woman increased as she followed her to the house. No longer was she the garrulous person of an hour before. She was now face to face with a big problem. The life of an unfortunate girl was at stake and there was no time for useless talk. Doris was beginning to learn something of her real character which had been tested for more than a score of years in her stern battle for existence on her stubborn farm. Her's was the heart of a heroine, and she proved it this night. And she proved her skill, too. Doris watched her as she laid Christie upon the kitchen floor and bent to the task of restoration. Her face was almost severe as she worked over the unconscious girl. She seemed to know just what to do, and Doris watched her in amazement. Where and when had this woman learned all this? she asked herself.

After a few minutes of steady work, Mrs. Bristol glanced up at Doris.

"Land's sake, child, ye'r shiverin'! Go an' change yer clothes."

"But I should stay here. You might need me."

"Oh, Jimmy'll be back in a minute. He's gittin' into some dry duds. He'll be more use than you."

Doris hesitated, her cheeks aflame. Yes, she was well aware that Jimmy would be of more use, and the thought humiliated her. She wanted to help, and yet she did not know what to do. Slowly she made her way upstairs, feeling how insignificant she was and of no account. Mrs. Bristol was but an ordinary country woman, and how brave and capable she was. And Jimmy was a hero. How many had received medals for doing far less than he had done that night. And he must be rewarded for his noble rescue. She would make his deed known just as soon as possible.

When she had changed her clothes, she hurried downstairs and entered the kitchen. But Christie was not there. Instead, she saw Jimmy sitting on a chair with his mother kneeling before him bandaging his right foot. She crossed the room and stood before them.

"What has happened to Jimmy?"

"Oh, he's hurt his foot," Mrs. Bristol explained. "I've warned him time an' time ag'in to be keerful where he puts his feet. He's allus hurtin' 'em."

"But, ma, I couldn't see when I went down after Christie. I didn't know there was a snag at the bottom of the lake. An' I didn't know I hurt me foot 'till I got t'shore. An' I skinned me shin ag'inst the boat, too. Christie was mighty heavy, an' you jist caught her in yer arms in the nick of time. I was all in, I guess, when ye grabbed her."

"Indeed ye was, Jimmy. An' so was Christie. But she's a'right now, thank the Lord."

"And Jimmy, too," Doris reminded. "It was wonderful what he did. He's a hero."

Jimmy suddenly became embarrassed, and his face colored.

"Aw, that was nuthin'. I could swim all day without any trouble. But I don't know the bottom of the lake as well as the top or I would have kept clear of that snag. Gee, ma! ye're tyin' that too tight."

"Am I, Jimmy? Well, I'll loose it a bit. I'm all rattled, I guess."

"Let me do it," Doris offered. "I want to be of some use. You are tired out, Mrs. Bristol. And you have not changed your clothes!"

"I know I haven't, so I'll slip right away an' do it this minute. But keep an ear open fer Christie. When she wakes I want to give her a hot drink."

Jimmy was pleased to have Doris finish the bandaging, and his eyes shone with pleasure as he watched her.

"Say, ye'r hands are mighty soft an' gentle. Ma's are awful rough."

"But her hands are nicer than mine, Jimmy."

"Nicer than yours! What d'ye mean?"

"Your mother's hands are rough through hard honest work to make a living. Mine are soft because they have been idle. I like your mother's hands."

"Guess ye'r right. Ma has wonderful hands, an' no mistake. She kin do a'most anything with 'em. Gee, ye should see her workin' out in the field. She's better'n a man any day. Yep, I guess her hands are a'right. I thought so, anyway, when she grabbed Christie."

"Don't you feel tired, Jimmy, after your trying experience in the water?"

"Tired! Me tired? Why, that was nuthin'. I'm used to swimmin'."

"I suppose so. But it was different going out there at night with such a storm raging. Weren't you afraid?"

"Not of the water. I'm used to that. But the thunder an' lightnin' did give me the creeps."

"But you went, for all that."

"What else was there fer me to do? I couldn't let Christie drown herself, could I?"

Doris made no reply. Her heart quickened at the unconscious heroism of this lad. He was afraid of the thunder and lightning, yet he did his duty, nevertheless. She went on quietly with her work, and in a few minutes the bandaging was done.

Just then Christie's voice was heard. Doris rose quickly to her feet, and listened intently. She then went to the door and looked in. The girl was lying on the bed with her right hand on her breast.

"Bob, when are you coming?" she asked. "Oh, there you are. I knew you wouldn't leave me. The baby is all right."

A smile overspread her face, and at that smile tears came into Doris's eyes. She turned hastily away and met Mrs. Bristol.

"What's the matter with Christie?"

"She is dreaming and calling for Bob. She thinks he is with her. She also spoke about the baby."

"Poor dear! I wish her dream'd come true, but I'm afraid it never will. Now, who is Bob? That's the first time she's mentioned his name. Oh, I wonder—"

She ceased abruptly and turned away her head. What she was thinking about Doris did not know. Perhaps she would explain later.

CHAPTER XXVII

"CRAZY" PAUL

Mr. Landrose returned home from his visit to Christie very much discouraged. He believed that he had accomplished nothing, and that he was unable to do anything to bring comfort to the troubled girl. His heart was exceedingly heavy, and several times he sighed as he sat at the table and made a pretence at eating his supper. This worried Rachel, so thinking to cheer him up, she brought the baby into the dining-room for him to see.

"I thought you might like to see him, sir. Isn't he a bright happy little fellow? And he is so good."

"But his mother is not happy, Rachel. I never saw anyone so sunk in the depths of despair."

"Perhaps she is grieving for her baby."

"I asked Mrs. Bristol about that, but she does not think so. Her chief thought seems to be about the man who betrayed her."

"Do you know who he is, sir?"

"No. I wish I did, though, for then something might be done. But Christie will not tell. She was always a strange girl in some ways, and I never got to know her very well. She used to run away to the fields or the woods whenever I went to the house. I wonder why?"

Rachel made no reply, but took the baby back to the kitchen. She was quite disappointed that the parson had taken no notice of the child. But he had always been like that, and she knew the reason why Christie had avoided him whenever possible. And she was not the only one. It was the same all over the parish. The reason was quite apparent, Mr. Landrose looked upon children with an eye to their baptism, instruction in the Catechism, and later on to their Confirmation. To him they were so many candidates for the Church. If he understood them better, and had entered into their little joys and troubles, they would not have dreaded his visits to their homes. Rachel had known of this for years, but she felt that it was not her business to tell her master. And, besides, she knew that he would have resented any interference on her part. He was sure that he was right, so that ended it.

After supper Mr. Landrose worked for a while in his garden. Here, busy with his hands, he found some relief from the thoughts which were agitating his soul and mind. For nearly an hour he remained here, part of the time leaning on his hoe, meditating. He then went back to the house and entered his study. He had his sermon to prepare for next Sunday, so decided to spend the evening at home. He was tired, and glad to sit down by his desk. The evening was sultry, and scarcely a breath of wind stirred the curtains at the open window. He had been thinking much during the week about a text which had given him considerable comfort, "Yea, like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him." At once his mind turned to the saying of the Master, "If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?" He repeated these familiar words, but stopped short at the word "stone". "Bread", "stone". What a difference between these two words. People needed bread, the Bread of Life, and he, God's minister, had been giving them a stone. Was that the reason why they were so unresponsive now after his long years of service? And it was the Bread of Life poor Christie needed, and he had none to give her. He felt that this was true, and his spirit groaned within him. Yes, he had failed in his life's work, and so miserably that he could not bring any relief to one unfortunate girl. What was he to do? He leaned back in his chair and looked out of the window through the deepening twilight. His entire life's work seemed to be falling in ruins around him. He thought of the stories which were in circulation about him and Doris, and the visit of the detective to the parish. And added to these was his own agony of soul, and his failure in the Lord's Vineyard.

A gentle knock upon the door aroused him, and Rachel entered.

"Excuse me, sir. There is a man to see you."

"Can't he come again, Rachel? I am very tired to-night, and in no mood to see anyone."

"I told him so, but he says he must see you. He has come a long way, and his business is very important."

"Oh, very well, then, let him come in. I suppose I must see him."

Mr. Landrose was annoyed at being thus disturbed, but when he turned and saw the visitor his annoyance changed to surprise. He rose at once to his feet and stood erect, uncertain what to say. The stranger had stopped just inside the door, and with hat in hand was looking intently at the clergymen. He was the first to speak.

"Pardon me, sir, for intruding upon you. But my business is very important. You do not know me, but that makes no difference."

At these words the parson stepped quickly forward and reached out a hand of welcome.

"I do know you. You are the man I heard preaching in the street when I was attending Synod. Sit down, please. You look tired."

"Ah, I am surprised that you recognize me, Mr. Landrose. Your memory is good."

He sat down in a nearby chair and placed his soft-felt hat upon the floor. He was a small man, almost mean in appearance at the first glance. His beard and hair had been carefully trimmed, and his clothes, though much worn, were neat and clean. But the man's eyes were what arrested the clergyman's attention. They glowed with a remarkable light of tranquility and peace. They were piercing, too, and seemed to read his very soul. They gave him a peculiar sensation, and he was glad to turn away his head as he sank down into his chair. The visitor noted his slight embarrassment, and a semblance of a smile flitted across his face.

"I can't help my eyes, sir. They are what you and the Lord made them."

Too astonished to speak, the clergyman stared at the stranger.

"Ah, you don't understand, I see. Well, that's natural. But what I am to-day is due to a sermon I heard you preach years ago. The Lord did the rest, praise be to His holy Name!"

"To a sermon you heard me preach! What you tell me is very strange."

"No doubt it is. But if you look at it aright it shows in what strange ways the Lord works. Yes, it was years ago that I happened to drop in at a service you were holding. You preached a sermon about the Church and what it should mean to people in general. I forget now the details, but that sermon stirred me up, for I was a free-thinker then and had read many books against the Church and religion. But I didn't know the Bible, so then and there I decided to read the Book very carefully to prove that you were wrong. I wanted to know it at first hand so as not to be caught in any argument."

The man paused and into his eyes came a far-away look as he turned them toward the window. The clergyman leaned eagerly forward.

"So you read the Book? You found more than you expected? Is that it?"

"It is, sir. I found Him, and in finding Him I found a new life. My whole point of view became changed. It was wonderful, most wonderful what I saw when my eyes were opened and He entered into my heart. It took a long time to overcome my old doubts, but when at last I was free my joy knew no bounds. I was a new man, filled with a new spirit, and I wanted to shout abroad what great things the Lord had done for me."

"So you took up street-preaching?"

"Not at first. But when I saw the need for the simple message, I could resist no longer. Like the Master I went into the highways and byways, wherever there are people. I have travelled far and wide, but something drew me back to my own province. If men and women will not go to church, the message must be taken to them. In that way I have brought the great reality home to many hearts. It is a wonderful joy in thus presenting a living and a loving Saviour to sinners. I am called 'Crazy Paul', but I rejoice in the name. If I am crazy, I hope to remain so."

"You have no use, then, for the formal church service."

"Indeed I have, sir. Please do not misunderstand me. I attend the church service whenever possible, and I was in the Cathedral that night of the Synod service."

"You were!"

"I was, and my heart was full to overflowing at what the Bishop said. I have been longing for years to hear such words from a Bishop of the Church. It is that spirit which will give new life. The Church is a marvellous organization, but it needs the revivifying spirit, and burning hearts. Oh, how often have I been grieved at the coldness and the mechanical manner in which the services have been conducted by so many clergymen. I have prayed that prayer of old, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live'."

He ceased and looked with glowing eyes at the parson. His face was radiant, and Mr. Landrose was deeply impressed. Yet he was not altogether satisfied. What authority had this man to teach? The Church had not sent him forth, and he had not been ordained. It was difficult to free himself from the idea of Apostolic Succession. He had believed and taught it for years, and had always scorned the idea of a man-made Ministry. The great commission had been given to the Church through the Bishops, and apart from them there could be no true Ministry. But here was a man who had taken upon himself the responsibility of preaching to others.

"Have you received authority, that is, a license from the Bishop for your work?"

"No, I have not. Mine comes from One greater than any Bishop. I have my commission direct from Him who has done so much for me."

"But would it not be better if you were ordained? Could you not do more effective service by working along established lines? Would you not meet with greater success if you had the authority and the blessing of the Church to support you?"

"Have you found that to be so in your work, Mr. Landrose? But, there, you need not answer, as I do not wish to embarrass you. One may prefer a rigid system, and work according to Canons and rubrics. But with me it is different. I would rather be guided by the Holy Spirit which always leads aright."

A month before Mr. Landrose would have considered such a statement as downright heresy, not to be tolerated for a minute. He would have buckled on his armor and charged in defense of the doctrines he held so dear. Now, however, he was not so keen for battle. The beaming eyes and burning words of the man before him disarmed him. Surely the spirit of God was with him. He had something which he, an ordained minister, did not possess. What could he say to such a man? What argument could he use?

"Why didn't you come to see me sooner?"

"Would you have received me as you have to-night?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you not have turned me from your door? You had no use for a street-preacher then."

"How do you know I have now?"

"Because you stopped to listen to me that night of the Synod service."

"Might not anyone do that? It might mean nothing more than curiosity."

"Quite true. But I saw your face that night, not only on the street but at the service, and I knew you were not happy. Something was troubling you, and I surmised the reason."

"You did!"

"Yes. And that is why I have come here to-night. Mine is an important mission concerning a young woman, Christie Rixton. She is a member of your flock, I understand."

"She was, but I hardly know whether she is now or not. She is in great trouble, poor girl, and I am at my wit's end to know what to do for her. We have her baby here, and my housekeeper is looking after it. I wish I knew who the child's father is, as I might be able to do something."

"I know him, sir, and he has sent me here. He asked me to find out where Christie is."

"He did! and who is he?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you just now, Mr. Landrose. But at one time he was a member of your flock."

"Was he! Now, who can he be! So many of my young men have gone from this parish that it would be difficult for me to guess the right one."

"You need not worry about that now, sir. He was a man very careless and indifferent about spiritual things. But one evening he and several other young men stopped to listen while I was speaking in the city. They were somewhat troublesome at first, especially the young man to whom I refer. As I kept my eyes upon him, for I was attracted by his appearance, I saw a sudden change come over his face. He stood quietly there after that until I was through. Then, leaving his companions, he came and asked if he could speak to me privately. I went with him to his boarding-place, and he told me the story of his life, and about the girl he had betrayed. I have never met a more repentant man. It was the Lord's doings, I am sure. What He did to Saul of Tarsus, he did to him that night."

The man's eyes were glowing, and under his excitement he rose to his feet and laid his hand lightly on the clergyman's shoulder.

"Do you know where Christie is? I must find her. I was told that you know."

"Yes, I saw her to-day, and found her in the depths of despair."

"Ah, that is too bad. But when she hears about her lover it will make a great change. Will you go with me to see her?"

"Does the young man wish to marry her?"

"He does, and as soon as I get Christie's consent, he will come for her. He is most anxious now to make amends as far as possible for the wrong he has done her."

"I am glad to hear that. Yes, I will go with you in the morning. This is all very wonderful, and I see the Lord's hand in it all."

"There is no doubt about it sir. It's as plain as day. But I must go now, as I have some business to attend to down the road. Good-night, sir. I shall be back again in the morning."

When the man had gone, Mr. Landrose sat quietly for some time with his head resting upon his right hand. At length he turned his eyes upon the Bible open on his desk before him. The words "bread" and "stone" arrested his attention.

"That man has been giving people bread while I have been giving them stones. And he has wrought a marvellous change in one of my flock. I wonder who Christie's lover is. Anyway, that street-preacher has done more than I could do, and he has not been ordained. Perhaps the Lord does work through such men, even though they are not in the Ministry. Why have I been so blind through the years as not to have seen this before?"

He ceased suddenly in his musing, for he caught sight of an old familiar verse which now became illuminated with a new meaning, "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

"Ah, I see it now. 'How much more'. What wonderful words! How much more has the Lord given of His Holy Spirit to that man than He has given to me. Yes, I see it, I see it. God forgive me for not seeing it sooner."

For a long time he sat there that night. His sermon for next Sunday was much in his mind. But it had taken a new form, and a strange thrill came into his soul as he thought upon the message he would give to his people. It was a thrill akin to the one he had experienced the day of the funeral when he had spoken without a written sermon.

The storm rolled up from the west, the thunder pealed, the lightning flashed, and the rain beat against the windows. But the silent thinker had no sense of fear, for his heart was full of an abiding peace which no earthly tempest could disturb.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GOOD NEWS

The night of the storm Tim Bendle became a fugitive from justice. While Jimmy Bristol was battling for the life of Christie Rixton in the lake, and Parson Dan was meditating in his study, Tim was crouching in the woods under the big upturned root of a fallen tree. Here he found some shelter from the rain, but no refuge from the wild rage that surged in his heart.

Tim was bewildered, so suddenly had the wheel of fortune turned against him. And it had all been brought about through one man, so he believed, the man he feared most in the whole parish. It was the physical fear of an animal for the beating he had received at the hands of John Norton but a short time before. It had filled his soul with the spirit of revenge, and he had only been waiting for an opportunity to strike back in some underhand manner. But his enemy had struck first and in a way he least expected. This was what confused Tim as he crouched there alone in the woods with the storm raging around him.

John Norton had not been idle since his visit to Doris in the back settlement. His suspicions of the man who called himself a detective had been aroused when he learned how he was going about his work. In the first place, he did too much talking, telling everybody he met the object of his visit. And then, he was very friendly with Tim Bendle. This in itself did not look well to John, so he went to the city and consulted the detective department there. What he had surmised was true, for he learned that no detective had been sent to Green Mount, and nothing was known at headquarters of the man who was posing as a detective. It was decided there and then to send down two men to apprehend the imposter and take him to the city. John also visited the office of the Trust Company to find out, if possible, about the "uncle". What he learned gave him great satisfaction. There was no uncle, and never had been, so he was informed. The dead woman had only one child, the mother of Doris Randall.

John was much elated at his success so far. But he was anxious to learn if Tim Bendle was really at the bottom of the mischief. It seemed certain that he had hired that imposter to injure innocent people. His intense love for Doris urged him on, and he was determined to leave no stone unturned in his efforts to bring Tim, if guilty, to task. Why he should wish to harm the reputation of such a girl as Doris Randall he could not understand. And then there was the clergyman for whom he had such respect. Perhaps it was on account of him that Tim had started the lies. John had thought of this before, and he was very anxious now to find out the truth.

He accompanied the detectives to Green Mount, and was with them when they interviewed McPrentiss, and placed him under arrest. The culprit told them that Tim Bendle had hired him, but so far he had not been paid a cent.

It was at the store where this took place, and Mrs. Bendle, who was passing at the time, heard the news. She hastened home in great fear and notified her husband. Surprised at the news, Tim swore that he would shoot the detectives if they ventured near his place. But after a few minutes thought, he seized his rifle and left the house. It was now the dusk of evening, so hiding in a clump of bushes by the side of the road, he was able to discern the two strangers accompanied by John Norton as they passed by on their way to his house. He now knew for certain the man who had brought this trouble upon him, and it filled his heart with a burning rage. But he would get even with Norton, so he swore. No one could do such a thing to him and get clear. He would abide his time, and then—

He spent the night in the woods, and crept cautiously back to his house at daybreak for something to eat.

"They will git you yet, Tim," his wife told him. "The detectives said it was no use for you to run away, as you could not escape."

"Let 'em try to git me," Tim growled as he gulped down his food. "Jist let 'em lay hands on me. An' that d—— cur, Norton, I'll fix him fer what he's done. He thinks he's smart, but I'll show him."

"Be careful, Tim. Don't do anything rash, or you'll be sorry."

"Me sorry! Bah! I know a thing or two, so don't you worry. An' see that you keep ye'r mouth shet as to where I am."

Early next morning the news of Tim's disappearance was known to all. There was great excitement, and people

wondered if he would be able to escape. When it was learned what he had done, indignation became general, and on all sides sympathy was expressed for Doris and the clergyman. The latter heard the news while at breakfast. It was Rachel who told him. Mrs. Wickham had come to the rectory that morning bubbling with excitement, and had imparted the information. The parson laid down his knife and looked at his housekeeper.

"And did Tim really bring that man down here, Rachel? It seems improbable."

"I suppose it does, sir, but it is true, nevertheless. Tim is a very revengeful man."

"I know he is. But I did not believe he would go so far as that. And you say he has escaped to the woods?"

"No one is sure. He has disappeared, anyway. He may have left the parish, for all I know."

"Most likely he has, Rachel, and good riddance it would be. He has been a worry to me for years, and he has led his poor wife a hard life. I must see her as soon as possible. And by the way, Rachel, when my last night's visitor comes bring him at once into the study. I do not expect to be home for dinner."

After the parson had gone, Rachel went on quietly with her work. Several times she glanced at the baby asleep in his cot, sweet and rosy from his recent bath. She was thinking of the little one she had lost years before. A mistiness came into her eyes.

"The parson never spoke about him. Perhaps he has forgotten that there is a baby in the house. He is a good man, but I wish he had children of his own. What a difference it would have made in his life. He would be more human now. I could not love this poor little waif so much if I had not had one of my own."

She continued her work, but her mind was in the past among other scenes and with another baby.

It was Jimmy Bristol who took the news to Glen Hollow. He had been to the early boat with butter and eggs, and on the wharf he had heard men and women discussing the affair of the night before. He had listened to every word he could hear with fast-beating heart, and when the steamer had gone he started at once for home. It was a wild trip he made over that rough backland road. The old wheezy car bumped and rattled, and it was a wonder that it did not shake to pieces in its headlong career. But hold together it did, and kept the road, too.

Mrs. Bristol was in the kitchen when the car swept into the yard and brought up with a jerk at the back door. She wondered what had brought Jimmy home so soon, for he generally took most of the morning when he went to the shore. Then she heard him calling to her, and from the tone of his voice she knew that he had news of special importance. She went at once to the door.

"What is it Jimmy?"

"Come here, ma, I've got somethin' to tell ye. It's great news."

Mrs. Bristol hastened out to the car, all a-flutter with curiosity.

"Fer land's sake, what is it? Nothin' wrong, I hope."

"Guess there is or I wouldn't be home this early. My! I made our old car travel. She was in the air most of the time."

"Never mind the car, Jimmy. What's the matter?"

"Tim Bendle's in a trap. He's caught, an' so is that detective feller."

"In a trap! Tim in a trap! An' that detective, too! Are they hurt much?"

"Aw, I don't mean a steel trap, ma, but a kind a man gits into when he does wrong. The law's after Tim, an' it's got that feller who said he was a detective. Tim's cleared out, an' no one knows where he is. But he's in a trap, a'right, an' he'll have some job gettin' out of the fix. He told lies about the parson an' Doris."

"Land's sake, Jimmy! When did all this happen?"

"Last night, so I heard. An' it was that Mr. Norton who done the trick. He went to the city an' came back with two real

detectives, an' they've taken that other feller away. Tim got wind of it, an' lit out."

Just then Doris was seen coming toward them. She was carrying a bunch of wild flowers she had gathered for Christie's room. She had been away in the fields for over half an hour, and enjoyed being alone. She had been thinking much about Christie and wondering what she could do for her. So far as money was concerned the girl should not want. But it was not money she needed now, and Doris's only hope was to find the man who had wronged her. But how could she do that? Her thoughts naturally turned to John. Perhaps he could help here, for a man could do far more than a woman in such a case. But where was John? She longed to see him, and a slight feeling of resentment stole into her heart at what she considered his neglect. She was thinking of this as she came near the house and noticed Mrs. Bristol standing near the car. When she saw the woman waving her hands and calling to her to hurry, she felt sure that something out of the ordinary had taken place. She quickened her steps as Mrs. Bristol came to meet her. It took but a minute for her to learn the news, and as she listened to what John had done, she chided herself for thinking that he had neglected her. Mrs. Bristol was much excited.

"Isn't it great what Mr. Norton done! My, I'm glad he didn't let the grass grow under his feet in roundin' up them skunks that spread sich lies about the old parson an' you, dear soul. I'd put 'em both in jail where they would stay fer some time, that's what I'd do."

Doris breathed a sigh of relief, and her eyes shone with joy.

"I am so thankful, Mrs. Bristol, for I was so worried about those lies that were in circulation. And I am sure that Mr. Landrose must be relieved. Oh, if this would only bring some comfort to Christie."

Before Mrs. Bristol had any time to reply, the sound of a car approaching arrested her attention.

"Why, it's the parson an' Mr. Norton! An' they've got another man with 'em. What in the world are they doin' here this time of the mornin'!"

It did not take her long to understand the cause of the visit, and when she knew, her face beamed with pleasure.

"Praise the Lord, an' bless His holy Name! Wonders'll never cease. Come right into the house."

She led the way to the front door, with the parson and Paul Random following. Christie was lying as if asleep. But when Mrs. Bristol approached, she opened her eyes. Then seeing the men, she started, while an expression of fear overspread her face.

"What are they doing here?" she demanded. "I don't want to see them. They can do me no good. They will only torment me. Send them away."

She clutched Mrs. Bristol by the hand and tried to rise.

"There, there, dear, don't ye worry. These men ain't come to torment ye. They've brought good news."

"Ah, I know what that means. But what is 'good news' to them is misery to me. What is heaven to a saint is hell to a sinner. No, I don't want them here. Tell them to go away."

She pulled up the quilt and covered her face. Mr. Landrose at once stepped to her side.

"Christie." His voice was firm and low. "Look at me."

Slowly the quilt was removed, and the girl's eyes met his.

"We are not here to torment you, Christie. We have come instead, to help you."

"How can you help me? There is only one person who can do that, but he won't come."

This was an opening, and eagerly the parson seized upon it.

"He will come, and he is just waiting to hear from you. That is why we are here."

At these words a change passed swiftly over the girl's face. Surprise, mingled with joy, was expressed in her eyes.

"Do you mean that Bob wants to come to me?"

"Yes. This man," and Mr. Landrose motioned to Paul, "has come all the way to see you. Bob sent him. He will tell you the rest."

Turning, he left the room, followed by Mrs. Bristol. The latter's face was beaming with happiness. When they had reached the kitchen she closed the door.

"Set down, sir, ye must be tired. I'm all flustered. An' no wonder. This news is almost too good to be true. But who is Bob, anyway, parson?"

"I am not sure, Mrs. Bristol, although I have my suspicion now."

"An' so have I, parson. I really believe it's Bob Bendle. He allus was fond of Christie, an' her of him."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he is the man. And my, my! how strange it will be for him to return now when his father is an outcast."

"H'm, I'm not worryin' about Tim, fer he's no good. I hope he'll be so fer an outcast that he'll never show up ag'in. But I did like Bob, so if it's him, I'll fergive him, even though he's done wrong. We're all human an' make mistakes, so we mustn't be too hard on others."

"Quite right, quite right, Mrs. Bristol. Anyway, I am glad that matters are turning out all right, and that the young man, whoever he may be, is willing to act the honorable part and marry Christie."

While Mrs. Bristol and the parson talked, Doris and John were with Mrs. Rosher. They had found her sitting in the vine-covered porch, busily knitting, and with a book in her lap. She was sincerely pleased to see them, and understood the meaning of the happiness that shone in their eyes. She loved young people, and they loved her. And it was only natural that on such a beautiful morning they should tell her of the great secret which meant so much to them. Her old heart thrilled as she listened, and her voice trembled with emotion as she gave them her blessing.

"May God bless you both, and keep you safe under His loving protection. It is great to be young and full of abounding health. Be true to each other, and never let the love in your hearts grow cold."

Doris twined her arms around the old woman and tenderly kissed her.

"Thank you, oh, thank you so much Mrs. Rosher for your blessing and words of advice. I am sure we shall never forget them."

"A'nt Hanner, please," she corrected, as she brushed away a tear that was stealing down her furrowed cheek. "I'm always 'A'nt Hanner' to the ones I love, and I love you both."

CHAPTER XXIX

REVENGE

Mr. Landrose was strangely drawn to Paul Random. He made an effort to oppose this influence, feeling that it was not altogether right. The man had not been ordained and he should not go about preaching, so he reasoned. But he could not overlook the good he was doing, especially in the case of Christie Rixton. Where he himself had failed, Random had succeeded. Why was that? He knew the answer, and it caused him much regret. Paul gave people spiritual food, while he had given them stones. He frankly acknowledged this to be true. After long years of hard work, it was a pathetic admission of failure. Paul never spoke about theological matters, Church government, ritual and such things which were so often discussed when the clergy met together. He had a far greater subject to think and talk about. To him it was the spirit that giveth life, and without that all the forms in the world are of little avail. "I believe in forms, and so does every builder," Random had said that morning on their way to Glen Hollow. "A form is necessary for the holding and binding of things together, such as cement, for instance. So religious forms are important for the preservation of truth. The danger comes when the forms are given too much emphasis. That is what makes me dissatisfied at times with some of our church services. The tyranny of form often crushes the vital spiritual life. For that reason I prefer to remain free and do my little work in my own way."

Random spoke very quietly, but there was no mistaking his strong conviction. The parson, listening, knew that he was right. He himself had magnified the form, and it had crushed the spirit. He was learning now in his old age what he should have known from personal experience before he entered the Ministry.

He thought of this as he stood by Christie's side when he bade her good-bye. The changed expression upon the girl's face, and the light of hope in her eyes told their own tale. Doris was standing near, and her heart thrilled with happiness at the transformation that had come so suddenly over Christie. The latter grasped the parson's hand and looked up into his face.

"Do you think it is really true? Surely that man wasn't deceiving me."

"Do not worry about that, my child. Mr. Random means what he said."

"I know that, but Bob may have changed his mind. Oh, I can't yet believe that he is willing to come. And, then, something may stop him. I had a dream, and I can't get it out of my mind. I saw Bob coming to me when something happened, and I saw him lying so white and still in the middle of the road. I hope it doesn't mean anything."

"Certainly not, my dear. We are going right back, and Mr. Random will telephone at once for Bob to come. He should be here this evening."

"And will you come, too? You know what I mean, don't you?"

"I do. You shall be married in the little church. How nice that will be."

"It will, although I somehow feel that it is all a wonderful dream."

The parson joined John and Paul who were waiting for him outside, and in another minute they were speeding down the road. He said very little on the way home, for he had many things to think about. But that afternoon as he and Random sat in the study waiting for Bob to arrive, he asked the question which had been much in his mind during the day.

"Was your conversion sudden, Mr. Random, like Saul's of Tarsus, for instance? Or was it a gradual growth?"

"Why do you ask me that, sir? Is it only curiosity?"

"No, no. I want to know, that I, too, may experience such a change. I need it, God knows. In the few years that remain for me to carry on my work, I must have a different spirit, something like yours, in fact."

Random was silent for a few minutes, gazing thoughtfully through the window out upon the fields beyond. His eyes were unusually bright and his face was almost radiant. Then he looked at the clergyman.

"The Kingdom of God is within. It comes not by observation, that one can say, 'Lo here!' or 'Lo there!' 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is

everyone that is born of the Spirit.' Such are the Master's words, and I have proven them to be true."

"I have no doubt about it, Mr. Random. But I wish to know whether this wonderful thing came suddenly or gradually."

"Both, sir. But the outcome was in a moment of time, and in a strange place and manner. I shall not attempt to tell you the whole story of my past life. Sufficient to say that for years after I heard that sermon of yours I fought a hard battle. To crush the spirit of God that was working in me I plunged into a reckless manner of living. I associated with men of low morals and became as one of them. But all the while I was most unhappy. This continued for some time. Then one night in a miserable dive, with evil companions around me, I saw a vision of Him. He stood before me with such an expression of pity and reproach in His eyes that I covered my face to hide the sight. And it was then that He spoke to me. I remember every word and the tone of His voice. They are stamped upon my soul. 'And for this thou hast left Me!' That is what He said. When at last I looked up, He was gone."

Random paused, lost in thought and memory. Mr. Landrose was much moved.

"And so that was the great change, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. That happened a year later. I had left my wretched manner of living, and travelled from place to place seeking peace, but finding it not. I left the busy haunts of men and plunged into the wilderness where dwell the natives. I lived with them, going with them on their hunting expeditions. Crazy I must have been, for I hardly knew what I was doing. But the Indians were good to me, and took me under their care. It was while with them that the change came. Three of us had been travelling through the woods for several days. The way was rough, and we were forced to carry our packs upon our backs. I was weary almost to the point of exhaustion when at length we reached a river. And there upon the bank I sank down and longed to die, so tired was I and full of agony of soul. I could find no peace, for the vision of the Master and His words were ever with me. Only one who has gone through such an experience can understand my feelings. At times I wanted to get away from Him, and again the great longing came upon me for His help. Between these two emotions I was tossed like a ship on a rough sea. Such was my condition as I dropped upon the ground by that inland stream."

Random again paused, while an expression of awe appeared in his eyes. He had come now to the momentous event in his life. This the clergyman knew, and he leaned eagerly forward so as not miss a single word.

"And it was there you found what you had been seeking? How?"

"Yes, I found Him, but in a most unexpected manner. It was there that the Indians made a strong raft and placed me on board, for I was too weak to walk, and we started downstream to the great lake beyond. As the current caught the raft and bore us onward, a strange new feeling came upon me. I thought of the days I had been struggling through the forest, depending upon my own feeble strength. But that was all over, and lying there I was borne forward so easily by a mighty power beneath. All I had to do was to entrust myself to its strength, join with it, so to speak, and all was well. The past struggles were forgotten in the pleasure of such a new sensation. No longer did I have to strive and fight my way onward, because the stream was doing it all for me.

"And as I thought of all this, there suddenly came into my soul a great illumination. I seemed to hear a voice saying, 'Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Then I knew the truth. I had been struggling along in my own strength for rest and peace of soul as through a rough wood, and had failed. And all the time there was One strong and willing to do it for me. All I had to do was to join myself with Him, trust implicitly to his upholding power and He would bear me up and give me what I desired. It all came to me quicker than it takes me to tell it, and oh, who can describe the new sense of strength and joy that came upon me. 'Come unto Me, and I will give.' These words kept ringing in my ears all the way down that river. I left the raft a new man, a new creature. Old things had passed away, and all things had become new."

He ceased and there was silence in the room for a few minutes. The men sat lost in thought. One was living again the struggles of the past; the other was longing for that transforming spirit which he did not possess. The parson was the first to speak.

"And has that power sustained you ever since, Mr. Random? Have there not been times of weakness and depression?"

"Indeed there have been, sir; plenty of them. I would not be human if they did not come upon me. Even the Master Himself had his moments of depression and doubt, so why should I expect to escape? But I have been kept by the power

of God, and have been wonderfully sustained. 'When I am weak, then am I strong,' for I throw myself upon Him, and He supplies all my needs. Then there always comes to me the feeling of rest, peace and strength such as I had that day while floating down the river. There is a verse of a master poet which has great depth of thought, and has meant much to me,

"Speak to Him, thou, for He hears,
For spirit and spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
And nearer than hands and feet.'

"Tennyson thus expressed a blessed truth which I have proved over and over again. 'Spirit and spirit can meet,' and when the spirit in a man meets the spirit of God, in that union man is more than conqueror. And it is not necessary to go in search of Him, for He is ever present, 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.' Yes, He is very near to each one who calls upon Him."

Mr. Landrose was deeply moved by these heart-burning words.

"Oh, if I could only have that feeling! If I could have that spirit, how it would transform my whole life! I need it so much because I am a minister of God. How can I impart to others what I do not possess myself? Have you ever read Dean Hole's 'A Book About Roses,' Mr. Random?"

"No, I never heard of it."

"Ah, that is too bad. You have missed a great treat. It is one of my favorite books, for it tells so much about the cultivation of roses. How well I remember his opening words, 'He who would have beautiful roses in his garden must have beautiful roses in his heart.' Those words have a new meaning for me now, for they apply to the work of the Ministry and the care of souls as well as flower gardens. Yes, he who would have spiritual flowers in his parish must have spiritual flowers in his heart. I see it now, alas, too late!"

"All that will come, sir, never fear, for 'No good thing will He withhold from them that lead a godly life.' You have the longing, and 'He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.'"

"How can I doubt it after what you have told me? And I have also witnessed what you have done for Christie Rixton. And think of the man who betrayed her. He has changed, so you tell me, has repented of his evil ways, and is coming to marry the girl. That is wonderful."

"It is only another evidence, sir, of what the Lord will do through one man. I have been but a very humble instrument used by Him in carrying out His design. It is 'not I, but the grace of God that is within me.'"

Just then Rachel appeared at the door, announcing supper.

"Dear me!" the clergyman exclaimed. "I had no idea it was so late. And that man has not come yet. Anyway, we might as well have something to eat."

Mr. Landrose was worried about Bob Bendle coming home while his father was an outcast from justice. There was much excitement throughout the parish, so he had learned that afternoon from the storekeeper. Several stories were in circulation, and they had gained a great deal while passing from person to person. Bob's arrival and his intended marriage to Christie would prove a choice topic of conversation. It would free Doris, anyway, of the base lie that had been told about her, and for that he was most thankful. He was pleased, too, that his own name had been cleared.

Supper was just over when Bob arrived alone in his car. Mr. Landrose knew him at once, and as he grasped his hand he looked keenly into the young man's face.

"Robert, I am glad you have come."

"Thank you, parson." He then lowered his voice. "I have done wrong, sir, but by God's help I hope to do better. How is Christie?"

"She is waiting for you, Robert, so we might as well go to her at once. I have my grip and register all ready. Have you procured the marriage license?"

"Yes, sir. I got it as soon as I heard from Mr. Random."

In a few minutes they were on their way, for Bob was eager to see Christie, and he drove fast up the main highway. Coming to the road leading to Glen Hollow, he was compelled to drive slower owing to the stones and ruts.

They had gone but a short distance when they reached a hill with a steep bank covered with rocks and bushes on the lower side. The clergyman was sitting with Random in the back seat, and he had just bent forward to move his grip a little to one side when the sharp report of a rifle sounded on the right. This was instantly followed by the crashing of the wind-shield and the scattering of broken glass. With a cry of pain Bob dropped his hands from the wheel, the car swerved suddenly to the right, leaped from the road, and plunged headlong down the bank among the tangled mass of bushes and rocks below. It turned over twice, and finally brought up with a crash against a large fir tree close to the edge of a little brook which trickled through the thicket.



CHAPTER XXX

WAITING

"I can hardly believe it is true. It all seems like a wonderful dream."

As Christie uttered these words she was sitting with Doris under the shade of a big maple tree on the upper side of the meadow. Behind was the forest, while down below lay the lake, very calm, and gleaming beneath the sun's rays. It was about the middle of the afternoon, and they were on their way to the little church. There was a short-cut through the woods, and they had stopped here to rest ere entering upon the well-beaten path. Christie was still weak, but her eyes and face expressed the hope and animation that had been enkindled in her heart. She was more like her old self now, and Doris was afraid lest she should attempt too much.

"It is no dream, Christie, dear. It is the reality. And I am so glad for your sake. I hope that your troubles are about over."

"They will never be over, Doris." Christie's voice was low. "The stain will always remain upon my soul, and people will never forget what I have done. But when I have Bob and the baby I will not mind so much what is said. Bob was good to me, until—" She paused abruptly and looked down at the lake. "Let us go on. I can't bear to look at that water now. It makes me shudder when I think of that night of the storm, and the mistake I made. But for Jimmy it would be all over."

Slowly they made their way through the woods. It was cool here, and the shade of the branching trees was refreshing. Ferns and moss lined the path, and the rich pungent smell of the forest was invigorating. Squirrels chattered around them, and birds flitted here and there. In a few minutes the big trees fell away and the path led to a pasture where several cows were peacefully feeding. Wild flowers were in abundance, and Christie stopped to pick several of the choicest.

"They are for my wedding. I always kept the vases filled in church in summer, and the parson liked to see them there. But I never thought in those happy free-from-care days that I should ever gather flowers for my own wedding. I used to dream, though, that I would be married in the church, and that the girls would trim it with beautiful flowers, and the neighbors would all come to the service. I would be dressed in white, and there would be singing, and everybody would crowd around to wish me much happiness. Oh, it was a glorious dream I used to have. But I don't want such a wedding now. Only a few friends must be there, and the service very quiet."

Doris made no reply as she assisted in gathering the flowers. When they had enough, they continued on their way until they reached the church. It was a little building, nestling among the trees. The door was unlocked, and as they entered, they stood for a minute just inside. Then Christie stepped forward to a pew, knelt down, and bowed her head in her hands. Doris partly imagined the emotion that was stirring the heart of the kneeling girl. No doubt she had often sat there in other days. But what a change had come over her life since she had last knelt there.

When Christie at length rose to her feet, she picked up the flowers lying by her side, entered the vestry to arrange them in the vases, while Doris went for water from the little brook that flowed by the church. When the flowers had been arranged to her satisfaction, Doris placed them upon the altar. She then stepped back and viewed them with critical eyes.

"I hope Bob will like them. He was always fond of flowers, especially the ones I gathered."

"I am sure he will like these," Doris assured her, placing her arm tenderly around her companion. "They look lovely there, and I wish we had more of them in the church."

"They are enough, Doris. I want only a few to-day."

When they returned home, they found Mrs. Bristol very busy in the house. She had been sweeping and dusting all the afternoon.

"I've jist finished gittin' the house set to rights. I had to do some cookin', too, fer I want to have a real weddin' supper fer Christie. It wouldn't do to have folks here with the house dirty an' the pantry empty."

At once Doris laid aside her hat and offered her assistance.

"Let me do something, Mrs. Bristol."

"I don't need ye'r help, me dear. I was glad to git you girls out of the way, fer I kin allus work better alone when I have much to do. It takes so long sometimes explainin' that I'd fer ruther do the work meself. Jimmy's ginerally around to give a hand. But dear me! He's been no use this afternoon. It's that he's been foolin' with," and she pointed to a gun standing in a corner of the kitchen. "He says he's expectin' a skunk to be prowlin' around t'night an' he wants to be ready fer it. I don't know what's put that notion into his head, fer we haven't seen nor smelled one of them critters fer some time. But Jimmy's jist like his pa. He takes sich queer freaks, an' I never know when one's goin' to attack him. But, there, I must git on with me work. You'd better lay down, Christie, an' rest yerself. You're not overly strong, an' gittin' married is ruther a tiresome bizness. I found it so, anyway. But dear me! it's nuthin' to bein' married, fer then ye'r tired all the time, an' haven't a ghost of a chance to git rested."

Mrs. Bristol worked while she was talking, and she did both with considerable energy. But what she had said so casually about Jimmy and the gun meant a great deal to Doris. There came at once to her mind that scene on the opposite side of the lake. Again she saw the boy standing on the shore, his eyes blazing with anger, and his hands clenched hard together as he threatened to kill the man who had harmed Christie. Was that wild idea still in his mind? And was that what he meant by the "skunk" he expected would be prowling around this night? She felt quite sure that it was, and her heart beat fast at the thought. Jimmy was a queer boy in many ways, there was no mistake, and it was hard to tell what terrible thoughts might be seething in his mind. She must see him at once.

After Christie had been induced to lie down and rest, Doris went out of doors. She looked around for Jimmy, but he was no where to be seen. Going to the back of the house, she found him seated upon a block of wood looking out over the lake. When he saw her approaching, his face flushed.

"Lost in thought, Jimmy?"

"Guess so."

"Thinking about that skunk?"

Jimmy started at these words, and sprang to his feet.

"Who told you about that?"

"Your mother, of course. And she showed me the gun in the corner."

"She did!"

"Yes. And, Jimmy, you have murder in your heart. But don't do it. Think what it would mean. If you kill that man, you will be arrested, and perhaps hung. Think of your mother, and how it would break her heart. You are all she has."

"I know, oh, I know, Doris. I've thought all about them things. But I can't let that skunk git off. Shootin's too good fer him. Think how he's a'most killed Christie."

"But he's coming back to her, Jimmy, and intends to marry her. If you kill him, Christie will be heart-broken. You love her, do you not?"

"Guess I do. She's like a sister to me, an' don't ye think I'd fight fer her? Why, I'd die fer her any minute, that's what I'd do."

"Well, then, if you love her so much, why should you cause her more trouble by shooting the man she wants to marry?"

"But s'pose he doesn't marry her?"

"He will. He is on his way now, most likely, and will be here shortly. Why would he come if he is not in earnest?"

"Dunno. But I'm goin' to be ready, an' if he doesn't marry Christie, he'll not leave this place alive. That old gun kin shoot wicked, an' she never misses when I pull the trigger. Yep, I'll stand by Christie."

Doris well knew that it would be useless to reason any more with the lad. The wild look in his eyes caused her great uneasiness, for she could not tell to what extremes his rage might carry him. He was a peculiar boy in some ways, and it

was uncertain what he might do when aroused by a mighty passion.

She went back into the house, but it was impossible to get Jimmy out of her mind. As she looked at the gun in the corner she was tempted to hide it somewhere. Anyway, she decided to keep a close watch upon it, and if possible to restrain Jimmy from carrying out his evil design.

Supper was ready, and Mrs. Bristol had the table spread with her best linen and dishes. She was very hot from her exertions, and for a few minutes she sat down and fanned herself with a newspaper.

"There, I've got everything ready. I hope t'goodness the folks won't keep me waitin' too long or the supper will be cold. We might as well eat now, so's be ready to wait upon the company. I'll call Jimmy. He's allus hungry, an' kin eat at any old time."

She went to the door and called. In a few minutes the lad appeared, took his place at the table and ate in silence. Doris, sitting opposite, watched him. When he was through, he went into the kitchen, picked up the gun and went outside.

"Now, be keerful with that gun, Jimmy," his mother called after him. "I don't want any accident around here. I wonder what kin be keepin' them folks, anyway," she continued, turning to Doris. "It's gittin' late."

"They may be here any minute now, Mrs. Bristol. Something may have detained them."

Just then Christie came into the room, looking paler than usual. She sat down by the table near Doris.

"Are you feeling rested, dear?" the latter asked.

"A little, thank you. But I have a weight here," and she pressed her right hand to her heart. "I have the feeling that something has happened, and that Bob will not come."

"Tut, tut, that's all nonsense," Mrs. Bristol replied, as she opened the oven door. "They'll be here, never fear. I'm not worryin'."

But as the evening wore on, and darkness enshrouded the land Mrs. Bristol did worry, although she showed no signs of it. She was bright and cheerful, but when nine o'clock came and the visitors had not arrived, she became exceedingly anxious. They were all sitting just outside the front door, for the night was warm. They had been watching the stars and talking about them. Mrs. Bristol was quite enthusiastic.

"Ain't they beautiful! Me an' Sam used to set here sometimes an' watch 'em when the day's work was done. Sam knew a lot about the stars an' could tell their names, too. He was quite poetical, Sam was, more so than he was religious. Mebbe that was his religion, fer all I know. I guess he saw the Lord back of the stars, fer he used to look up an' in a very solemn kind of voice would say, 'Sary, ain't they wonderful! But we must remember that the things that are seen are temp'ral, but the things we can't see are internal.' Yes, them's the exact words he said, an' they are in the Bible. Poor Sam did like to talk about internal things, even though he didn't make any perfession of religion. An' I guess the Lord'll understand. My! did ye see that shootin'-star? Sam allus said when he saw one, 'Another world gone to destruction.' That's what he said."

"That star makes me shiver," Christie declared.

"We'd better go into the house, then, fer ye might git cold here in the night air. It wasn't the star that made me shiver, but the dampness comin' up from the lake an' swamp. Sam used to feel the same way, an' he'd sneeze awful when he sat out here too long. He was a great man to sneeze, anyway, an' he could be heard all over the place. Yes, we'd better go in, an' mebbe Doris'll play something fer us on the organ."

Mrs. Bristol knew the meaning of Christie's shiver all too well, and it troubled her. She was fond of music herself, and believed it might have a soothing effect upon the girl. And this was so, for as Doris played hymn after hymn, the anxious expression upon Christie's face gradually faded. Several times she softly hummed the words of some old familiar hymns, and once asked Doris to play one which was her special favorite.

The most marked effect, however, was made upon Jimmy. He had crept into the room and slumped down into a chair near the organ. As the playing continued, the wild look in his eyes softened, and the strained expression upon his face relaxed. When at last Doris began to sing, he sprang to his feet and stood by her side. He loved music, and knew a number of hymns by heart. Often had he sung them when alone out in the fields or woods. So now he joined in the singing

in one of his favorites, lifting up his voice in the comforting words of "Abide with Me." Verse after verse they sang, and when the Amen died down, and the last notes ended, Jimmy gave a deep sigh and resumed his seat. Doris glanced at his face, and what she saw there gave her much encouragement. She felt sure that the music had accomplished what all her reasoning had failed to do. Jimmy's heart had been touched, and the evil thoughts had been banished for a while, at least.

Doris was about to continue her playing, when Jimmy became suddenly alert.

"They're comin' now," he cried, as he hurried from the room with his mother following.

Doris went, too, and as she reached the front door she heard a man outside saying, "Bad accident, Mrs. Bristol. The parson and Bob Bendle went over the bank at Deep Brook in a car."

"Fer land's sake, Jim!" Mrs. Bristol exclaimed. "Will they die?"

"I can't say. They're both at the rectory now, and the doctor is tending them. It was a bad smash-up, and I can't understand how Crazy Paul escaped as he did. He got only a few scratches."

Mrs. Bristol turned from the car to enter the house. As she did so, she saw Christie standing near Doris. She stopped suddenly.

"Did ye hear the news, Christie?"

"I did, and I must go to Bob at once. Jim will take me."

"But, me dear, ye're not strong enough to go."

"I am going, and nothing can stop me. I must be with Bob."

"And I will go with you," Doris declared. "Perhaps I can be of some help."

"Thank you, Doris. It is good of you."

Christie's voice was firm, and the light of a strong resolution shone in her eyes as she made ready for the journey. Doris assisted her, and she was surprised at the girl's animation. She had expected an outburst of grief and wild lamentation instead of such calmness.

"You are wonderful, Christie, to bear this so bravely. I was afraid that the shock of the news would almost kill you."

Christie paused for a minute and looked straight into her companion's eyes.

"It is a great blow, Doris, and if Bob dies it will be very hard on me. But if he gets better, he will know what it means to suffer, and that will do him good. Come, let us go."



CHAPTER XXXI

RETRIBUTION

For years Tim Bendle had been a law unto himself. Only his wife, and occasionally the parson, opposed him when he became exceptionally unruly. His neighbors were wonderfully tolerant of his frequent outbursts of temper. This was largely due to their fear of the man lest he should injure them in some underhand manner. They left him alone as much as possible, and although they talked a great deal at times, they took no action against him. He was a thorn in the flesh to many, but no one knew what to do to get rid of the annoyance.

Such patience and forbearance, however, were not right. The community suffered by having such a man in its midst. He was a nuisance, and the sooner a nuisance is removed or remedied the better it is for all concerned. And Tim himself also suffered. He believed that he could do almost anything and get off with it. His boldness increased as people gave way to him, and he gloated over his masterfulness, as he called it. He tore gaps in the line fence, and allowed his half-starved cows to wander at will through his neighbor's meadow. His big dog harried the sheep for miles around, and no one had the courage to shoot it for fear of incurring Tim's wrath. Several times he had threatened to shoot any man who killed his dog, and it was generally believed that he meant what he said.

Tim's wife opposed him, and he retaliated by beating her, driving her from the house and smashing the furniture. He resented the parson's interference, and vowed to get even with him. He had not long to wait after his last wild outburst, for the burial of the woman by night, and the presence of Doris at the rectory furnished choice material for his purpose. Then the coming of Christie, and the story she told him, gave him intense satisfaction. The presence of the fake detective, and the excitement in the parish over the parson's strange actions proved of great value. Everything was going his way, and he looked eagerly forward to the clergyman's complete downfall and ruin.

"I'll teach the old cuss a lesson," he said to himself. "He'll learn to mind his own business and leave me alone after this."

But there is always an unknown quantity, and it is this which so often upsets the most carefully-laid schemes. Tim found this to be so, and in his case it was John Norton. He had not expected anyone to oppose him, so when John suddenly landed upon him, and gave him a thorough thrashing it was like a bolt from the blue. He vowed revenge, but again John acted first, and Tim found himself driven from the ways of men, a wretched outcast. This filled his heart with a burning rage against the one man who had brought about his downfall.

He accordingly prowled around among the trees, gun in hand, waiting his chance. It came, so he thought, when he saw the car leave the rectory for Glen Hollow. That it belonged to John Norton he had no doubt, and as the auto began to descend the hill he took careful aim at the driver and pulled the trigger. The result of his shot was more than he had expected. When he saw the car leave the road and plunge down the steep bank, a sudden fear filled his heart. Suppose it was not Norton, after all! His anger cooled as he listened for some sound. Hearing nothing, he glanced fearfully around. What if he had killed all in the car! He had sense enough to know what that would mean. Although he had escaped so far, there could be no escape for a murderer. All the forces of the law would be brought forth, and he would be hunted from place to place.

He longed to go forward and find out what had happened. But the thought of seeing dead men there was sickening. He turned and fled to the depths of the woods. And there he waited in fear and trembling. Every sound he heard became magnified to his heated brain, and at times he imagined he could hear his pursuers in the distance. Despair settled upon him as he crouched in a dense thicket of young fir trees. He must find out what had been the result of his shot, or he felt that he would go mad.

Coming out upon the main highway, he looked up and down the road, uncertain which way to go or what to do. He did not wish to meet anyone, and yet he must learn something. Off in the distance, to the left, was his house. Perhaps his wife could tell him. But suppose his house was being watched? No, he must not go there at present. To the right he could see the rectory. And as he looked, he noticed that the windows were aglow with light. This was unusual, for except the parson's study, the building was generally in darkness. What was the reason of all those lights? Was something out of the ordinary taking place there? Perhaps Norton had been taken to the rectory. It was quite likely, for he and the parson were great friends. Anyway, Tim decided to find out. Keeping clear of the road, lest he should meet anyone, he sped along on the meadow side of the fence until he came quite close to the rectory. Here he stopped, dropped down into the grass and

watched. Through the windows facing him he could see people moving to and fro, telling plainly that something out of the ordinary was going on in the house. There were several autos before the building, and presently the front door opened and a number of people came out, bearing something between them which they placed in one of the cars. Tim crept closer on hands and knees, peering keenly through the darkness, and straining his ears for some word which might give him a clue as to what had happened. Was it a dead man they had in the car? And had he killed him? The thought was terrible, and his hands clutched hard upon the grass in front of him. In another minute the car had moved away very slowly toward the main road. Tim decided to follow it. Keeping at a safe distance, he glided back along the way he had recently come, with the car moving just ahead of him on his right. This led to his own place, and to his great surprise the car turned in at his gate. What was the meaning of that? Why were they going to his house? Ah, now he understood. John Norton was dead! He, Tim Bendle, had shot him, and they were taking the body to his house to hold an inquest. Such was the thought which passed through the unhappy man's heated brain. What else could it mean? But curiosity led him on, and very carefully he crept along until he came near the back door. Here hidden in the shadow of a hen-house, he watched and waited. Presently a light shone forth from the little bed-room at the back of the parlor. Creeping up close, he peered into the room. Several people were there, including the doctor. And who was that man lying upon the bed? A woman was standing at his head, so he could not see the man's face. But when she moved a little to one side, Tim beheld his own son, Bob! The sight caused him to stagger back as from a blow. Bob! His son! Had he killed him?

Again he crept up to the window. Perhaps he had been mistaken. He looked steadily now. It was Bob, all right, and who was that kneeling by his side? It was a young woman, and instantly he recognized her. It was Christie Rixton! Ah, now he understood. Bob had been on his way to see Christie, and he had mistaken him for John Norton. He stifled a groan, left the window and slumped down upon the ground. He was weak for lack of food and the excitement of the last few hours. But this final blow had unmanned him completely. As he grovelled there, he felt that he would go mad. He had shot his own son! Retribution was piling thick and fast upon the head of this wretched man.

For some time he remained there, and when at length he struggled to his feet, he looked once again into the window. All was still in the room. Bob was lying quietly on the bed, with a bandage across his forehead, and Christie was sitting by his side holding his hand. Bob was not dead. That was some relief. But how badly was he injured?

Sick at heart, Tim longed to go into the house. He wanted to ask his wife a number of questions. But how could he go? The constable might arrive at any minute. No, he would go away and never return. How could he ever face his neighbors again after what he had done?

He was a different man who groped his way to the main road from the one who had fled to the woods over a day before. His spirit had been broken and subdued at last. It had taken a hard blow to do the breaking, but it had been most effective.

Instead of going out upon the highway he sat down upon the ground near his own gate just inside the broken-down fence. He wanted to think, to form some plan as to his future course of action. He knew that he must get away. But where could he go to escape the long arm of the law and his own troubled conscience? No matter where he went he would be surely followed. He could not live long in the woods, that was certain. He would be forced to come out for food, and that would betray his presence.

And as he sat there, he heard the sound of voices. Ere long he was able to distinguish the forms of two men coming up the road. They were talking in a most animated manner, and he listened with bated breath.

"Yes, I'm afraid it will go hard with the poor old parson," one was saying.

"But the doctor thinks he can pull him through all right," the other replied.

"So he says. But I have me doubts. He thinks Bob may be crippled fer life. Too bad, an' him such a smart young feller. I wonder what Tim'll do without him."

"What happened to the car, anyway, do you suppose?"

"Oh, something must have gone wrong, struck a stone, mebbe, or the steering-gear broke. It sometimes does. Ye haven't seen Tim, have ye?"

What the reply was Tim could not hear, as the men were too far away. But he had learned several important things. Bob

would be a cripple for life, so the doctor had said. Bob a cripple! The words kept sounding in his ears. His Bob, so strong and active, a cripple! He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud. He did not care who heard him. He was wild with despair and agony of soul. And the parson had been injured, too. But he would most likely recover, while Bob would be a cripple for life. And his father had done the deed! Wild thoughts surged through his brain. He would kill himself, and thus be free from his torment. What else was there for him to do? He could not go away, neither could he remain at home. Death was the only remedy.

And as this wild resolve took shape in his mind, he heard a step behind him. Startled, he turned quickly around and saw the dim form of a man approaching. He was on the point of leaping aside and running away, when a calm voice stayed him.

"Were you calling me?"

"Callin' you! Lord, no! I wasn't callin' anybody."

"But it seemed to me that you were. You need help, don't you?"

"Should 'say I do. I'm in a h—— of a fix."

"I'm just the man you need, then. I have come in the nick of time."

"Who are you, anyway?" Tim gasped. "I thought at first ye was a constable."

"Well, I'm not. I am only Paul Random. I saved your son, and I am now here to save you. Come along with me."

CHAPTER XXXII

A MODERN MIRACLE

There was great excitement throughout the parish over the accident. People discussed it in their homes, at the store, and wherever two or three were gathered together. All were deeply concerned about Parson Dan, and neighbors came to the rectory to learn how he was getting along. Their feeling toward him had been suddenly changed, and they realised at last how much he really meant to them. For over forty years he had been in their midst, and had entered into their lives in times of sorrow and joy. He had baptized their children, married many of them, and had buried their dead. Suppose he should die! They could not imagine what the place would be like without his familiar form going along the road in his old buggy.

"Why, we'll be lost without him," Joe Steffins declared that morning in the store, as he leaned against the counter. "Though I've not been much of a church-goer, I allus liked to know that the parson was among us. I liked to feel if I got sick he'd be handy when I needed him."

"H'm, I guess there were more like you, Joe," the storekeeper retorted. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You've talked against the parson for years, and never even attended church. Yet you wanted to have him handy when you got sick. Bah! I wouldn't give a snap of my fingers for that kind of religion, and I don't believe the Lord will, either."

"Mebbe ye'r right," and Joe ran his fingers through his hair, a sure sign of the depth of his feeling. "But if the parson is spared to us, I swear I'll turn over a new leaf, by jingo, I will!"

And more than Joe decided to make a change. Their hearts had been touched as never before, and it seemed that the accident which befell the parson had produced a greater effect than all the sermons he had preached.

The parish was also stirred over the accident to Bob Bendle. At first it was a mystery as to what he was doing in the place. But when the news leaked out, it provided a choice subject for conversation. It swept away the falsehood about Doris Randall, and all felt sorry for the girl. Following upon this came the startling information that Tim Bendle had given himself up to the police. No one could understand this, for Tim was the last man, so all believed, to do such a thing. He had been seen in the company of "Crazy" Paul, and all wondered what that might mean. Thus everywhere there was much excitement, combined with considerable talking, while all waited eagerly to see what would happen next.

Little by little the news of what was going on drifted into the rectory. The parson knew whenever a visitor arrived, and he was always anxious to know who it was. Although he suffered much from his broken left arm and the bruises upon his head and body, his mind was perfectly clear. He was a model patient, and gave his attendants as little trouble as possible. He liked to have Doris with him, and at times he would close his eyes and imagine it was Martha as he had known her years before. And Doris enjoyed waiting upon the clergyman. He seemed nearer to her now since she had learned from Mrs. Rosher the story of his past life and of his great love for her grandmother. She did everything in her power for his comfort. Whenever a visitor called with any news, she told him whatever she believed would interest him.

"It is good of my people to come to inquire about me," he remarked more than once. "They never seemed to take much interest in me when I was well except to criticize everything I did and said. Perhaps this accident will turn out for the best, after all. The Lord always overrules everything for good if only we have eyes to see. There is someone else at the door now. Go and see who it is."

Doris was gone longer than usual, and when she returned there was a happy expression upon her face. This Mr. Landrose noticed, and he was anxious to know the reason.

"Something of importance, eh?"

"It is. Christie has been here to see her baby, and she has good news of Bob, as she calls him. He is greatly changed, so she said, and the doctor believes he will recover, although it will take some time."

"I am so glad to hear that," and the clergyman gave a deep sigh of relief. "I was so anxious about the poor fellow, and have been wondering what he would do should he be a cripple for life. How pleased Christie must be."

"Indeed she is, and you should see her with the baby. It brought tears to my eyes the way she kissed and fondled him.

How hard it must have been for her to part with him."

"I do hope everything will be all right now, Doris. We have Mr. Random to thank for what he has done for Bob. I wonder where he is, anyway."

"Oh, Christie said that he is with Tim Bendle, and he has done so much for him. He was with him last night, and she heard that Tim is going to give himself up to the police."

"What! Tim is to give himself up! I can hardly believe that. It is so improbable."

"But Christie says it is true, and that Tim called to see his son, and asked his forgiveness for the harm he had done to him."

"What harm? Bob was the only one Tim ever thought anything about. His affection for his son was his only redeeming feature."

Doris did not at once reply, but stood very still, lost in thought. This caused Mr. Landrose some surprise. He also noted that her face had become quite pale.

"Do not be afraid to tell me if anything is wrong. In what way did Tim injure his son?"

"He was the cause of the accident. He shot at Bob as he was driving the car, thinking it was John."

"What's this? What's this, Doris? Tim shot Bob!"

"That's what he said, and he is so sorry. I never heard a man talk as he did, and when he left the house he was crying like a child."

"I can hardly believe it, Doris. It is not like Tim at all. He must have undergone a remarkable change since I saw him last. Where is he now?"

"I do not know. He went away with Mr. Random."

"With Random! Ah, now I understand. It was Random who changed Tim, I feel sure of that. My! my! this is wonderful news to me."

Just then a knock was heard upon the door, and at once Random himself entered. The clergyman's eyes expressed his pleasure and surprise.

"Why, we were talking about you this very minute, and here you are. I am so glad to see you. Sit down here by my side, for I know you have much to tell me."

"Indeed I have," the visitor replied. He then turned to Doris who was standing nearby.

"There is someone waiting for you outside, Miss Randall. You can guess, perhaps, who it is."

The girl's face flushed with pleasure.

"Is it John?"

"Yes. He has just arrived, and wants to see you."

In another minute the girl was gone, and the two men were left alone. Random drew up a chair close to the bed, and sat down.

"How are you feeling now, sir?"

"Much better, thank you, since I have heard the great news about Tim. I can hardly believe it, so wonderful does it all seem. How did you manage to perform such a remarkable miracle?"

Random smiled, and his eyes shone with happiness.

"It wasn't my doing, sir, but the power of the Holy Spirit. I was sent to Tim last night when he was on the verge of

despair. He was a broken man, and ready for a desperate deed. But man's extremity is God's opportunity, and I was led to him just when his need was the greatest. At any other time he would have scorned me and driven me away with curses. But not last night. He was worn out for lack of sleep and food. I saw that he got both, and then, as I have told you, the Spirit did the rest."

"But how did you do it, Mr. Random? What did you say to him? This is all news to me, and I want to know."

"Mr. Landrose, when a man is starving and you give him food, you do not have to argue to induce him to eat. When he is dying of thirst and you place water before him, you do not have to urge him to drink. When the need is great and the desire is intense, there is no difficulty then. That was the way with Tim. I merely pointed him to the Bread and Water of life, Who alone can satisfy the hungry and thirsty soul. It was all very easy."

"Perhaps so, but I cannot understand how Tim could change in such a short time. I might believe it about anyone else but him. He has been a hard man, opposed to religion, and an inveterate reader of atheistic books. I have several of them in the house now which his wife let me have. They are most pernicious."

"Ah, Mr. Landrose, there is often more hope of such a man as that than one who is absolutely indifferent. He was a thinker, and that counted for much. I was once that way myself, and when people believed I was hopeless, the Spirit was all the time striving with me and giving me no rest. I have already told you of my experience, and how I suddenly found peace while drifting down that northern river. And so it must have been with Tim. He was evidently seeking and not finding. For a time he was mad, and his madness led him to his deed of violence. Then when his need was the greatest he found that for which he had been seeking. St. Paul, you remember, was like that, but on the road to Damascus the Lord met him. Is it any more wonderful now than in olden days?"

"No, no, certainly not, Mr. Random. But this is a miracle, if ever there was one. Oh, if we could only have others changed like that!"

"They will only have it, sir, when they feel the need of the power from on high. 'Power belongeth unto God,' so we read, but it will only be given to us in proportion to our need and faith. The Master Himself came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' Those words are as true to-day as of old. Only to those who receive Him will power be given. I have proven it over and over again."

"I believe you have," the clergyman murmured. With closed eyes he lay very still for a few minutes, while silence reigned in the room. When at last he spoke there was a deep earnestness in his voice as he turned his eyes upon his companion's face.

"And I need that Spirit, too. I have lacked power because I have not received. And if I have not received, how could I impart to others? Oh, I see my mistake now. Yes, I see it. God forgive me for not realizing it before. You have done a great thing for me, Mr. Random, and I thank you with all my heart."

"But you must have received, sir," was the quiet reply. "How could you have carried on your work for so many years unless you had been spiritually upheld? Surely grace has been given to you."

"I suppose I have had some. But my people have not responded, for I have given them the husks instead of food. I have taught them, but the teaching lacked the life-giving power. Religion such as I have imparted has not been a vital and personal thing. I have explained the benefits of religion as taught by the Church, but I have not led my people to accept Him as their Saviour Who alone can supply all their needs. No, I had come to the end of my resources when my eyes were opened and I realized my mistake. In a way, I was like Tim Bendle, in despair. Now I see that at such times Christ comes as He came to the disciples on the storm-tossed lake when they needed Him most. I see it now."

For a few minutes longer they talked, and when Random rose to go, the clergyman grasped his hand.

"Come again soon. There are many things we must talk over together. The Lord is surely using you to do great things. Good-bye, and God bless you."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BISHOP

Mr. Landrose had never been confined to his bed for more than a day or two at a time. This, therefore, was a new experience to be laid aside and unable to carry on his work. It was strange for him to be lying there with others waiting upon him. But he did not altogether dislike it. Doris and John were much with him, and they were always cheerful. It was pleasant to have these young people by his side, and at times as they talked to each other he would watch them. How happy they were, and he was glad. He thought of other days when he and Martha were young, and the glamor of the past came upon him as on the wings of fancy he drifted back to scenes of old. He now knew that it was for the best that he had not married Martha. She would not have been happy with him, he was sure. She would never have submitted to the quiet routine of a clergyman's life in a country parish. She needed excitement and travel. And she had obtained her heart's desire, but at what a price!

The clergyman was much interested in the newspaper's report of the accident. There was a big headline, "Clergyman Badly Injured." It then described what had taken place, and gave a sketch of the parson's life. "Mr. Landrose," so the paper stated, "is one of the oldest and most faithful clergyman in the diocese. He has spent over forty years in his present parish, ministering to his scattered flock. He is a man highly respected, and the influence of his self-denying work has extended far beyond the bounds of Green Mount. In these days when men are ever on the move, flitting from one parish to another, it is good to find a man who has been content to remain in one place for such a length of time, growing up with his people, entering into their joys and sorrows, the confidant, adviser, and spiritual friend of all. The sympathy of all is extended to Mr. Landrose, and it is sincerely hoped that he will soon be fully restored to his former strength and vigor."

"Well! well!" the parson exclaimed. "Who in the world wrote that about me! Why, I am really unknown beyond this parish."

"You are better known than you imagine, sir," John replied. "Why, I have already met many who inquired after you. They all know of your faithful service here. It has taken this trouble to teach you how highly respected you are."

"It is all very strange and bewildering to me. I have never sought publicity, and always disliked it. My aim always was to go on steadily with my work, and glad when others received honors."

"You should have received them, though," John declared. "And what has the Church done for you? It has neglected you, while other men, and some of them far inferior, have been recognized. It is a downright shame, and I am surprised at the Bishop for overlooking you."

Mr. Landrose made no reply. He was in a quandary, and knew not what to say. He wished to defend his Bishop, and mention his offer of the Canonry in the Cathedral. But how could he explain his reason for not accepting it? In order to do so he would have to refer to his sin in giving an excommunicated woman the Holy Communion. But he could not have his Bishop misjudged. He looked at the two young people before him, and felt that they would respect his secret if he revealed it to them. It would unburden his mind, anyway.

"You must not judge the Bishop too harshly," he at length began. "He did offer me a Canonry, and I have not accepted it. I could not see my way clear to do so."

"Mr. Landrose!" John exclaimed. "You astonish me! Why did you not accept it?"

"Because of my unworthiness."

"H'm, that's all nonsense. You are too humble, sir."

"It is not humbleness, but sinfulness. Listen. How could I accept the Canonry when I have disobeyed my Bishop? Doris, I gave the Holy Communion to your grandmother, knowing that she had been excommunicated. That was my great sin. Now you know why I have not accepted the Bishop's offer. He was not to blame. No one knows what mental agony I have endured since my fall."

At these words Doris rose to her feet and went close to the clergyman's side. Her face was aglow, and her eyes were unusually bright.

"And you did that for granny's sake?" she asked. "You made that great sacrifice for her? And because of that you did not accept the Canonry?"

"I did, I did, Doris. I know I was weak, but how could I help it when your grandmother meant so much to me? You understand, I suppose, what I mean?"

"I did not until Mrs. Rosher told me a few days ago."

"Ah, so she told you, did she? She should not have done so."

"Why not? It was right that I should know, for it explained several things I could not understand. But I had no idea that granny had been put out of the Church. And, oh, Mr. Landrose, I am so thankful that you gave her the Communion. I am sure the Lord will forgive you even if the Bishop doesn't. I am proud of you."

"You must not say that, Doris. You should never be proud of anyone who has done wrong. Oh, how I have prayed that my sin might be forgiven, but I receive no peace. Perhaps I merit none."

"Have you told the Bishop, sir?"

"No, and that is what worries me, too. I have not even replied to his letter, as I do not know what to say. I cannot write without explaining my sin. But I am determined to do so just as soon as I am able to write. The Bishop must know what I have done. What the outcome will be I cannot tell. It will be hard to be reprimanded in my old age. But if so, I must submit. The fault is mine, so I must bear it."

This conversation was interrupted by Rachel, who entered carrying a tray containing the clergyman's luncheon. He looked up in surprise.

"Dear me! I seem to be always eating. I had my breakfast only a short time ago."

"And you didn't eat enough to keep a sparrow alive," Rachel replied. "You must do better than that now. And here is your mail, too." She motioned to several letters lying upon the tray. "But you must eat something before you open them. You have to obey orders now."

"So it seems, Rachel. But, then, I don't mind when everyone is so kind. You are a wonderful woman, Rachel, and a great comfort to me."

The housekeeper said nothing in reply, but her eyes were a little misty. He had complimented her at times in the past, but always in an absent-minded manner. The tone of his voice was different now, and she wondered if it was due to his accident. He was much more considerate, and not so fussy about little things.

After Mr. Landrose had finished his meal, he picked up his letters. One was from the Bishop, who after expressing his sympathy, stated that he would come to Green Mount next Sunday and take the three services. This was welcome news to the parson, for he had been troubled about the services. The people would be glad to have the Bishop with them, and for once the churches would be filled. At the same time, he dreaded the Bishop's visit, for he would speak, no doubt, about the Canonry which had been offered. A full explanation would then be necessary, and how grieved and offended the Bishop would be at his disobedience. That such a breach of discipline could or would be forgiven never once occurred to him. Duty was duty, and law was law, so that ended it as far as he could see. This had been the guiding principle of his entire ministry except once—and for that one offense he was a condemned man. Did not the Bible say that "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all?" And that was so in his case, he believed, and his past good conduct would amount to nothing.

When Doris and John learned that the Bishop was coming they did all in their power to keep the clergyman from worrying. Doris read to him from the book he had purchased in the city, and although it was quite dry and dull to her, it was of considerable interest to the invalid. Several times he interrupted her with comments.

"That man knows what he wrote about. He has had a long experience in parish work. I like his spirit."

There were other interruptions, as well, for several visitors called to inquire about the parson. He was glad to see them, and chatted with each for several minutes. Christie also came during the afternoon. She had been over to see the baby, and when Mr. Landrose heard that she was at the rectory, he sent for her. She came timidly into the room where he was

lying, and sat down by his side.

"And how is Robert getting along?" the parson asked.

"As well as can be expected. The doctor was in to see him this morning, and he spoke most hopefully."

"I am glad to hear that, Christie. I can sympathize with the poor fellow. Both of us will be laid aside for some time. I trust that Robert is supplied with everything for his comfort. Let me know if there is anything he needs."

"Doris is attending to all that, sir. She has been so good and wanted to get a nurse for Bob. But I would rather look after him myself."

"Yes, Doris spoke to me about the matter, and I readily gave my consent. She is a great comfort to us all. She is to me, anyway, and I do not know what I should do without her. She is like my own daughter."

"She has meant much to me, Mr. Landrose. No sister could be kinder or more thoughtful. She is not one bit selfish, but is always thinking of others. But, there, I must go and see how Bob is getting along."

It was dark when the Bishop arrived, and Doris conducted him at once to where Mr. Landrose was lying. She then stood back and silently watched the two men. She had never met a Bishop before, and she stood in considerable awe of such a Church dignitary. But this man was just like anyone else, and spoke so pleasantly to her that her fear was immediately removed. Her heart warmed toward him as she noticed how considerate and respectful he was to the invalid. There was no trace of condescension on his part. He sat by the side of the bed, took the parson's hand, expressed his sympathy, and inquired as to his welfare. It was like the meeting of two old friends, and there was no sign of any difference in their positions in the Ministry. Thinking it best that the two should be left alone, Doris went quietly out of the room, and sought Rachel and the baby. The latter was just ready for bed, and he reached out his little hands as Doris came near.

"Isn't he a darling!" she exclaimed, taking the wee lad in her arms. "How Christie must love him. Isn't it wonderful to watch her face when she is looking at him?"

"I am afraid she will be taking him away from us soon," and Rachel sighed at the idea. "I wish that I could keep him as my own."

"Perhaps Christie will let you, Rachel."

"It is hardly likely. No mother would wish to be separated from such a child for any length of time. I wouldn't, anyway."

While the women talked, the Bishop and Mr. Landrose were engaged in an earnest conversation. The latter in a trembling voice had made his confession. It had been a hard thing for him to do, and when he had ended he looked at the Bishop who was sitting with downcast eyes and hands clasped together, as if in deep thought. For a minute there was silence in the room. Mr. Landrose's heart beat fast, for he felt that the Bishop was very angry. At length he could endure the tension no longer.

"I know this has shocked you, my lord, and that is only natural. But I do not plead for mercy. I have sinned, perhaps, in your eyes, but I am sure the Lord will understand and be merciful."

At once the Bishop reached out and grasped the clergyman's right hand as it lay motionless outside the counterpane.

"Do not say that. I have not been shocked at your confession, for I knew all about what you had done."

"You did!" The parson's eyes opened wide in amazement. "Who told you?"

"Oh, I learned about it in several ways. One was by means of an anonymous sent to me shortly after you committed the offense. I also saw the account of the woman's death in the paper, and how you had conducted the funeral. Thus, you see, I knew quite well what you had done."

"And yet you did not write and reprimand me."

"No."

"Did you know what I had done when you offered me the Canonry?"

"No."

"You had no idea, then, why I did not accept the honor?"

"Oh, yes, I knew quite well, for I knew you. Any other man would have accepted it at once. But with you it was different."

The clergyman was puzzled at these words, and groped about in his mind as to the Bishop's meaning. The latter noticed this, and smiled.

"If I had the least doubt in the past about my course of action, it is entirely gone now. You are a man in a thousand."

"How can you say that, my lord, after what I have done? I am astonished at your moderation."

"Perhaps you are. But you yourself are to blame for that."

"In what way? I do not understand your meaning."

"For being such a faithful clergyman for so many years. Your life has been an inspiration to the whole diocese, though you were not aware of it. Most men remain in one place but a short time, and then move away somewhere else. But you have stuck to your post through thick and thin."

"But what about my great sin, my lord? Have you forgotten that?"

"Not at all. Now, if a young man had done that I should, no doubt, have called him to account at once. But it was different in your case. I had enough confidence in you to let it pass. I believed that you had some very special reason for giving an excommunicated woman the Communion. What that was, I did not know, but my confidence in you was very great."

There were tears in the parson's eyes when the Bishop ended, and he found it difficult to speak. He lay very still, looking straight before him. The Bishop saw his emotion, and he, too, was deeply moved.

"I am glad that I have had this talk with you to-night. I have waited quite a while for your confession. You will accept the Canonry now, I hope."

"It will be a great pleasure, my lord. I can hardly believe it is true that the ordeal is over, and I have not been severely reprimanded. I longed to tell you before, and I had planned to unburden my mind at the Synod. But you were very busy, and, besides, my courage failed. And I also hesitated about revealing the secret about my past life. I thought it would only bother you. Now, however, I know better. Yes, there was a special reason why I gave that woman the Communion, for she and I were once engaged to be married. I was willing to give my life, if necessary, that Martha Benson might have the comfort of the Journey Food. She needed it, poor soul, if anyone ever did. Now you understand. I can tell you no more."

"I do, I certainly do," the Bishop replied in a husky voice. "And I appreciate your confidence. May God bless you."

He rose to his feet, and was about to leave the room when the door opened, and Paul Random entered. He was not surprised to see the Bishop there, and a smile illumined his face.

"I am so glad to see you," the Bishop accosted, as he held out his hand. "You are everywhere, it seems to me, and doing a wonderful work as usual. Mr. Landrose has been telling me of your latest triumphs. Oh, for more such workers in the Church!"

"Not unto us, O Lord, but unto Thy name give the praise," Random quietly replied. "It is only He who doeth marvellous works, for all power belongeth unto Him."

"I believe it, I believe it," the Bishop fervently declared. "Oh, for more of His Holy Spirit in our midst. But I must go now, and leave you two together. I hope to see you to-morrow," he added turning to the clergyman. "I wish to talk over with you about getting some one to take duty in this parish while you are laid up. Good-night to you both."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE WEDDING

During the following weeks, Mr. Landrose made steady progress toward recovery. The Bishop's visit and his forgiveness had lifted a great burden from his mind. That he had not been reprimanded for what he had done gave him much comfort, and he often meditated over the change that had come upon the Church since his ordination. There was a deeper and a more earnest feeling, and the spirit was taking the place of the letter, so it seemed to him. He thought of Bishop Strathroy's sermon at the Synod, and also the words of his own Bishop. If these men had received the vision it was a sign of what was taking place in the whole body of the Church. For such he was most thankful, and he was no longer afraid to acknowledge the change that had come into his own soul. It brought him a new peace and comfort such as he had never experienced in the past when he had thought only of the dry bones of religion. He knew that the letter was important and must not be neglected, but the letter without the spirit is dead.

Doris was his faithful attendant, and they had long conversations together. Sometimes the girl would read to him, but what he liked best of all was to talk about personal matters.

"You remind me so much of your grandmother when she was your age," he said to her one day. "The resemblance is very remarkable, and I can almost imagine that you are Martha as I knew her. It all seems like a wonderful dream that you are with me here. How can I ever repay you for all you have done for me?"

"Do not try," Doris smilingly replied. "I am more than repaid already. What little I can do will never make up for the way granny treated you. But, oh, how she must have suffered, too. I did not understand it when she was alive, but I do now. She was always so restless and unhappy, and I know the reason. How strange that I did not suspect what was the trouble, even after we came to this place and I knew that she was so much interested in you."

"I know, I know. Poor soul! She was something like the children of Israel in olden days, when the Lord 'gave them their hearts' desire, but sent leanness withal into their soul.' And so with Martha. She got what her heart desired, but it brought great unrest into her soul. It reminds me of a fable about a little brook among the hills which became dissatisfied with its simple life. It asked for snow from the mountains, and rain from the clouds. Then when its prayer was granted, it burst its bounds and brought ruin and desolation on all sides. At first it delighted in its strength, but seeing at last how much harm it had done, and that it was doomed forever to be a sullen stream, it longed for the quietness and restfulness of its former home in the hills among the birds, flowers and trees. Ah, yes, that was sadly true in Martha's case."

He ceased and looked off over the fields, lost in thought.

"But granny did come back," Doris reminded. "She did find peace at last."

"To a certain extent she did. But how brief it was, and it was mingled with the regret of what she had lost in life. It is always so. Anyway, I am thankful that Martha came back, and that I have you with me. Your presence here has made a great difference in my life. When Martha asked me to be your guardian I considered it a great burden. But it has turned out to be a joy and a blessing."

"Perhaps it was my fault that you considered the guardianship of me as a burden. I was not very civil to you at first. I was annoyed at what granny had done, and I hated you, and planned to make you thoroughly disgusted with your task."

"You did! Well, I never knew of it, for you have been so kind ever since that first meeting at the hotel."

"Don't you remember how I sent you to the city to buy my clothes?"

"Oh, yes, I shall never forget that terrible ordeal. But what had it to do with your plan?"

"Very much. John and I decided that we would make you do all sorts of disagreeable things until you gave up your guardianship in despair."

"Why didn't you continue the plan?"

"Because I couldn't. I got to know you, and that made such a great difference. And, oh, I am so thankful since I have

learned what granny did to you."

A mistiness came into the clergyman's eyes as he listened to this candid confession. He thought of how he had planned to teach this girl the doctrines of the Church. But, instead, she had been his teacher in many things. For this he was thankful, as he knew it was all for the best.

Mr. Landrose's days were also brightened by many visitors. Among them was Mrs. Bristol. Her very presence was invigorating, like a fresh breeze from the hills and woods of her valley home.

"My, it's good to see ye around ag'in!" she exclaimed, as she grasped the parson's hand. "I've been longin' fer a sight of ye'r face, so I got Jimmy to drive me in t'day. Ye've been through deep waters, parson, since I saw ye last."

"I have, Mrs. Bristol. But the Lord has been merciful."

"Deed He has, an' to others, too. I hear Bob's gittin' on fine. I met Christie on the road an' her face was beamin'. She told me that Bob is settin' up now, an' the doctor thinks he'll be as well as ever. I'm so glad fer Christie's sake."

Thus through the weeks of summer Mr. Landrose made steady progress. John came often to see him. It was not for his sake alone that he came, he was well aware, for he was not blind to the love that he and Doris had for each other. He said nothing, however, but it was a pleasure to watch them and rejoice in their happiness. His mind went back to other days when he and Martha were young. But no rebellious feeling entered his heart, for he knew that all had turned out for the best.

Several times Paul Random came to see him, and they always had long talks together. Random had much to tell about his work, and the parson listened with keen interest. How he, too, longed to be up and doing, to start all over again, old as he was, and do more effective service in the Lord's cause.

When Mr. Landrose was strong enough he would walk every day over to the church, and kneel for some time in his old accustomed place. Then he would go out and stand by Martha's grave. He liked best to go there in the quietness and coolness of the evening. The church then was filled with a subdued light, and the figures in the stained-glass windows facing west were soft with the glow of departing day. These were all in memory of loved ones, and only one window remained to be filled. That should be for Martha Benson, so he resolved, and it would be the parable of the Lost Sheep. He had a picture in his study of the Master seeking the wandering one in a dreary mountain region, clinging with one hand to a rough boulder on the side of a steep precipice, and reaching down with the other to rescue the sheep below. Yes, that would be the subject.

Coming out of the church that evening with heart stirred and eyes aglow at the thoughts which had come to him, he saw Tim Bendle just outside. He gave a slight start and looked keenly into the man's face. This was the first time he had met Tim since the accident, and it was hard for him to rid his mind of past impressions. This, however, was no longer the Tim of other days, but a man subdued and respectful. His bold manner had departed.

"I've come to see ye, parson, about them books of mine the Missus let ye have a while ago."

"Oh, yes, I remember them now, Tim, although I had forgotten all about them. They are in my study. I have been tempted to burn them."

"That's what I intend to do with 'em, parson. I'm goin' to have a bon-fire to-night an' burn the hull lot. They're trash, an' full of lies. Me eyes have been opened, an' I see the truth now."

"Thank God for that," the clergyman fervently declared, as he reached out and caught Tim by the hand. "I can hardly believe it possible."

"Neither kin I, parson. But it's true, an' I'm a new man. An' in thankin' the Lord, I'm not goin' to leave Paul Random out. It was him that found me jist in the nick of time. Mebbe the Lord sent him, fer all I know. Anyway, he found me when I needed help in the worst way, an' changed me from the devil I was. I kin see now what a bad critter I've been. But by the help of God an' Paul Random I'm goin' to do better."

"So you are going to burn those books, Tim?"

"I sure am, an' to-night if I kin git the ones you have. I don't seem to have the right peace until the work is done."

"Come with me to the rectory, then, and you shall have them. Oh, I am so thankful at this change in your life. You were a hard man."

"Indeed I was, parson, an' I was a mighty trouble to you. But that's all ended now, an' I'm goin' to settle down to steady work. Mr. Norton has a job fer me, an' it's good of him to take me after what I've done."

The change in Tim's life was a great relief to Mr. Landrose. It was also the talk of the whole parish. Some had their doubts, for it was difficult for them to believe that Tim Bendle could be reformed. But as the weeks passed, and he worked steadily in the quarry, even the most skeptical had to acknowledge that Tim was in earnest. His wife was delighted, and a new peace and harmony settled down upon the Bendle home.

Summer at length gave place to fall, and at the end of September Bob Bendle was almost his former self again. Plans had been made weeks before for the wedding which would be held in the little church out among the hills. Christie wished it so, and she and Doris often talked about it.

"I can hardly believe it yet," Christie one day confided to her companion. "But I know it is true. I want the wedding to be in my home church which I attended as a child. And I want Mrs. Bristol and Jimmy to be there. And how I wish A'nt Hanner could see us married."

The wedding-day arrived fine and warm. The little church was filled with interested people. Wild flowers, especially the golden-rod, were artistically arranged in the chancel, while the vases on the altar were filled with beautiful white roses, which had been sent from the city by Doris's special order. The service was most impressive, and when at last Mr. Landrose pronounced Bob and Christie man and wife many present breathed deep sighs of relief and thankfulness. Tears rolled down Mrs. Bristol's cheeks, and Doris found it difficult to conceal her emotion. Jimmy was by his mother's side, alert and watchful. He kept his eyes fixed upon Bob during the entire service. But when the benediction had been pronounced, his watchful attitude relaxed, and his face brightened. A heavy burden was lifted from his mind, and he knew that he would not have to use his gun, after all.

After the service there were many congratulations, and then came a great surprise. There was to be a wedding-supper at A'nt Hanner's. Mrs. Bristol had made all the arrangements. For two days she had been cooking, and Jimmy had taken everything over to the house in the car. John Norton, who had really suggested the idea, had done all in his power to make the supper a success. Doris surmised this, and the grateful look she gave John was all the reward he needed. A'nt Hanner was overjoyed, and ere Bob and Christie left when supper was ended, she clasped the girl in her arms and gave her a motherly kiss.

"May God bless you both," she said. "I have known you, Christie, ever since you were a little child. You have come through deep waters, but He who has guided you will never fail nor forsake you. Be true to Him, and you and Bob will be true to each other."

That night in the rectory study, Mr. Landrose, Doris and John sat before an open fire, for a chilliness was in the air. Among other things, they talked of what had taken place that day. Then the young couple told the clergyman of their love for each other. They had no need to tell him, however, for he knew it long before. But he was glad of their confidence, so all that remained for him to do was to add his blessing.

"My heart overflows with peace and gratitude," he quietly said. "Many are the blessings vouchsafed to me in my old age. I have been forgiven by my Bishop. My people have gathered around me. They have given me their love and sympathy, and from Martha I have received a daughter to love and to be loved in return. But above all, I have gained a new spirit, and in that spirit I shall henceforth live and work. It has crowded out many things which I once thought were so essential. I have been a stumbling shepherd, but the Lord has kept me from falling. He has given me a new vision, and has guided my feet into the way of peace."

As he finished, Paul Random came quietly into the room and took a seat by the clergyman's side. His unannounced appearance seemed to them like the very embodiment of that spirit of which the parson had just been speaking.

THE END

BY H. A. CODY

THE STUMBLING SHEPHERD
FIGHTING STARS
THE FIGHTING-SLOGAN
THE MASTER REVENGE
THE TRAIL OF THE GOLDEN HORN
THE KING'S ARROW
JESS OF THE REBEL TRAIL
GLEN OF THE HIGH NORTH
THE TOUCH OF ABNER
THE UNKNOWN WRESTLER
UNDER SEALED ORDERS
IF ANY MAN SIN
THE CHIEF OF THE RANGES
THE FOURTH WATCH
THE LONG PATROL
ROD OF THE LONE PATROL
THE FRONTIERSMA

[The end of *The Stumbling Shepherd* by H. A. Cody]