

THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS

A NOVEL

by
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By Harold Bell Wright

TO FRANCES, MY WIFE
IN MEMORY OF THAT BEAUTIFUL SUMMER
IN THE OZARK HILLS, WHEN, SO OFTEN,
WE FOLLOWED THE OLD TRAIL AROUND
THE RISE OF MUTTON HOLLOW—THE TRAIL
THAT IS NOBODY KNOWS HOW OLD—AND FROM
SAMMY'S LOOKOUT WATCHED THE
DAY GO OVER THE WESTERN RIDGES.

*“That all with one consent praise new-born gawds,
Tho they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o’er-dusted.”*

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA. ACT 3; SC. 3.

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INTRODUCTORY.

THE TWO TRAILS.

THIS, my story, is a very old story.

In the hills of life there are two trails. One lies along the higher sunlit fields where those who journey see afar, and the light lingers even when the sun is down; and one leads to the lower ground, where those who travel, as they go, look always over their shoulders with eyes of dread, and gloomy shadows gather long before the day is done.

This, my story, is the story of a man who took the trail that leads to the lower ground, and of a woman, and how she found her way to the higher sunlit fields.

In the story, it all happened in the Ozark Mountains, many miles from what we of the city call civilization. In life, it has all happened many, many times before, in many, many places. The two trails lead afar. The story, so very old, is still in the telling.

“Preachin’ Bill” who runs the ferry says, “When God looked upon th’ work of his hands an’ called hit good, he war sure a lookin’ at this here Ozark country. Rough ? Law yes! Hit war made that a way on purpose. Ain’t nothin’ to a flat country nohow. A man jest naturally wear hisself plumb out a walkin’ on a level ’thout ary down hill t’ spell him. An’ then look how much more there is of hit! Take forty acres o’ flat now an’ hit’s jest a forty, but you take forty acres o’ this here Ozark country an’ God ’lmighty only knows how much ’twould be if hit war rolled out *flat*. ’Taint no wonder ’t all, God rested when he made these here hills; he jest naturally had t’ quit, fer he done his beateenest an’ war plumb gin out.”

Of all the country Bill had seen, “from Ant Creek Head t’ the mouth of James an’ plumb to Pilot Knob,” he “lowed the Mutton Hollow neighborhood was the prettiest.”

From the Matthews place on the ridge that shuts in the valley on the north and east, there is an Old Trail leading down the mountain. Two hundred yards below the log barn, the narrow path finds a bench on the steep slope of the hillside, and, at that level, follows around the rim of the Hollow. Dipping a little at the head of the ravine east of the spring, then lifting itself over a low, heavily timbered spur of one of the higher hills, it comes out again into the open. Following a rocky ledge, the way, farther on, leads through a clump of sumac bushes, and past the deer lick in the big low gaps, then around the base of Boulder Bald, along another ledge, and out on the hare shoulder of Dewey Bald, which partly shuts in the little valley on the south.

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down there in Texas, I promised her that I'd be a good daddy to my little one, and since then I done the best I know.

"After things quieted down, and I come back with my girl, Wash here got the old crowd, what was left of us, together, and wanted to reorganize again. I told you then that I'd go in with you and stand by the old oath, so long as it was necessary to protect ourselves from them that might be tryin' to get even for what had been done, but that I wouldn't go no farther. I don't mind tellin' you now, boys—though I reckon you know it—that I went in because I knowed what you'd do for me if I didn't. And I didn't dare risk leaving my girl all alone then. I've 'tended every meetin', and done everything I agreed, and there ain't a man here can say I ain't."

Some of the men nodded, and "That's so," and "You're right, Jim" came from two or three.

Jim went on, "You know that I voted against it, and tried to stop you when you hung old man Lewis. I thought then, and I think yet, that it was spite work and not protection; and you know how I was against goin' for the shepherd, and you went when I didn't know it. As for this here bank business, I didn't even know of it, 'till you give me this stuff here for me to keep for you. I had to take it 'count of the oath.

"It's got to be just like it was before. We come together first to keep each other posted, and save ourselves if there was any call to, and little by little you've been led into first one thing and then another, 'till you're every bit and grain as bad as the old crowd was, only there ain't so many of you, and you've kept me in it 'cause I didn't dare leave my girl." Jim paused. There was an ominous silence in the room.

With his eyes covering every scowling face in the company, Jim spoke again, "But things has changed for me right smart, since our last meetin', when you give me this stuff to hold. You boys all know how I've kept Wash Gibbs away from my girl, and there ain't one of you that don't know I'm right, knowin' him as we do. More'n two weeks ago, when I wasn't around, he insulted her, and would have done worse, if Young Matt hadn't been there to take care of her. I called you here to-night, because I knowed that after what happened at the mill, Wash and Bill would be havin' a meetin' as soon as they could get around, and votin' you all to go against Young Matt and his people. But I'm goin' to have my say first."

Wash Gibbs reached stealthily for his weapon, but hesitated when he saw that the dark faced man noted his movement.

Jim continued, in his drawling tones, but his voice rang cold and clear, "I ain't never been mealy mouthed with no man, and I'm too old to begin now. I know the law of the order, and I reckon Gibbs there will try to have you keep it. You boys have got to say whether

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you'll stand by him or me. It looks like you was goin' to go with him alright. But whether you do or don't, I don't aim to stay with nobody that stands by such as Wash Gibbs. I'm goin' to side with decent folks, who have stood by my girl, and you can do your damndest. You take this stuff away from here. And as for you, Wash Gibbs, if you ever set foot on my place again, if you ever cross my path after to-night I'll kill you like the measly yeller hound you are." As he finished, Jim stood with his back to the corner of the room, his hand inside of the hickory shirt where the button was missing.

While her father was speaking, Sammy forgot everything, in the wild joy and pride of her heart. He was her Daddy, her Daddy Jim; that man standing so calmly there before the wild company of men. Whatever the past had been, he had wiped it clean to-night. He belonged to her now, all to her. She looked toward Wash Gibbs. Then she remembered the posse, the officers of the law. They could not know what she knew. If her father was taken with the others and with the stolen gold, he would be compelled to suffer with the rest. Yet if she called out to save him, she would save Wash Gibbs and his companions also, and they would menace her father's life day and night.

The girl drew back from the window. She must think. What should she do? Even as she hesitated, a score of dark forms crept swiftly, silently toward the cabin. At the same moment a figure left the side of the house near the girl, and, crouching low, ran to the two horses that were tied near the barn.

Sammy was so dazed that for a moment she did not grasp the meaning of those swiftly moving forms. Then a figure riding one horse and leading another dashed away from the barn and across a corner of the clearing. The silence was broken by a pistol shot in the cabin. Like an echo came a shot from the yard, and a voice rang out sharply, "*Halt!*" The figure reeled in the saddle, as if to fall, but recovered, and disappeared in the timber. The same instant there was a rush toward the house—a loud call to surrender—a woman's scream—and then, came to Sammy, blessed, kindly darkness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES UNTO THE HILLS."

WHEN Sammy opened her eyes, she was on the bed in her own room. In the other room someone was moving about, and the light from a lamp shone through the door.

At first the girl thought that she had awakened from a night's sleep, and that it was her father whom she heard, building the fire

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before calling her, as his custom was. But no, he was not building the fire, he was scrubbing the floor. How strange. She would call presently and ask what he meant by getting up before daylight, and whether he thought to keep her from scolding him by trying to clean up what he had spilled before she should see it.

She had had a bad dream of some kind, but she could not remember just what it was. It was very strange that something seemed to keep her from calling to her father just then. She would call presently. She must remember first what that dream was. She felt that she ought to get up and dress, but she did not somehow wish to move. She was strangely tired. It was her dream, she supposed. Then she discovered that she was already fully dressed, and that her clothing was wet, muddy and torn. And with this discovery every incident of the night came vividly before her. She hid her face.

After awhile, she tried to rise to her feet, but fell back weak and dizzy. Who was that in the other room? Could it be her father? Would he never finish scrubbing the floor in that corner? When she could bear the suspense no longer, she called in a voice that sounded weak and far away; "Daddy, Oh, Daddy."

Instantly the noise ceased; a step crossed the room; and the shepherd appeared in the doorway. Placing the lamp on a little stand, the old man drew a chair to the side of the bed, and laid his hand upon her forehead, smoothing back the tangled hair. He spoke no word, but in his touch there was a world of tenderness.

Sammy looked at him in wonder. Where had he come from? Why was he there at all? And in her room? She glanced uneasily about the apartment, and then back to the kind face of her old teacher. "I—don't think I understand."

"Never mind, now, dear. Don't try to understand just yet. Aunt Mollie will be here in a few minutes. Matt has gone for her. When she comes and you are a little stronger, we shall talk."

The girl caught his hand; "You—you won't leave me, Dad? You won't leave me alone? I'm afraid, Dad. I never was before."

"No, no, my child; I shall not leave you. But you must have something warm to drink. I have been preparing it." He stepped into the other room, soon returning with a steaming cup. When she had finished the strengthening draught, Young Matt, with his mother and father, arrived.

While helping the girl into clean, dry clothing, Aunt Mollie spoke soothingly to her, as one would reassure a frightened child. But Sammy could hear only the three men, moving about in the other room, doing something and talking always in low tones. She did not speak, but in her brown eyes, that never left the older woman's face, was that wide, questioning look.

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When Mrs. Matthews had done what she could for the comfort of the girl, and the men had finished whatever they were doing in the other room, Sammy said, "Aunt Mollie, I want to know. I must know. Won't you tell Dad to come, please?" Instinctively she had turned to her teacher.

When the shepherd came, she met him with the old familiar demand, "Tell me everything, Dad; everything. I want to be told all about it."

"You will be brave and strong, Sammy?"

Instantly, as ever, her quick mind grasped the meaning that lay back of the words and her face grew deathly white. Then she answered, "I will be brave and strong. But first, please open the window, Dad." He threw up the sash. It was morning, and the mists were over the valley, but the mountain tops were bathed in light.

Sammy arose, and walked steadily to a chair by the open window. Looking out upon the beautiful scene, her face caught the light that was on the higher ground, and she said softly, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.' That's our word, now, isn't it, Dad? I can share it with you, now." Then the shepherd told her. Young Matt had been at the ranch with Mr. Howitt since early in the evening, and was taking his leave for the night when they heard horses stopping at the corral, and a voice calling. Upon their answering, the voice said, "There is trouble at Jim Lane's. Take these horses and go quick." And then as they had run from the house, the messenger had retreated into the shadow of the bluff, saying, "Never mind me. If you love Sammy, hurry." At this they mounted and had ridden as fast as possible.

The old man did not tell the girl that he had found his saddle wet and slippery, and that when he reached the light his hands were red.

They had found the officers ready to leave with their prisoners. All but two of the men were captured with their booty—Wash Gibbs alone escaping badly hurt, they thought, after killing one of the posse.

When they had asked for Sammy, one of the officers told them that she was at Ford's over on Jake Creek, but another declared that he had heard a woman scream as they were making the attack. Young Matt had found her unconscious on the ground behind the cabin.

When the shepherd finished his brief account, the girl said, "Tell me all, Dad. I want to know all. Did—did they take Daddy away?"

The old man's eyes were dim as he answered gently, "No, dear girl; *they* did not take him away." Then Sammy knew why Dad had scrubbed the cabin floor, and what the three men who talked so low had been doing in the other room.

She made no outcry, only a moan, as she looked away across the silent hills and the valley, where the mists were slowly lifting; lifting slowly like the pale ghost of the starlight that was. "Oh, Daddy, Daddy Jim. You *sure* kept your promise. You sure did. I'm glad—glad they

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didn't get you, Daddy. They never *would* have believed what I know; never—never."

But there were no tears, and the shepherd, seeing after a little touched her hand. "Everything is ready, dear; would you like to go now?"

"Not just yet, Dad. I must tell you first how I came to be at home, and why I am glad—oh, so glad, that I was here. But call the others, please; I want them all to know."

When the three, who with her teacher loved her best, had come, Sammy told her story; repeating almost word for word what she had heard her father say to the men. When she had finished, she turned her face again to the open window. The mists were gone. The landscape lay bright in the sun. But Sammy could not see.

"It is much better, so much better, as it is, my child," said the old scholar. "You see, dear, they would have taken him away. Nothing could have saved him. It would have been a living death behind prison walls away from you."

"Yes, I know, Dad. I understand. It is better as it is. Now, we will go to him, please." They led her into the other room. The floor in the corner of the cabin where the shepherd had washed it was still damp.

Through it all, Sammy kept her old friend constantly by her side. "It is easier, Dad, when you are near." Nor would she leave the house until it was all over, save to walk a little way with her teacher.

Young Matt and his father made the coffin of rough boards, sawed at the mill; and from the country round about, the woods-people came to the funeral, or, as they called it in their simple way, the "burying." The grave was made in a little glen not far from the house. When some of the neighbors would have brought a minister from the settlement, Sammy said, "No." Dad would say all that was necessary. So the shepherd, standing under the big trees, talked a little in his simple kindly way, and spoke the words, "Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes." "As good," declared some, "as any preacher on earth could o' done hit;" though one or two held "it warn't jest right to put a body in th' ground 'thout a regular parson t' preach th' sermon."

When the last word was spoken, and the neighbors had gone away over the mountains and through the woods to their homes, Aunt Mollie with her motherly arm about the girl, said, "Come, honey; you're our girl now. As long as you stay in the hills, you shall stay with us." And Old Matt added, "You're the only daughter we've got, Sammy; and we want you a heap worse than you know."

When Sammy told them that she was not going to the city to live, they cried in answer, "Then you shall be our girl always," and they took her home with them to the big log house on the ridge.

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For a week after that night at the Lane cabin, Pete was not seen. When at last, he did appear, it was to the shepherd on the hill, and his voice and manner alarmed Dad. But the boy's only reply to Mr. Howitt's question was, "Pete knows; Pete knows." Then in his own way he told something that sent the shepherd to Young Matt, and the two followed the lad to a spot where the buzzards were flying low through the trees.

By the shreds of clothing and the weapons lying near, they knew that the horrid thing, from which as they approached, carrion birds flapped their wings in heavy flight, was all that remained of the giant, Wash Gibbs.

Many facts were brought out at the trial of the outlaws and it was made clear that Jim Lane had met his death at the hands of Wash Gibbs, just at the beginning of the attack, and that Gibbs himself had been wounded a moment later by one of the attacking posse.

Thus does justice live even in the hills.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER STRANGER.

MR. MATTHEWS and his son first heard of the stranger through Lou Gordon, the mail carrier, who stopped at the mill on his way to Flag with the week's mail.

The native rode close to the shed, and waited until the saw had shrieked its way through the log of oak, and the carriage had rattled back to first position. Then with the dignity belonging to one of his station, as a government officer, he relieved his overcharged mouth of an astonishing quantity of tobacco, and drawled, "Howdy, men."

"Howdy, Lou," returned Young Matt from the engine, and Old Matt from the saw.

"Reckon them boards is fer a floor in Joe Gardner's new cabin?"

"Yes," returned Old Matt; "we ought to got 'em out last week, but seems like we couldn't get at it with the buryin' an' all."

"Pears like you all 'r gettin' mighty proud in this neighborhood. *Puncheon* floors *used t'* be good enough fer anybody t' dance on. Be a buildin' board houses next, I reckon."

Mr. Matthews laughed, "Bring your logs over to Fall Creek when you get ready to build, Lou; we'll sure do you right."

The representative of the government recharged his mouth. "Lowed as how I would," he returned. "I ain't one o' this here kind that don't want t' see no changes. Gov'ment's all th' time makin' 'provements. Inspector 'lowed last trip we'd sure be a gettin' mail

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twice a week at Flag next summer. This here's sure bound t' be a big country some day.

"Talkin' 'bout new fangled things, though, men! I seed the blamdest sight las' night that ever was in these woods, I reckon. I gonies! Hit was a plumb wonder!" Kicking one foot from the wooden stirrup and hitching sideways in the saddle, he prepared for an effort.

"Little feller, he is. Ain't as tall as Preachin' Bill even, an' fat! I gonies! he's fat as a possum 'n 'simmon time. *He* don't walk, can't; just naturally waddles on them little duck legs o' hisn. An' he's got th' prettiest little ol' face; all red an' white, an' as round's a walnut; an' a fringe of th' whitest hair you ever seed. An' clothes! Say, men." In the pause the speaker deliberately relieved his overcharged mouth. The two in the mill waited breathlessly. "Long tailed coat, stove pipe hat, an' cane with a gold head as big as a 'tater. 'Fo' God, men, there ain't been ary such a sight within a thousand miles of these here hills ever. An' doin's! My Lord, a'mighty!"

The thin form of the native doubled up as he broke into a laugh that echoed and re-echoed through the little valley, ending in a wild, "Whoop-e-e-e. Say! When he got out of th' hack last night at th' Forks, Uncle Ike he caught sight o' him an' says, says he t' me, 'Ba thundas! Lou, looky there! Talk 'bout prosperity. I'm dummed if there ain't ol' Santa Claus a comin' t' th' Forks in th' summa time. 'Ba thundas! What!

"An' when Santa come in, he—he wanted—Now what d' you reckon he wanted? A *bath!* Yes, sir-e-e. Dad burn me, 'f he didn't. A bath! Whoop-e-e, you ought t' seen Uncle Ike! He told him, 'Ba thundas!' he could give him a bite to eat an' a place to sleep, but he'd be pised bit by rattlers, clawed by wild cats, chawed by the hogs, et by buzzards, an' everlastin'ly damned 'fore he'd tote water 'nough fer anybody t' swim in. 'Ba thundas! What!

"What's he doin' here?" asked Mr. Matthews, when the mountaineer had recovered from another explosion.

Lou shook his head, as he straightened himself in the saddle. "Blame me 'f I kin tell. Jest wouldn't tell 't all last night. Wanted a *bath*. Called Uncle Ike some new fangled kind of a savage, an' th' old man 'lowed he'd show him. He'd sure have him persecuted fer 'sultin' a gov'ment servant when th' inspector come around. Yes he did. Oh, thar was doin's at the Forks last night!"

Again the mail carrier's laugh echoed through the woods.

"Well, I must mosey along. He warn't up this mornin' when I left. Reckon he'll show up 'round here sometime 'fore sun down. Him an' Uncle Ike won't hitch worth a cent an' he'll be huntin' prouder folks. I done told th' old man he'd better herd him fer a spell, fer if he was t' get loose in these woods, there wouldn't be nary deer er bear left come Thanksgivin' time. Uncle Ike said 'Ba thundas!' he'd let me

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know that he warn't runnin' no dummed asylum. He 'lowed he was postmaster, 'Ba thundas!' an' had all he could do t' keep th' dad burned gov'ment straight."

Late that afternoon Lou's prophecy was fulfilled. A wagon going down the Creek with a load of supplies for the distillery stopped at the mill shed and the stranger began climbing carefully down over the wheels. Budd Wilson on his high seat winked and nodded at Mr. Matthews and his son, as though it was the greatest joke of the season.

"Hold those horses, driver. Hold them tight; tight, sir."

"Got 'em, Mister," responded Budd promptly. The mules stood with drooping heads and sleepy eyes, the lines under their feet.

The gentleman was feeling carefully about the hub of the wheel with a foot that, stretch as he might, could not touch it by a good six inches.

"That's right, man, right," he puffed. "Hold them tight; tight. Start now, break a leg sure, sure. Then what would Sarah and the girls do? Oh, blast it all, where is that step? Can't stay here all day. Bring a ladder. Bring a high chair, a table, a box, a big box, a—heh—heh—Look out, I say, look out! Blast it all, what do you mean?" This last was called forth by Young Matt lifting the little man bodily to the ground, as an ordinary man would lift a child.

To look up at the young giant, the stranger tipped back his head, until his shining silk hat was in danger of falling in the dirt. "Bless my soul, what a specimen! What a specimen!" Then with a twinkle in his eye, "Which one of the boys are you, anyway?"

At this the three mountaineers roared with laughter. With his dumpy figure in the long coat, and his round face under the tall hat, the little man was irresistible. He fairly shone with good humor; his cheeks were polished like big red apples; his white hair had the luster of silver; his blue eyes twinkled; his silk hat glistened; his gold watch guard sparkled; his patent leathers glistened; and the cane with the big gold head gleamed in the sunlight.

"That's him, Doc," called the driver. "That's the feller what walered Wash Gibbs like I was a tellin' ye. Strongest man in the hills he is. Dad burn me if I believe he knows how strong he is."

"Doc—Doc—Dad burned—Doc," muttered the stranger. "What would Sarah and the girls say!" He waddled to the wagon, and reached up one fat hand with a half dollar to Budd, "Here, driver, here. Get cigars with that; cigars, mind you, or candy. I stay here. Mind you don't get anything to drink; nothing to drink, I say."

Budd gathered up the reins and woke the sleepy mules with a vigorous jerk. "Nary a drink, Doc; nary a drink. Thank you kindly all the same. Got t' mosey 'long t' th' still now; ought t' o' been there hour ago. 'f I can do anything fer you, jest le' me know. I live over on

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Sow Coon Gap, when I'm 't home. Come over an' visit with me. Young Matt there'll guide you."

As he watched the wagon down the valley, the stranger mused. "Doc—Doc—huh. Quite sure that fellow will buy a drink; quite sure."

When the wagon had disappeared, he turned to Mr. Matthews and his son; "According to that fellow, I am not far from a sheep ranch kept by a Mr. Howitt. That's it, Mr. Daniel Howitt; fine looking man, fine; brown eyes; great voice; gentleman, sir, gentleman, if he is keeping sheep in this wilderness. Blast it all, just like him, just like him; always keeping somebody's sheep; born to be a shepherd; born to be. Know him?"

At mention of Mr. Howitt's name, Young Matt had looked at his father quickly. When the stranger paused, he answered, "Yes, sir. We know Dad Howitt. Is he a friend of yourn?"

"Dad—Dad Howitt. Doc and Dad. Well, what would Sarah and the girls say? Friend of mine? Young man Daniel and David, I am David; Daniel and David lay on the same blanket when they were babies; played in the same alley; school together same classes; col-legged together; next door neighbors. Know him! Blast it all, where *is* this sheep place?"

Again the two woodsmen exchanged glances. The elder Matthews spoke, "It ain't so far from here, sir. The ranch belongs to me and my son. But Mr. Howitt will be out on the hills somewhere with the sheep now. You'd better go home with us and have supper, and the boy will take you down this evenin'."

"Well, now, that's kind, sir; very kind, indeed. Man at the Postoffice is a savage, sir; blasted, old incorrigible savage. My name is Coughlan; Dr. David Coughlan, of Chicago; practicing physician for forty years; don't do anything now; not much, that is. Sarah and the girls won't let me. Your name, sir?"

"Grant Matthews. My boy there has the same. We're mighty glad to meet any friend of Dad's, I can tell you. He's sure been a God's blessin' to this neighborhood."

Soon they started homeward, Young Matt going ahead to do the chores, and to tell his mother of their coming guest, while Mr. Matthews followed more slowly with the doctor. Shortening his stride to conform to the slow pace of the smaller man, the mountaineer told his guest about the shepherd; how he had come to them; of his life; and how he had won the hearts of the people. When he told how Mr. Howitt had educated Sammy, buying her books himself from his meager wages, the doctor interrupted in his quick way, "Just like him! just like him. Always giving away everything he earned. Made others give, too. Blast it all, he's cost me thousands of dollars, thousands of dollars, treating patients of his that never paid a cent; not a cent, sir.

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Proud, though; proud as Lucifer. Fine old, family; finest in the country, sir. Right to be proud, right to be."

Old Matt scowled as he returned coldly, "He sure don't seem that way to us, Mister. He's as common as an old shoe." And then the mountaineer told how his son loved the shepherd, and tried to explain what the old scholar's friendship had meant to them.

The stranger ejaculated, "Same old thing; same old trick. Did me that way; does everybody that way. Same old Daniel. Proud, though; can't help it; can't help it."

The big man answered with still more warmth, "You ought to hear how he talks to us folks when we have meetin's at the Cove school house. He's as good as any preacher you ever heard; except that he don't put on as much, maybe. Why, sir, when we buried Jim Lane week before last, everybody 'lowed he done as well as a regular parson."

At this Dr. Coughlan stopped short and leaned against a convenient tree for support, looking up at his big host, with merriment he could not hide; "Parson, parson! Daniel Howitt talk as good as a parson! Blast it all! Dan is one of the biggest D. D.'s in the United States; as good as a parson, I should think so! Why, man, he's my pastor; my pastor. Biggest church, greatest crowds in the city. Well what would Sarah and the girls say!" He stood there gasping and shaking with laughter, until Old Matt, finding the ridiculous side of the situation, joined in with a guffaw that fairly drowned the sound of the little man's merriment.

When they finally moved on again, the Doctor said, "And you never knew? The papers were always full, always. His real name is—"

"Stop!" Old Matt spoke so suddenly and in such a tone that the other jumped in alarm. "I ain't a meanin' no harm, Doc; but you oughtn't to tell his name, and—anyway I don't want to know. Preacher or no preacher, he's a man, he is, and that's what counts in this here country. If Dad had wanted us to know about himself, I reckon he'd a told us, and I don't want to hear it until he's ready."

The Doctor stopped short again, "Right, sir; right. Daniel has his reasons, of course. I forgot. That savage at the Postoffice tried to interrogate me; tried to draw me. I was close; on guard you see. Fellow in the wagon tried; still on guard. You caught me. Blast it all, I like you! Fine specimen that boy of yours; fine!"

When they reached the top of the ridge the stranger looked over the hills with exclamations of delight, "Grand, sir; grand! Wish Sarah and the girls could see. Don't wonder Daniel staid. That Hollow down there you say; way down there? Mutton—Mutton Hollow? Daniel lives there? Blast it all; come on, man; come on."

As they drew near the house, Pete came slowly up the Old Trail and met them at the gate.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OLD FRIENDS.

AFTER supper Young Matt guided the stranger down the trail to the sheep ranch in Mutton Hollow.

When they reached the edge of the clearing, the mountaineer stopped. "Yonder's the cabin, sir, an' Dad is there, as you can see by the smoke. I don't reckon you'll need me any more now, an' I'll go back. We'll be mighty glad to see you on the ridge any time, sir. Any friend of Dad's is mighty welcome in this neighborhood."

"Thank you; thank you; very thoughtful; very thoughtful, indeed; fine spirit, fine. I shall see you again when Daniel and I have had it out. Blast it all; what is he doing here? Good night, young man; good-night." He started forward impetuously. Matt turned back toward home.

The dog barked as Dr. Coughlan approached the cabin, and the shepherd came to the open door. He had been washing the supper dishes. His coat was off, his shirt open at the throat, and his sleeves rolled above his elbows. "Here, Brave." The deep voice rolled across the little clearing, and the dog ran to stand by his master's side. Then, as Mr. Howitt took in the unmistakable figure of the little physician, he put out a hand to steady himself.

"Oh, it's me, Daniel; it's me. Caught you didn't I? Blast it all; might have known I would. Bound to; bound to, Daniel; been at it ever since I lost you. Visiting in Kansas City last week with my old friends, the Stewarts; young fellow there, Ollie, put me right. First part of your name, description, voice and all that; knew it was you; knew it. Didn't tell them, though; blasted reporters go wild. Didn't tell a soul, not a soul. Sarah and the girls think I am in Kansas City or Denver. Didn't tell old man Matthews, either; came near, though, very near. Blast it all; what does it mean? what does it all mean?"

In his excitement the little man spoke rapidly as he hurried toward the shepherd. When he reached the cabin, the two friends, so different, yet so alike, clasped hands.

As soon as the old scholar could speak, he said, "David, David! To think that this is really you. You of all men; you, whom I most needed."

"Huh!" grunted the other. "Look like you never needed me less. Look fit for anything, anything; ten years younger; every bit of ten years. Blast it all; what have you done to yourself? What have you done?" He looked curiously at the tanned face and rude dress of his

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friend. "Bless my soul, what a change! What a change! Told Matthews you were an aristocrat. He wouldn't believe it. Don't wonder. Doubt it myself, now."

The other smiled at the Doctor's amazement. "I suppose I have changed some, David. The hills have done it. Look at them!" He pointed to the encircling mountains. "See how calm and strong they are; how they lift their heads above the gloom. They are my friends and companions, David. And they have given me of their calmness and strength a little. But come in, come in; you must be very tired. How did you come?"

The doctor followed him into the cabin. "Railroad, hack, wagon, walked. Postoffice last night. Man there is a savage, blasted incorrigible savage. Mill this afternoon. Home with your friends on the ridge. Old man is a gentleman, a gentleman, sir, if God ever made one. His boy's like him. The mother, she's a real mother; made to be a mother; couldn't help it. And that young woman, with the boy's name, bless my soul, I never saw such a creature before, Daniel, never! If I had I—I—Blast it all; I wouldn't be bossed by Sarah and the girls, I wouldn't. See in that young man and woman what God meant men and women to be. Told them they ought to marry; that they owed it to the race. You know my ideas, Daniel. Think they will?"

The shepherd laughed, a laugh that was good to hear.

"What's the matter now, Daniel? What is the matter? Have I said anything wrong again? Blast it all; you know how I always do the wrong thing. Have I?"

"No, indeed, David; you are exactly right," returned Mr. Howitt. "But tell me, did you see no one else at the house? There is another member of the family."

The doctor nodded. "I saw him; Pete, you mean. Looked him over. Mr. Matthews asked me to. Sad case, very sad. Hopeless, absolutely hopeless, Daniel."

"Pete has not seemed as well as usual lately. I fear so much night roaming is not good for the boy," returned the other slowly. "But tell me, how are Sarah and the girls? Still looking after Dr. Davie, I suppose."

"Just the same; haven't changed a bit; not a bit. Jennie looks after my socks and handkerchiefs; Mary looks after my shirts and linen; Anna looks after my ties and shoes; Sue looks after my hats and coats; and Kate looks after the things I eat; and Sarah, Sarah looks after everything and everybody, same as always. Blast it all! If they'd give me a show, I'd be as good as ever; good as ever, Daniel. What can a man do; what can a man do, with an only sister and her five old maid daughters looking after him from morning until night, from morning until night, Daniel? Tell them I am a full grown man; don't do no

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good; no good at all. Blast it all; poor old things, just got to mother something; got to, Daniel.”

While he was speaking, his eyes were dancing from one object to another in the shepherd’s rude dwelling, turning for frequent quick glances to Dad himself. “You live here, you? You ought not, Daniel, you ought not. What would Sarah and the girls say? Blast it all; what do you mean by it? I ordered you away on a vacation. You disappear. Think you dead; row in the papers, mystery; I hate mystery. Blast it all; what does it mean, what does it all mean? Not fair to me, Daniel; not fair.”

By this time the little man had worked himself up to an astonishing pitch of excitement; his eyes snapped; his words came like pistol shots; his ejaculations were genuine explosions. He tapped with his feet; rapped with his cane; shook his finger; and fidgeted in his chair. “We want you back, Daniel. I want you. Church will want you when they know; looking for a preacher right now. I come after you, Daniel. Blast it all, I’ll tell Sarah and the girls, and they’ll come after you, too. Chicago will go wild when they know that Daniel Howitt Cha—”

“Stop!” The doctor bounced out of his chair. The shepherd was trembling, and his voice shook with emotion. “Forgive me, David. But that name must never be spoken again, never. My son is dead, and that name died with him. It must be forgotten.”

The physician noted his friend’s agitation in amazement. “There, there, Daniel. I didn’t mean to. Thought it didn’t matter when we were alone. I—I—Blast it all! Tell me Daniel, what do you mean by this strange business, this very strange business?”

A look of mingled affection, regret and pain, came into the shepherd’s face, as he replied, “Let me tell you the story, David, and you will understand.”

When he had finished, Mr. Howitt asked gently, “Have I not done right, David? The boy is gone. It was hard, going as he did. But I am glad, now, for Old Matt would have killed him, as he would kill me yet, if he knew. Thank God, we have not also made the father a murderer. Did I not say rightly, that the old name died with Howard? Have I not done well to stay on this spot and to give my life to this people?”

“Quite right, Daniel; quite right. You always are. It’s me that goes wrong; blundering, bumping, smashing into things. Blast it all! I—I don’t know what to say. B—B—Blast it all!”

The hour was late when the two men finally retired for the night. Long after his heavy, regular breathing announced that the doctor was sleeping soundly, the shepherd lay wide awake, keenly sensitive to every sound that stirred in the forest. Once he arose from his bed, and stepping softly left the cabin, to stand under the stars, his face lifted to the dark summit of Old Dewey and the hills that rimmed the

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Hollow. And once, when the first light of day came over the ridges, he went to the bunk where his friend lay, to look thoughtfully down upon the sleeping man.

Breakfast was nearly ready when Dr. Coughlan awoke. The physician saw at once by the worn and haggard look on his friend's face that his had been a sleepless night. It was as though all the pain and trouble of the old days had returned. The little doctor muttered angrily to himself while the shepherd was gone to the spring for water. "Blast it all, I'm a fool, a meddling, old fool. Ought to have let well enough alone. No need to drag him back into it all again; no need. Do no good; no good at all."

When the morning meal was finished, Mr. Howitt said, "David, will you think me rude, if I leave you alone to-day? The city pavement fits one but poorly to walk these hills of mine, and you are too tired after your trip and the loss of your regular sleep to go with me this morning. Stay at the ranch and rest. If you care to read, here are a few of your favorites. Will you mind very much? I should like to be alone to-day, David."

"Right, Daniel, right. I understand. Don't say another word; not a word. Go ahead. I'm stiff and sore anyway; just suit me."

The shepherd arranged everything for his friend's comfort, putting things in readiness for his noonday meal, and showing him the spring. Then, taking his own lunch, as his custom was, he went to the corral and released the sheep. The doctor watched until the last of the flock was gone, and he could no longer hear the tinkle of the bells and the bark of the dog.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I AIN'T NOBODY NO MORE.

WITH the coming of the evening, the shepherd returned to his guest. Dr. Coughlan heard first the bells on the leaders of the flock, and the barking of the dog coming nearer and nearer through the woods. Soon the sheep appeared trooping out of the twilight shadows into the clearing; then came Brave followed by his master.

The countenance of the old scholar wore again that look of calm strength and peace that had marked it before the coming of his friend. "Have you had a good rest, David? Or has your day been long and tiresome? I fear it was not kind of me to leave you alone in this wilderness."

The doctor told how he had passed the time, reading, sleeping and roaming about the clearing and the nearby woods. "And you," he

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said, looking the other over with a professional eye, "you look like a new man; a new man, Daniel. How do you do it? Some secret spring of youth in the wilderness? Blast it all, wish you would show me. Fool Sarah and the girls, fool them, sure."

"David, have you forgotten the prescription you gave me when you ordered me from the city? You took it you remember from one of our favorite volumes." The shepherd bared his head and repeated,

"If thou art worn and hard beset,
With sorrows, that thou wouldst forget;
If thou wouldst read a lesson, that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep,
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears."

"David, I never understood until the past months why the Master so often withdrew alone into the wilderness. There is not only food and medicine for one's body; there is also healing for the heart and strength for the soul in nature. One gets very close to God, David, in these temples of God's own building."

Dr. Coughlan studied his old friend curiously; "Change; remarkable change in you! Remarkable! Never said a thing like that in all your life before, never."

The shepherd smiled, "It's your prescription, Doctor," he said.

They retired early that evening, for the physician declared that his friend must need the rest. "Talk to-morrow," he said; "all day; nothing else to do." He promptly enforced his decision by retiring to his own bunk, leaving the shepherd to follow his example. But not until the doctor was sure that his friend was sleeping soundly did he permit himself to sink into unconsciousness.

It was just past midnight, when the shepherd was aroused by the doctor striking a match to light the lamp. As he awoke, he heard Pete's voice, "Where is Dad? Pete wants Dad."

Dr. Coughlan, thinking it some strange freak of the boy's disordered brain, and not wishing to break his friend's much needed rest, was trying in low tones to persuade the boy to wait until morning.

"What does Pete want?" asked the shepherd entering the room.

"Pete wants Dad; Dad and the other man. They must sure go with Pete right quick."

"Go where with Pete? Who told Pete to come for Dad?" asked Mr. Howitt.

"*He* told Pete. Right now, he said. And Pete he come. 'Course I come with him. Dad must go, an' the other man too, 'cause he said so."

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In sickness or in trouble of any kind the people for miles around had long since come to depend upon the shepherd of Mutton Hollow. The old man turned now to the doctor. "Someone needs me, David. We must go with the boy."

"But, Daniel, Daniel! Blast it all! The boy's not responsible. Where will he take us? Where do you want us to go, boy?"

"Not me; not me; nobody can't go nowhere, can they? You go with Pete, Mister."

"Yes, yes; go with Pete; but where will Pete take us?" persisted the Doctor.

"Pete knows."

"Now, look at that, Daniel! Look at that. Blast it all; we ought not go; not in the night this way. What would Sarah and the girls say?" Notwithstanding his protests, the doctor was ready even before the shepherd. "Take a gun, Daniel; take a gun, at least," he said.

The other hesitated, then asked, "Does Pete want Dad to take a gun?"

The youth, who stood in the doorway waiting impatiently, shook his head and laughed, "No, no; nothing can't get Dad where Pete goes. God he's there just like Dad says."

"It's all right, David," said the shepherd with conviction. "Pete knows. It is safe to trust him to-night."

And the boy echoed, as he started forward, "It's alright, Mister; Pete knows."

"I wish you had your medicine case, though, David," added Mr. Howitt, as they followed the boy out into the night.

"Got one, Daniel; got one. Always have a pocket case; habit."

Pete led the way down the road, and straight to the old cabin ruin below the corral. Though the stars were hidden behind clouds, it was a little light in the clearing; but, in the timber under the shadow of the bluff, it was very dark. The two men were soon bewildered and stood still. "Which way, Pete?" said the shepherd. There was no answer. "Where's Pete? Tell Pete to come here," said Mr. Howitt again. Still there was no reply. Their guide seemed to have been swallowed up in the blackness. They listened for a sound. "This is strange," mused the shepherd.

A grunt of disgust came from the doctor, "Crazy, man, crazy. There's three of us. Which way is the house? Blast it all, what would—" A spot of light gleamed under the bushes not fifty feet away.

"Come, Dad. Come on, Pete's ready."

They were standing close to the old cabin under the bluff. In a narrow space between the log wall of the house and the cliff, Pete stood with a lighted lantern. The farther end of the passage was completely hidden by a projection of the rock; the overhanging roof touched the ledge above; while the opening near the men was

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concealed by the heavy growth of ferns and vines and the thick branches of a low cedar. Even in daylight the place would have escaped anything but a most careful search.

Dropping to his knees and to one hand the shepherd pushed aside the screen of vines and branches with the other, and then on all fours crawled into the narrow passage. The Doctor followed. They found their guide crouching in a small opening in the wall of rock. Mr. Howitt uttered an exclamation, "The lost cave! Old man Dewey!"

The boy laughed, "Pete knows. Come, Dad. Come, other man. Ain't nothin' can get you here." He scrambled ahead of them into the low tunnel. Some twenty feet from the entrance, the passage turned sharply to the left and opened suddenly into a hallway along which the shepherd could easily walk erect. Pete went briskly forward as one on very familiar ground, his lantern lighting up the way clearly for his two companions.

For some distance their course dipped downward at a gentle angle, while the ceilings and sides dripped with moisture. Soon they heard the sound of running water, and entering a wider room saw sparkling in the lantern's light a stream that came from under the rocky wall, crossed their path, and disappeared under the other wall of the chamber. "Lost Creek!" ejaculated the shepherd, as he picked his way over the stream on the big stones. And the boy answered, "Pete knows. Pete knows."

From the bank of the creek the path climbed strongly upward, the footing grew firmer, and the walls and ceiling drier; as they went on, the passage, too, grew wider and higher, until they found themselves in a large underground hallway that echoed loudly as they walked. Overhead, pure white stalactites and frost-like formations glittered in the light, and the walls were broken by dark nooks and shelf-like ledges with here and there openings leading who could tell where?

At the farther end of this hallway where the ceiling was highest, the guide paused at the foot of a ledge against which rested a rude ladder. The shepherd spoke again, "Dewey Bald?" he asked. Pete nodded, and began to climb the ladder.

Another room, and another ledge; then a long narrow passage, the ceiling of which was so high that it was beyond the lantern light; then a series of ledges, and they saw that they were climbing from shelf to shelf on one side of an underground cañon. Following along the edge of the chasm, the doctor pushed a stone over the brink, and they heard it go bounding from ledge to ledge into the dark heart of the mountain. "No bottom, Daniel. Blast it all, no bottom to it! What would Sarah and the girls say?"

They climbed one more ladder and then turned from the cañon into another great chamber, the largest they had entered. The floor was perfectly dry; the air, too, was dry and pure; and, from what

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seemed to be the opposite side of the huge cavern, a light gleamed like a red eye in the darkness. They were evidently nearing the end of their journey. Drawing closer they found that the light came from the window of a small cabin built partly of rock and partly of logs.

Instinctively the two men stopped. Pete said in a low tone, as one would speak in a sacred presence, "*He* is there. Come on, Dad. Come, other man. Don't be scared."

Still the boy's companions hesitated. Mr. Howitt asked, "Who, boy? who is there? Do you know who it is?"

"No, no, not me. Nobody can't know nothin', can they?"

"Hopeless case, Daniel; hopeless. Too bad, too bad," muttered the physician, laying his hand upon his friend's shoulder.

The shepherd tried again, "Who does Pete say it is?"

"Oh, Pete says it's him, just him."

"But who does Pete say he is?" suggested Dr. Coughlan.

Again the boy's voice lowered to a whisper, "Sometimes Pete says it must be God, 'cause he's so good. Dad says God is good an' that he takes care of folks, an' *he* sure does that. 'Twas him that scared Wash Gibbs an' his crowd that night. An' he sent the gold to you, Dad; God's gold it was; he's got heaps of it. He killed that panther, too, when it was a goin' to fight Young Matt. Pete knows. You see, Dad, when Pete is with him, I ain't nobody no more. I'm just Pete then, an' Pete is me. Funny, ain't it? But he says that's the way it is, an' he sure knows."

The two friends listened with breathless interest. "And what does Pete call him?" asked the doctor.

"Pete calls him father, like Dad calls God. He talks to God, too, like Dad does. Do you reckon God would talk to God, mister?"

With a cry the shepherd reeled. The doctor caught him. "Strong, Daniel, strong." Pete drew away from the two men in alarm.

The old scholar's agitation was pitiful. "David, David; tell me, what is this thing? Can it be—my boy—Howard, my son—can it be? My God, David, what am I saying? He is dead. Dead, I tell you. Can the dead come back from the grave, David?" He broke from his friend and ran staggering toward the cabin; but at the door he stopped again. It was as if he longed yet feared to enter, and the doctor and the boy came to his side. Without ceremony Pete pushed open the door.

The room was furnished with a cupboard, table and small cook stove. It was evidently a living room. Through a curtained opening at the right, a light showed from another apartment, and a voice called, "Is that you, Pete?"

A look of pride came into the face of the lad, "That's me," he whispered. "I'm Pete here, an' Pete is me. It's always that way with

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him." Aloud, he said, "Yes, Father, it's Pete. Pete, an' Dad, an' the other man." As he spoke he drew aside the curtain.

For an instant the two men paused on the threshold. The room was small, and nearly bare of furniture. In the full glare of the lamp, so shaded as to throw the rest of the room in deep shadow, hung a painting that seemed to fill the rude chamber with its beauty. It was the picture of a young woman, standing by a spring of water, a cup brimming full in her outstretched hand.

On a bed in the shadow, facing the picture, lay a man. A voice faltered, "Father. Dr. Coughlan."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A MATTER OF HOURS.

"FATHER—Father; can—you—can—you—forgive me?"

The man on his knees raised his head.

"Forgive you, my son? Forgive you? My dear boy, there has never been in my heart a thought but of love and sympathy. Pain there has been, I can't deny, but it has helped me to know what you have suffered. I understand it now, my boy. I understand it all, for I, too, have felt it. But when I first knew, even beneath all the hurt, I was glad—glad to know, I mean. It is a father's right to suffer with his child, my son. It hurt most, when the secret stood between us, and I could not enter into your life, but I understand that, too. I understand why you could not tell me. I, too, came away because I was not strong enough."

"I—I thought it would be easier for you never to know," said the son as he lay on the bed. "I am—sorry, now. And I am glad that you know. But I must tell you all about it just the same. I must tell you myself, you see, so that it will be all clear and straight when I—when I go." He turned his eyes to the picture on the wall.

"When you go?"

Howard laid a hand upon the gray head. "Poor father; yes, I am going. It was an accident, but it was a kindness. It will be much better that way—only—only I am sorry for you, father. I thought I could save you all this. I intended to slip quietly away without your ever knowing, but when Pete said that Dr. Coughlan was here, I could not go without—without—"

The little doctor came forward. "I am a fool, Howard, an old fool. Blast it all; no business to go poking into this; no business at all! Daniel would have sent if he had wanted me. Ought to have known. Old native can give me lessons on being a gentleman every time. Blast it

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all! What's wrong, Howard? Get hurt? Now I am here, might as well be useful."

"Indeed, Doctor, you did right to come. You will be such a help to father. You will help us both, just as you have always done. Will you excuse us, father, while Dr. Coughlan looks at this thing here in my side?"

The physician arranged the light so that it shone full upon the man on the bed, then carefully removed the bandages from an ugly wound in the artist's side. Dr. Coughlan looked very grave. "When did this happen, Howard?"

"I—I can't tell exactly. You see I thought at first I could get along with Pete to help, and I did, for a week, I guess. Then things—didn't go so well. Some fever, I think, for she—she came." He turned his eyes toward the picture again. "And I—I lost all track of time. It was the night of the eighteenth. Father will know."

"Two weeks," muttered the physician.

A low exclamation came from the shepherd. "It was you—you who brought the horses to the ranch that night?"

The artist smiled grimly. "The officers saw me, and thought that I was one of the men they wanted. It's alright, though." The old scholar instinctively lifted his hands and looked at them. He remembered the saddle, wet with blood.

Making a careful examination, the doctor asked more questions. When he had finished and had skilfully replaced the bandages, the wounded man asked, "What about it, Dr. Coughlan?" The kind hearted physician jerked out a volley of scientific words and phrases that meant nothing, and busied himself with his medicine case.

When his patient had taken the medicine, the doctor watched him for a few minutes, and then asked, "Feel stronger, Howard?"

The artist nodded. "Tell me the truth, now, Doctor. I know that I am going. But how long have I? Wait a minute first. Where's Pete? Come here, my boy." The lad drew near. "Father." Mr. Howitt seated himself on the bedside. "You'll be strong, father? We are ready now, Dr. Coughlan."

"Yes, tell us, David," said the shepherd, and his voice was steady.

The physician spoke, "Matter of hours, I would say. Twenty-four, perhaps; not more; not more."

"There is no possible chance, David?" asked the shepherd.

Again the little doctor took refuge behind a broadside of scientific terms before replying, "No; no possible chance."

A groan slipped from the gray bearded lips of the father. The artist turned to the picture and smiled. Pete looked wonderingly from face to face.

"Poor father," said the artist. "One thing more, Doctor; can you keep up my strength for awhile?"

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“Reasonably well, reasonably well, Howard.”

“I am so glad of that because there is much to do before I go. There is so much that must be done first, and I want you both to help me.”

CHAPTER XL.

THE SHEPHERD'S MISSION.

DURING the latter part of that night and most of the day, it rained; a fine, slow, quiet rain, with no wind to shake the wet from burdened leaf or blade. But when the old shepherd left the cave by a narrow opening on the side of the mountain, near Sammy's Lookout, the sky was clear. The mists rolled heavily over the valley, but the last of the sunlight was warm on the knobs and ridges.

The old man paused behind the rock and bushes that concealed the mouth of the underground passage. Not a hundred feet below was the Old Trail; he followed the little path with his eye until it vanished around the shoulder of Dewey. Along that way he had come into the hills. Then lifting his eyes to the far away lines of darker blue, his mind looked over the ridge to the world that is on the other side, the world from which he had fled. It all seemed very small and mean, now; it was so far—so far away.

He started as the sharp ring of a horse's iron shoe on the flint rocks came from beyond the Lookout, and, safely hidden, he saw a neighbor round the hill and pass on his way to the store on Roark. He watched, as horse and rider followed the Old Trail around the rim of the Hollow; watched, until they passed from sight in the belt of timber. Then his eyes were fixed on a fine thread of smoke that curled above the trees on the Matthews place; and, leaving the shelter of rock and bush, he walked along the Old Trail toward the big log house on the distant ridge.

Below him, on his left, Mutton Hollow lay submerged in the drifting mists, with only a faint line of light breaking now and then where Lost Creek made its way; and on the other side Compton Ridge lifted like a wooded shore from the sea. A black spot in the red west shaped itself into a crow, making his way on easy wing toward a dead tree on the top of Boulder Bald. The old shepherd walked wearily; the now familiar objects wore a strange look. It was as though he saw them for the first time, yet had seen them somewhere before, perhaps in another world. As he went his face was the face of one crushed by shame and grief, made desperate by his suffering.

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Supper was just over and Young Matt was on the porch when Mr. Howitt entered the gate. The young fellow greeted his old friend, and called back into the house, "Here's Dad, Father." As Mr. Matthews came out, Aunt Mollie and Sammy appeared in the doorway. How like it all was to that other evening.

The mountaineer and the shepherd sat on the front porch, while Young Matt brought the big sorrel and the brown pony to the gate, and with Sammy rode away. They were going to the Postoffice at the Forks. "Ain't had no news for a week," said Aunt Mollie, as she brought her chair to join the two men. "And besides, Sammy needs the ride. There's goin' to be a moon, so it'll be light by the time they start home."

The sound of the horses' feet and the voices of the young people died away in the gray woods. The dusk thickened in the valley below, and, as the light in the west went out, the three friends saw the clump of pines etched black and sharp against the blood red background of the sky.

Old Matt spoke, "Reckon everything's alright at the ranch, Dad. How's the little doctor? You ought to brung him up with you." He watched the shepherd's face curiously from under his heavy brows, as he pulled at his cob pipe.

"Tired out trampin' over these hills, I reckon," ventured Aunt Mollie. Mr. Howitt tried to answer with some commonplace, but his friends could not but note his confusion. Mrs. Matthews continued, "I guess you'll be a leavin' us pretty soon, now. Well, I ain't a blamin' you; and you've sure been a God's blessin' to us here in the woods. I don't reckon we're much 'long 'side the fine friends you've got back where you come from in the city; and we—we can't do nothin' for you, but—but—" The good soul could say no more.

"We've often wondered, sir," added Old Matt, "how you've stood it here, an educated man like you. I reckon, though, there's somethin' deep under it all, keepin' you up; somethin' that ignorant folks, without no education, like us, can't understand."

The old scholar could have cried aloud, but he was forced to sit dumb while the other continued, "You're goin' won't make no difference, though, with what you've done. This neighborhood won't never go back to what it was before you come. It can't with all you've taught us, and with Sammy stayin' here to keep it up. It'll be mighty hard, though, to have you go; it sure will, Mr. Howitt."

Looking up, the shepherd said quietly, "I expect to live here until the end if you will let me. But I fear you will not want me to stay when you know what I've come to tell you this evening."

The mountaineer straightened his huge form as he returned, "Dad, there ain't nothin' on earth or in hell could change what we think of you, and we don't want to hear nothin' about you that you

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don't like to tell us. We ain't a carin' what sent you to the hills. We're takin' you for what you are. And there ain't nothin' can change that."

"Not even if it should be the grave under the pine yonder?" asked the other in a low voice.

Old Matt looked at him in a half frightened way, as though, without knowing why, he feared what the shepherd would say next. Mr. Howitt felt the look and hesitated. He was like one on a desperate mission in the heart of an enemy's country, feeling his way. Was the strong man's passion really tame? Or was his fury only sleeping, waiting to destroy the one who should wake it? Who could tell?

The old scholar looked away to Dewey Bald for strength. "Mr. Matthews," he said, "you once told me a story. It was here on this porch when I first came to you. It was a sad tale of a great crime. Tonight I know the other side of that story. I've come to tell you."

At the strange words, Aunt Mollie's face turned as white as her apron. Old Matt grasped the arms of his chair, as though he would crush the wood, as he said shortly, "Go on."

At the tone of his voice, the old shepherd's heart sank.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY.

WITH a prayer in his heart for the boy who lay dying in that strange underground chamber, the artist's father began.

"It is the story, Mr. Matthews, of a man and his only son, the last of their family. With them will perish—has perished one of the oldest and proudest names in our country.

"From his childhood this man was taught the honored traditions of his people, and, thus trained in pride of ancestry, grew up to believe that the supreme things of life are what his kind call education, refinement, and culture. In his shallow egotism, he came to measure all life by the standards of his people.

"It was in keeping with this that the man should enter the pulpit of the church of his ancestors, and it was due very largely, no doubt, to the same ancestral influence that he became what the world calls a successful minister of the gospel. But Christianity to him was but little more than culture, and his place in the church merely an opportunity to add to the honor of his name. Soon after leaving the seminary, he married. The crowning moment of his life was when his first born—a boy—was laid in his arms. The second child was a girl; there were no more.

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“For ten years before her death the wife was an invalid. The little girl, too, was never strong, and six months after they buried the mother the daughter was laid beside her.

“You, sir, can understand how the father lavished every care upon his son. The first offspring of the parents’ love, the sole survivor of his home, and the last to bear the name of a family centuries old, he was the only hope of the proud man’s ambition.

“The boy was a beautiful child, a delicate, sensitive soul in a body of uncommon physical grace and strength, and the proud father loved to think of him as the flower of long ages of culture and refinement. The minister, himself, jealously educated his son, and the two grew to be friends, sir, constant companions. This, also, *you* will understand—you and your boy. But with all this the young man did not follow his father in choosing his profession. He—he became an artist.”

Old Matt started from his seat. Aunt Mollie uttered an exclamation. But the shepherd, without pausing, continued: “When his schooling was completed the boy came into the Ozarks one summer to spend the season painting. The man had expected to go with his son. For months they had planned the trip together, but at last something prevented, and the father could not go—no, he could not go—” The speaker’s voice broke; the big mountaineer was breathing hard; Aunt Mollie was crying.

Presently Mr. Howitt went on. “When the young artist returned to his father, among many sketches of the mountains, he brought one painting that received instant recognition. The people stood before it in crowds when it was exhibited in the art gallery; the papers were extravagant in their praise; the artist became famous; and wealthy patrons came to his studio to sit for their portraits. The picture was of a beautiful girl, standing by a spring, holding out a dripping cup of water.”

At this a wild oath burst from the giant. Springing to his feet, he started toward the speaker. Aunt Mollie screamed, “Grant, oh Grant! Think what Dad has done for us.” The mountaineer paused.

“Mr. Matthews,” said the shepherd, in trembling tones, “for my sake, will you not hear me to the end? for my sake?”

The big man dropped back heavily into his chair. “Go on,” he said. But his voice was as the growl of a beast.

“The boy loved your girl, Mr. Matthews. It was as though he had left his soul in the hills. Night and day he heard her calling. The more his work was praised, the more his friends talked of honors and planned his future, the keener was his suffering, and most of all there was the shadow that had come between him and his father, breaking the old comradeship, and causing them to shun each other; though the father never knew why. The poor boy grew morose and despondent, giving way at times to spells of the deepest depression. He tried

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to lose himself in his work. He fled abroad and lived alone. It seemed a blight had fallen on his soul. The world called him mad. Many times he planned to take his life, but always the hope of meeting her again stopped him.

“At last he returned to this country determined to see her at any cost, and, if possible, gain her forgiveness and his father’s consent to their marriage. He came into the hills only to find that the mother of his child had died of a broken heart.

“Then came the end. The artist disappeared, leaving a long, pitiful letter, saying that before the word reached his father, he would be dead. The most careful investigation brought nothing but convincing evidence that the unhappy boy had taken his own life. The artist knew that it would be a thousand times easier for the proud man to think his son dead than for him to know the truth, and he was right. Mr. Matthews, he was right. I cannot tell you of the man’s suffering, but he found a little comfort in the reflection that such extravagant praise of his son’s work had added to the honor of the family, for the lad’s death was held by all to be the result of a disordered mind. There was not a whisper of wrong doing. His life, they said, was without reproach, and even his sad mental condition was held to be evidence of his great genius.

“The minister was weak, sir. He knew something of the intellectual side of his religion and the history of his church, but he knew little, very little, of the God that could sustain him in such a trial. He was shamefully weak. He tried to run away from his trouble, and, because the papers had made so much of his work as a preacher, and because of his son’s fame, he gave only the first part of his name, thinking thus to get away from it all for a season.

“But God was to teach the proud man of culture and religious forms a great lesson, and to that end directed his steps. He was led here, here, sir, to your home, and you—you told him the story of his son’s crime.”

The shepherd paused. A hoarse whisper came from the giant in the chair, “You—you, Dad, your—name is—”

The other threw out his hand, as if to guard himself, and shrank back; “Hush, oh hush! I have no name but the name by which you know me. The man who bore that name is dead. In all his pride of intellect and position he died. Your prayers for vengeance were answered, sir. You—you killed him; killed him as truly as if you had plunged a knife into his heart; and—you—did—well.”

Aunt Mollie moaned.

“Is that all?” growled the mountaineer.

“All! God, no! I—I must go on. I must tell you how the man you killed staid in the hills and was born again. There was nothing else for him to do but stay in the hills. With the shame and horror of his boy’s

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disgrace on his heart, he could not go back—back to the city, his friends and his church—to the old life. He knew that he could not hope to deceive them. He was not skilled in hiding things. Every kind word in praise of himself, or in praise of his son, would have been keenest torture. He was a coward; he dared not go back. His secret would have driven him mad, and he would have ended it all as his son had done. His only hope for peace was to stay here; here on the very spot where the wrong was done, and to do what little he could to atone for the crime.

“At first it was terrible; the long, lonely nights with no human friend near; the weight of shame; the memories; and the lonely wind—always the wind—in the trees—her voice, Pete said, calling for him to come. God, sir, I wonder the man did not die under his punishment!

“But God is good, Mr. Matthews. God is good and merciful. Every day out on the range with the sheep, the man felt the spirit of the hills, and little by little their strength and their peace entered into his life. The minister learned here, sir, what he had not learned in all his theological studies. He learned to know God, the God of these mountains. The hills taught him, and they came at last to stand between him and the trouble from which he had fled. The nights were no longer weary and long. He was never alone. The voices in the wilderness became friendly voices, for he learned their speech, and the poor girl ceased to call in the wailing wind. Then Dr. Coughlan came, and—”

Again the shepherd stopped. He could not go on. The light was gone from the sky and he felt the blackness of the night. But against the stars he could still see the crown of the mountain where his son lay. When he had gathered strength, he continued, saying simply, “Dr. Coughlan came, and—last night we learned that my son was not dead but living.”

Again that growl like the growl of a wild beast came from the mountaineer. Silently Mr. Howitt prayed. “Go on,” came the command in hoarse tones.

In halting, broken words, the shepherd faltered through the rest of his story as he told how, while using the cabin under the cliff as a studio, the artist had discovered the passage to the old Dewey cave; how, since his supposed death, he had spent the summers at the scene of his former happiness; how he had met his son roaming the hills at night, and had been able to have the boy with him much of the time; how he had been wounded the night Jim Lane was killed; and finally how Pete had led them to his bedside.

“He is dying yonder. Dr. Coughlan is with him—and Pete—Pete is there, too. I—I came for you. He is calling for you. I came to tell you. All that a man may suffer here, he has suffered, sir. Your prayer has been doubly answered, Mr. Matthews. Both father and son are dead.

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The name—the old name is perished from the face of the earth. For Christ's dear sake, forgive my boy, and let him go. For my sake, sir, I—I can bear no more."

Who but He that looketh upon the heart of man could know the battle that was fought in the soul of that giant of the hills? He uttered no sound. He sat in his seat as if made of stone; save once, when he walked to the end of the porch to stand with clenched hands and passion shaken frame, facing the dark clump of pines on the hill.

Slowly the moon climbed over the ridge and lighted the scene. The mountaineer returned to his chair. All at once he raised his head, and, leaning forward, looked long and earnestly at the old shepherd, where he sat crouching like a convict awaiting sentence.

From down the mill road came voices and the sound of horses' feet. Old Matt started, turning his head a moment to listen. The horses stopped at the lower gate.

"The children," said Aunt Mollie softly. "The children. Grant, Oh, Grant! Sammy and our boy."

Then the shepherd felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, and a voice, that had in it something new and strange, said, "Dad—my brother—Daniel, I—I ain't got no education, an' I—don't know rightly how to say it—but, Daniel, what these hills have been to you, you—you have been to me. It's sure God's way, Daniel. Let's—let's go to the boy."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WAY OF THE LOWER TRAIL.

"FIX—the—light, as it was—please? That's—it. Thank you, Doctor. How beautiful she is—how beautiful!" He seemed to gather strength, and looked carefully into the face of each member of the little group about the bed; the shepherd, Old Matt, Aunt Mollie, Pete, and the physician. Then he turned his eyes back to the painting. To the watchers, the girl in the picture, holding her brimming cup, seemed to smile back again.

"I loved her—I loved—her. She was my natural mate—my other self. I belonged to her—she to me. I—I can't tell you of that summer—when we were together—alone in the hills—the beautiful hills—away from the sham and the ugliness of the world that men have made. The beauty and inspiration of it all I put into my pictures, and I knew because of that they were good—I knew they would win a place for me—and—they did. Most of all—I put it there," (He pointed to the painting on the wall) "and the crowd saw it and felt it, and did not know what it was. But I knew—I knew—all the time, I knew. Oh!—if

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that short summer could have been lengthened—into years, what might I not have done? Oh, God! That men—can be—so blind—so blind!”

For a time he lay exhausted, his face still turned toward the picture, but with eyes closed as though he dreamed. Then suddenly, he started up again, raising himself on his elbows, his eyes opened wide, and on his face a look of wondering gladness. They drew near.

“Do—do—you—hear? She is calling—she is calling again. Yes—sweetheart—yes, dear. I—I am—com—”

Then, Old Matt and Aunt Mollie led the shepherd from the room.

And this way runs the trail that follows the lower level, where those who travel, as they go, look always over their shoulders with eyes of dread, and the gloomy shadows gather long before the day is done.

CHAPTER XLIII.

POOR PETE.

THEY buried the artist in the cave as he had directed, close under the wall on the ledge above the cañon, with no stone or mark of any sort to fix the place. The old mine which he had discovered was reached by one of the side passages far below in the depth of the mountain. The grave would never be disturbed.

For two weeks longer, Dr. Coughlan staid with his friend; out on the hills with him all day, helping to cook their meals at the ranch, or sitting on the porch at the Matthews place when the day was gone. When the time finally came that he must go, the little physician said, as he grasped the shepherd's hand, “You're doing just right, Daniel; just right. Always did; always did. Blast it all! I would stay, too, but what would Sarah and the girls do? I'll come again next spring, Daniel, sure, sure, if I'm alive. Don't worry, no one will ever know. Blast it all! I don't like to leave you, Daniel. Don't like it at all. But you are right, right, Daniel.”

The old scholar stood in the doorway of his cabin to watch the wagon as it disappeared in the forest. He heard it rattle across the creek bottom below the ruined cabin under the bluff. He waited until from away up on Compton Ridge the sound of wheels came to him on the breeze that slipped down the mountain side. Still he waited, listening, listening, until there were only the voices of the forest and the bleating of the sheep in the corral. Slipping a book in his pocket, and taking a luncheon for himself and Pete he opened the corral gate and followed his flock to the hills.

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All that summer Pete was the shepherd's constant companion. At first he seemed not to understand. Frequently he would start off suddenly for the cave, only to return after a time, with that look of trouble upon his delicate face. Mr. Howitt tried to help the boy, and he appeared gradually to realize in part. Once he startled his old friend by saying quietly, "When are you goin', Dad?"

"Going where? Where does Pete think Dad is going?"

The boy was lying on his back on the grassy hillside watching the clouds. He pointed upward, "There, where *he* went; up there in the white hills. Pete knows."

The other looked long at the lad before answering quietly, "Dad does not know when he will go. But he is ready any time, now."

"Pete says better not wait long, Dad; 'cause Pete he's a goin' an' course when he goes I've got to go 'long. Do you reckon Dad can see Pete when he is up there in them white hills? Some folks used to laugh at Pete when he told about the white hills, the flower things, the sky things, an' the moonlight things that play in the mists. An' once a fellow called Pete a fool, an' Young Matt he whipped him awful. But folks wasn't really to blame, 'cause they couldn't see 'em. That's what *he* said. An' *he* knew, 'cause he could see 'em too. But Aunt Mollie, an' Uncle Matt, an' you all, they don't never laugh. They just say, 'Pete knows.' But they couldn't see the flower things, or the tree things neither. Only *he* could see."

The summer passed, and, when the blue gray haze took on the purple touch and all the woods and hills were dressed with cloth of gold, Pete went from the world in which he had never really belonged, nor had been at home. Mr. Howitt, writing to Dr. Coughlan of the boy's death, said:

"Here and there among men, there are those who pause in the hurried rush to listen to the call of a life that is more real. How often have we seen them, David, jostled and ridiculed by their fellows, pushed aside and forgotten, as incompetent or unworthy. He who sees and hears too much is cursed for a dreamer, a fanatic, or a fool, by the mad mob, who, having eyes, see not, ears and hear not, and refuse to understand.

"We build temples and churches, but will not worship in them; we hire spiritual advisers, but refuse to heed them; we buy bibles, but will not read them; believing in God, we do not fear Him; acknowledging Christ, we neither follow nor obey Him. Only when we can no longer strive in the battle for earthly honors or material wealth, do we turn to the unseen but more enduring things of life; and, with ears deafened by the din of selfish war and cruel violence, and eyes blinded by the glare of passing pomp and folly, we strive to hear and see the things we have so long refused to consider.

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The next summer the painter went again to the Ozarks. Even as he was greeted by the strong master of the hills and his charming wife, there fell upon his ears a dull report as of distant cannon; then another, and another. They led him across the yard, and there to the north on the other side of Roark, men were tearing up the mountain to make way for the railroad. As they looked, another blast sent the rocks flying, while the sound rolled and echoed through the peaceful hills.

The artist turned to his friends with questioning eyes; "Mr. Howitt said it would come. Is he—is he well?"

Mrs. Matthews answered softly, "Dad left us while the surveyors were at work. He sleeps yonder." She pointed to Dewey Bald.

Then they went into the library, where the large picture was unveiled. When the artist saw it, he exclaimed, "Mad Howard's lost masterpiece! How—where did you find it?"

"It was Father Howitt's request that I tell you the story," Sammy replied.

And then she told the artist a part of that which I have set down here.

THE END.