

with gals' hearts and then runs off ten miles, maybe a'n't no better'n he had orter be. That's what I says, says I."

To this general remark Dr. Small assented in his invisible—shall I say *intangible*?—way.

"I allers think, maybe, that some folks has found it best to leave home and go away. You can't never tell. But when people is a-bein' robbed it's well to lookout. Hey?"

"I think so," said Small quietly, and, having taken his hat and bowed a solemn and respectful adieu, he departed.

He had not spoken twenty words, but he had satisfied the news-monger of Flat Creek that Ralph was a bad character at home and worthy of suspicion of burglary.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS MARTHA HAWKINS.

"It's very good for the health to dig in the elements. I was quite emaciated last year at the East, and the doctor told me to dig in the elements. I got me a florial hoe and dug, and it's been most excellent for me."* Time, the Saturday following the Friday on which Ralph kept Shocky company as far as the "forks" near Granny Sanders's house. Scene, the Squire's garden. Ralph helping that worthy magistrate perform sundry little jobs such as a warm winter day suggests to the farmer. Miss Martha Hawkins, the Squire's niece, and his house-keeper in his present bereaved condition, leaning over the palings—pickets she called them—of the garden fence, talking to the master. Miss Hawkins was recently from Massachusetts. How many people there are in the most cultivated communities whose education is partial!

"It's very common for school-master to dig in

* Absurd as this speech seems, it is a literal transcript of words spoken in the author's presence by a woman who, like Miss Hawkins, was born in Massachusetts.

the elements at the East," proceeded Miss Martha. Like many other people born in the celestial empires (of which there are three—China, Virginia, Massachusetts), Miss Martha was not averse to reminding outside barbarians of her good fortune in this regard. It did her good to speak of the East.

Now Ralph was amused with Miss Martha. She really had a good deal of intelligence despite her affectation, and conversation with her was both interesting and diverting. It helped him to forget Hannah, and Bud, and the robbery, and all the rest, and she was so delighted to find somebody to make an impression on that she had come out to talk while Ralph was at work. But just at this moment the school-master was not so much interested in her interesting remarks, nor so much amused by her amusing remarks, as he should have been. He saw a man coming down the road riding one horse and leading another, and he recognized the horses at a distance. It must be Bud who was riding Means's bay mare and leading Bud's roan colt. Bud had been to mill, and as the man who owned the horse-mill kept but one old blind horse himself, it was necessary that Bud should take two. It required three horses to run the mill; the old blind one could have ground the grist, but the two others had to overcome the friction of the clumsy machine.

But it was not about the horse-mill that Ralph was thinking nor about the two horses. Since that Wednesday evening on which he escorted Hannah home from the spelling-school he had not seen Bud Means. If he had any lingering doubts of the truth of what Mirandy had said, they had been dissipated by the absence of Bud from school.

"When I was to Bosting——" Miss Martha was to Boston only once in her life, but as her visit to that sacred city was the most important occurrence of her life, she did not hesitate to air her reminiscences of it frequently. "When I was to Bosting," she was just saying, when, following the indication of Ralph's eyes, she saw Bud coming up the hill near Squire Hawkins's house. Bud looked red and sulky, and to Ralph's and Miss Martha Hawkins's polite recognitions he returned only a surly nod. They both saw that he was angry. Ralph was able to guess the meaning of his wrath.

Toward evening Ralph strolled through the Squire's cornfield toward the woods. The memory of the walk with Hannah was heavy upon the heart of the young master, and there was comfort in the very miserableness of the cornstalks with their disheveled blades hanging like tattered banners and rattling discordantly in the rising wind. Wandering without purpose, Ralph followed the rows of

stalks first one way and then the other in a zigzag line, turning a right angle every minute or two. At last he came out in a woods mostly of beech, and he pleased his melancholy fancy by kicking the dry and silky leaves before him in billows, while the soughing of the wind through the long, vibrant boughs and slender twigs of the beech forest seemed to put the world into the wailing minor key of his own despair.

What a fascination there is in a path come upon suddenly without a knowledge of its termination! Here was one running in easy, irregular curves through the wood, now turning gently to the right in order to avoid a stump, now swaying suddenly to the left to gain an easier descent at a steep place, and now turning wantonly to the one side or the other, as if from very caprice in the man who by idle steps unconsciously marked the line of the foot-path at first. Ralph could not resist the impulse—who could?—to follow the path and find out its destination, and following it he came presently into a lonesome hollow, where a brook gurgled among the heaps of bare limestone rocks that filled its bed. Following the path still, he came upon a queer little cabin built of round logs, in the midst of a small garden-patch inclosed by a brush fence. The stick chimney, daubed with clay and

topped with a barrel open at both ends, made this a typical cabin.

It flashed upon Ralph that this place must be Rocky Hollow, and that this was the house of old John Pearson, the one-legged basket-maker, and his rheumatic wife—the house that hospitably sheltered Shocky. Following his impulse, he knocked and was admitted, and was not a little surprised to find Miss Martha Hawkins there before him.

“You here, Miss Hawkins?” he said when he had returned Shocky’s greeting and shaken hands with the old couple.

“Bless you, yes,” said the old lady. “That blessed gyrl”—the old lady called her a girl by a sort of figure of speech perhaps—“that blessed gyrl’s the kindest creetur you ever saw—comes here every day, most, to cheer a body up with somethin’ or nuther.”

Miss Martha blushed, and said “she came because Rocky Hollow looked so much like a place she used to know at the East. Mr. and Mrs. Pearson were the kindest people. They reminded her of people she knew at the East. When she was to Bosting—”

Here the old basket-maker lifted his head from his work, and said: “Pshaw! that talk about kyindness” (he was a Kentuckian and said *kyindness*) “is

all humbug. I wonder so smart a woman as you don't know better. You come nearder to bein' kyind than anybody I know; but, laws a me! we're all selfish akordin' to my tell."

"You wasn't selfish when you set up with my father most every night for two weeks," said Shocky, as he handed the old man a splint.

"Yes, I was, too!" This in a tone that made Ralph tremble. "Your father was a miserable Britisher. I'd fit red-coats, in the war of eighteen-twelve, and lost my leg by one of 'em stickin' his dog-on'd bagonet right through it, that night at Lundy's Lane; but my messmate killed him though, which is a satisfaction to think on. And I didn't like your father 'cause he was a Britisher. But ef he'd a died right here in this free country, 'thout nobody to give him a drink of water, blamed ef I wouldn't a been ashamed to set on the platform at a Fourth of July barbecue, and to hold up my wooden leg fer to make the boys cheer! That was the selfishest thing I ever done. We're all selfish akordin' to my tell."

"You wasn't selfish when you took me that night, you know," and Shocky's face beamed with gratitude.

"Yes, I war, too, you little sass-box! What did I take you fer? Hey? Bekase I didn't like Pete



Jones nor Bill Jones. They're thieves, dog-on 'em!"

Ralph shivered a little. The horse with the white forefoot and white nose galloped before his eyes again.

"They're a set of thieves. That's what they air."

"Please, Mr. Pearson, be careful. You'll get into trouble, you know, by talking that way," said Miss Hawkins. "You're just like a man that I knew at the East."

"Why, do you think an old soldier like me, hobbling on a wooden leg, is afraid of them thieves? Didn't I face the Britishers? Didn't I come home late last Wednesday night? I rather guess I must a took a little too much at Welch's grocery, and laid down in the middle of the street to rest. The boys thought 'twas funny to crate² me. I woke up kind o' cold, 'bout one in the mornin.' 'Bout

² When the first edition of this book appeared, the critic who analyzed the dialect in *The Nation* confessed that he did not know what to "crate" meant. It was a custom in the days of early Indiana barbarism for the youngsters of a village, on spying a sleeping drunkard, to hunt up a "queensware crate"—one of the cages of round withes in which crockery was shipped. This was turned upside down over the inebriate, and loaded with logs or any other heavy articles that would make escape difficult when the poor wretch should come to himself. It was a sort of rude punishment for inebriety, and it afforded a frog-killing delight to those who executed justice.

two o'clock I come up Means's hill, and didn't I see Pete Jones, and them others that robbed the Dutchman, and somebody, I dunno who, a-crossin' the blue-grass paster *towards* Jones's?" (Ralph shivered.) "Don't shake your finger at me, old woman. Tongue is all I've got to fight with now; but I'll fight them thieves till the sea goes dry, I will. Shocky, gim me a splint."

"But you wasn't selfish when you tuck me." Shocky stuck to his point most positively.

"Yes, I was, you little tow-headed fool! I didn't take you kase I was good, not a bit of it. I hated Bill Jones what keeps the poor-house, and I knowed him and Pete would get you bound to some of their click, and I didn't want no more thieves raised; so when your mother hobbled, with you a-leadin' her, poor blind thing! all the way over here on that winter night, and said, 'Mr. Pearson, you're all the friend I've got, and I want you to save my boy,' why, you see I was selfish as ever I could be in takin' of you. Your mother's cryin' sot me a-cryin' too. We're all selfish in everything, akordin' to my tell. Blamed ef we ha'n't, Miss Hawkins, only sometimes I'd think you was real benev'lent ef I didn't know we war all selfish."

CHAPTER XII.

THE HARDSHELL PREACHER.

"THEY'S preachin' down to Bethel Meetin'-house to-day," said the Squire at breakfast. Twenty years in the West could not cure Squire Hawkins of saying "to" for "at." "I rather guess as how the old man Bosaw will give pertickeler fits to our folks to-day." For Squire Hawkins, having been expelled from the "Hardshell" church of which Mr. Bosaw was pastor, for the grave offense of joining a temperance society, had become a member of the "Reformers," the very respectable people who now call themselves "Disciples," but whom the profane will persist in calling "Campbellites." They had a church in the village of Clifty, three miles away.

I know that explanations are always abominable to story readers, as they are to story writers, but as so many of my readers have never had the inestimable privilege of sitting under the gospel as it is ministered in enlightened neighborhoods like Flat Creek, I find myself under the necessity—need-cesity the Rev. Mr. Bosaw would call it—of rising to