

for God and endure for God, surely has yet the best of life left. And, like the knights who could find the Holy Grail only in losing themselves, Hartsook, in throwing his happiness out of the count, found the purest happiness, a sense of the victory of the soul over the tribulations of life. The man who knows this victory scarcely needs the encouragement of the hope of future happiness. There is a real heaven in bravely lifting the load of one's own sorrow and work.

And it was a good thing for Ralph that the danger hanging over Shocky made immediate action necessary.

CHAPTER XX.

GOD REMEMBERS SHOCKY.

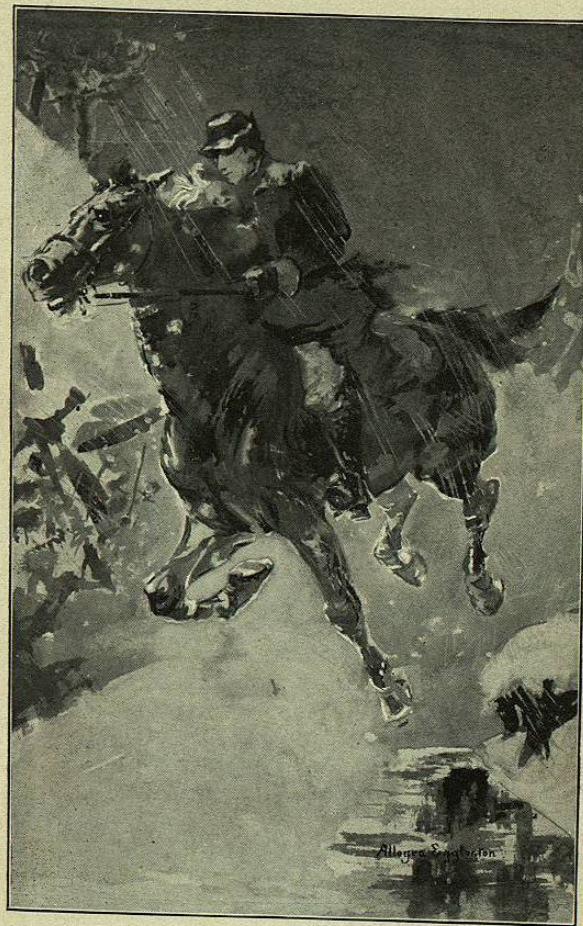
AT four o'clock the next morning, in the midst of a driving snow, Ralph went timidly up the lane toward the homely castle of the Meanses. He went timidly, for he was afraid of Bull. But he found Bud waiting for him, with the roan colt bridled and saddled. The roan colt was really a large three-year-old, full of the finest sort of animal life, and having, as Bud declared, "a mighty sight of hoss sense fer his age." He seemed to understand at once that there was something extraordinary on hand when he was brought out of his comfortable quarters at four in the morning in the midst of a snow-storm. Bud was sure that the roan colt felt his responsibility.

In the days that followed, Ralph often had occasion to remember this interview with Bud, who had risked much in bringing his fractured arm out into the cold, damp air. Jonathan never clave to David more earnestly than did Bud this December morning to Ralph.

"You see, Mr. Hartsook," said Bud, "I wish I was well myself. It's hard to set still. But it's a-doing me a heap of good. I'm like a boy at school. And I'm a-findin' out that doing one's best licks fer others ain't all they is of it, though it's a good part. I feel like as if I must git Him, you know, to do lots for me. They's always some sums too hard fer a feller, and he has to ax the master to do 'em, you know. But see, the roan's a-stomping round. He wants to be off. Do you know I think that hoss knows something's up? I think he puts in his best licks fer me a good deal better than I do fer Him."

Ralph pressed Bud's right hand. Bud rubbed his face against the colt's nose and said: "Put in your best licks, old fellow." And the colt whinnied. How a horse must want to speak! For Bud was right. Men are gods to horses, and they serve their deities with a faithfulness that shames us.

Then Ralph sprang into the saddle, and the roan, as if wishing to show Bud his willingness, broke into a swinging gallop, and was soon lost to the sight of his master in the darkness and the snow. When Bud could no more hear the sound of the roan's footsteps he returned to the house, to lie awake picturing to himself the journey of Ralph with Shocky and the roan colt. It was a great comfort to Bud that the roan, which was almost a part of



THE ROAN COLT'S BEST LICKS *See page 186*

himself, represented him in this ride. And he knew the roan well enough to feel sure that he would do credit to his master. "He'll put in his best licks," Bud whispered to himself many a time before day-break.

The ground was but little frozen, and the snow made the roads more slippery than ever. But the rough-shod roan handled his feet dexterously and with a playful and somewhat self-righteous air, as though he said: "Didn't I do it handsomely that time?" Down slippery hills, through deep mud-holes covered with a slender film of ice he trod with perfect assurance. And then up over the rough stones of Rocky Hollow, where there was no road at all, he picked his way through the darkness and snow. Ralph could not tell where he was at last, but gave the reins to the roan, who did his duty bravely, and not without a little flourish, to show that he had yet plenty of spare power.

A feeble candle-ray, making the dense snow-fall visible, marked for Ralph the site of the basket-maker's cabin. Miss Martha had been admitted to the secret, and had joined in the conspiracy heartily, without being able to recall anything of the kind having occurred at the East, and not remembering having seen or heard of anything of the sort the time she was to Bosting. She had Shocky

all ready, having used some of her own capes and shawls to make him warm.

Miss Martha came out to meet Ralph when she heard the feet of the roan before the door.

"O Mr. Hartsook! is that you? What a storm! This is jest the way it snows at the East. Shocky's all ready. He didn't know a thing about it till I waked him this morning. Ever since that he's been saying that God hasn't forgot, after all. It's made me cry more'n once." And Shocky kissed Mrs. Pearson, and told her that when he got away from Flat Creek he'd tell God all about it, and God would bring Mr. Pearson back again. And then Martha Hawkins lifted the frail little form, bundled in shawls, in her arms, and brought him out into the storm; and before she handed him up he embraced her, and said: "O Miss Hawkins! God ha'n't forgot me, after all. Tell Hanner that He ha'n't forgot. I'm going to ask him to git her away from Means's and mother out of the poor-house. I'll ask him just as soon as I get to Lewisburg."

Ralph lifted the trembling form into his arms, and the little fellow only looked up in the face of the master and said: "You see, Mr. Hartsook, I thought God had forgot. But he ha'n't."

And the words of the little boy comforted the master also. God had not forgotten him, either!

From the moment that Ralph took Shocky into his arms, the conduct of the roan colt underwent an entire revolution. Before that he had gone over a bad place with a rush, as though he were ambitious of distinguishing himself by his brilliant execution. Now he trod none the less surely, but he trod tenderly. The neck was no longer arched. He set himself to his work as steadily as though he were twenty years old. For miles he traveled on in a long, swinging walk, putting his feet down carefully and firmly. And Ralph found the spirit of the colt entering into himself. He cut the snow-storm with his face, and felt a sense of triumph over all his difficulties. The bulldog's jaws had been his teacher, and now the steady, strong, and conscientious legs of the roan inspired him.

Shocky had not spoken. He lay listening to the pattering music of the horse's feet, doubtless framing the footsteps of the roan colt into an anthem of praise to the God who had not forgot. But as the dawn came on, making the snow whiter, he raised himself and said half-aloud, as he watched the flakes chasing one another in whirling eddies, that the snow seemed to be having a good time of it. Then he leaned down again on the master's bosom, full of a still joy, and only roused himself from his happy reverie to ask what that big, ugly-looking house was.

"See, Mr. Hartsook, how big it is, and how little and ugly the windows is! And the boards is peeling off all over it, and the hogs is right in the front yard. It don't look just like a house. It looks dreadful. What is it?"

Ralph had dreaded this question. He did not answer it, but asked Shocky to change his position a little, and then he quickened the pace of the horse. But Shocky was a poet, and a poet understands silence more quickly than he does speech. The little fellow shivered as the truth came to him.

"Is that the poor-house?" he said, catching his breath. "Is my mother in that place? *Won't* you take me in there, so as I can just kiss her once? 'Cause she can't see much, you know. And one kiss from me will make her feel so good. And I'll tell her that God ha'n't forgot." He had raised up and caught hold of Ralph's coat.

Ralph had great difficulty in quieting him. He told him that if he went in there Bill Jones might claim that he was a runaway and belonged there. And poor Shocky only shivered and said he was cold. A minute later, Ralph found that he was shaking with a chill, and a horrible dread came over him. What if Shocky should die? It was only a minute's work to get down, take the warm horse-blanket from under the saddle, and wrap it

about the boy, then to strip off his own overcoat and add that to it. It was now daylight, and finding, after he had mounted, that Shocky continued to shiver, he put the roan to his best speed for the rest of the way, trotting up and down the slippery hills, and galloping away on the level ground. How bravely the roan laid himself to his work, making the fence-corners fly past in a long procession! But poor little Shocky was too cold to notice them, and Ralph shuddered lest Shocky should never be warm again, and spoke to the roan, and the roan stretched out his head, and dropped one ear back to hear the first word of command, and stretched the other forward to listen for danger, and then flew with a splendid speed down the road, past the patches of blackberry briars, past the elderberry bushes, past the familiar red-haw tree in the fence-corner, over the bridge without regard to the threat of a five-dollar fine, and at last up the long lane into the village, where the smoke from the chimneys was caught and whirled round with the snow.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS NANCY SAWYER.

IN a little old cottage in Lewisburg, on one of the streets which was never traveled except by a solitary cow seeking pasture or a countryman bringing wood to some one of the half-dozen families living in it, and which in summer was decked with a profusion of the yellow and white blossoms of the dog-fennel—in this unfrequented street, so generously and unnecessarily broad, lived Miss Nancy Sawyer and her younger sister Semantha. Miss Nancy was a providence, one of those old maids that are benedictions to the whole town; one of those in whom the mother-love, wanting the natural objects on which to spend itself, overflows all bounds and lavishes itself on every needy thing, and grows richer and more abundant with the spending, a fountain of inexhaustible blessing. There is no nobler life possible to any one than to an unmarried woman. The more shame that some choose a selfish one, and thus turn to gall all the affection with which they are endowed. Miss

Nancy Sawyer had been Ralph's Sunday-school teacher, and it was precious little, so far as information went, that he learned from her; for she never could conceive of Jerusalem as a place in any essential regard very different from Lewisburg, where she had spent her life. But Ralph learned from her what most Sunday-school teachers fail to teach, the great lesson of Christianity, by the side of which all antiquities and geographies and chronologies and exegetics and other niceties are as nothing.

And now he turned the head of the roan toward the cottage of Miss Nancy Sawyer as naturally as the roan would have gone to his own stall in the stable at home. The snow had gradually ceased to fall, and was eddying round the house, when Ralph dismounted from his foaming horse, and, carrying the still form of Shocky as reverently as though it had been something heavenly, knocked at Miss Nancy Sawyer's door.

With natural feminine instinct that lady started back when she saw Hartsook, for she had just built a fire in the stove, and she now stood at the door with unwashed face and uncombed hair.

"Why, Ralph Hartsook, where did you drop down from—and what have you got?"

"I came from Flat Creek this morning, and I

brought you a little angel who has got out of heaven, and needs some of your motherly care."

Shocky was brought in. The chill shook him now by fits only, for a fever had spotted his cheeks already.

"Who are you?" said Miss Nancy, as she unwrapped him.

"I'm Shocky, a little boy as God forgot, and then thought of again."

CHAPTER XXII.

PANCAKES.

HALF an hour later, Ralph, having seen Miss Nancy Sawyer's machinery of warm baths and simple remedies safely in operation, and having seen the roan colt comfortably stabled, and rewarded for his faithfulness by a bountiful supply of the best hay and the promise of oats when he was cool—half an hour later Ralph was doing the most ample, satisfactory, and amazing justice to his Aunt Matilda's hot buckwheat-cakes and warm coffee. And after his life in Flat Creek, Aunt Matilda's house did look like paradise. How white the table-cloth, how bright the coffee-pot, how clean the wood-work, how glistening the brass door-knobs, how spotless everything that came under the sovereign sway of Mrs. Matilda White! For in every Indiana village as large as Lewisburg, there are generally a half-dozen women who are admitted to be the best housekeepers. All others are only imitators. And the strife is between these for the pre-eminence. It is at least safe to say that no other in Lewisburg stood so high as an enemy to

dirt, and as a "rat, roach, and mouse exterminator," as did Mrs. Matilda White, the wife of Ralph's maternal uncle, Robert White, Esq., a lawyer in successful practice. Of course no member of Mrs. White's family ever stayed at home longer than was necessary. Her husband found his office—which he kept in as bad a state as possible in order to maintain an equilibrium in his life—much more comfortable than the stiffly clean house at home. From the time that Ralph had come to live as a chore-boy at his uncle's, he had ever crossed the threshold of Aunt Matilda's temple of cleanliness with a horrible sense of awe. And Walter Johnson, her son by a former marriage, had—poor, weak-willed fellow!—been driven into bad company and bad habits by the wretchedness of extreme civilization. And yet he showed the hereditary trait, for all the genius which Mrs. White consecrated to the glorious work of making her house too neat to be habitable, her son Walter gave to tying exquisite knots in his colored cravats and combing his oiled locks so as to look like a dandy barber. And she had no other children. The kind Providence that watches over the destiny of children takes care that very few of them are lodged in these terribly clean houses.

But Walter was not at the table, and Ralph had

so much anxiety lest his absence should be significant of evil, that he did not venture to inquire after him as he sat there between Mr. and Mrs. White disposing of Aunt Matilda's cakes with an appetite only justified by his long morning's ride and the excellence of the brown cakes, the golden honey, and the coffee, enriched, as Aunt Matilda's always was, with the most generous cream. Aunt Matilda was so absorbed in telling of the doings of the Dorcas Society that she entirely forgot to be surprised at the early hour of Ralph's arrival. When she had described the number of the garments finished to be sent to the Five Points Mission, or the Home for the Friendless, or the South Sea Islands, I forget which, Ralph thought he saw his chance, while Aunt Matilda was in a benevolent mood, to broach a plan he had been revolving for some time. But when he looked at Aunt Matilda's immaculate—horribly immaculate—house-keeping, his heart failed him, and he would have said nothing had she not inadvertently opened the door herself.

"How did you get here so early, Ralph?" and Aunt Matilda's face was shadowed with a coming rebuke.

"By early rising," said Ralph. But, seeing the gathering frown on his aunt's brow, he hastened to

tell the story of Shocky as well as he could. Mrs. White did not give way to any impulse toward sympathy until she learned that Shocky was safely housed with Miss Nancy Sawyer.

"Yes, Sister Sawyer has no family cares," she said by way of smoothing her slightly ruffled complacency, "she has no family cares, and she can do those things. Sometimes I think she lets people impose on her and keep her away from the means of grace, and I spoke to our new preacher about it the last time he was here, and asked him to speak to Sister Sawyer about staying away from the ordinances to wait on everybody, but he is a queer man, and he only said that he supposed Sister Sawyer neglected the inferior ordinances that she might attend to higher ones. But I don't see any sense in a minister of the gospel calling prayer-meeting a lower ordinance than feeding catnip-tea to Mrs. Brown's last baby. But hasn't this little boy—Shocking, or what do you call him?—got any mother?"

"Yes," said Ralph, "and that was just what I was going to say." And he proceeded to tell how anxious Shocky was to see his half-blind mother, and actually ventured to wind up his remarks by suggesting that Shocky's mother be invited to stay over Sunday in Aunt Matilda's house.

"Bless my stars!" said that astounded saint, "fetch a pauper here? What crazy notions you have got! Fetch her here out of the poor-house? Why, she wouldn't be fit to sleep in my——" here Aunt Matilda choked. The bare thought of having a pauper in her billowy beds, whose snowy whiteness was frightful to any ordinary mortal, the bare thought of the contagion of the poor-house taking possession of one of her beds, smothered her. "And then you know sore eyes are very catching."

Ralph boiled a little. "Aunt Matilda, do you think Dorcas was afraid of sore eyes?"

It was a center shot, and the lawyer-uncle, lawyerlike, enjoyed a good hit. And he enjoyed a good hit at his wife best of all, for he never ventured on one himself. But Aunt Matilda felt that a direct reply was impossible. She was not a lawyer but a woman, and so dodged the question by making a counter-charge.

"It seems to me, Ralph, that you have picked up some very low associates. And you go around at night, I am told. You get over here by daylight, and I hear that you have made common cause with a lame soldier who acts as a spy for thieves, and that your running about of night is likely to get you into trouble."

Ralph was hit this time. "I suppose," he said, "that you've been listening to some of Henry Small's lies."

"Why, Ralph, how you talk! The worst sign of all is that you abuse such a young man as Dr. Small, the most exemplary Christian young man in the county. And he is a great friend of yours, for when he was here last week he did not say a word against you, but looked so sorry when your being in trouble was mentioned. Didn't he, Mr. White?"

Mr. White, as in duty bound, said yes, but he said yes in a cool, lawyerlike way, which showed that he did not take quite so much stock in Dr. Small as his wife did. This was a comfort to Ralph, who sat picturing to himself the silent flattery which Dr. Small's eyes paid to his Aunt Matilda, and the quiet expression of pain that would flit across his face when Ralph's name was mentioned. And never until that moment had Hartsook understood how masterful Small's artifices were. He had managed to elevate himself in Mrs. White's estimation and to destroy Ralph at the same time, and had managed to do both by a contraction of the eyebrows!

But the silence was growing painful and Ralph thought to break it and turn the current of talk from himself by asking after Mrs. White's son.

"Where is Walter?"

"Oh! Walter's doing well. He went down to Clifty three weeks ago to study medicine with Henry Small. He seems so fond of the doctor, and the doctor is such an excellent man, you know, and I have strong hopes that Wallie will be led to see the error of his ways by his association with Henry. I suppose he would have gone to see you but for the unfavorable reports that he heard. I hope, Ralph, you too will make the friendship of Dr. Small. And for the sake of your poor, dead mother"—here Aunt Matilda endeavored to show some emotion—"for the sake of your poor, dead mother——"

But Ralph heard no more. The buckwheat-cakes had lost their flavor. He remembered that the colt had not yet had his oats, and so, in the very midst of Aunt Matilda's affecting allusion to his mother, like a stiff-necked reprobate that he was, Ralph Hartsook rose abruptly from the table, put on his hat, and went out toward the stable.

"I declare," said Mrs. White, descending suddenly from her high moral stand-point, "I declare that boy has stepped right on the threshold of the back-door," and she stuffed her white handkerchief into her pocket, and took down the floor-cloth to wipe off the imperceptible blemish left by Ralph's boot-