

CHAPTER XXXIII.

INTO THE LIGHT.

FOR two weeks longer Ralph taught at the Flat Creek school-house. He was everybody's hero. And he was Bud's idol. He did what he could to get Bud and Martha together, and though Bud always "saw her safe home" after this, and called on her every Sunday evening, yet, to save his life, he could not forget his big fists and his big feet long enough to say what he most wanted to say, and what Martha most wanted him to say.

At the end of two weeks Ralph found himself exceedingly weary of Flat Creek, and exceedingly glad to hear from Mr. Means that the school-money had "gin out." It gave him a good excuse to return to Lewisburg, where his heart and his treasure were. A certain sense of delicacy had kept him from writing to Hannah just yet.

When he got to Lewisburg he had good news. His uncle, ashamed of his previous neglect, and perhaps with an eye to his nephew's growing popularity, had got him the charge of the grammar de-

partment in the new graded school in the village. So he quietly arranged to board at a boarding-house. His aunt could not have him about, of which fact he was very glad. She could not but feel, she said, that he might have taken better care of Walter than he did, when they were only four miles apart.

He did not hasten to call on Hannah. Why should he? He sent her a message, of no consequence in itself, by Nancy Sawyer. Then he took possession of his school; and then, on the evening of the first day of school, he went, as he had appointed to himself, to see Hannah Thomson.

And she, with some sweet presentiment, had got things ready by fixing up the scantily-furnished room as well as she could. And Miss Nancy Sawyer, who had seen Ralph that afternoon, had guessed that he was going to see Hannah. It's wonderful how much enjoyment a generous heart can get out of the happiness of others. Is not that what He meant when he said of such as Miss Sawyer that they should have a hundred-fold in this life for all their sacrifices? Did not Miss Nancy enjoy a hundred weddings and have the love of five hundred children? And so Miss Nancy just happened over at Mrs. Thomson's humble home, and, just in the most matter-of-course way, asked that lady

and Shocky to come over to her house. Shocky wanted Hannah to come too. But Hannah blushed a little, and said that she would rather not.

And when she was left alone, Hannah fixed her hair two or three times, and swept the hearth, and moved the chairs first one way and then another, and did a good many other needless things. Needless: for a lover, if he be a lover, does not see furniture or dress.

And then she sat down by the fire, and tried to sew, and tried to look unconcerned, and tried to feel unconcerned, and tried not to expect anybody, and tried to make her heart keep still. And tried in vain. For a gentle rap at the door sent her pulse up twenty beats a minute and made her face burn. And Hartsook was, for the first time, abashed in the presence of Hannah. For the oppressed girl had, in two weeks, blossomed out into the full-blown woman.

And Ralph sat down by the fire, and talked of his school and her school, and everything else but what he wanted to talk about. And then the conversation drifted back to Flat Creek, and to the walk through the pasture, and to the box-elder tree, and to the painful talk in the lane. And Hannah begged to be forgiven, and Ralph laughed at the idea that she had done anything wrong. And she

praised his goodness to Shocky, and he drew her little note out of— But I agreed not tell you where he kept it. And then she blushed, and he told how the note had sustained him, and how her white face kept up his courage in his flight down the bed of Clifty Creek. And he sat a little nearer, to show her the note that he had carried in his bosom—I have told it! And—but I must not proceed. A love-scene, ever so beautiful in itself, will not bear telling. And so I shall leave a little gap just here, which you may fill up as you please. . . . Somehow, they never knew how, they got to talking about the future instead of the past, after that, and to planning their two lives as one life. And . . . And when Miss Nancy and Mrs. Thomson returned later in the evening, Ralph was standing by the mantel-piece, but Shocky noticed that his chair was close to Hannah's. And good Miss Nancy Sawyer looked in Hannah's face and was happy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"HOW IT CAME OUT."

WE are all children in reading stories. We want more than all else to know how it all came out at the end, and, if our taste is not perverted, we like it to come out well. For my part, ever since I began to write this story, I have been anxious to know how it was going to come out.

Well, there were very few invited. It took place at ten in the morning. The "preacher-in-charge" came, of course. Miss Nancy Sawyer was there. But Ralph's uncle was away, and Aunt Matilda had a sore throat and couldn't come. Perhaps the memory of the fact that she had refused Mrs. Thomson, the pauper, a bed for two nights, affected her throat. But Miss Nancy and her sister were there, and the preacher. And that was all, besides the family, and Bud and Martha. Of course Bud and Martha came. And driving Martha to a wedding in a "jumper" was the one opportunity Bud needed. His hands were busy, his big boots were out of sight, and it was so easy to slip from Ralph's

love affair to his own, that Bud somehow, in pulling Martha Hawkins's shawl about her, stammered out half a proposal, which Martha, generous soul, took for the whole ceremony, and accepted. And Bud was so happy that Ralph guessed from his face and voice that the agony was over, and Bud was betrothed at last to the "gal as was a gal."

And after Ralph and Hannah were married—there was no trip, Ralph only changed his boarding-place and became head of the house at Mrs. Thomson's thereafter—after it was all over, Bud came to Mr. Hartsook, and, snickering just a little, said as how as him and Martha had fixed it all up, and now they wanted to ax his advice; and Martha, proud but blushing, came up and nodded assent. Bud said as how as he hadn't got no book-larnin' nor nothin', and as how as he wanted to be some-thin', and put in his best licks fer Him, you know. And that Marthy, she was of the same way of thinkin', and that was a blessin'. And the Squire was a-goin' to marry agin', and Marthy would ruther vacate. And his mother and Mirandy was sech as he wouldn't take no wife to. And he thought as how Mr. Hartsook might think of some way or some place where he and Marthy mout make a livin' fer the present, and put in their best licks fer Him, you know.

Ralph thought a moment. He was about to make an allusion to Hercules and the Augean stables, but he remembered that Bud would not understand it, though it might remind Martha of something she had seen at the East, the time she was to Bosting.

"Bud, my dear friend," said Ralph, "it looks a little hard to ask you to take a new wife"—here Bud looked admiringly at Martha—"to the poor-house. But I don't know anywhere where you can do so much good for Christ as by taking charge of that place, and I can get the appointment for you. The new commissioners want just such a man."

"What d'ye say, Marthy?" said Bud.

"Why, somebody ought to do for the poor, and I should like to do it."

And so Hercules cleaned the Augean stables.

And so my humble, homely Hoosier story of twenty years ago¹ draws to a close, and not without regret I take leave of Ralph and Hannah; and Shocky, and Bud, and Martha, and Miss Nancy, and of my readers.

P. S.—A copy of the Lewisburg *Jeffersonian* came into my hands to-day, and I see by its columns that Ralph Hartsook is principal of the Lew-

¹ Written in 1871.

isburg Academy. It took me some time, however, to make out that the sheriff of the county, Mr. Israel W. Means, was none other than my old friend Bud, of the Church of the Best Licks. I was almost as much puzzled over his name as I was when I saw an article in a city paper, by Prof. W. J. Thomson, on Poor-Houses. I should not have recognized the writer as Shocky, had I not known that Shocky has given his spare time to making outcasts feel that God has not forgot.

THE END.

