

IV

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

WHILE the corn grew, school went on and, like the corn, Chad's schooling put forth leaves and bore fruit rapidly. The boy's mind was as clear as his eye and, like a mountain-pool, gave back every image that passed before it. Not a word dropped from the master's lips that he failed to hear and couldn't repeat, and, in a month, he had put Dolph and Rube, who, big as they were, had little more than learned the alphabet, to open shame: and he won immunity with his fists from gibe and insult from every boy within his inches in school—including Tad Dillon, who came in time to know that it was good to let the boy alone. He worked like a little slave about the house, and, like Jack, won his way into the hearts of old Joel and his wife, and even of Dolph and Rube, in spite of their soreness over Chad's having spelled them both down before the whole school. As for Tall Tom, he took as much pride as the school-master in the boy, and in town, at the grist-mill, the cross-roads, or blacksmith shop, never failed to tell the story of the dog and the boy, whenever

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

there was a soul to listen. And as for Melissa, while she ruled him like a queen and Chad paid sturdy and uncomplaining homage, she would have scratched out the eyes of one of her own brothers had he dared to lay a finger on the boy. For Chad had God's own gift—to win love from all but enemies and nothing but respect and fear from them. Every morning, soon after daybreak, he stalked ahead of the little girl to school, with Dolph and Rube lounging along behind, and, an hour before sunset, stalked back in the same way home again. When not at school, the two fished and played together—inseparable.

Corn was ripe now, and school closed and Chad went with the men into the fields and did his part, stripping the gray blades from the yellow stalks, binding them into sheaves, stowing them away under the low roof of the big barn, or stacking them tent-like in the fields—leaving each ear perched like a big roosting bird on each lone stalk. And when the autumn came, there were husking parties and dances and much merriment; and, night after night, Chad saw Sintha and the school-master in front of the fire—"settin' up"—close together with their arms about each other's necks and whispering. And there were quilting parties and house-warmings and house-raisings—one that was of great importance to Caleb Hazel and to Chad. For, one morning, Sintha disappeared and came

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

back with the tall young hunter in the deerskin leggings—blushing furiously—a bride. At once old Joel gave them some cleared land at the head of a creek; the neighbors came in to build them a cabin, and among them all, none worked harder than the school-master: and no one but Chad guessed how sorely hit he was.

Meanwhile, the woods high and low were ringing with the mellow echoes of axes, and the thundering crash of big trees along the mountain-side; for already the hillsmen were felling trees while the sap was in the roots, so that they could lie all winter, dry better and float better in the spring, when the rafts were taken down the river to the little capital in the Bluegrass. And Caleb Hazel said that he would go down on a raft in the spring and perhaps Chad could go with him—who knew? For the school-master had now made up his mind finally—he would go out into the world and make his way out there; and nobody but Chad noticed that his decision came only after, and only a little while after, the house-raising at the head of the creek.

When winter came, school opened again, and on Saturdays and Sundays and cold snowy nights, Chad and the school-master—for he too lived at the Turners' now—sat before the fire in the kitchen, and the school-master read to him from "Ivanhoe" and "The Talisman," which he had

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

brought from the Bluegrass, and from the Bible which had been his own since he was a child. And the boy drank in the tales until he was drunk with them and learned the conscious scorn of a lie, the conscious love of truth and pride in courage, and the conscious reverence for women that make the essence of chivalry as distinguished from the unthinking code of brave, simple people. He adopted the master's dignified phraseology as best he could; he watched him, as the master stood before the fire with his hands under his coat-tails, his chin raised, and his eyes dreamily upward, and Tall Tom caught the boy in just this attitude one day and made fun of him before all the others. He tried some high-sounding phrases on Melissa, and Melissa told him he must be crazy. Once, even, he tried to kiss her hand gallantly and she slapped his face. Undaunted, he made a lance of white ash, threaded some loose yarn into Melissa's colors, as he told himself, sneaked into the barn, where Beelzebub was tied, got on the sheep's back and, as the old ram sprang forward, couched his lance at the trough and shattered it with a thrill that left him trembling for half an hour. It was too good to give up that secret joust and he made another lance and essayed another tournament, but this time Beelzebub butted the door open and sprang with a loud ba-a-a into the yard and charged for the gate—in full view

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

of old Joel, the three brothers, and the school-master, who were standing in the road. Instinctively, Chad swung on in spite of the roar of laughter and astonishment that greeted him and, as Tom banged the gate, the ram swerved and Chad shot off sidewise as from a catapult and dropped, a most unheroic little knight, in the mire. That ended Chad's chivalry in the hills, for in the roars of laughter that greeted him, Chad recognized Caleb Hazel's as the loudest. If *he* laughed, chivalry could never thrive there, and Chad gave it up; but the seeds were sown.

The winter passed, and what a time Chad and Jack had, snaking logs out of the mountains with two, four, six—yes, even eight yoke of oxen, when the log was the heart of a monarch oak or poplar—snaking them to the chute; watching them roll and whirl and leap like jack-straws from end to end down the steep incline and, with one last shoot in the air, roll, shaking, quivering, into a mighty heap on the bank of Kingdom Come. And then the "rafting" of those logs—dragging them into the pool of the creek, lashing them together with saplings driven to the logs with wooden pins in auger-holes—wading about, meanwhile, waist deep in the cold water: and the final lashing of the raft to a near-by tree with a grape-vine cable—to await the coming of a "tide."

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

Would that tide never come? It seemed not. The spring ploughing was over, the corn planted; there had been rain after rain, but gentle rains only. There had been prayers for rain:

"O Lord," said the circuit-rider, "we do not presume to dictate to Thee, but we need rain, an' need it mighty bad. We do not presume to dictate, but, if it pleases Thee, send us, not a gentle sizzle-sozzle, but a sod-soaker, O Lord, a gully-washer. Give us a tide, O Lord!" Sunrise and sunset, old Joel turned his eye to the east and the west and shook his head. Tall Tom did the same, and Dolph and Rube studied the heavens for a sign. The school-master grew visibly impatient and Chad was in a fever of restless expectancy. The old mother had made him a suit of clothes—mountain-clothes—for the trip. Old Joel gave him a five-dollar bill for his winter's work. Even Jack seemed to know that something unusual was on hand and hung closer about the house, for fear he might be left behind.

Softly at last, one night, came the patter of little feet on the roof and passed—came again and paused; and then there was a rush and a steady roar that wakened Chad and thrilled him as he lay listening. It did not last long, but the river was muddy enough and high enough for the Turner brothers to float the raft slowly out from the mouth of Kingdom Come and down in front of the

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

house, where it was anchored to a huge sycamore in plain sight. At noon the clouds gathered and old Joel gave up his trip to town.

"Hit'll begin in about an hour, boys," he said, and in an hour it did begin. There was to be no doubt about this flood. At dusk, the river had risen two feet and the raft was pulling at its cable like an awakening sea-monster. Meanwhile, the mother had cooked a great pone of corn-bread, three feet in diameter, and had ground coffee and got sides of bacon ready. All night it poured and the dawn came clear, only to darken into gray again. But the river—the river! The roar of it filled the woods. The frothing hem of it swished through the tops of the trees and through the underbrush, high on the mountain-side. Arched slightly in the middle, for the river was still rising, it leaped and surged, tossing tawny mane and fleck and foam as it thundered along—a mad, molten mass of yellow struck into gold by the light of the sun. And there the raft, no longer the awkward monster it was the day before, floated like a lily-pad, straining at the cable as lightly as a greyhound leaping against its leash.

The neighbors were gathered to watch the departure—old Jerry Budd, blacksmith and "yarb doctor," and his folks; the Cultons and Middletons, and even the Dillons—little Tad and Whizzer—and all. And a bright picture of Arcadia

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

the simple folk made, the men in homespun and the women with their brilliant shawls, as they stood on the bank laughing, calling to one another, and jesting like children. All were aboard now and there was no kissing nor shaking hands in the farewell. The good old mother stood on the bank, with Melissa holding to her apron and looking at Chad gravely.

"Take good keer o' yo'self, Chad," she said kindly, and then she looked down at the little girl. "He's a-comin' back, honey — Chad's a-comin' back." And Chad nodded brightly, but Melissa drew her apron across her mouth, dropped her eyes to the old rifle in the boy's lap, and did not smile.

All were aboard now—Dolph and Rube, old Squire Middleton, and the school-master, all except Tall Tom, who stood by the tree to unwind the cable.

"Hold on!" shouted the squire.

A raft shot suddenly around the bend above them and swept past with the Dillon brothers, Jake and Jerry, nephews of old Tad Dillon, at bow and stern—passed with a sullen wave from Jerry and a good-natured smile from stupid Jake.

"All right," Tom shouted, and he unwound the great brown pliant vine from the sycamore and leaped aboard. Just then there was a mad howl behind the house and a gray streak of light

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

flashed over the bank and Jack, with a wisp of rope around his neck, sprang through the air from a rock ten feet high and landed lightly on the last log as the raft shot forward. Chad gulped once and his heart leaped with joy, for he had agreed to leave Jack with old Joel, and old Joel had tied the dog in the barn.

"Hi there!" shouted the old hunter. "Throw that dawg off, Chad—throw him off."

But Chad shook his head and smiled.

"He won't go back," he shouted, and, indeed, there was Jack squatted on his haunches close by his little master and looking gravely back as though he were looking a last good-by.

"Hi!" shouted old Joel again. "How am I goin' to git along without that dawg? Throw him off, boy—throw him off, I tell ye!" Chad seized the dog by the shoulders, but Jack braced himself and, like a child, looked up in his master's face. Chad let go and shook his head.

A frantic yell from Tall Tom at the bow oar drew every eye to him. The current was stronger than anyone guessed and the raft was being swept by an eddy straight for the point of the opposite shore where there was a sharp turn in the river.

"Watch out thar," shouted old Joel, "you're goin' to 'bow'!" Dolph and Rube were slashing the stern oar forward and back through the swift water, but straight the huge craft made for that

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

deadly point. Every man had hold of an oar and was tussling in silence for life. Every man on shore was yelling directions and warning, while the women shrank back with frightened faces. Chad scarcely knew what the matter was, but he gripped his rifle and squeezed Jack closer to him. He heard Tom roar a last warning as the craft struck, quivered a moment, and the stern swept around. The craft had "bowed."

"Watch out—jump, boys, jump! Watch when she humps! Watch yo' legs!" These were the cries from the shore, and still Chad did not understand. He saw Tom leap from the bow, and, as the stern swung to the other shore, Dolph, too, leaped. Then the stern struck. The raft humped in the middle like a bucking horse—the logs ground savagely together. Chad heard a cry of pain from Jack and saw the dog fly up in the air and drop in the water. He and his gun had gone up, too, but he came back on the raft with one leg in between two logs and he drew it up in time to keep the limb from being smashed to a pulp as the logs crashed together again, but not quickly enough to save the foot from a painful squeeze. Then he saw Tom and Dolph leap back again, the raft whirled on and steadied in its course, and behind him he saw Jack swimming feebly for the shore—fighting the waves for his life, for the dog was hurt. Twice he turned his eyes despairingly

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

toward Chad, and the boy would have leaped in the water to save him if Tom had not caught him by the arm.

"Tell him to git to shore," he said quickly, and Chad motioned, when Jack looked again, and the dog obediently made for land. Old Joel was calling tenderly:

"Come on, Jack; come on, ole feller!"

Chad watched with a thumping heart. Once Jack went under, but gave no sound. Again he disappeared, and when he came up he gave a cry for help, but when he heard Chad's answering cry he fought on stroke by stroke until Chad saw old Joel reach out from the bushes and pull him in. And Chad could see that one of his hind legs hung limp. Then the raft swung around the curve out of sight.

Behind, the whole crowd rushed down to the water's edge. Jack tried to get away from old Joel and scramble after Chad on his broken leg, but old Joel held him, soothing him, and carried him back to the house, where the old "yarb doctor" put splints on the leg and bound it up tightly, just as though it had been the leg of a child. Melissa was crying and the old man put his hand on her head.

"He'll be all right, honey. That leg'll be as good as the other one in two or three weeks. It's all right, little gal."

THE COMING OF THE TIDE

Melissa stopped weeping with a sudden gulp. But when Jack was lying in the kitchen by the fire alone, she slipped in and put her arm around the dog's head, and, when Jack began to lick her face, she bent her own head down and sobbed.