

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

and Jack looked wondering and dazed, but his eyes never wavered or blinked. Chad could not long stand those honest eyes.

"No," he said, fiercely—"no, little doggie, no—no!" And Chad dropped on his knees and took Jack in his arms and hugged him to his breast.

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BY degrees the whole story was told Chad that night. Now and then the Turners would ask him about his stay in the Bluegrass, but the boy would answer as briefly as possible and come back to Jack. Before going to bed, Chad said he would bring Jack into the house:

"Somebody might pizen him," he explained, and when he came back, he startled the circle about the fire:

"Whar's Whizzer?" he asked, sharply. "Who's seen Whizzer?"

Then it developed that no one had seen the Dillon dog—since the day before the sheep was found dead near a ravine at the foot of the mountain in a back pasture. Late that afternoon Melissa had found Whizzer in that very pasture when she was driving old Betsy, the brindle, home at milking-time. Since then, no one of the Turners had seen the Dillon dog. That, however, did not prove that Whizzer was not at home. And yet,

"I'd like to know whar Whizzer is now!" said Chad, and, after, at old Joel's command, he had

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tied Jack to a bedpost—an outrage that puzzled the dog sorely—the boy threshed his bed for an hour—trying to think out a defence for Jack and wondering if Whizzer might not have been concerned in the death of the sheep.

It is hardly possible that what happened, next day, could happen anywhere except among simple people of the hills. Briefly, the old Squire and the circuit-rider had brought old Joel to the point of saying, the night before, that he would give Jack up to be killed, if he could be proven guilty. But the old hunter cried with an oath:

"You've got to prove him guilty." And thereupon the Squire said he would give Jack every chance that he would give a man—*he would try him*; each side could bring in witnesses; old Joel could have a lawyer if he wished, and Jack's case would go before a jury. If pronounced innocent, Jack should go free: if guilty—then the dog should be handed over to the sheriff, to be shot at sundown. Joel agreed.

It was a strange procession that left the gate of the Turner cabin next morning. Old Joel led the way, mounted, with "ole Sal," his rifle, across his saddle-bow. Behind him came Mother Turner and Melissa on foot and Chad with his rifle over his left shoulder, and leading Jack by a string with his right hand. Behind them slouched Tall Tom with his rifle and Dolph and Rube, each with a

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huge old-fashioned horse-pistol swinging from his right hip. Last strode the school-master. The cabin was left deserted—the hospitable door held closed by a deer-skin latch caught to a wooden pin outside.

It was a strange humiliation to Jack thus to be led along the highway, like a criminal going to the gallows. There was no power on earth that could have moved him from Chad's side, other than the boy's own command—but old Joel had sworn that he would keep the dog tied and the old hunter always kept his word. He had sworn, too, that Jack should have a fair trial. Therefore, the guns—and the school-master walked with his hands behind him and his eyes on the ground: he feared trouble.

Half a mile up the river and to one side of the road, a space of some thirty feet square had been cut into a patch of rhododendron and filled with rude benches of slabs—in front of which was a rough platform on which sat a home-made, cane-bottomed chair. Except for the opening from the road, the space was walled with a circle of living green through which the sun dappled the benches with quivering disks of yellow light—and, high above, great poplars and oaks arched their mighty heads. It was an open-air "meeting-house" where the circuit-rider preached during his summer circuit and there the trial was to take place.

Already a crowd was idling, whittling, gossiping

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in the road, when the Turner cavalcade came in sight—and for ten miles up and down the river people were coming in for the trial.

“Mornin’, gentlemen,” said old Joel, gravely.

“Mornin’,” answered several, among whom was the Squire, who eyed Joel’s gun and the guns coming up the road.

“Squirrel-huntin’?” he asked and, as the old hunter did not answer, he added, sharply:

“Air you afeerd, Joel Turner, that you ain’t a-goin’ to git justice from *me*?”

“I don’t keer whar it comes from,” said Joel, grimly—“but I’m a-goin’ to *have* it.”

It was plain that the old man not only was making no plea for sympathy, but was alienating the little he had: and what he had was very little—for who but a lover of dogs can give full sympathy to his kind? And, then, Jack was believed to be guilty. It was curious to see how each Dillon shrank unconsciously as the Turners gathered—all but Jerry, one of the giant twins. He always stood his ground—fearing not man, nor dog—nor devil.

Ten minutes later, the Squire took his seat on the platform, while the circuit-rider squatted down beside him. The crowd, men and women and children, took the rough benches. To one side sat and stood the Dillons, old Tad and little Tad, Daws,

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Nance, and others of the tribe. Straight in front of the Squire gathered the Turners about Melissa and Chad and Jack as a centre—with Jack squatted on his haunches foremost of all, facing the Squire with grave dignity and looking at none else save, occasionally, the old hunter or his little master.

To the right stood the sheriff with his rifle, and on the outskirts hung the school-master. Quickly the old Squire chose a jury—giving old Joel the opportunity to object as he called each man’s name. Old Joel objected to none, for every man called, he knew, was more friendly to him than to the Dillons: and old Tad Dillon raised no word of protest, for he knew his case was clear. Then began the trial, and any soul that was there would have shuddered could he have known how that trial was to divide neighbor against neighbor, and mean death and bloodshed for half a century after the trial itself was long forgotten.

The first witness, old Tad—long, lean, stooping, crafty—had seen the sheep rushing wildly up the hill-side “‘bout crack o’ day,” he said, and had sent Daws up to see what the matter was. Daws had shouted back:

“That damned Turner dog has killed one o’ our sheep. Thar he comes now. Kill him!” And old Tad had rushed in-doors for his rifle and had taken a shot at Jack as he leaped into the road and loped

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for home. Just then a stern, thick little voice rose from behind Jack:

"Hit was a God's blessin' fer you that you didn't hit him."

The Squire glared down at the boy and old Joel said, kindly:

"Hush, Chad."

Old Dillon had then gone down to the Turners and asked them to kill the dog, but old Joel had refused.

"Whar was Whizzer?" Chad asked, sharply.

"You can't axe that question," said the Squire.

"Hit's er-er-irrelevant."

Daws came next. When he reached the fence upon the hill-side he could see the sheep lying still on the ground. As he was climbing over, the Turner dog jumped the fence and Daws saw blood on his muzzle.

"How close was you to him?" asked the Squire.

"Bout twenty feet," said Daws.

"Humph!" said old Joel.

"Whar was Whizzer?" Again the old Squire glared down at Chad.

"Don't you axe that question again, boy. Didn't I tell you hit was irrelevant?"

"What's irrelevant?" the boy asked, bluntly.

The Squire hesitated. "Why—why, hit ain't got nothin' to do with the case."

"Hit ain't?" shouted Chad.

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"Joel," said the Squire, testily, "ef you don't keep that boy still, I'll fine him fer contempt o' court."

Joel laughed, but he put his heavy hand on the boy's shoulder. Little Tad Dillon and Nance and the Dillon mother had all seen Jack running down the road. There was no doubt but that it was the Turner dog. And with this clear case against poor Jack, the Dillons rested. And what else could the Turners do but establish Jack's character and put in a plea of mercy—a useless plea, old Joel knew—for a first offence? Jack was the best dog old Joel had ever known, and the old man told wonderful tales of the dog's intelligence and kindness and how one night Jack had guarded a stray lamb that had broken its leg—until daybreak—and he had been led to the dog and the sheep by Jack's barking for help. The Turner boys confirmed this story, though it was received with incredulity.

How could a dog that would guard one lone helpless lamb all night long take the life of another?

There was no witness that had aught but kind words to say of the dog or aught but wonder that he should have done this thing—even back to the cattle-dealer who had given him to Chad. For at that time the dealer said—so testified Chad, no objection being raised to hearsay evidence—that Jack was the best dog he ever knew. That was all the

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Turners or anybody could do or say, and the old Squire was about to turn the case over to the jury when Chad rose:

"Squire," he said, and his voice trembled, "Jack's my dog. I lived with him night an' day for 'bout three years an' I want to axe some questions."

He turned to Daws:

"I want to axe you ef thar was any blood around that sheep."

"Thar was a great big pool o' blood," said Daws, indignantly. Chad looked at the Squire.

"Well, a sheep-killin' dog don't leave no great big pool o' blood, Squire, with the *fust* one he kills! *He sucks it!*" Several men nodded their heads.

"Squire! The fust time I come over these mountains, the fust people I seed was these Dillons—an' Whizzer. They sicked Whizzer on Jack hyeh and Jack whooped him. Then Tad thar jumped me and I whooped him." (The Turner boys were nodding confirmation.) "Sence that time they've hated Jack an' they've hated me and they hate the Turners partly fer takin' keer o' me. Now you said somethin' I axed just now was irrelevant, but I tell you, Squire, I know a sheep-killin' dawg, and jes' as I know Jack *ain't*, I know the Dillon dawg naturely *is*, and I tell you, if the Dillons' dawg killed that sheep and they could put it on Jack—they'd do it. They'd do it—Squire,

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an' I tell you, you—ortern't—to let—that—sheriff—thar—shoot my—dog—until the Dillons answers what I axed—" the boy's passionate cry rang against the green walls and out the opening and across the river—

"*Whar's Whizzer?*"

The boy startled the crowd and the old Squire himself, who turned quickly to the Dillons.

"Well, whar is Whizzer?"

Nobody answered.

"He ain't been seen, Squire, sence the evenin' afore the night o' the killin'!" Chad's statement seemed to be true. Not a voice contradicted.

"An' I want to know if Daws seed signs o' killin' on Jack's head when he jumped the fence, why them same signs didn't show when he got home."

Poor Chad! Here old Tad Dillon raised his hand.

"Axe the Turners, Squire," he said, and as the school-master on the outskirts shrank, as though he meant to leave the crowd, the old man's quick eye caught the movement and he added:

"Axe the school-teacher!"

Every eye turned with the Squire's to the master, whose face was strangely serious straightway.

"Did you see any signs on the dawg when he got home?" The gaunt man hesitated with one swift glance at the boy, who almost paled in answer.

"Why," said the school-master, and again he

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hesitated, but old Joel, in a voice that was without hope, encouraged him:

"Go on!"

"What wus they?"

"Jack had blood on his muzzle, and a little strand o' wool behind one ear."

There was no hope against that testimony. Melissa broke away from her mother and ran out to the road—weeping. Chad dropped with a sob to his bench and put his arms around the dog: then he rose up and walked out the opening while Jack leaped against his leash to follow. The school-master put out his hand to stop him, but the boy struck it aside without looking up and went on: he could not stay to see Jack condemned. He knew what the verdict would be, and in twenty minutes the jury gave it, without leaving their seats.

"Guilty!"

The Sheriff came forward. He knew Jack and Jack knew him, and wagged his tail and whimpered up at him when he took the leash.

"Well, by —, this is a job I don't like, an' I'm damned ef I'm agoin' to shoot this dawg afore he knows what I'm shootin' him fer. I'm goin' to show him that sheep fust. Whar's that sheep, Daws?"

Daws led the way down the road, over the fence, across the meadow, and up the hill-side where lay the slain sheep. Chad and Melissa saw them com-

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ing—the whole crowd—before they themselves were seen. For a minute the boy watched them. They were going to kill Jack where the Dillons said he had killed the sheep, and the boy jumped to his feet and ran up the hill a little way and disappeared in the bushes, that he might not hear Jack's death-shot, while Melissa sat where she was, watching the crowd come on. Daws was at the foot of the hill, and she saw him make a gesture toward her, and then the Sheriff came on with Jack—over the fence, past her, the Sheriff saying, kindly, "Howdy, Melissa. I shorely am sorry to have to kill Jack," and on to the dead sheep, which lay fifty yards beyond. If the Sheriff expected Jack to drop head and tail and look mean he was greatly mistaken. Jack neither hung back nor sniffed at the carcass. Instead he put one fore foot on it and with the other bent in the air, looked without shame into the Sheriff's eyes—as much as to say:

"Yes, this is a wicked and shameful thing, but what have I got to do with it? Why are you bringing *me* here?"

The Sheriff came back greatly puzzled and shaking his head. Passing Melissa, he stopped to let the unhappy little girl give Jack a last pat, and it was there that Jack suddenly caught scent of Chad's tracks. With one mighty bound the dog snatched the rawhide string from the careless

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Sheriff's hand, and in a moment, with his nose to the ground, was speeding up toward the woods. With a startled yell and a frightful oath the Sheriff threw his rifle to his shoulder, but the little girl sprang up and caught the barrel with both hands, shaking it fiercely up and down and hieing Jack on with shriek after shriek. A minute later Jack had disappeared in the bushes, Melissa was running like the wind down the hill toward home, while the whole crowd in the meadow was rushing up toward the Sheriff, led by the Dillons, who were yelling and swearing like madmen. Above them, the crestfallen Sheriff waited. The Dillons crowded angrily about him, gesticulating and threatening, while he told his story. But nothing could be done—nothing. They did not know that Chad was up in the woods or they would have gone in search of him—knowing that when they found him they would find Jack—but to look for Jack now would be like searching for a needle in a hay-stack. There was nothing to do, then, but to wait for Jack to come home, which he would surely do—to get to Chad—and it was while old Joel was promising that the dog should be surrendered to the Sheriff that little Tad Dillon gave an excited shriek.

"Look up thar!"

And up there at the edge of the wood was Chad standing and, at his feet, Jack sitting on his

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haunches, with his tongue out and looking as though nothing had happened or could ever happen to Chad or to him.

"Come up hyeh," shouted Chad.

"You come down hyeh," shouted the Sheriff, angrily. So Chad came down, with Jack trotting after him. Chad had cut off the rawhide string, but the Sheriff caught Jack by the nape of the neck.

"You won't git away from me agin, I reckon."

"Well, I reckon you ain't goin' to shoot him," said Chad. "Leggo that dawg."

"Don't be a fool, Jim," said old Joel. "The dawg ain't goin' to leave the boy." The Sheriff let go.

"Come on up hyeh," said Chad. "I got some-
thin' to show ye."

The boy turned with such certainty that without a word Squire, Sheriff, Turners, Dillons, and spectators followed. As they approached a deep ravine the boy pointed to the ground where were evidences of some fierce struggle—the dirt thrown up, and several small stones scattered about with faded stains of blood on them.

"Wait hyeh!" said the boy, and he slid down the ravine and appeared again dragging something after him. Tall Tom ran down to help him and the two threw before the astonished crowd the body of a black and white dog.

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"Now I reckon you know whar Whizzer is," panted Chad vindictively to the Dillons.

"Well, what of it?" snapped Daws.

"Oh, nothin'," said the boy with fine sarcasm. "Only *Whizzer* killed that sheep and Jack killed Whizzer." From every Dillon throat came a scornful grunt.

"Oh, I reckon so," said Chad, easily. "Look thar!" He lifted the dead dog's head, and pointed at the strands of wool between his teeth. He turned it over, showing the deadly grip in the throat and close to the jaws, that had choked the life from Whizzer—Jack's own grip.

"Ef you will jus' rickollect, Jack had that same grip the time afore—when I pulled him off o' Whizzer."

"By —, that's so," said Tall Tom, and Dolph and Rube echoed him amid a dozen voices, for not only old Joel, but many of his neighbors knew Jack's method of fighting, which had made him a victor up and down the length of Kingdom Come.

There was little doubt that the boy was right—that Jack had come on Whizzer killing the sheep, and had caught him at the edge of the ravine, where the two had fought, rolling down and settling the old feud between them in the darkness at the bottom. And up there on the hill-side, the jury that pronounced Jack guilty pronounced him innocent, and, as the Turners started joyfully

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down the hill, the sun that was to have sunk on Jack stiff in death sank on Jack frisking before them—home.

And yet another wonder was in store for Chad. A strange horse with a strange saddle was hitched to the Turner fence; beside it was an old mare with a boy's saddle, and as Chad came through the gate a familiar voice called him cheerily by name. On the porch sat Major Buford.