I

THE century just past had not begun the race of its many-footed years when a neighborhood of Kentucky pioneers, settled throughout the green valleys of the silvery Elkhorn, built a church in the wilderness, and constituted themselves a worshipping association. For some time peace of one sort prevailed among them, if no peace of any other sort was procurable around. But by and by there arose sectarian quarrels with other backwoods folk who also wished to worship God in Kentucky, and hot personal disputes among the members — as is the eternal law. So that the church grew as grow infusorians and certain worms, — by fissure, by periodical splittings and breakings to pieces, each spontaneous division becoming a new or-

ganism. The first church, however, for all that it split off and cast off, seemed to lose nothing of its vitality or fighting qualities spiritual and physical (the strenuous life in those days!); and there came a time when it took offence at one particular man in its membership on account of the liberality of his religious opinions. This settler, an old Indian fighter whose vast estate lay about halfway between the church and the nearest village, had built himself a good brick house in the Virginian style; and it was his pleasure and his custom to ask travelling preachers to rest under his roof as they rode hither and thither throughout the wilderness—Zion's weather-beaten, solitary scouts.

While giving entertainment to man and beast, if a Sunday came round, he would further invite his guest, no matter what kind of faith the vessel held, if it only held any faith, to ride with him through the woods and preach to his brethren. This was the front of his offending. For since he seemed brother to men of every creed,

they charged that he was no longer of *their* faith (the only true one). They considered his case, and notified him that it was their duty under God to expel him.

After the sermon one Sunday morning of summer the scene took place. They had asked what he had to say, and silence had followed. Not far from the church doors the bright Elkhorn (now nearly dry) swept past in its stately shimmering flood. The rush of the water over the stopped mill-wheel, that earliest woodland music of civilization, sounded loud amid the suspense and the stillness.

He rose slowly from his seat on the bench in front of the pulpit — for he was a deacon — and turned squarely at them; speechless just then, for he was choking with rage.

"My brethren," he said at length slowly, for he would not speak until he had himself under control, "I think we all remember what it is to be persecuted for religion's sake. Long before we came together in Spottsylvania County, Virginia,

and organized ourselves into a church and travelled as a church over the mountains into this wilderness, worshipping by the way, we knew what it was to be persecuted. Some of us were sent to jail for preaching the Gospel and kept there; we preached to the people through the bars of our dungeons. Mobs were collected outside to drown our voices; we preached the louder and some jeered, but some felt sorry and began to serve God. They burned matches and pods of red pepper to choke us; they hired strolls to beat drums that we might not be heard for the din. Some of us knew what it was to have live snakes thrown into our assemblages while at worship; or nests of live hornets. Or to have a crowd rush into the church with farming tools and whips and clubs. Or to see a gun levelled at one of us in the pulpit, and to be dispersed with firearms. Harder than any of these things to stand, we have known what it is to be slandered. But no single man of us, thank God, ever stopped for these things or for anything.

Thirty years and more this lasted, until we and all such as we found a friend in Patrick Henry. Now, we hear that by statute all religious believers in Virginia have been made equal as respects the rights and favors of the law.

"But you know it was partly to escape intolerable tyranny that we left our mother country and travelled a path paved with suffering and lined with death into this wilderness. For in this virgin land we thought we should be free to worship God according to our consciences.

"Since we arrived you know what our life has been, — how we have fought and toiled and suffered all things together. You recall how lately it was that when we met in the woods for worship, — having no church and no seats, — we men listened and sang and prayed with our rifles on our shoulders."

He paused, for the memories hurt him cruelly.

"And now you notify me that you intend to expel me from this church as a

man no longer fit to worship my Maker in your company. Do you bring any charge against my life, my conduct? None. Nothing but that, as a believer in the living God — whom honestly I try to serve according to my erring light — I can no longer have a seat among you — not believing as you believe. But this is the same tyranny that you found unendurable in Spottsylvania. You have begun it in Kentucky. You have been at it already how long? Well, my brethren, I'll soon end your tyranny over me. You need not *turn* me out. And I need not change my religious opinions. I will *go* out. But ——"

He wheeled round to the rough pulpit on which lay the copy of the Bible that they had brought with them from Virginia, their Ark of the Covenant on the way, seized it, and faced them again. He strode toward the congregation as far as the benches would allow — not seeing clearly, for he was sightless with his tears.

"But," he roared, and as he spoke he struck the Bible repeatedly with his clenched fist, "by the Almighty, I will build a church of my own to Him! To Him! do you hear? not to your opinions of Him nor mine nor any man's! I will cut off a parcel of my farm and make a perpetual deed of it in the courts, to be held in trust forever. And while the earth stands, it shall stand, free to all Christian believers. I will build a school-house and a meeting-house, where any child may be free to learn and any man or woman free to worship."

He put the Bible back with shaking arms and turned on them again.

"As for you, my brethren," he said, his face purple and distorted with passion, "you may be saved in your crooked, narrow way, if the mercy of God is able to do it. But you are close to the jaws of Hell this day!"

He went over into a corner for his hat, took his wife by the hand and held it tightly, gathered the flock of his children

before him, and drove them out of the church. He mounted his horse, lifted his wife to her seat behind him, saw his children loaded on two other horses, and, leading the way across the creek, disappeared in the wilderness.

II

Some sixty-five years later, one hot day of midsummer in 1865 — one Saturday afternoon — a lad was cutting weeds in a woodland pasture; a big, raw-boned, demure boy of near eighteen.

He had on heavy shoes, the toes green with grass stain; the leather so seasoned by morning dews as to be like wood for hardness. These were to keep his feet protected from briers or from the bees scattered upon the wild white clover or from the terrible hidden thorns of the honey-locust. No socks. A pair of scant homespun trousers, long outgrown. A coarse clean shirt. His big shock-head thatched with yellow straw, a dilapidated sun-and-rain shed.