

VIII

THE session reached its close. The students were scattered far among the villages, farms, cities of many states. Some never to return, having passed from the life of a school into the school of life; some, before vacation ended, gone with their laughter and vigor into the silence of the better Teacher.

Over at the dormitory the annual breaking-up of the little band of Bible students had, as always, been affecting. Calm, cool, bright day of June! when the entire poor tenement house was fragrant with flowers brought from commencement; when a south wind sent ripples over the campus grass; and outside the campus, across the street, the yards were glowing with roses. Oh, the roses of those young days, how sweet, how sweet they were! How much sweeter now after the long, cruel, evil suffering years which have passed and gone since they faded!

The students were dispersed, and David sat at his table by his open window, writing to his father and mother.

After telling them he had stood well in his classes, and giving some descriptions of the closing days and ceremonies of the college, for he knew how interested they would be in reading about these things, he announced that he was not coming home. He enclosed a part of the funds still on hand, and requested his father to hire a man in his place to work on the farm during the summer. He said nothing of his doubts and troubles, but gave as the reason of his remaining away what indeed the reason was: that he wished to study during the vacation; it was the best chance he had ever had, perhaps would ever have; and it was of the utmost importance to him to settle a great many questions before the next session of the Bible College opened. His expenses would be small. He had made arrangements with the wife of the janitor to take charge of his room and his washing and to give him his meals: his

room itself would not cost him anything, and he did not need any more clothes.

It was hard to stay away from them. Not until separated, had he realized how dear they were to him. He could not bear even to write about all that. And he was homesick for the sight of the farm, — the horses and cows and sheep, — for the sight of Captain. But he must remain where he was; what he had to do must be done quickly — a great duty was involved. And they must write to him oftener because he would need their letters, their love, more than ever now. And so God keep them in health and bless them. And he was their grateful son, who too often had been a care to them, who could never forget the sacrifices they had made to send him to college, and whose only wish was that he might not cause them any disappointment in the future.

This letter drew a quick reply from his father. He returned the money, saying that he had done better on the farm than he had expected and did not need it, and

that he had a man employed, his former slave. Sorry as they were not to see him that summer, still they were glad of his desire to study through vacation. His own life had not been very successful; he had tried hard, but had failed. For a long time now he had been accepting the failure as best he could. But compensation for all this were the new interests, hopes, ambitions, which centred in the life of his son. To see him a minister, a religious leader among men — that would be happiness enough for him. His family had always been a religious people. One thing he was already looking forward to: he wanted his son to preach his first sermon in the neighborhood church founded by the lad's great-grandfather — that would be the proudest hour of his life and in the lad's mother's. There were times in the past when perhaps he had been hard on him, not understanding him; this only made his wish the greater to aid him now in every way, at any cost. When they were not talking of him at home, they were

thinking of him. And they blessed God that He had given them such a son. Let him not be troubled about the future; they knew that he would never disappoint them.

David sat long immovable before that letter.

One other Bible student remained. On the campus, not far from the dormitory, stood a building of a single story, of several rooms. In one of these rooms there lived, with his family, that tall, gaunt, shaggy, middle-aged man, in his shiny black coat and paper collars, without any cravats, who had been the lad's gentle monitor on the morning of his entering college. He, too, was to spend the summer there, having no means of getting away with his wife and children. Though he sometimes went off himself, to hold meetings where he could and for what might be paid him; now preaching and baptizing in the mountains; now back again, laboring in his shirt-sleeves at the Pentateuch and the elementary structure of the English language. Such

troubles as David's were not for him; nor science nor doubt. His own age contained him as a green field might hold a rock. Not that this kind, faithful, helpful soul was a lifeless stone; but that he was as unresponsive to the movements of his time as a boulder is to the energies of a field. Alive in his own sublime way he was, and inextricably rooted in one ever-living book alone — the Bible.

This middle-aged, childlike man, settled near David as his neighbor, was forever a reminder to him of the faith he once had had — the faith of his earliest youth, the faith of his father and mother. Sometimes when the day's work was done and the sober, still twilights came on, this reverent soul, sitting with his family gathered about him near the threshold of his single homeless room, — his oldest boy standing beside his chair, his wife holding in her lap the sleeping babe she had just nursed, — would begin to sing. The son's voice joined the father's; the wife's followed the son's, in their usual hymn: —

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word."

Up in his room, a few hundred yards away, the lad that moment might be trimming his lamp for a little more reading. More than once he waited, listening in the darkness, to the reliant music of the stalwart, stern old poem. How devotedly he too had been used to sing it!

That summer through, then, he kept on at the work of trying to settle things before college reopened — things which involved a great duty. Where the new thought of the age attacked dogma, Revelation, Christianity most, there most he read. He was not the only reader. He was one of a multitude which no man could know or number; for many read in secret. Ministers of the Gospel read in secret in their libraries, and locked the books away when their church officers called unexpectedly. On Sunday, mounting their pulpits, they preached impassioned sermons concerning faith — addressed to the doubts, ravaging their own convictions and consciences.

Elders and deacons read and kept the matter hid from their pastors. Physicians and lawyers read and spoke not a word to their wives and children. In the church, from highest ecclesiastic and layman, wherever in the professions a religious, scientific, scholarly mind, there was felt the central intellectual commotion of those years — the Battle of the Great Three.

And now summer was gone, the students flocking in, the session beginning. David reëntered his classes. Inwardly he drew back from this step; yet take any other, throw up the whole matter, — that he could not do. With all his lifelong religious sense he held on to the former realities, even while his grasp was loosening.

But this could not endure. University life as a Bible student and candidate for the ministry, every day and many times every day, required of him duties which he could not longer conscientiously discharge; they forced from him expressions regarding his faith which made it