word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.' "

He shut his Testament and put it back into his pocket and looked at his judges.

"I understand this declaration of Christ to mean," he said, "that whether I believe in Him or do not believe in Him, I am not to be judged till God's Day of Judgment."

IX

A FEW days later David was walking across the fields on his way home: it was past the middle of the afternoon.

At early candle-light that morning, the huge red stage-coach, leaving town for his distant part of the country, had rolled, creaking and rattling, to the dormitory entrance, the same stage that had conveyed him thither. Throwing up his window he had looked out at the curling white breath of the horses and at the driver, who, buried in coats and rugs, and holding the lash of his whip in his mittened fist, peered up and called out with no uncertain temper.

The lad was ready. He hastily carried down the family umbrella and the Brussels carpet valise with its copious pink roses, looking strangely out of season amid all that hoar frost. Then he leaped back upstairs for something which had been added to his worldly goods since he entered college — a small, cheap trunk, containing a few garments and the priceless books. These things the driver stored in the boot of the stage, bespattered with mud now frozen. Then, running back once more, the lad seized his coat and hat, cast one troubled glance around the meaningless room which had been the theatre of such a drama in his life, went over to the little table, and blew out his Bible Student's lamp forever; and hurrying down with a cordial "all ready," climbed to the seat beside the driver and was whirled away.

He turned as he passed from the campus to take a last look at Morrison College, standing back there on the hill, venerable, majestical, tight-closed, its fires put out. As he crossed the city (for there were pas-

sengers to be picked up and the mail-bag to be gotten), he took unspoken leave of many other places: of the bookstore where he had bought the masterpieces of his masters; of the little Italian apple-man — who would never again have so simple a customer for his slightly damaged fruit; of several tall, proud, well-frosted church spires now turning rosy in the sunrise; of a big, handsome house standing in a fashionable street, with black coal smoke pouring out of the chimneys. There the friends of his boyhood "boarded"; there they were now, asleep in luxurious beds, or gone away for the holidays, he knew not which: all he did know was that they were gone far away from him along life's other pathways.

Soon the shops on each side were succeeded by homesteads; gradually these stood farther apart as farm-houses set back from the highroad; the street had become a turnpike, they were in open country and the lad was on his way to his father and mother.

In the afternoon, at one of the stops for watering horses, he had his traps and trappings put out. From this place a mud road wound across the country to his neighborhood; and at a point some two miles distant, a pair of bars tapped it as an outlet and inlet for the travel on his father's land.

Leaving his things at the roadside farm-house with the promise that he would return for them, the lad struck out — not by the lane, but straight across country.

It was a mild winter day without wind, without character — one of the days on which Nature seems to take no interest in herself and creates no interest in others. The sky was overcrowded with low, ragged clouds, without discernible order or direction. Nowhere a yellow sunbeam glinting on any object, but vast jets of misty radiance shot downward in far-diverging lines toward the world: as though above the clouds were piled the waters of light and this were scant escaping spray.

He walked on, climbing the fences, com-

ing on the familiar sights of winter woods and fields. Having been away from them for the first time and that during more than a year, with what feelings he now beheld them!

Crows about the corn shocks, flying leisurely to the stake-and-ridered fence: there alighting with their tails pointing toward him and their heads turned sideways over one shoulder; but soon presenting their breasts seeing he did not hunt. The solitary caw of one of them — that thin, indifferent comment of their sentinel, perched on the silver-gray twig of a sycamore. In another field the startled flutter of field larks from pale-yellow bushes of ground-apple. Some boys out rabbit-hunting in the holidays, with red cheeks and gay woollen comforters around their hot necks and jeans jackets full of Spanish needles: one shouldering a gun, one carrying a game-bag, one eating an apple: a pack of dogs and no rabbit. The winter brooks, trickling through banks of frozen grass and broken reeds; their clear brown

water sometimes open, sometimes covered with figured ice.

Red cattle in one distant wood, moving tender-footed around the edge of a pond. The fall of a forest tree sounding distinct amid the reigning stillness — felled for cord wood. And in one field — right there before him! — the chopping sound of busy hemp brakes and the sight of negroes, one singing a hymn. Oh, the memories, the memories!

By and by he reached the edge of his father's land, climbed to the topmost rail of the boundary fence and sat there, his eyes glued to the whole scene. It lay outspread before him, the entirety of that farm. He had never realized before how little there was of it, how little! He could see all around it, except where the woods hid the division fence on one side. And the house, standing in the still air of the winter afternoon, with its rotting roof and low red chimneys partly obscured by scraggy cedars — how small it had become! How poor, how wretched

everything — the woodpile, the cabin, the hen-house, the ice-house, the barn! Was this any part of the great world? It was one picture of desolation, the creeping paralysis of a house and farm. Did anything even move?

Something did move. A column of blue smoke moved straight and thin from the chimney of his father's and mother's room. In a far corner of the stable lot, pawing and nozzling some remnants of fodder, were the old horses. By the hayrick he discovered one of the sheep, the rest being on the farther side. The cows by and by filed slowly around from behind the barn and entered the doorless milking stalls. Suddenly his dog emerged from one of those stalls, trotting cautiously, then with a playful burst of speed went in a streak across the lot toward the kitchen. A negro man issued from the cabin, picked out a log, knocked the ashes out of his pipe in the palm of his hand, and began to cut the firewood for the night.

All this did not occur at once: he had

been sitting there a long time — heart-sick with the thought of the tragedy he was bringing home. How could he ever meet them, ever tell them? How would they ever understand? If he could only say to his father: "I have sinned and I have broken your heart: but forgive me." But he could not say this: he did not believe that he had done wrong. Yet all that he would now have to show in their eyes would be the year of his wasted life, and a trunk full of the books that had ruined him.

Ah, those two years before he had started to college, during which they had lived happily together! Their pride in him! their self-denial, affection — all because he was to be a scholar and a minister!

He fancied he could see them as they sat in the house this moment, not dreaming he was anywhere near. One on each side of the fireplace; his mother wearing her black dress and purple shawl: a ball of yarn and perhaps a tea-cake in her

lap; some knitting on her needles; she knit, she never mended. But his father would be mending — leather perhaps, and sewing, as he liked to sew, with hog bristles — the beeswax and the awls lying in the bottom of a chair drawn to his side. There would be no noises in the room otherwise: he could hear the stewing of the sap in the end of a fagot, the ticking of one clock, the fainter ticking of another in the adjoining room, like a disordered echo. They would not be talking; they would be thinking of him. He shut his eyes, compressed his lips, shook his head resolutely, and leaped down.

He had gone about twenty yards, when he heard a quick, incredulous bark down by the house and his dog appeared in full view, looking up that way, motionless. Then he came on running and barking resentfully, and a short distance off stopped again.

"Captain," he called with a quivering voice.

With ears laid back and one cry of joy

the dog was on him. The lad stooped and drew him close. Neither at that moment had any articulate speech nor needed it. As soon as he was released, the dog, after several leaps toward his face, was off in despair either of expressing or of containing his joy, to tell the news at the house. David laggingly followed.

As he stepped upon the porch, piled against the wall beside the door were fagots as he used to see them. When he reached the door itself, he stopped, gazing foolishly at those fagots, at the little gray lichens on them: he could not knock, he could not turn the knob without knocking. But his step had been heard. His mother opened the door and peered curiously out.

"Why, it's Davy!" she cried. "Davy! Davy!"

She dropped her knitting and threw her arms around him.

"David! David!" exclaimed his father, with a glad proud voice inside. "Why, my son, my son!"

"Ah, he's sick — he's come home sick!" cried the mother, holding him a little way off to look at his face. "Ah! the poor fellow's sick! Come in, come in. And this is why we had no letter! And to think yesterday was Christmas Day! And we had the pies and the turkey!"

"My son, are you unwell — have you been unwell? Sit here, lie here."

The lad's face was overspread with ghastly pallor; he had lost control of himself.

"I have not been sick. I am perfectly well," he said at length, looking from one to the other with forlorn, remorseful affection. They had drawn a chair close, one on each side of him. "How are you, mother? How are you, father?"

The change in *him!* — that was all they saw. As soon as he spoke, they knew he was in good health. Then the trouble was something else, more terrible. The mother took refuge in silence as a woman instinctively does at such times; the father sought relief in speech.

"What is the matter? What happened?"

After a moment of horrible silence, David spoke:—

"Ah, father! How can I ever tell you!"

"How can you ever tell me?"

The rising anger mingled with distrust and fear in those words! How many a father knows!

"Oh, what is it!" cried his mother, wringing her hands, and bursting into tears. She rose and went to her seat under the mantelpiece.

"What have you done?" said his father, also rising and going back to his seat.

There was a new sternness in his voice; but the look which returned suddenly to his eyes was the old life-long look.

The lad sat watching his father, dazed by the tragedy he was facing.

"It is my duty to tell you as soon as possible — I suppose I ought to tell you now."

"Then speak — why do you sit there —"

The words choked him.

"Oh! oh! —"

"Mother, don't! —"

"What is it?"

"Father, I have been put out of college and expelled from the church."

How loud sounded the minute noises of the fire — the clocks — the blows of an axe at the woodpile — the lowing of a cow at the barn.

"*For what?*"

The question was put at length in a voice flat and dead. It summed up a life-time of failure and admitted it. After an interval it was put again: —

"*For what?*"

"I do not believe the Bible any longer. I do not believe in Christianity."

"Oh, don't do *that!*"

The cry proceeded from David's mother, who crossed quickly and sat beside her husband, holding his hand, perhaps not knowing her own motive.

This, then, was the end of hope and pride, the reward of years of self-denial, the insult to all this poverty. For the time, even the awful nature of his avowal made no impression.

After a long silence, the father asked feebly: —

"*Why have you come back here?*"

Suddenly he rose, and striding across to his son, struck him one blow with his mind: —

"*Oh, I always knew there was nothing in you!*"

It was a kick of the foot.

X

More than two months had passed. Twilight of closing February was falling over the frozen fields. The last crow had flapped low and straight toward the black wood beyond the southern horizon. No sunset radiance streamed across the wide land, for all day a solitude of cloud had stretched around the earth, bringing on the darkness now before its time.

In a small hemp field on an edge of the vast Kentucky table-land, a solitary breaker kept on at his work. The splintered shards were piled high against his