

In Happy Valley

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Preaching at the open-air meeting-house was just over and the citizens of Happy Valley were pouring out of the benched enclosure within living walls of rhododendron. Men, women, children, babes in arms mounted horse or mule or strolled in family groups homeward up or down the dusty road. Youths and maids paired off, dallying behind. Emerged last one rich, dark, buxom girl alone. Twenty yards down the road two young mountaineers were squatted in the shade whittling, and to one she nodded. The other was a stranger--one Jay Dawn--and the stare he gave her was not only bold but impudent.

"Who's goin' home with that gal?" she heard him ask.

"Nobody," was the answer; "that gal al'ays goes home alone." She heard his snort of incredulity.

"Well, I'm goin' with her right now." The other man caught his arm.

"No, you ain't"--and she heard no more.

Athwart the wooded spur she strode like a man. Her full cheeks and lips were red and her black, straight hair showed Indian blood, of which she was not ashamed. On top of the spur a lank youth with yellow hair stood in the path.

"How-dye, Allaphair!" he called uneasily, while she was yet some yards away.

"How-dye!" she said unsmiling and striding on toward him with level eyes.

"Allaphair," he pleaded quickly,
"lemme-----"

"Git out o' my way, Jim Spurgill." The boy stepped quickly from the path and she swept past him.

"Allaphair, lemme walk home with ye." The girl neither answered nor turned her head, though she heard his footsteps behind her.

"Allaphair, uh, Allaphair, please lemme--" He broke off abruptly and sprang behind a tree, for Allaphair's ungentle ways were widely known. The girl had stooped for a stone and was wheeling with it in her hand. Gingerly the boy poked his head

out from behind the tree, prepared to dodge.

"You're wuss'n a she-wolf in sucklin' time," he grumbled, and the girl did not seem displeased. Indeed, there was a grim smile on her scarlet lips when she dropped the stone and stalked on. It was almost an hour before she crossed a foot-log and took the level sandy curve about a little bluff, whence she could see the two-roomed log cabin that was home. There were flowers in the little yard and morning-glories covered the small porch, for, boyish as she was, she loved flowers and growing things. A shrill cry of welcome greeted her at the gate, and she swept the baby sister toddling toward her high above her head, fondled her in her arms, and stopped on the threshold.

Within was another man, slight and pale and a stranger.

"This is the new school-teacher, Allaphair," said her mother. "He calls hisself Iry Combs."

"How-dye!" said the girl, but the slight man rose and came forward to shake hands. She flashed a frown at her mother a moment later, behind the stranger's back; teachers boarded around and he might be there for a week and perhaps more. The teacher was mountain born and bred, but he had been to the Bluegrass to school, and he had brought back certain little niceties of dress, bearing, and speech that irritated the girl. He ate slowly and little, for he had what he called indigestion, whatever that was. Distinctly he was shy, and his only vague

appeal to her was in his eyes, which were big, dark, and lonely.

It was a disgrace for Allaphair to have reached her years of one-and-twenty without marrying, and the disgrace was just then her mother's favorite theme. Feeling rather poorly, the old woman began on it that afternoon. Allaphair had gone out to the woodpile and was picking up an armful of firewood, and the mother had followed her. Said Allaphair:

"I tell you agin an' agin I hain't got no use fer 'em--a-totin' guns an' knives an' a-drinkin' moonshine an' fightin' an' breakin' up meetin's an' lazin' aroun' ginerally. An' when they ain't that way," she added contemptuously, "they're like that un thar. Look at him!" She broke into a loud laugh. Ira Combs had volunteered

to milk, and the old cow had just kicked him over in the mud. He rose red with shame and anger--she felt more than she saw the flash of his eyes--and valiantly and silently he went back to his task. Somehow the girl felt a pang of pity for him, for already she saw in his eyes the telltale look that she knew so well in the eyes of men. With his kind it would go hard; and right she was to the detail.

She herself went to St. Hilda to work and learn, but one morning she passed his little schoolhouse just as he was opening for the day. From a gable the flag of her country waved, and she stopped mystified. And then from the green, narrow little valley floated up to her wondering ears a song. Abruptly it broke off and started again; he was teaching the children the song of her own land,

which she and they had never heard before. It was almost sunset when she came back and the teacher was starting for home. He was ahead of her--she knew he had seen her coming--but he did not wait for her, nor did he look back while she was following him all the way home. And next Sunday he too went to church, and after meeting he started for home alone and she followed alone. He had never made any effort to speak to her alone, nor did he venture the courting pleasantries of other men. Only in his telltale eyes was his silent story plain, and she knew it better than if he had put it into words. In spite of her certainty, however, she was a little resentful that Sunday morning, for his slender figure climbed doggedly ahead, and suddenly she sat down that he might get entirely out of her sight.

She got down on her hands and knees to drink from the little rain-clear brook that tinkled across the road at the bottom of the hill, and all at once lifted her head like a wild thing. Some one was coming down the hill--coming at a dog-trot. A moment later her name was called, and it was the voice of a stranger. She knew it was Jay Dawn, for she had heard of him--had heard of his boast that he would keep company with her--and she kept swiftly on. Again and again he called, but she paid no heed. She glared at him fiercely when he caught up with her--and stopped. He stopped. She walked on and he walked on. He caught her by the arm when she stopped again, and she threw off his hold with a force that wheeled him half around, and started off on a run. She stooped when she next heard him close

to her and whirled, with a stone in her hand.

"Go 'way!" she panted. "I'll brain ye!" He laughed, but he came no nearer.

"All right," he said, as though giving up the chase, but when she turned the next spur there Jay was waiting for her by the side of the road.

"How-dye," he grinned. Three times he cut across ledge and spur and gave her a grinning how-dye. The third time she was ready for him and she let fly. The first stone whistled past his head with astonishing speed. The second he dodged and the third caught him between the shoulders as he leaped for a tree with an oath and a yell. And there she left him, swearing horribly and frankly at her.

Jay Dawn did not go back to logging that week. Report was that he had gone to "courtin' an' throwin' rocks at woodpeckers." Both statements were true, but Jay was courting at long range. He hung about her house a great deal. Going to mill, looking for her cow, to and fro from the mission, Allaphair never failed to see Jay Dawn. He always spoke and he never got answer. He always grinned, but his eye was threatening. To the school-teacher he soon began to give special notice, for that was what Allaphair seemed to be doing herself. He saw them sitting in the porch together alone, going out to milk or to the woodpile. Passing her gate one flower-scented dusk, he heard the drone of their voices behind the morning-glory vines and heard her laugh quite humanly. He snorted his

disgust, but once when he saw the girl walking home with the teacher from school he seethed with rage and bided his time for both. He did spend much time throwing at woodpeckers, ostensibly, but he was not practising for a rock duel with Allaphair. He had picked out the level stretch of sandy road not far from Allaphair's house, which was densely lined with rhododendron and laurel, and was carefully denuding it of stones. When any one came along he was playing David with the birds; a moment later he was "a-workin' the public road," but not to make the going easier for the none too dainty feet of Allaphair. Indeed, the girl twice saw him at his peculiar diversion, but all suspicion was submerged in scorn.

The following Sunday things happened. On the way from church the girl had

come to the level stretch of sand. Beyond the vine-clad bluff and "a whoop and a holler" further on was home. Midway of the stretch Jay Dawn stepped from the bushes and blocked her way, and with him were his grin and his threatening eye.

"I'm goin' to kiss ye," he said. Right, left, and behind she looked for a stone, and he laughed.

"Thar hain't a rock between that poplar back thar and that poplar thar at the bluff; the woodpeckers done got 'em all." There was no use to run--the girl knew she was trapped and her breast began to heave. Slowly he neared her, with one hand outstretched, as though he were going to halter a wild horse, but she did not give ground. When she slapped at his

hand he caught her by one wrist, and then with lightning quickness by the other. Quickly she bent her head, caught one of his wrists with her teeth, and bit it to the bone, so that with an open cry of pain he threw her loose. Then she came at him with her fists like a man, and she fought like a man. Blow after blow she rained on him, and one on the chin made him stagger. He could not hit back, so he closed in, and then it was cavewoman and caveman. He expected her to bite again and scratch, but she did neither-- nor did she cry for help. She kept on like a man, and after one blow in his stomach which made him sick she grappled like a wrestler, which she was, and but for his own quickness would have thrown him over her left knee. Each was in the straining embrace of the other now and

her heaving breast was crushed against his, and for a moment he stood still.

"This suits me exactly," he cackled, and that made her furious and turned her woman again. To keep her now from biting him he thrust his right forearm under her chin and bent her slowly backward. Her right fist beat his muscular back harmlessly--she caught him by the hair, but unmindful he bent her slowly on.

"I'll have ye killed," she said savagely--"I'll have ye killed"; and then suddenly he felt her collapse, submissive, and his lips caught hers.

"Thar now," he said, letting her loose; "you need a leetle tamin', you do," and he turned and walked slowly away. The girl dropped to the ground, weeping. But

there was an exultant look in her eyes before she reached home.

The teacher was sitting in the porch.

"He never would 'a' done it," she muttered, and she hardly spoke to him.

A message from Jay Dawn reached the school-teacher the morning after the "running of a set" at the settlement school. Jay had infuriated Allaphair by his attentions to Polly Stidham from Quicksand. Allaphair had flirted outrageously with Ira Combs the teacher, and in turn Jay got angry, not at her but at the man. So he sent word that he would come down the next Saturday and knock "that mullet-headed, mealy-mouthed, spindle-shanked rat into the

middle of next week," and drive him from the hills.

"Whut you goin' to do about it?" asked Allaphair, secretly thrilled. To her surprise the little man seemed neither worried nor frightened.

"Nothing," he said, adding the final g with irritating precision; "but I have never backed out of a fight in my life." Allaphair could hardly hold back a hoot of contempt.

"Why, he'll break you to pieces with his hands."

"Perhaps--if he gets hold of me." The girl almost shrieked.

"You hain't going to run?"

"I'm not going to run; it's no disgrace to get licked."

"But if he crows over ye atterwards--whut'll you do then?"

The teacher made no answer, nor did he answer Jay's message. He merely went his way, which was neither to avoid nor seek; so Jay sought him. Allaphair saw him the next Friday afternoon, waiting by the roadside--waiting, no doubt, for Ira Combs. Her first impulse was to cross over the spur and warn the teacher, but curiosity as to just what the little man would do got the better of her, and she slipped aside into the bushes and crept noiselessly to a spot whence she could peer out and see and hear all that might happen. Soon she saw the school-teacher

coming, as was his wont, leisurely, looking at the ground at his feet and with his hands clasped behind his back. He did not see the threatening figure waiting until Jay rose.

"Stop thar, little Iry," he sneered, and he whipped out his revolver and fired. The girl nearly screamed, but the bullet cut into the dust near Ira's right foot.

"Yuh danced purty well t'other night, an' I want to see ye dance some more by yo'self. Git at it!" He raised his gun again and the school-teacher raised one hand. He had grown very red and as suddenly very pale, but he did not look frightened.

"You can kill me," he drawled quietly, "but I'm not going to dance for you. Suppose

you whoop me instead--I heard that was your intention." Jay laughed.

"Air ye goin' to fight me?" he asked incredulously.

"I'd rather be licked than dance."

"All right," said Jay. "I'll lam' ye aroun' a little an' spank ye good an' mebbe make ye dance atterwards." He unbuckled his pistol and tossed it into the grass by the roadside.

"Will you fight fair?" asked Ira, still formal in speech. "No wrestling, biting, or gouging."

"No wrasslin', no bitin', no gougin'," mimicked Jay, beginning to revolve his huge fists around each other in country

fashion. The little man waited, his left arm outstretched and bent and his right across and close to his chest, and the watching girl almost groaned. Still his white, calm face, his steady eyes, and his lithe poise fascinated her. She would not let Jay hurt him badly--she would come out and take a hand herself. Jay opened one fist, and with his open hand made a powerful, contemptuous sweep at Ira's head, and the girl expected to see the little teacher fly off into the bushes and the fight over. To her amazement Ira gave no ground at all. His feet never moved, but like a blacksnake's head his own darted back; Jay's great hand fanned the air, and as his own force whirled him half around, Allaphair had to hold back a screech of laughter, for Ira had slapped him. Jay looked puzzled, but with fists clinched, he rushed fiercely. Right and left

he swung, but the teacher was never there. Presently there was another stinging smack on his cheek and another, as Ira danced about him like the shadow of a magic lantern.

"He's a-tirin' him down," thought Allaphair, but she was wrong; Ira was trying to make him mad, and that did not take much time or trouble. Jay rushed him.

"No wrasslin'," called Ira quietly, at the same time stopping the rush with a left-hand swing on Jay's chin that made the head wobble.

"I reckon he must be left-handed," thought the wondering Allaphair. There are persons who literally do grind their

teeth with rage and it is audible. The girl heard Jay's now.

"He's goin' to kill him," she thought, and she got ready to do her part, for with a terrible, hoarse grunt Jay had rushed. Like a greased rod of steel the boy writhed loose from the big, crooked talons that reached for his throat, and his right fist, knobbed on the end of another bar of steel, came up under Jay's bent head with every ounce of the whole weight behind it in the blow. It caught the big man on the point of the chin. Jay's head snapped up and back violently, his feet left the ground, and his big body thudded the road.

[Illustration]

"My God, he's knocked him down! My God, he's knocked him down!" muttered the amazed girl. "You got him down!" she cried. "Jump on him an' stomp him!" He turned one startled look toward her and--it is incredible--the look even at that moment was shy; but he stood still, for Ira had picked up the ethics as well as the skill of the art, of which nothing was known in Happy Valley or elsewhere in the hills. So he stood still, his hands open, and waited. For a while Jay did not move, and his eyes, when they did open, looked dazed. He rose slowly, and as things came back to him his face became suddenly distorted. Nothing alive could humiliate him that way and still live; he meant to kill now.

"Look out!" screamed the girl. Jay rushed for the gun and Ira darted after him; but

there was a quicker flash from the bushes, and Jay found his own gun pointed at his own breast and behind it Allaphair's black eyes searing him.

"Huh!" she grunted contemptuously, and the silence was absolute while she broke the pistol, emptied the cartridges into her hand, and threw them far over into the bushes.

"Less go on home, Iry," she said, and a few steps away she turned and tossed the gun at Jay's feet. He stooped, picked it up, and, twirling it in his hand, looked foolishly after them. Presently he grinned, for at bottom Jay was a man. And two hours later, amid much wonder and many guffaws, he was telling the tale:

"The damned leetle spindle-shank licked me--licked me! An' I'll back him agin anybody in Happy Valley or anywhar else--ef you leave out bitin', gougin', and wrasslin'."

"Did ye lose yo' gal, too?" asked Pleasant Trouble.

"Huh!" said Jay, "I reckon not--she knows her boss."

The two walked home slowly and in silence--Ira in front and Allaphair, as does the woman in the hills, following close behind, in a spirit quite foreign to her hitherto. The little school-teacher had turned shy again and said never a word, but, as he opened the gate to let her pass through, she saw the old, old telltale look

in his sombre eyes. Her mother was crooning in the porch.

"No ploughin' termorrer, mammy. Me an' Iry want the ole nag to go down to the Couht House in the mornin'. Iry's axed me to marry him."

Perhaps every woman does not love a master--perhaps Allaphair had found hers.

THE COMPACT OF CHRISTOPHER

The boy had come home for Sunday and must go back now to the Mission school. He picked up his battered hat and there was no good-bye.

"I reckon I better be goin'," he said, and out he walked. The mother barely raised her eyes, but after he was gone she rose and from the low doorway looked after his sturdy figure trudging up the road. His whistle, as clear as the call of a quail, filled her ears for a while and then was buried beyond the hill. A smaller lad clutched her black skirt, whimpering:

"Wisht I c'd go to the Mission school."

"Thar hain't room," she said shortly.

"The teacher says thar hain't room. I wish to God thar was."

Still whistling, the boy trudged on. Now and then he would lift his shrill voice and the snatch of an old hymn or a folk-song would float through the forest and echo

among the crags above him. It was a good three hours' walk whither he was bound, but in less than an hour he stopped where a brook tumbled noisily from a steep ravine and across the road--stopped and looked up the thick shadows whence it came. Hesitant, he stood on one foot and then on the other, with a wary look down the road and up the ravine.

"I said I'd try to git back," he said aloud. "I said I'd try."

And with this self-excusing sophistry he darted up the brook. The banks were steep and thickly meshed with rhododendron, from which hemlock shot like black arrows upward, but the boy threaded through them like a snake. His breast was hardly heaving when he

reached a small plateau hundreds of feet above the road, where two branches of the stream met from narrower ravines right and left. To the right he climbed, not up the bed of the stream, but to the top of a little spur, along which he went slowly and noiselessly, stooping low. A little farther on he dropped on his knees and crawled to the edge of a cliff, where he lay flat on his belly and peeked over. Below him one Jeb Mullins, a stooping, gray old man, was stirring something in a great brass kettle. A tin cup was going the round of three men squatting near. On a log two men were playing with greasy cards, and near them another lay in drunken sleep. The boy grinned, slid down through the bushes, and, deepening his voice all he could, shouted:

"Throw up yo' hands!"

The old man flattened behind the big kettle with his pistol out. One of the four men leaped for a tree--the others shot up their hands. The card-players rolled over the bank near them, with no thought of where they would land, and the drunken man slept on. The boy laughed loudly.

"Don't shoot!" he cried, and he came through the bushes jeering. The men at the still dropped their hands and looked sheepish and then angry, as did the card-players, whose faces reappeared over the edge of the bank. But the old man and the young one behind the tree, who alone had got ready to fight, joined in with the boy, and the others had to look sheepish again.

"Come on, Chris!" said the old moonshiner, dipping the cup into the white liquor and handing it forth full, "Hit's on me."

Christmas is "new Christmas" in Happy Valley. The women give scant heed to it, and to the men it means "a jug of liquor, a pistol in each hand, and a galloping nag." There had been target-shooting at Uncle Jerry's mill to see who should drink old Jeb Mullins's moonshine and who should smell, and so good was the marksmanship that nobody went without his dram. The carousing, dancing, and fighting were about all over, and now, twelve days later, it was the dawn of "old Christmas," and St. Hilda sat on the porch of her Mission school alone. The old folks of Happy Valley pay puritan heed to "old Christmas." They eat cold food and

preserve a solemn demeanor on that day, and they have the pretty legend that at midnight the elders bloom and the beasts of the field and the cattle in the barn kneel, lowing and moaning. The sun was just rising and the day was mild, for a curious warm spell, not uncommon in the hills, had come to Happy Valley. Already singing little workers were "toting rocks" from St. Hilda's garden, corn-field, and vineyard, for it was Monday, and every Monday they gathered--boys and girls--from creek and hillside, to help her as volunteers. Far up the road she heard among them taunting laughter and jeers, and she rose quickly. A loud oath shocked the air, and she saw a boy chasing one of the workers up the vineyard hill. She saw the pursuer raise his hand and fall, just as he was about to hurl a stone. Then there were more laughter and jeers, and

the fallen boy picked himself up heavily and started down the road toward her--staggering. On he came staggering, and when he stood swaying before her there was no shocked horror in her face--only pity and sorrow.

"Oh, Chris, Chris!" she said sadly. The boy neither spoke nor lifted his eyes, and she led him up-stairs and put him to bed. All day he slept in a stupor, and it was near sunset when he came down, pale, shamed, and silent. There were several children in the porch.

"Come, Chris!" St. Hilda said, and he followed her down to the edge of the creek, where she sat down on a log and he stood with hanging head before her.

"Chris," she said, "we'll have a plain talk now. This is the fourth time you've been"--the word came with difficulty--"drunk."

"Yes'm."

"I've sent you away three times, and three times I've let you come back. I let you come back after new Christmas, only twelve days ago."

"Yes'm."

"You can't keep your word."

"No'm."

"I don't know what to do now, so I'm going to ask you."

She paused and Chris was silent, but he was thinking, and she waited. Presently he looked straight into her eyes, still silent.

"What do you think I'd better do?" she insisted.

"I reckon you got to whoop me, Miss Hildy."

"But you know I can't whip you, Chris. I never whip anybody."

Several times a child had offered to whip himself, had done so, and she wondered whether the boy would propose that, but he repeated, obstinately and hopelessly:

"You got to whoop me."

"I won't--I can't." Then an idea came.
"Your mother will have to whip you."

Chris shook his head and was silent. He was not on good terms with his mother. It was a current belief that she had "put pizen in his daddy's liquer." She had then married a man younger than she was, and to the boy's mind the absence of dignity in one case matched the crime in the other.

"All right," he said at last; "but I reckon you better send somebody else atter her. You can't trust me to git by that still"--he stopped with a half-uttered oath of surprise:

"Look thar!"

A woman was coming up the road. She wore a black cotton dress and a black sunbonnet--mourning relics for the dead husband which the living one had never had the means to supplant--and rough shoes. She pushed back the bonnet with one nervous, bony hand, saw the two figures on the edge of the creek, and without any gesture or call came toward them. And only the woman's quickness in St. Hilda saw the tense anxiety of the mother's face relax. The boy saw nothing; he was only amazed.

"Why, mammy, whut the--whut are you doin' up hyeh?"

The mother did not answer, and St. Hilda saw that she did not want to answer. St. Hilda rose with a warm smile of welcome.

"So this is Chris's mother?"

The woman shook hands limply.

"Hit's whut I passes fer," she said, and she meant neither smartness nor humor. The boy was looking wonderingly, almost suspiciously at her, and she saw she must give him some explanation.

"I been wantin' to see the school hyeh an' Miss Hildy. I had to come up to see Aunt Sue Morrow, who's might' nigh gone, so I jes kep' a-walkin' on up hyeh."

"Miss Hildy hyeh," said the boy, "was jes about to send fer ye."

"To sen' fer me?"

"I been drunk agin."

The mother showed no surprise or displeasure.

"Hit's the fourth time since sorghum time," the boy went on relentlessly. "I axed Miss Hildy hyeh to whoop me, but she says she don't nuver whoop nobody, so she was jes a-goin' to send fer you to come an' whoop me when you come a-walkin' up the road."

This was all, and the lad pulled out an old Barlow knife and went to a hickory sapling. The two women watched him silently as he cut off a stout switch and calmly began to trim it. At last the woman turned to the teacher and her voice trembled.

"I don't see Chris thar more'n once or twice a year, an' seems kind o' hard that I got to whoop him."

The boy turned sharply, and helplessly she took the switch.

"And hit hain't his fault nohow. His stepdaddy got him drunk. He tol' me so when he come home. I went by the still to find Chris an' cuss out ole Jeb Mullins an' the men thar. An' I come on hyeh."

"Set down a minute, mammy," said Chris, dropping on the log on one side of St. Hilda, and obediently the mother sat down on the other side.

[Illustration]

"Mammy," he said abruptly, "I'll stop drinkin' if you will."

St. Hilda almost gasped. The woman lifted her eyes to the mountainside and dropped her gaze presently to her hands, which were twisting the switch in her lap.

"I'll stop if you will," he repeated.

"I'll try, Chris," she said, but she did not look up.

"Gimme yo' hand."

Across St. Hilda's lap she stretched one shaking hand, which the boy clasped.

"Put yo' hand on thar, too, Miss Hildy," he said, and when he felt the pressure of her

big, strong, white hand for a moment he got up quickly and turned his face.

"All right, mammy."

St. Hilda rose, too, and started for the house--her eyes so blurred that she could hardly see the path. Midway she wheeled.

"Don't!" she cried.

The mother was already on her way home, breaking the switch to pieces and hiding her face within the black sunbonnet. The boy was staring after her.

THE LORD'S OWN LEVEL

The blacksmith-shop sat huddled by the roadside at the mouth of Wolf Run--a hut of blackened boards. The roof-tree sagged from each gable down to the crazy chimney in the centre, and the smoke curled up between the clapboard shingles or, as the wind listed, out through the cracks of any wall. It was a bird-singing, light-flashing morning in spring, and Lum Chapman did things that would have set all Happy Valley to wondering. A bareheaded, yellow-haired girl rode down Wolf Run on an old nag. She was perched on a sack of corn, and she gave Lum a shy "how-dye" when she saw him through the wide door. Lum's great forearm eased, the bellows flattened with a long, slow wheeze, and he went to the door and looked after her. Professionally he noted that one hind shoe of the old nag was loose and that the other was

gone. Then he went back to his work. It would not be a busy day with Uncle Jerry at the mill--there would not be more than one or two ahead of her and her meal would soon be ground. Several times he quit work to go to the door and look down the road, and finally he saw her coming. Again she gave him a shy "how-dye," and his eyes followed her up Wolf Run until she was out of sight.

The miracle these simple acts would have been to others was none to him. He was hardly self-conscious, much less analytical, and he went back to his work again.

A little way up that creek Lum himself lived in a log cabin, and he lived alone. This in itself was as rare as a miracle in the hills, and the reason, while clear, was

still a mystery: Lum had never been known to look twice at the same woman. He was big, kind, taciturn, ox-eyed, calm. He was so good-natured that anybody could banter him, but nobody ever carried it too far except a bully from an adjoining county one court day. Lum picked him up bodily and dashed him to the ground so that blood gushed from his nose and he lay there bewildered, white, and still. Lum rarely went to church, and he never talked religion, politics, or neighborhood gossip. He was really thought to be quite stupid, in spite of the fact that he could make lightning calculations about crops, hogs, and cattle in his head. However, one man knew better, but he was a "furriner," a geologist, a "rock-pecker" from the Bluegrass. To him Lum betrayed an uncanny eye in discovering coal signs and

tracing them to their hidden beds, and wide and valuable knowledge of the same. Once the foreigner lost his barometer just when he was trying to locate a coal vein on the side of the mountain opposite. Two days later Lum pointed to a ravine across the valley.

"You'll find that coal not fer from the bottom o' that big poplar over thar." The geologist stared, but he went across and found the coal and came back mystified.

"How'd you do it?"

Lum led him up Wolf Run. Where the vein showed by the creek-side Lum had built a little dam, and when the water ran even with the mud-covered stones he had turned the stream aside. The geologist lay down, sighted across the surface of

the water, and his eye caught the base of the big poplar.

"Hit's the Lord's own level," said Lum, and back he went to his work, the man looking after him and muttering:

"The Lord's own level."

Hardly knowing it, Lum waited for grinding day. There was the same exchange of "how-dyes" between him and the girl, going and coming, and Lum noted that the remaining hind shoe was gone from the old nag and that one of the front ones was going. This too was gone the next time she passed, and for the first time Lum spoke:

"Yo' hoss needs shoein'."

"She ain't wuth it," said the girl. Two hours later, when the girl came back, Lum took up the conversation again.

"Oh, yes, she is," he drawled, and the girl slid from her sack of meal and watched him, which she could do fearlessly, for Lum never looked at her. He had never asked her name and he did not ask her now.

"I'm Jeb Mullins's gal," she said. "Pap'll be comin' 'long hyeh some day an' pay ye."

"My name's Lum--Lum Chapman."

"They calls me Marthy."

He lifted her bag to the horse's bony withers with one hand, but he did not

offer to help her mount. He watched her again as she rode away, and when she looked back he turned with a queer feeling into his shop. Two days later Jeb Mullins came by.

"Whad' I owe ye?" he asked.

"Nothin'," said Lum gruffly.

The next day the old man brought down a broken plough on his shoulder, and to the same question he got the same answer:

"Nothin'." So he went back and teased Martha, who blushed when she next passed the door of the shop, and this time Lum did not go out to watch her down the road.

Sunday following, Parson Small, the circuit-rider, preached in the open-air "meetin'-house," that had the sky for a roof and blossoming rhododendron for walls, and--wonder of wonders--Lum Chapman was there. In the rear he sat, and everybody turned to look at Lum. So simple was he that the reason of his presence was soon plain, for he could no more keep his eyes from the back of Martha Mullins's yellow head than a needle could keep its point from the North Pole. The circuit-rider on his next circuit would preach the funeral services of Uncle Billy Hall, who had been dead ten years, and Uncle Billy would be draped with all the virtues that so few men have when alive and that so few lack when dead. He would marry such couples as might to marriage be inclined. There were peculiar customs in Happy Valley,

due to the "rider's" long absences, so that sometimes a baby might without shame be present at the wedding of its own parents. To be sure, Lum's eyes did swerve once when the preacher spoke of marriage--swerved from where the women sat to where sat the men--to young Jake Kilburn, called Devil Jake, a name of which he was rather proud; for Martha's eyes had swerved to him too, and Jake shot back a killing glance and began twisting his black mustache.

And then the preacher told about the woman whom folks once stoned.

Lum listened dully and waited helplessly around at the end of the meeting until he saw Martha and Jake go down the road together, Martha shy and conscious and Jake the conquering daredevil that he

was known to be among women. Lum went back to his cabin, cooked his dinner, and sat down in his doorway to whittle and dream.

Lum went to church no more. When Martha passed his shop, the same "how-dye" passed between them and no more. Twice the circuit-rider came and went and Martha and Devil Jake did not ask his services. A man who knew Jake's record in another county started a dark rumor which finally reached Lum and sent him after the daredevil. But Jake had fled and Lum followed him almost to the edge of the bluegrass country, to find that Jake had a wife and child. He had meant to bring Jake back to his duty, but he merely beat him up, kicked him to one side of the road like a dog, and came back to his shop.

Old Jeb Mullins came by thereafter with the old nag and the sack of corn, and Lum went on doing little jobs for him for nothing, for Jeb was a skinflint, a moonshiner, and a mean old man. He did not turn Martha out of his hut, because he was callous and because he needed her to cook and to save him work in the garden and corn-field. Martha stayed closely at home, but she was treated so kindly by some of the neighbors that once she ventured to go to church. Then she knew from the glances, whispers, and gigglings of the other girls just where she stood, and she was not seen again very far from her own door. It was a long time before Lum saw her again, so long, indeed, that when at last he saw her coming down Wolf Run on a sack of corn she carried a baby in her arms. She did

not look up as she approached, and when she passed she turned her head and did not speak to him. So Lum sat where he was and waited for her to come back, and she knew he had been waiting as soon as she saw him. She felt him staring at her even when she turned her head, and she did not look up until the old nag stopped. Lum was barring the way.

"Yo' hoss needs shoein'," he said gravely, and from her lap he took the baby unafraid. Indeed, the child dimpled and smiled at him, and the little arm around his neck gave him a curious shiver that ran up the back of his head and down his spine. The shoeing was quickly done, and in absolute silence, but when they started up Wolf Run Lum went with them.

"Come by my shack a minit," he said.

The girl said nothing; that in itself would be another scandal, of course, but what was the difference what folks might say? At his cabin he reached up and lifted mother and child from the old nag, and the girl's hair brushed his cheek.

[Illustration]

"You stay hyeh with the baby," he said quietly, "an' I'll take yo' meal home." She looked at him with mingled trust and despair. What was the difference?

It was near sundown when Lum got back. Smoke was coming out of his rickety chimney, and the wail of an old ballad reached his ears. Singing, the girl did not hear him coming, and through the open door he saw that the room had been

tidied up and that she was cooking supper. The baby was playing on the floor. She turned at the creak of his footstep on the threshold and for the first time she spoke.

"Supper'll be ready in a minit."

A few minutes later he was seated at the table alone and the girl, with the baby on one arm, was waiting on him. By and by he pushed back his chair, pulled out his pipe, and sat down in the doorway. Dusk was coming. In the shadowy depths below a wood-thrush was fluting his last notes for that day. Then for the first time each called the other by name.

"Marthy, the circuit-rider'll be 'roun' two weeks from next Sunday."

"All right, Lum."

THE MARQUISE OF QUEENSBERRY

I

Thus it had happened. Pleasant Trouble was drunk one day and a fly lit on his knee. He whipped his forty-four from its holster.

"I'll show ye who you air lightin' on!" he swore, and blazed away. Of course he killed the fly, but incidentally he shattered its lighting-place. Had he been in a trench anywhere in France, his leg would have been saved, but he was away out in the Kentucky hills. If he minded the loss of it, however, no one could see, for with chin

up and steady, daredevil eyes he swung along about as well on his crutch as if it had been a good leg. Down the road, close to the river's brim, he was swinging now--his voice lifted in song. Ahead of him and just around the curve of the road, with the sun of Happy Valley raining its last gold on her golden bare head, walked the Marquise; but neither Pleasant nor she herself knew she was the Marquise. A few minutes later the girl heard the crunch of the crutch in the sandy road behind her, and she turned with a smile:

"How-dye, Pleaz!" The man caught the flapping brim of his slouch-hat and lifted it--an act of courtesy that he had learned only after Happy Valley was blessed by the advent of the Mission school: making it, he was always embarrassed no little.

"How-dye, Miss Mary!"

"Going down to the dance?"

"No'm," he said with vigorous severity, and then with unctuous virtue--"I hain't nuver run a set or played a play in my life."

The word "dance" is taboo among these Calvinists of the hills. They "run sets" and "play plays"--and these are against the sterner morals that prevail--but they do not dance. The Mission teacher smiled. This was a side-light on the complex character of Pleasant Trouble that she had not known before, and she knew it had nothing to do with his absent leg. A hundred yards ahead of them a boy and a girl emerged from a ravine--young King

Camp and Polly Sizemore--and plainly they were quarrelling. The girl's head was high with indignation; the boy's was low with anger, and now and then he would viciously dig the toe of his boot in the sand as he strode along. Pleasant grinned.

"I won't holler to 'em," he said; "I reckon they'd ruther be alone."

"Pleasant," said Miss Mary, "you drink moonshine, don't you?"

"Yes'm."

"You sometimes make it, don't you?"

"I've been s'picioned."

"You were turned out of church once, weren't you, for shooting up a meeting?"

"Yes," was the indignant defense, "but I proved to 'em that I was drunk, an' they tuk me back." The girl had to laugh.

"And yet you think dancing wrong?"

"Yes'm."

The girl gave it up--so perfunctory and final was his reply. Indeed, he seemed to have lost interest. Twice he had looked back, and now he turned again. She saw the fulfilment of some prophecy in his face as he grunted and frowned.

"Thar comes Ham Cage," he said.

Turning, the girl saw an awkward youth stepping into the road from the same

ravine whence Polly and young King had come, but she did not, as did Pleasant, see Ham shifting a revolver from his hip to an inside pocket.

"Those two boys worry the life out of me," she said, and again Pleasant grunted. They were the two biggest boys in the school, and in running, jumping, lifting weights, shooting at marks, and even in working--in everything, indeed, except in books--they were tireless rivals. And now they were bitter contestants for the favor of Polly Sizemore--a fact that Pleasant knew better than the Mission girl.

Flirts are rare in the hills. "If two boys meets at the same house," Pleasant once had told her, "they jes makes the gal say which one she likes best, and t'other one

gits!" But with the growth of the Mission school had come a certain tolerance which Polly had used to the limit. Indeed, St. Hilda had discovered a queer reason for a sudden quickening of interest on Polly's part in her studies. Polly had to have the letters she got read for her, and the letters she sent written for her, and thus St. Hilda found that at least three young men, who had gone into the army and had learned to write, thought--each of them--that he was first in her heart. Polly now wanted to learn to read and write so that she could keep such secrets to herself. She had been "settin' up" with Ham Cage for a long time, and now she was "talkin' to" young King Camp. King was taking her to the dance, and it was plain to Pleasant that trouble was near. He looked worried.

"Well," he said, "I reckon thar hain't so much harm the way you school folks run sets because you don't 'low drinkin' or totin' pistols, an' you make 'em go home early. I heerd Miss Hildy is away--do you think you can manage the bad uns?"

"I think so," smiled Miss Mary.

"Well, mebbe I will come around to-night."

"Come right along now," said the girl heartily, but Pleasant had left his own gun at home, so he shook his head and started up the mountain.

II

Happy Valley was darkening now. The evening star shone white in the last rosy

western flush, and already lanterns glowed on the porch of the "big house" where the dancing was to be. From high in the shadows a voice came down to the girl:

"I hain't got a gun an' I hain't had a drink to-day. Hit's a shame when Miss Hildy's always a-tryin' to give us a good time she has to beg us to behave."

The young folks were gathering in. On the porch she saw Polly Sizemore in a chair and young King Camp slipping into the darkness on the other side of the house. A few minutes later Ham Cage strolled into sight, saw Polly, and sullenly dropped on the stone steps as far away from her as possible. The little teacher planned a course of action.

"Ham," she said, as she passed, "I want you to run the first set with me." Ham stared and she was rather startled by his flush.

"Yes'm," he stammered. A moment later young King reappeared at the other end of the porch.

"King," she said, "I want you to run the second set with me," and King too stared, flushed, and stammered assent, while Polly flashed indignation at the little teacher's back. It had been Miss Mary's plan to break up the hill custom of one boy and one girl dancing together all the time--and she had another idea as well.

Pleasant Trouble swung into the circle of light from the porch just as the first set started, and he sat down on the stone

steps to look on. It was a jolly dance. Some elderly folks were there to look on, and a few married couples who, in spite of Miss Mary's persuasions, yet refused to take part. It was soon plain that Polly Sizemore and the little teacher were the belles of the ball, though of the two Polly alone seemed to realize it. Pleasant could hardly keep his eyes off the Mission girl. She was light as a feather, her eyes sparkled, her cheeks grew rosy, her laugh rang out, and the flaming spirit of her was kindling fires of which she never dreamed. Pleasant saw her dance first with Ham and then with King, and he grinned with swift recognition of her purpose. And he grinned the more when he saw that she was succeeding beyond her realization--saw it by the rage in Polly's black eyes, which burned now at Ham and now at King, for Miss Mary had

no further need to ask either of them to dance--one or the other was always at her side. Indeed the Marquise, without knowing it, was making a pretty triangular mess of things, and Pleasant chuckled unholily--chuckled until he saw things were getting serious, and then his inner laughing ceased and his sharp eyes got wary and watchful. For first Ham and then King would disappear in the darkness, and each time they came back their faces were more flushed and their dancing was more furious.

Now, Polly was winging arrows of anger at the little teacher, and presently Pleasant rose lightly and with incredible swiftness swung across the floor just as the climax came. From the other side Polly too darted forward. Ham and King were glaring at each other over the

teacher's pretty head--each claiming the next dance. Miss Mary was opening her mouth for a mild rebuke when the two boys sprang back, the right hand of each flashing to his hip. King drew first, and Pleasant's crutch swished down on his wrist, striking his pistol to the floor. Polly had caught Ham's hand with both her own, and Ham felt the muzzle of Pleasant's forty-four against his stomach.

"Stop it!" said Pleasant sternly. "Miss Mary don't like sech doin's."

So quickly was it on and over that the teacher hardly realized that it had come on and was over. Her bewildered face paled, but the color came back with a rush, and when her indignant eyes began their deadly work Pleasant knew there was no further need of him, and he

stepped back as though to escape penalty even for playing peacemaker in a way so rude.

"You--you--you two!" breathed Miss Mary helplessly, but only for a moment.

"Give me that gun, Ham. Pick that one up, King." Both she handed to Pleasant, and then--no torrent came. She turned with a wave of her hand.

"You can all go home now." There had been a moment of deadly quiet, but in the mountains even boys and girls do not take such events very seriously; the hubbub and tittering that had started again ceased again, and all left quickly and quietly--all but the teacher, Pleasant, and the two boys, for Polly too was moving away. King turned to go after her.

"Wait a moment, King," said Miss Mary, and Polly cried fiercely: "He can stay till doomsday fer all o' me. I hain't goin' with ary one uv 'em." And she flirted away.

"I am not going to talk to you two boys until to-morrow," said Miss Mary firmly, "and then I'm going to put a stop to all this. I want both of you to be here when school closes. I want you too, Pleasant, and I want you to bring Lum Chapman."

Pleasant Trouble was as bewildered as the two shamefaced boys--did she mean to have him hold a gun on the two boys while Lum, the blacksmith, whaled them?

"Me?--Lum?--why, whut----"

"Never mind--wait till to-morrow. Will you all be here?"

"Yes'm," said all.

"Go with them up the river, Pleasant. Don't let them quarrel, and see that each one goes up his own creek."

The two boys moved away like yoked oxen. At the bottom step Pleasant turned to look back. Very rigid and straight the little teacher stood under the lantern, and the pallor and distress of her face had given way to a look of stern determination.

"Whew!" he breathed, and he turned a half-circle on his crutch into the dark.

Miss Mary Holden was a daughter of the Old Dominion, on the other side of the Cumberland Range, and she came, of course, from fighting stock. She had gone North to school and had come home horrified by--to put it mildly--the Southern tendency to an occasional homicide. There had been a great change, to be sure, within her young lifetime. Except under circumstances that were peculiarly aggravating, gentlemen no longer peppered each other on sight. The duel was quite gone. Indeed, the last one at the old university was in her father's time, and had been, he told her, a fake. A Texan had challenged another student, and the seconds had loaded the pistols with blank cartridges. After firing three times at his enemy the Texan threw his weapon down, swore that he could hit

a quarter every time at that distance, pulled forth two guns of his own and demanded that they be used; and they had a terrible time appeasing the Westerner, who, failing in humor, challenged then and there every member of his enemy's fraternity and every member of his own. Thereafter it became the custom there and at other institutions of learning in the State to settle all disputes fist and skull; and of this Miss Holden, who was no pacifist, thoroughly approved. Now she was in a community where the tendency to kill seemed well-nigh universal. St. Hilda was a gentle soul, who would never even whip a pupil. She might not approve--but Miss Holden had the spirit of the pioneer and she must lead these people into the light. So she told her plan next day to Pleasant Trouble and Lum Chapman, who were

first to come. Stolid Lum would have shown no surprise had she proposed that the two boys dive from a cliff, and if one survived he won; but the wonder and the succeeding joy in Pleasant's face disturbed Miss Holden. And when Pleasant swung his hat from his head and let out a fox-hunting yelp of pure ecstasy she rebuked him severely, whereat the man with the crutch lapsed into solemnity.

"Will they fight this way?" she asked.

"Them two boys will fight a bee-gum o' sucklin' wildcats--tooth and toe-nail."

"They aren't going to fight that way," protested Miss Holden. "They will fight by the Marquis of--er--Somebody's rules." She explained the best she could the

intervals of action and of rest, and her hearers were vastly interested.

"They can't kick?" asked Pleasant.

"No."

"Ner bite?"

"No!"

"Ner gouge?"

"What do you mean by 'gouge'?" Pleasant pantomimed with a thumbnail crooked on the outer edge of each eye-socket.

"No!" was the horrified cry.

"Jest a square, stand-up and knock-down fight?"

"Yes," she said reluctantly but bravely.

"Lum will be timekeeper and referee to make them break away when they clinch." When she explained that Pleasant scratched his head.

"They can't even wrassle?" Miss Holden understood and did not correct.

"They can't even wrassle. And you and I will be the seconds."

"Seconds--whut do we do?"

"Oh, we--we fan them and--and wash off the blood," she shivered a little in spite of herself. Pleasant smiled broadly.

"Which one you goin' to wash off?"

"I--I don't know." Pleasant grinned.

"Well, we better toss up fer it an' atter they git hyeh." She did not understand his emphasis.

"Very well," she assented carelessly.

Up the road came Ham Cage now, and down the road came King Camp--both with a rapid stride. Though both had sworn to shoot on sight, they had kept away from each other as they had promised, and now without speaking they glowered unwinking into each other's eyes. Nor did either ask a question when the little teacher, with two towels over one arm, led the way down the road, up over a little ridge, and down to a grassy hollow by the side of a tinkling creek. It

was hard for the girl to believe that these two boys meant to shoot each other as they had threatened, but Pleasant had told her they surely would, and that fact held her purpose firm. Without a word they listened while she explained, and without a word both nodded assent--nor did they show any surprise when the girl repeated what she had told Pleasant Trouble and Lum Chapman.

"Jes' a plain ole square, stand-up an' knock-down fight," murmured Pleasant consolingly, pulling forth a silver quarter, "Heads--you wipe Ham; tails--you wipe King." Miss Holden nodded, and for the first time the two lads turned their angry eyes from each other to the girl and yet neither asked a question. Tails it was, and the girl motioned King to a log on one side of the hollow, and Pleasant and Ham

to another log on the other side. She handed Pleasant one of the towels, dropped her little watch into Lum's huge palm, and on second thought took it back again: it might get broken, and Lum might be too busy to keep time. Only Pleasant saw the gritting of Ham's teeth when she took her stand by King's side.

"Take off your coats!" she said sharply. The two obeyed swiftly.

"Time!" she called, and the two leaped for each other.

"Stop!" she cried, and they halted. "I forgot--shake hands!"

Both shook their heads instead, like maddened bulls, and even Lum looked amazed; he even spoke:

"Whut's the use o' fightin', if they shakes hands?"

Miss Holden had no argument ready, and etiquette was waived. "Time!" she repeated, and then the two battering-rams, revolving their fists country-fashion, engaged. Half-forgotten Homeric phrases began to flit from a faraway schoolroom back into the little teacher's mind and she began to be consoled for the absence of gloves--those tough old ancients had used gauges of iron and steel. The two boys were evenly matched. After a few thundering body blows they grew wary, and when the round closed their faces were unmarked, they had done each other no damage, and Miss Holden was thrilled--it wasn't so bad after all. Each boy grabbed his own

towel and wiped the sweat off his own face.

"Git at it, Ham--git at it!" encouraged Pleasant, and Ham got at it. He gave King a wallop on the jaw; King came back with a jolt on the chin, and the two embraced untenderly.

"Break away!" cried the girl. "Lum, make them break!" Lum thrust one mighty arm between them and, as they flailed unavailingly over it, threw them both back with a right-and-left sweep. Both were panting when the girl called time, and the first blood showed streaming from King's nose. Miss Holden looked a little pale, but gallantly she dipped the towel in the brook and went about her work. Again Pleasant saw his principal's jaw work in a gritting movement, and he

chuckled encouragement so loudly that the girl heard him and looked around indignantly. It was inevitable that the seconds, even unconsciously, should take sides, and that point was coming fast. The girl did not hear herself say:

"Shift your head and come back from underneath!" And that was what King proceeded to do, and Ham got an uppercut on the chin that snapped his head up and sprinkled the blue sky with stars for him just as the bell of the girl's voice sounded time. Meanwhile, up the road below them came a khaki-clad youth and a girl--Polly Sizemore and one of her soldier lovers who was just home on a furlough. Polly heard the noises in the hollow, cocked an ear, put her finger on her lips, and led him to the top of the little ridge whence she could peak over.

Her amazed eyes grew hot seeing the Mission girl, and she turned and whispered:

"That fotted-on woman's got 'em fightin'."

The soldier's face radiated joy indeed, and as unseen spectators the two noiselessly settled down.

"Whur'd they learn to fight this way?" whispered the soldier--the army had taught him. Polly whispered back:

"She's a-larnin' 'em." The khaki boy gurgled his joy and craned his neck.

"Whut they fightin' about?" Polly flushed and turned her face.

"I--er--I don't know." The soldier observed neither her flush nor her hesitation, for King and Ham were springing forward for another round; he only muttered his disgust at their awkwardness and their ignorance of the ring in terms that were strange to the girl by his side.

"The mutts, the cheeses, the pore dawgs--they don't know how to guard an' they ain't got no lefts."

Pleasant was advising and encouraging his principal now openly and in a loud voice, and Ham's face began to twist with fury when he heard the Mission girl begin to spur on King. With bared teeth he rushed forward and through the wild blows aimed at him, got both underholds,

and King gave a gasping grunt as the breath was squeezed quite out of him.

"Break!" cried the girl. Lum tugged at the locked hand and wrist behind King's back and King's hands flew to Ham's throat. "Break! Break!" And Lum had literally to tear them apart.

"Time!" gasped the girl. She was on the point of tears now, but she held them back and her mouth tightened--she would give them one more round anyhow. When the battling pair rose Pleasant lost his head. He let loose a fox-hunting yell. He forgot his duty and the rules; he forgot the girl--he forgot all but the fight.

[Illustration]

"Let 'em loose!" he yelled. "Git at it boys! Go fer him, Ham--whoop--ee--ee!" The girl was electrified. Lum began cracking the knuckles of his huge fingers. Polly and the soldier rose to their feet. That little dell turned eons back. The people there wore skins and two cavemen who had left their clubs at home fought with all the other weapons they had. The Mission girl could never afterward piece out the psychology of that moment of world darkness, but when she saw Ham's crooked thumbs close to King's eyes a weird and thrilling something swept her out of herself. Her watch dropped to the ground. She rushed forward, seized two handfuls of Ham's red hair, and felt Polly's two sinewy hands seizing hers. Like a tigress she flashed about; just in time then came the call of civilization, and she answered it with a joyous cry. Bounding

across the creek below came a tall young man, who stopped suddenly in sheer amaze at the scene and as suddenly dashed on. With hair and eyes streaming, the girl went to meet him and rushed into his arms. From that haven she turned.

"It's a draw!" she said faintly. "Shake--" She did not finish the sentence. Ham and King had risen and were staring at her and the stranger. They looked at each other, and then saw Polly sidling back to the soldier. Again they looked at each other, grinned at each other, and, as each turned for his coat--clasped hands.

"Oh!" cried the girl, "I'm so glad."

"This is not my brother," she said, leading the stranger forward. If she expected to surprise them, she didn't, for in the hills

brothers and sisters do not rush into each other's arms. "It's my sweetheart, and he's come to take me home. And you won't shoot each other--you won't fight any more?" And Ham said:

"Not jes' at present"; and King laughed.

"I'm so glad."

Pleasant swung back to the Mission House with the two foreigners, and on the way Miss Holden explained. The stranger was a merry person, and that part of Happy Valley rang with his laughter.

"My! I wish I had got there earlier--what were they fighting about?"

"Why, Polly Sizemore, that pretty girl with black hair who lost her head when--when--I caught hold of Ham." The shoulder of Pleasant Trouble that was not working up and down over his crutch began to work up and down over something else.

"What's the matter, Pleasant?" asked the girl.

"Nothin'." But he was grinning when they reached the steps of the Mission, and he turned on Miss Holden a dancing eye.

"Polly nothin'--them two boys was a-fightin' about you!" And he left her aghast and wheeled chuckling away.

Next afternoon the Marquise bade her little brood a tearful good-by and rode

with her lover up Happy Valley to go over the mountain, on to the railroad, and back into the world. At the mouth of Wolf Run Pleasant Trouble was waiting to shake hands.

"Tell Polly good-bye for me, Pleasant," said Miss Holden. "She wasn't there."

"Polly and the soldier boy rid up to the Leetle Jedge o' Happy Valley last night to git married."

"Oh," said Miss Holden, and she flushed a little. "And Ham and King weren't there-- where do you suppose they are?"

Pleasant pointed to a green little hollow high up a ravine.

"They're up thar."

"Alone?" Pleasant nodded and Miss Holden looked anxious.

"They aren't fighting again?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you suppose they are really friends now?"

"Ham an' King air as lovin' as a pair o' twins," said Pleasant decidedly and Miss Holden looked much pleased.

"What on earth are they doing up there?"

"Well," drawled Pleasant, "when they ain't huggin' an' shakin' hands they're wrasslin' with a jug o' moonshine."

The Mission girl looked disturbed, and the merry stranger let loose his ringing laugh.

"Oh, dear! Now, where do you suppose they got moonshine?"

"I tol' you," repeated Pleasant, "that I didn't know nobody who couldn't git moonshine." Miss Holden sighed, her lover laughed again, and they rode away, Pleasant watching them till they were out of sight.

"Whut I aimed to say was," corrected Pleasant mentally, "I didn't know nobody who knowed me that couldn't git it." And he jingled the coins in his pockets that at daybreak that morning had been in the pockets of Ham and King.

HIS LAST CHRISTMAS GIFT

The sergeant got the wounded man to his feet and threw one arm around his waist. Then he all but carried him, stumbling along, with both hands clasped across his eyes, down the ravine that looked at night like some pit of hell. For along their path a thousand coke-ovens spat forth red tongues that licked northward with the wind, shot red arrows into the choking black smoke that surged up the mountainside, and lighted with fire the bellies of the clouds rolling overhead.

"Whar you takin' me?"

"Hospital." The mountainer stopped suddenly.

"Why, I can't see them ovens!"

"You come on, Jim."

Next morning Jim lay on a cot with a sheet drawn to his chin and a grayish, yellow bandage covering forehead and eyes down to the tip of his nose. When the surgeon lifted that bandage the nurse turned her face aside, and what was under it, or rather what was not under it, shall not be told. Only out in the operating-room the smooth-faced young assistant was curiously counting over some round leaden pellets, and he gave one low whistle when he pushed into a pile a full fourscore.

"He said he was a-lookin' through a keyhole," the sergeant reported, "an'

somebody let him have it with both barrels--but that don't go. Jim wouldn't be lookin' through no keyhole; he'd bust the door down."

Nor could the sergeant learn more. He had found the man stumbling down Possum Hollow, and up that hollow the men and women of the mining camp did not give one another away.

"It might 'a' been any one of a dozen fellers I know," the sergeant said, for Jim was a feudsman and had his enemies by the score.

The man on the cot said nothing. Once, to be sure, when he was crossing the border of Etherland, and once only, he muttered: "Yes, she come from Happy Valley, but she was a cat, no doubt about

that. Yes, sir, the old girl was a cat." But when he was conscious that much even he never would say again. He simply lay grim, quiet, uncomplaining, and not even the surgeon, whose step he got quickly to know, could get him to tell who had done the deed.

On the fourth day he showed some cheer.

"Look here, doc," he said, "when you goin' to take this rag off o' my eyes? I hain't seen a wink since I come in here."

"Oh, pretty soon," said the surgeon, and the nurse turned away again with drops in her eyes that would never be for the wounded man's eyes to shed again.

On the sixth day his pulse was fast and his blood was high--and that night the

nurse knew precisely what meant the look in the surgeon's face when he motioned her to leave the room. Then he bent to lift the bandage once more.

"Why don't you take 'em all off, doc? I'd like to see the old girl again. Has she gone back to Happy Valley?"

"No--she's here."

"Won't she come to see me?"

"Yes, she'll come, but she can't now--she's sick abed." The man grinned.

"Yes, I know them spells."

"Jim," said the surgeon suddenly, "I'm going to be very busy to-morrow, and if you've got any message to send to

anybody or anything to say to me, you'd better say it before I go." He spoke carelessly, but with a little too much care.

The sheet moved over the hands clasped across Jim's breast. "Why, doc, you don't mean to say--" He stopped and drew in one breath slowly.

"Oh, no, but you can't always tell, and I might not get back till late, and I thought you might have something to tell me about--" He paused helplessly, and the man on the cot began moving his lips. The surgeon bent low.

"Why, doc," he said very slowly, "you--don't--really--mean--to--say--that the old--" his voice dropped to a whisper, "has finished me this time?"

"Who finished you, Jim--who'd you say finished you?"

A curious smile flitted over the coarse lips and passed. Then the lips tightened and the thought behind the bandage made its way to the surgeon's quick brain, and there was a long silence.

At last:

"Doc, d'you ever hear tell of a woman bein' hung?"

"Yes, Jim."

And then:

"Doc, am I goin' shore?" This question the surgeon answered with another, bending low.

"Jim, what message shall I give your wife?" The curious smile came back.

"Doc, this is Christmas, ain't it?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Doc, you're shore, air ye, that nobody knows who done it?"

"Nobody but you, Jim."

The man had been among men the terror of the hills for years, but on the last words that passed his gray lips his soul must have swung upward toward the soul of the Man who lived and died for the peace of those hills.

"Doc," he said thickly, "you jus' tell the old girl Jim says: 'Happy Christmas!'"

The surgeon started back at the grim cheer of that message, but he took it like a priest and carried it back through the little hell that flared down the ravine on Jim now through the window. And like a priest he told it to but one living soul.

THE ANGEL FROM VIPER

He had violet eyes, the smile of a seraph, and a halo of yellow hair, and he came from Viper, which is a creek many, many hills away from Happy Valley. He came on foot and alone to St. Hilda, who said sadly that she had no room for him. But she sighed helplessly when the Angel

smiled--and made room for him. To the teachers he became Willie--to his equals he was Bill. In a few weeks he got homesick and, without a word, disappeared. A fortnight later he turned up again with a little brother, and again he smiled at St. Hilda.

"Jeems Henery hyeh," he said, "lowed as how he'd come along"--and James Henry got a home. Jeems was eight, and the Angel, who was ten, was brother and father to him. He saw to it that Jeems Henery worked and worked hard and that he behaved himself, so that his concern for the dull, serious little chap touched St. Hilda deeply. That concern seemed, indeed, sacrificial--and was.

When spring breathed on the hills the Angel got restless. He was homesick again and must go to see his mother.

"But, Willie," said St. Hilda, "you told me your mother died two years ago."

"She come might' nigh dyin'," said the Angel. "That's what I said." St. Hilda reasoned with him to no avail, and because she knew he would go anyhow gave him permission.

"Miss Hildy, I'm a-leavin' Jeems Henery with ye now, an' I reckon I oughter tell you somethin'."

"Yes, Willie," answered St. Hilda absently.

[Illustration]

"Miss Hildy, Jeems Henery is the bigges' liar on Viper."

"Yes," repeated St. Hilda; "what?"

"The truth ain't in Jeems Henery," the Angel went on placidly. "You can't lam' it inter 'im an' tain't no use to try. You jus' watch him close while I'm gone."

"I will."

Half an hour later the Angel put his hand gently on St. Hilda's knee, and his violet eyes were troubled. "Miss Hildy," he said solemnly, "Jeems Henery is the cussin'est boy on Viper. I reckon Jeems Henery is the cussin'est boy in the world. You've got to watch him while I'm gone, or no tellin' whut he will larn them young uns o' yours."

"All right. I'll do the best I can."

"An' that ain't all," added the Angel solemnly. "Jeems Henery"--St. Hilda almost held her breath--"Jeems Henery is the gamblin'est boy on Viper. Jeems Henery jes' can't look at a marble without tremblin' all over. If you don't watch him like a hawk while I'm gone I reckon Jeems Henery'll larn them young uns o' yours all the devilment in the world."

"Gracious!"

James Henry veered into view just then around the corner of the house.

"Jeems Henery," called the Angel sternly, "come hyeh!" And James Henry stood before the bar of the Angel's judgment.

"Jeems Henery, air you the gamblin'est boy on Viper?" James Henry nodded cheerfully.

"Air you the cussin'est boy on Viper?" Again there was a nod of cheerful acknowledgment.

"Jeems Henery, air you the bigges' liar on Viper?" James Henry, looking with adoring eyes at the Angel, nodded shameless shame for the third time, and the Angel turned triumphantly.

"Thar now!" Astounded, St. Hilda looked from one brother to the other.

"Well, not one word of this have I heard before."

"Jeems Henery is a sly un--ain't you, Jeems Henery?"

"Uh-huh."

"Ain't nobody who can ketch up Jeems Henery 'ceptin' me."

"Well, Willie, if this is more than I can handle, don't you think you'd better not go home but stay here and help me with James Henry?" The Angel did not even hesitate.

"I reckon I better," he said, and he visibly swelled with importance. "I had to lam' Jeems Henery this mornin', an' I reckon I'll have to keep on lammin' him 'most every day."

"Don't you lam' James Henry at all," said St. Hilda decisively.

"All right," said the Angel. "Jeems Henery, git about yo' work now."

Thereafter St. Hilda kept watch on James Henry and he was, indeed, a sly one. There was gambling going on. St. Hilda did not encourage tale-bearing, but she knew it was going on. Still she could not catch James Henry. One day the Angel came to her.

"I've got Jeems Henery to stop gamblin'," he whispered, "an' I didn't have to lam' him." And, indeed, gambling thereafter ceased. The young man who had come for the summer to teach the boys the games of the outside world reported that

much swearing had been going on but that swearing too had stopped.

"I've got Jeems Henery to stop cussin'," reported the Angel, and so St. Hilda rewarded him with the easy care of the nice new stable she had built on the hillside. His duty was to clean it and set things in order every day.

Some ten days later she was passing near the scene of the Angel's new activities, and she hailed him.

"How are you getting along?" She called.

"Come right on, Miss Hildy," shouted the Angel. "I got ever'thing cleaned up. Come on an' look in the furthest corners!"

St. Hilda went on, but ten minutes later she had to pass that way again and she did look in. Nothing had been done. The stable was in confusion and a pitchfork lay prongs upward midway of the barn door.

"How's this, Ephraim?" she asked, mystified. Ephraim was a fourteen-year-old boy who did the strenuous work of the barn.

"Why, Miss Hildy, I jes' hain't had time to clean up yit."

"You haven't had time?" she echoed in more mystery. "That isn't your work--it's Willie's." It was Ephraim's turn for mystery.

"Why, Miss Hildy, Willie told me more'n a week ago that you said fer me to do all the cleanin' up."

"Do you mean to say that you've been doing this work for over a week? What's Willie been doing?"

"Not a lick--jes' settin' aroun' studyin' an' whistlin'."

St. Hilda went swiftly down the hill, herself in deep study, and she summoned the Angel to the bar of her judgment. The Angel writhed and wormed, but it was no use, and at last with smile, violet eyes, and halo the Angel spoke the truth. Then a great light dawned for St. Hilda, and she played its searching rays on the Angel's past and he spoke more truth, leaving her gasping and aghast.

"Why--why did you say all that about your poor little brother?"

The Angel's answer was prompt. "Why, I figgered that you couldn't ketch Jeems Henery an' wouldn't ketch me. An'," the Angel added dreamily, "it come might' nigh bein' that-a-way if I just had----"

"You're a horrid, wicked little boy," St. Hilda cried, but the Angel would not be perturbed, for he was a practical moralist.

"Jeems Henery," he called into space, "come hyeh!" And out of space James Henry came, as though around the corner he had been waiting the summons.

"Jeems Henery, who was the gamblin'est, cussin'est, lyin'est boy on Viper?"

"My big brother Bill!" shouted Jeems Henery proudly.

"Who stopped gamblin', cussin', an' lyin'?"

"My big brother Bill!"

"Who stopped all these young uns o' Miss Hildy's from cussin' an' gamblin'?" And Jeems Henery shouted: "My big brother Bill!" The Angel, well pleased, turned to St. Hilda.

"Thar now," he said triumphantly, and seeing that he had reduced St. Hilda to helpless pulp he waved his hand.

"Git back to yo' work, Jeems Henery." But St. Hilda was not yet all pulp.

"Willie," she asked warily, "when did you stop lying?"

"Why, jes' now!" There was in the Angel's face a trace of wonder at St. Hilda's lack of understanding.

"How did James Henry know?" The mild wonder persisted.

"Jeems Henery knows me!" St. Hilda was all pulp now, but it was late afternoon, and birds were singing in the woods, and her little people were singing as they worked in fields; and her heart was full. She spoke gently.

"Go on back to work, Willie," she was about to say, but the Angel had gone a-

dreaming and his face was sad, and she said instead:

"What is it, Willie?"

"I know whut's been the matter with me, Miss Hildy--I hain't been the same since my mother died six year ago." For a moment St. Hilda took a little silence to gain self-control.

"You mean," she said sternly, "'come might' nigh dyin',' Willie, and two years ago."

"Well, Miss Hildy, hit 'pears like six." Her brain whirled at the working of his, but his eyes, his smile, and the halo, glorified just then by a bar of sunlight, were too much for St. Hilda, and she gathered him into her arms.

"Oh, Willie, Willie," she half-sobbed; "I don't know what to do with you!" And then, to comfort her, the Angel spoke gently:

"Miss Hildy, jes' don't do--nothin'."

THE POPE OF THE BIG SANDY

He entered a log cabin in the Kentucky hills. An old woman with a pair of scissors cut the tie that bound him to his mother and put him in swaddling-clothes of homespun. Now, in silk pajamas, with three doctors and two nurses to make his going easy, he was on his way out of a suite of rooms ten stories above the splendor of Fifth Avenue.

It was early morning. A taxi swung into the paved circle in front of the hotel below and a little man in slouch-hat and black frock coat, and with his trousers in his boots, stepped gingerly out. He took off the hat with one hand, dropped his saddle-pockets from the other, and mopped his forehead with a bandanna handkerchief.

"My God, brother," he said to the grinning driver, "I tol' ye to hurry, but I didn't 'low you'd fly! How much d' I owe ye an' how do I git in hyeh?"

A giant in a gold-braided uniform had picked up the saddle-pockets when the little man turned.

"Well, now, that's clever of ye," he said, thrusting out his hand, "I reckon you air the proprietor--how's the Pope?"

"Sure, I dunno, sor--this way, sor." The astonished giant pointed to the swinging door and turned for light to the taxi man who, doubled with laughter over his wheel, tapped his forehead. At the desk the little man pushed his hat back and put both elbows down.

"Whar's the Pope?"

"The Pope!" From behind, the giant was making frantic signs, but the clerk's brow cleared. "Oh, yes--front!"

The little man gasped and swayed as the elevator shot upward, but a moment later

the little judge of Happy Valley and the Pope of the Big Sandy were hand in hand.

"How're yo' folks, judge?"

"Stirrin'--how're you, Jim?"

"Ain't stirrin' at all."

"Shucks, you'll be up an' aroun' in no time."

"I ain't goin' to git up again."

"Don't you git stubborn now, Jim."

A nurse brought in some medicine and the Pope took it with a wry face. The judge reached for his saddle-pockets and pulled out a bottle of white liquor with a stopper of corn-shucks.

"This'll take the bad taste out o' yo' mouth."

"The docs won't let me--but lemme smell it." The judge had whipped out a twist of long green and again the Pope shook his head:

"Can't drink--can't chaw!"

"Oh, Lord!" The judge bit off a mouthful and a moment later walked to the window and, with his first and second fingers forked over his lips, ejected an amber stream.

"Good Lord, judge--don't do that. You'll splatter a million people." He called for a spittoon and the judge grunted disgustedly.

"I'd hate to live in a place whar a feller can't spit out o' his own window."

"Don't you like it?"

"Hit looks like circus day--I got the headache already."

A telegram was brought in.

"Been seein' a lot about you in the papers," said the judge, and the Pope waved wearily to a pile of dailies. There were columns about him in those papers--about his meteoric rise: how he started a poor boy in the mountains, studied by candle-light, taught school in the hills: how a vision of their future came to him even that early and how he clung to that vision all his life, turning,

twisting for option money on coal lands, making a little sale now and then, but always options and more options and sales and more sales, until now the poor mountain boy was a king among the coal barons of the land.

"Judge," said the Pope, "the votin's started down home."

"How's it goin'?"

"Easy."

"Been spendin' any money?"

"Not a cent."

"Ole Bill Maddox is."

"Why, judge, I'm the daddy an' granddaddy o' that town. I built streets and sidewalks for it out o' my own pocket. I put up two churches for 'em. I built the water-works, the bank, an' God knows what all. Ole Bill Maddox can't turn a wheel against me." The little judge was marvelling: here was a man who had refused all his life to run for office, who could have been congressman, senator, governor; and who had succumbed at last.

"Jim, what in blue hell do you want that office fer?"

"To make folks realize their duties as citizens," said the Pope patiently; "to maintain streets and sidewalks and water-works and sewers an' become an

independent community, instead o' layin' back on other folks!"

"How about all them churches you been buildin' all over them mountains--air they self-sustainin'?"

"Well, they do need a little help now and then." The judge grunted.

Through the morning many cards were brought the Pope, but the doctors allowed no business. To amuse himself the Pope sent the judge into the sitting-room to listen to the million-dollar project of one sleek young man, and the judge reported:

"Nothin' doin'--he's got a bad eye."

"Right," said the Pope. At twelve o'clock the judge looked at his watch:

"Dinner-time." And the Pope ordered his old mountain friend cabbage, bacon, and greens.

"Judge, I got to sleep now. I've got a car down below. After dinner you can take a ride or you can take a walk."

"You can't git me into a automobile an' I'm afeard to walk. I'd git run over. I'll jus' hang aroun'."

Another telegram was brought in.

"Runnin' easy an' winnin' in a walk," said the Pope. "It's a cinch. You can open anything else that comes while I'm asleep."

The judge himself had not slept well on the train; so he took off his boots, put his yarn-stockinged feet in one chair, and sitting up in another took a nap. An hour later the Pope called for him. The last telegram reported that he was so far ahead that none others would be sent until the committee started to count ballots.

"I've made you an executor in my will, judge," he said, "an' I want you to see that some things are done yourself." The judge nodded.

"I want you to have a new church built in Happy Valley. I want you to give St. Hilda and that settlement school five thousand a year. An'"--he paused--"you know ole Bill Maddox cut me out an' married Sally

Ann Spurlock--how many children they got now, judge?"

"Ten--oldest, sixteen."

"Well, I want you to see that every gold-durned one of 'em gits the chance to go to school."

Now, old Bill Maddox was running against the Pope, and was fighting him hard, and the judge hated old Bill Maddox; so he said nothing. The Pope too was silent a long while.

"Judge, I got all my money out o' the mountain folks. I robbed 'em right and left."

"You ain't never robbed nobody in Happy Valley," said the judge a little grimly, and the Pope chuckled.

"No, you wouldn't let me. I got all my money from 'em an' do you know what I'm goin' to do?"

"Git some more, I reckon."

[Illustration]

The Pope chuckled again: "I'm a-goin' to give it back to 'em. Churches, schools, libraries, hospitals, good roads--any durned thing in the world that will do 'em any good. It's all in my will. An', judge," he added with a little embarrassment, "I've sort o' fixed it so that when you want to help out a widder or a orphan in

Happy Valley you can do it without always diggin' down into yo' own jeans."

"Shucks, don't you worry about me or the folks in Happy Valley--you done enough fer them lettin' 'em alone; an' that durned ole Bill Maddox, he's a fightin' you right now afore yo' face an' behind yo' back. He's the meanest----"

"Makes no difference. His children ain't to blame an' thar's Sally Ann." The Pope yawned and his brow wrinkled with pain. "I better take a little more sleep, judge." A doctor came in and felt the Pope's pulse and the judge left the room worried by the physician's face and his whispered direction to the nurse to summon another doctor.

An hour later the Pope called him back, and his voice was weak:

"Bring in every telegram, judge."

"You mustn't bother," interposed the doctor firmly, and the Pope's mouth set and the old dominant gleam came into his eyes.

"Bring in every telegram," he repeated. Outside, in the hallway, the judge waylaid the doctor.

"Ain't he goin' to pull through?"

"One chance in a thousand," was the curt answer.

About three o'clock the judge got a telegram that made him swear fearfully,

and thereafter they came fast. The Pope would use no money. The judge wired the Pope's manager warily offering a thousand of his own. The answer came--"Too late." At five o'clock they were running neck and neck. Ten minutes before the polls closed old Bill Maddox rounded up twenty more votes and victory was his. And all the while the judge was making reports to the Pope:

"Runnin' easy."

"It's a cinch."

"Ole Bill fighting tooth and toe-nail but you got him, Jim."

"Countin' the votes now."

"Air ye shore, Jim, you want to leave all that money fer ole Bill's brats?--he's a hound."

"Ole Bill comin' up a little, Jim."

And then came that last telegram, reporting defeat, and with it crushed in his hand the judge made his last report:

"All over. You've got 'em, Jim. Hooray! Can't you hear 'em yell?" The Pope's white mouth smiled and his eyelids flickered, but his eyes stayed closed.

"Jim, I wouldn't give all that money to old Bill's brats--just some fer Sally Ann."

"All of it for old Bill's--for Sally Ann's children, the mountain folks, an' the old

home town." The Pope opened his eyes and he spoke:

"All of you--nurses an' docs--git out o' here, please." And knowing that the end was nigh they quietly withdrew.

"Judge, you ain't no actor--you're a ham!"

"Whut you mean, Jim?" asked the judge, for in truth he did not understand--not just then. The roar of the city rose from below, but the sunset came through the window as through all windows of the world. The Pope's hand reached for the judge's hand. His lips moved and the judge bent low.

"Beat!" whispered the Pope; "beat, by God! Beat--for--councilman--in--my--own

home town." And because he knew his fellow man, the good and the bad, the Pope passed with a smile.

THE GODDESS OF HAPPY VALLEY

I

The professor stood at the window of his study waiting for Her to come home. The wind outside was high and whipped her skirts close to her magnificent body as, breasting it unconcernedly, she came with a long, slow stride around a corner down the street. Now, as always whenever he saw her move, he thought of the line in Virgil, for even in her walk she showed the goddess. And Juno was her name.

He met her at the door and he did not have to stoop to kiss her. "What is it, dear?" he said quickly, for deep in her eyes, which looked level with his, he saw trouble.

She handed him a letter and walked to the window--looking out at the gathering storm. The letter was from her home away down in the Kentucky hills--from the Mission teacher in Happy Valley.

There was an epidemic of typhoid down there. It was spreading through the school and through the hills. They were without nurses or doctors, and they needed help.

"Too bad, too bad," he murmured, and he turned anxiously.

"I must go," she said, with a catch in her breath. "One cabin is built above another all the way up the creeks down there. The springs are by the stream. High water floods all of them, and the infection goes with the tide. And the poor things don't know--they don't know. Oh, I must go!"

For a moment he was silent, and then he got up and put his arms about her. He was smiling.

"Then, I'll go with you." She wheeled quickly.

"No, no, no! You can't leave your work, and--remember!"

He did remember how useless it had been to argue with her, and he knew it was useless now. Moreover, if she was going at all, it was like her to go at once--like her to go up-stairs at once to her packing and leave him in the darkened study alone.

They had been married two years. He had seen her first entering his own classroom, and straightway that Latin line took permanent quarters in his brain, so that he was almost startled when he learned her Olympic name. It was not long before he found himself irresistibly drawn to her big, serious eyes that never wandered in a moment's inattention, found himself expounding directly to her--a fact already discovered by every girl in the classroom except Juno herself; and she never did discover, for no one

was intimate enough to tell her seriously, and there was that about her that forbade the telling in badinage. With all secrecy, and shyly almost, he set about to learn what he could about her, and that was little indeed.

She came from the mountains of Kentucky, she had won a scholarship in the bluegrass region of the same State, had come North, and was living with painful economy working her way through college, he heard, as a waitress in the dining-hall. He was rather shocked to hear of one incident. The girl who was the head of all athletics in college had once addressed rather sharp words to Juno, who had been persuaded to try for the basket-ball team. The mountain girl did not respond in kind. Instead, her big eyes narrowed to volcanic slits, she

caught the champion shot-putter by the shoulders, shook her until her hair came down, and then, with fists doubled, had stood waiting for more trouble.

When the term closed the professor stayed on to finish some experiments he had on hand, and at dinner in his boarding-house the next night he nearly overturned his soup-plate, for it was the goddess who had placed it before him. She was there for the summer--not having money to go home--as a general helper in the household and living under the same roof. She too was going on with her studies, and he offered to help her.

He found her a source of puzzling surprises. While she was from the South, she was not Southern in speech, sentiments, ideas, or ideals. Her voice

was not Southern and, while she elided final consonants, her intonation was not of the South. Indeed she would startle him every now and then by dropping some archaic word or old form of expression that made him think of Chaucer. Her feeling toward the negro was precisely what his was, and once when he halted in some stricture on the Confederacy and started to apologize she laughed.

"All my folks," she said, "fit fer the Union--as we say down there," she added with a smile.

So that gradually he began to realize that the Appalachian Range, while being parts of the Southern States, was not of them at all, but was a region sui generis, and that its inhabitants were the only

Americans who had never swerved in fealty to the flag.

By midsummer it was all over with him, and he shocked his own reticent soul by blurting out one day: "I want you to marry me." The words had been shot from him by some inner dynamic force, and at the moment he would have given anything he had could he have taken them back. He waited in terror and very frankly and proudly she lifted her heavy lashes, looked straight into his eyes, and firmly said:

"No!"

He went away then, but his relief was not what he thought it would be. He could not forget that her mouth quivered slightly, and that there seemed to be a

faint weakening in the depths of her eyes when he told her good-bye. He could climb no mountain that he did not see her striding as from Olympus down it. He walked by no seashore that he did not see her rising from the waves, and again he went to her, and again he asked. And this time, just as frankly and proudly, she looked him in the eyes and said:

"Yes--on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you don't go to my home and my people for five years." He laughed.

"Why, you big, beautiful, silly young person, I know mountains and mountaineers."

"Yes--of Europe--but not mine."

"Very well," he said, and, not knowing women, he asked:

"Why didn't you say 'Yes' the first time?"

"I don't know," she said.

II

She had lifted her voice first, one spring dawn, in a log cabin that clung to the steep bank of Clover Fork, and her wail rose above the rush of its high waters--above the song of a wood-thrush in the top of a poplar high above her.

Somewhere her mother had heard the word Juno, and the mere sound of the word appealed to her starved sense of beauty as did one of the old-fashioned

flowers she planted in her tiny yard. So the mother gave the child that name and, like the name, the child grew up, tall, slow, and majestic of movement, singularly gentle and quiet, except when aroused, and then her wrath and her might were primeval.

St. Hilda, the Mission teacher, was the first from the outside world to be drawn to her. She had stopped in at the cabin on Clover one day to find the mother of the family ill in bed, and twelve-year-old Juno acting as cook and mother for a brood of ten. A few months later she persuaded the father to let the girl come down to her school, and in the succeeding years she became St. Hilda's right hand and the mainstay in the supervision of the kitchen, housework, and laundry, and even in the management of the Mission's

farm. No one had the subtle understanding of St. Hilda's charges as had Juno--no one could handle them quite so well. So that it was with real grief and great personal loss that St. Hilda opened the way for Juno to go to school in the Bluegrass. And now, one sunset in mid-May, she was back at the Mission in Happy Valley, and the two were in each other's arms.

Happy Valley it was no longer, for throughout it the plague had spread fear or sickness or death in every little home. St. Hilda had gathered her own little sufferers in tents collected from a railway-camp over the mountains, a surveying party, and from the Bluegrass. A volunteer doctor had come from the "settlements," and two nurses, and so Juno took to the outside work up and

down the river, up every little creek, and out in the hills. All day and far into the night she was gone. Sometimes she did not for days come back to the Mission. Her face grew white and drawn, and her cheeks hollow from poor food, meagre snatches of sleep, and untiring work. The doctor warned her, St. Hilda warned her, she got anxious warning letters from her husband, but on she went. And the inevitable happened.

One hot midday, as she watched by the bedside of a little patient with a branch of maple in her hand to keep the flies away, she drowsed, and one of the wretched little insects lighted on her moist red lips. Soon thereafter the "walking typhoid" caught her as she was striding past Lum Chapman's blacksmith-shop. Instinctively she kept on toward home, and reached

there raving: "Don't let him come--don't let him come!" And when the news got about the heart of Happy Valley almost bled.

Only St. Hilda guessed what the mutterings of the sick girl meant, but she did not heed them, and the professor from New England soon crossed Mason and Dixon's line for the first time in his life. For the first time he fell under the spell of the Southern hills--graceful, gracious big hills, real mountains, densely wooded like thickets to their very tops--so densely wooded, indeed, that they seemed overspread with a great shaggy green rug that swept on and on over the folds of the hills as though billowed up by a mighty wind beneath. And the lights, the mists, the drifting cloud shadows! Why had Juno not wanted him to see

them? And when he took to horseback and mounted through that billowing rug, through ferns stirrup-high, with flowers innumerable nodding on either side of the trail and the air of the first dawn in his nostrils--mounted to the top of the Big Black, rode for miles along its gently waving summit, and saw at every turn of the path the majestic supernal beauty of the mighty green waves that swept on and on before him, in wonder he kept asking himself:

"Why--why?"

He had not come into contact yet with the humanity in those hills. The log cabins he had seen from the train--clinging to the hillsides, nestling in little coves amid apple-trees, or close to the banks of rushing little creeks--had struck

him as most picturesque and charming, and an occasional old mill, with its big water-wheel, boxed-in, grass-hung mill-race half hidden by weeping willows, had given him sheer delight; but now he was meeting the people in the road and could see them close at hand in doorway and porches of the wretched little houses that he passed. How mean, meagre, narrow, and poverty-stricken must be their lives!

At one cabin he had to stop for midday dinner, for the word "lunch," he found, was unknown. A slatternly woman with scraggling black hair, and with three dirty children clinging to her dirty apron, "reckoned she mought git him a bite," and disappeared. Flies swarmed over him when he sat in the porch. The rancid smell of bedding struck his sensitive nostrils from within. He heard the loud

squawking of a chicken cease suddenly, and his hunger-gnawed stomach almost turned when he suddenly realized just what it meant. When called within, it was dirt and flies, flies and dirt, everywhere. He sat in a chair with a smooth-worn cane bottom so low that his chin was just above the table. The table-cover was of greasy oilcloth. His tumbler was cloudy, unclean, and the milk was thin and sour. Thick slices of fat bacon swam in a dish of grease, blood was perceptible in the joints of the freshly killed, half-cooked chicken, and the flies swarmed.

As he rode away he began to get a glimmer of light. Perhaps Juno--his Juno--had once lived like that; perhaps her people did yet.

There was another mountain to climb, and a stranger who was going his way offered to act as guide. The stranger was a Kentuckian, he said, from the Bluegrass region, and he was buying timber through the hills. He volunteered this, but the New England man made no self-revelment. Instead he burst out:

"How do these people live this way?"

"They have to--they're pretty poor."

"They don't have to keep--dirty."

"They've got used to it, and so would you if your folks had been living out in this wilderness for a hundred years."

From a yard that they passed, a boy with a vacant face and retreating forehead dropped his axe to stare at them.

"That's the second one I've seen," said the professor.

"Yes, idiots are not unusual in these mountains--inbreeding!"

"Do they still have moonshining and feuds and all that yet?"

"Plenty of moonshining. The feuds are all over practically, though I did hear that the big feud over the mountain was likely to be stirred up again--the old Camp and Adkin feud." A question came faintly from behind:

"Do you know any of the Camps?"

"Used to know old Red King Camp, the leader. He's in the penitentiary now for killing a man. What's the matter?" He turned in his saddle, but the New Englander had recovered himself.

"Nothing--nothing. It seems awful to a Northern man."

The stranger thought he had heard a groan behind him, and he had--King Camp was the name of the Northern man's father-in-law. Ah, he was beginning to understand; but why did Juno not want him to come for five years?

"Is--is Red King Camp--how long was his sentence?"

"Let's see--he's been in two years, and I heard he had three years more. Yes, I remember--he got five years."

Once more the Bluegrass man thought he heard a groan, but the other was only clearing his throat. The New Englander asked no more questions, and about two hours by sun they rode over a ridge and down to the bed of Clover Fork.

"Well, stranger, we part here. You go up to the head of the creek, and anybody'll tell you where Red King lives. There's plenty of moonshining up that way, and if anybody asks your name and your business--tell 'em quick. They won't bother you. And if I were you I wouldn't criticise these people to anybody. They're morbidly sensitive, and you never know when you are giving mortal offense. And,

by the way, most offenses are mortal in these hills."

"Thank you. Good-by--and thank you."

Everybody knew where old King Camp lived--"Fust house a leetle way down t'other side o' the mountain from the head of Clover." And nobody asked him his name or his business. Near dusk he was at the head of Little Clover and looking down on Happy Valley. The rimming mountains were close overhung with motionless wet clouds. Above and through them lightning flashed, and thunder cracked and boomed like encircling artillery around the horizon. The wind came with the rush of mighty wings, and blackness dropped like a curtain. By one flash of lightning he saw a great field of corn, by another a big,

comfortable barn, a garden, a trim picket-fence, a yard full of flowers, and a log house the like of which he had not seen in the hills--and a new light came--Juno's work! A torrent of rain swept after him as he stepped upon the porch and knocked on the door. A moment later he was looking at the kindest and most motherly face and into the kindest eyes he had ever seen.

"I'm Juno's husband," he said simply. For a moment she blinked up at him bewilderedly through brass-rimmed spectacles, and then she put her arms around him and bent back to look up at him again. Then, still without a word, she led him on tiptoe to an open door and pointed.

"She's in thar." And there she lay--his Juno--thin, white, unconscious, her beauty spiritualized, glorified. He sat simply looking at her--how long he did not know--until he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder. It was Juno's mother beckoning him to supper.

Going out he saw Juno's hand in everything--the hand-woven rag carpet, the curtains at the windows, the andirons at the log fire--for summer nights in those hills are always cool--saw it in the kitchen, the table-cloth, napkins, even though they were in rings, the dishes, the food, the neatness in everything. He could see the likeness of Juno to the gentle-voiced old woman who would talk of nothing but her daughter. In a moment she was calling him "Jim," and few others than his dead mother had ever called him

that. And when at bedtime she said, "Don't let her die, Jim," he leaned down and kissed her--something her own sons when grown up had never done.

"No, mother," he said, and the word did not come hard.

III

Juno had been delirious since the day she was stricken. Her mutterings had been disjointed and unintelligible, but that night, while Mother Camp and the New Englander sat at her bedside, she said again:

"Don't let him come."

"She ain't said that for three days now," said Mother Camp. "Whut d' you s'pose

she means?" The husband shook his head.

Next morning the nurse for whom St. Hilda had sent arrived from the Bluegrass, and the New Englander started down Little Clover to the settlement school to consult the doctor and see St. Hilda. It was a brilliant, drenched June day, and never, he believed, had his eyes rested on such a glory of green and gold. Already he had been heralded in the swift way common in the hills, and all who saw him coming knew who he was. He was Juno's man, and the people straightway called him--Jim. When he stood on St. Hilda's porch her words and her drawn, anxious face went straight to his heart. There was nobody like Juno, and without Juno she did not know how she could get along. Her own little sufferers were in

tents about her, and there was only one nurse for them. Juno, said the doctor, might be unconscious for a long time, and her nurse must be with her night and day: so who would take Juno's place throughout the hills she did not know. At once the New Englander, who knew a good deal about medicine and something of typhoid, found himself offering to do all he could. Then and there the Mission teacher gave him a list of patients, and then and there, with a thermometer in his pocket and a medicine-case in his hand, he started on his first round. The people were very shy with him at first. In a few days he was promoted to Doctor Jim, and soon he was plain "Doc" to all. By every mouth that opened he found Juno's name blessed, and many were the tales of what she had done. She had saved wild Jay Dawn's little girl and Lum

Chapman's firstborn. She had brought old Aunt Sis Stidham back from the shadow of the grave, and had turned that tart, irreverent old person's erring feet back into the way of the Lord.

[Illustration]

Night and day, and through wind and storm, she had travelled the hills, healing the sick and laying out and helping to bury the dead. Apparently there was not a man, woman, or child in Happy Valley who did not love her or have some reason to be grateful, and when in the open-air meeting-house Parson Small told of her work and prayed that her life be spared, there were fervent "Amens," or tears and sobs, from all. Doctor Jim soon found himself getting deeply interested in the people, and when he contrasted the

lives of those whom the influence of the Mission school had not yet reached with the folks in Happy Valley he began to realize the amazing good that St. Hilda was doing in the hills. What a place he was earning for himself he was yet to learn, but through some mystification an inkling came. To be sure, everybody spoke to him as though he were a fixture in the land. He could pass no door that somebody did not ask him to come in and rest a spell, or stay all night. He never went by the mill that Aunt Jane did not have a glass of buttermilk for him and Uncle Jerry did not try to entice him in for a talk. Several times the little judge of Happy Valley had ridden down to ask after Juno and to talk with him. Pleasant Trouble waved his crutch from a hillside and shouted himself at Doctor Jim's disposal for any purpose whatever. But

one sunset he had stopped at Lum Chapman's blacksmith-shop just as a big, black-haired fellow, with a pistol buckled around him, was reeling away. The men greeted him rather solemnly, and he felt that they wanted to say something to him, but no one spoke. He saw Jay Dawn nod curtly to Pleasant Trouble, who got briskly up and walked up the road with him until they were in sight of Juno's home. For three days thereafter Pleasant was waiting for him at the shop and walked the same space with him. The next day Jay Dawn spoke with some embarrassment to him:

"Have you got a gun?"

"No." Jay handed forth one.

"Oh, no!" said Doctor Jim.

"Go on!" said Jay shortly; "I got another un."

"But why do I need a gun?" Jay was distinctly embarrassed.

"Well," he drawled, "thar's some purty bad fellers 'bout hyeh, an' when they gits drunk they might do somethin'. Now that Jerry Lipps you seed hyeh t'other day a-staggerin' off drunk--he's bad. An' you do a heap o' travellin' alone. This ain't fer you to kill nobody but jus' kind o' to pertect yerself."

"All right," laughed Doctor Jim. "I couldn't hit a barn--" but to humor Jay he took the weapon, and this time Pleasant Trouble did not walk home with him.

Later he mentioned the matter to St. Hilda, who looked very grave.

"Yes, Jerry Lipps is a bad man. He's just out of the penitentiary. Pleasant walked home with you to protect you from him. They won't let him do anything to you openly. And Jay gave you that gun in case he should attack you when nobody was around."

"But what has the fellow got against me?"
The teacher hesitated.

"Well, Jerry used to be in love with Juno, but she would never have anything to do with him and he never would let her have anything to do with anybody else. He shot one boy, and shot at another, and he has always sworn that he would kill the man she married."

"Nonsense!" he said, but going home that night Doctor Jim carried the gun where he could get at it quickly.

"My God!" he muttered with grim humor; "no wonder Juno didn't want me to come."

It was only a few days later that Doctor Jim came out of Lum Chapman's house and paused in the path looking up Wolf Run. Jerry Lipps's sister lived half a mile above and he had just heard that her little daughter was down with the fever. Jerry might be staying with the sister, but Doctor Jim's duty was now up there and, in spite of the warnings given him, he did not hesitate. The woman stared when he told who he was and why he had come, but she nodded and pointed to the bed

where the child lay. He put his pistol on the bed, thrust a thermometer into the little girl's mouth and began taking her pulse. A hand swept the pistol from the bed and, when he turned around, about all he could think was: "How extraordinary!"

Jerry, red with rage and drink, was at the kitchen door fumbling at the butt of his pistol, while his sister had Doctor Jim's gun levelled at her brother's heart.

"You can't tech him," she said coolly, "an' if you pull that gun out an inch furder I'll kill ye as shore as thar's a God in heaven." And at that moment the door opened and Pleasant Trouble swung in on his crutch and grinned. Doctor Jim then heard the tongue-lashing of his life. The woman's volubility was like a mill-race,

and her command of vitriolic epithets was beyond his ken. She recited what Juno had done, Doctor Jim was doing, the things Jerry had done and left undone, and wound up:

"You never was wuth Juno's little finger, an' you ain't wuth his little finger-nail now. Take his gun, Pleas. Take him to the State line, an' don't you boys let him come back agin until he's stopped drinkin', got a suit o' clothes, an' a job."

"Why, Mandy," said Pleasant, "hit's kind o' funny, but Lum an' Jay an' me fixed hit up about an hour ago that we aimed to do that very thing. I seed Doc a-comin' up hyeh, an' was afeard I mought be too late: but if I'd 'a' knowed you was hyeh I wouldn't 'a' worried."

Again Doctor Jim was thinking, "How extraordinary!" but this time how extraordinary it was that the man really meant to shoot him. Somehow he began to understand.

Still grinning, Pleasant Trouble had swung across the room, whipped Jerry's pistol from the holster, and with it motioned the owner toward the door. Then Doctor Jim rose. "Hold on!" he said, and he took the pistol from the woman's hands, strode straight up to Jerry and smiled. Now, from the top of Virginia down through seven Southern States to Georgia there are some three million mountaineers, and it is doubtful if among them all any other three pairs of ears ever heard such words as Professor James Blagden of New England spoke now:

"Jerry, I don't blame you for having loved Juno, or for loving her now. I wouldn't blame anybody. I even understand now why you wanted to kill me, but that would have been--silly. Give him back his gun, Pleasant," he added, still smiling, "and give this one back to Jay." He reached in his pocket, pulled forth two cigars and handed one to each. "Now you two sit down and smoke, and in a moment I'll go along with you, and we'll help Jerry get a job." And thereupon Doctor Jim turned around to his little patient. Dazed and a bit hypnotized, Jerry took the cigar and thrust his pistol into his holster.

"I'll be gittin' along," he said sullenly, and made for the door. Pleasant followed him. At the road Jerry turned one way and Pleasant the other.

"You heered whut Mandy and me said," drawled Pleasant. "If you poke yore nose over the line 'bout three of us will shoot you on sight. We'd do it fer Juno, an' if she ain't alive we'll do it fer Doctor Jim."

"I was a-goin' over thar anyways," said Jerry, "an' I'll come back when I please. You one-legged limb o' Satan--you go plum"--Pleasant's eyes began to glitter--"back to him."

Pleasant laughed, and as they walked their separate ways the same question was in the minds of both:

"Now, whut the hell did he mean by 'silly'?"

Only the next morning a happy day dawned. Old King Camp came home with his sons--two stalwart boys and a giant father. Doctor Jim looked long at old King's hair, which was bushy and jet-black. He stood it as long as he could and then he asked:

"Why do people on the other side of the mountain call you Red King Camp?" he asked.

"They don't--not more'n once," was the grim answer. "I'm Black King Camp. Red's my cousin, but I don't claim him."

One load was off Doctor Jim's heart. His father-in-law was like his name in many ways, and Doctor Jim liked him

straightway and Black King liked Doctor Jim. Old King shook his head.

"I don't see why Juno didn't bring you down here long ago," he said, and Doctor Jim did not try to explain--he couldn't. It must have been fear of Jerry--and he believed that Jerry, too, was now out of the way.

About noon Juno came back for the first time from another world. She did not open her eyes, but she heard voices and knew what they were saying. Her mother was talking in the next room to somebody whom she called Jim. Who could Jim be? And then she heard the man's voice. Her eyes opened slowly on the nurse, her lips moved, but before she could frame the question her heart throbbed so that she went back into

unconsciousness again. But the nurse saw and told, and when Juno came back again she saw her husband and smiled without surprise or fright.

"I dreamed you were here," she whispered, "and I'm dreaming right now that you are here. Why, I see you." Gently he took her face in his hands, and when she felt his touch she looked at him wildly and the tears sprang. From that day on she gained fast, and from the nurse, her mother, and the neighbors she soon knew the story of Doctor Jim.

"So you thought Red King was my father," she said, "and that he was in the penitentiary?" Doctor Jim nodded shamefacedly.

"Well, even that wouldn't have been so bad--not down here. And maybe you thought I didn't want you to come on account of Jerry Lipps." Again Doctor Jim nodded admission, and Juno laughed.

"I never thought of that, and if I had," she added proudly and scornfully, "I never would have been afraid--for you."

"Then why didn't you want me to come?"

"I didn't know you--didn't know the big, big man you are. Now I'm shamed--and happy."

One morning, three weeks later, Jay Dawn and Lum Chapman brought up a litter that Lum had made, and they two and Black King and Doctor Jim made ready to carry Juno down the mountain.

Jerry Lipps was passing in the road when they bore her out the gate, and he started to sidle by with averted eyes. Doctor Jim halted.

"Here, Jerry!" he called. "You take my place." And Jerry, red as an oak leaf in autumn, stepped up to the litter, and up at her old lover Juno smiled.

"Doc," said Jerry, "I got a job."

Behind, Pleasant Trouble swung along with Doctor Jim. Mother Camp followed on horseback. People ran from every house to greet Juno, or from high on the hillsides waved their hands and shouted "how-dyes" down to her. Soon they were at the Mission, where St. Hilda and Uncle Jerry and Aunt Jane were waiting on the porch, and where pale little boys and girls

trooped weakly from the tents to welcome her. And then at a signal from Doctor Jim the four picked up the litter.

"Why, where are you going?" asked Juno.

"Never you mind," said Doctor Jim.

Through the little vineyard they went, up a little hill underneath cedars and blooming rhododendrons, and there on the top was a little cabin built of logs with the bark still on them, with a porch running around all sides but one, and supported by the trunks of little trees. The smell of cedar came from the open door, and all was as fresh and clean as the breath of the forest from which everything came--a home that had been the girl's lifelong dream. The Goddess of

Happy Valley had her own little temple at last.

On the open-air sleeping-porch they sat that night alone.

"I'm going to help raise some money for that Mission down there," said Doctor Jim. "I don't know where any more good is being done, and I don't know any people who are more worth being helped than--your people."

Happy Valley below was aswarm with fireflies. The murmur of the river over shallows rose to them. The cries of whippoorwills encircled them from the hillsides and over the mountain majestically rose the moon.

"And you and I are coming down every summer--to help."

Juno gathered his hand in both her own and held it against her cheek.

"Jim--Doctor Jim--my Jim."

THE BATTLE-PRAYER OF PARSON SMALL

Parson Small rose. From the tail-pocket of his long broadcloth coat he pulled a red bandanna handkerchief and blew his nose. He put the big blunt forefinger of his right hand on the text of the open Bible before him.

"Suffer--" he said. He glanced over his flock--the blacksmith, his wife, and her

child, the old miller and Aunt Betsey, the Mission teacher and some of her brood, past Pleasant Trouble with his crutch across his half a lap, and to the heavy-set, middle-aged figure just slipping to a seat in the rear with a slouched hat in his hand. The parson's glance grew stern and he closed the Great Book. Jeb Mullins, the newcomer, was--moonshiner and undesirable citizen in many ways. He had meant, said the parson, to preach straight from the word of God, but he would take up the matter in hand, and he glared with doubtful benevolence at Jeb's moon face, grayish whiskers, and mild blue eyes. Many turned to follow his glance, and Jeb moved in his seat and his eyes began to roll, for all knew that the matter in hand was Jeb.

Straightway the parson turned his batteries on the very throne of King Alcohol and made it totter. Men "disguised by liquer" were not themselves. Whiskey made the fights and the feuds. It broke up meetings. It made men lie around in the woods and neglect their families. It stole brains and weakened bodies. It made women unhappy and debauched children. It turned Holy Christmas into a drunken orgy. And "right thar in their very midst," he thundered, was a satellite of the Devil-King, "who was a-doin' all these very things," and that limb of Satan must give up his still, come to the mourner's bench, and "wrassle with the Sperit or else be druv from the county and go down to burnin' damnation forevermore." And that was not all: this man, he had heard, was "a-detainin' a female," an' the little judge

of Happy Valley would soon be hot on his trail. The parson mentioned no name in the indictment, but the stern faces of the women, the threatening looks of the men were too much for Jeb. He rose and bolted, and the parson halted.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth!" he cried, and he raised hands for the benediction.

"Thar's been so much talk about drinkin'," muttered Aunt Sis Stidham as she swayed out, "that hit's made me plum' thirsty. I'd like to have a dram right now." Pleasant Trouble heard her and one eye in his solemn face gave her a covert wink.

The women folks had long clamored that their men should break up Jeb's still; and

the men had stood the nagging and remained inactive through the hanging-together selfishness of the sex, for with Jeb gone where then would they drink their drams and play Old Sledge? But now Jeb was "a-detainin' of a female," and that was going too far. For a full week Jeb was seen no more, for three reasons: he was arranging an important matter with Pleasant Trouble; he was brooding over the public humiliation that the parson had visited on him; and he knew that he might be waited upon any day by a committee of his fellow citizens and customers headed by a particular enemy of his. And indeed such a committee, so headed, was formed, and as chance would have it they set forth the following Sunday morning just when Jeb himself set forth to halt the parson on his way to church. The committee caught

sight of Jeb turning from the roadside into the bushes and the leader motioned them too into the rhododendron, whispering:

"Wait an' we'll ketch him in some mo' devilment." In the bushes they waited. Soon the parson hove in view on a slowly pacing nag, with his hands folded on the pommel of his saddle and deep in meditation. Jeb stepped out into the road and the hidden men craned their necks from the bushes with eyes and ears alert.

"Good mornin', Parson Small!" The old nag stopped and the parson's head snapped up from his reverie.

"Good mornin', Jeb Mullins." The parson's greeting was stern and somewhat

uneasy, for he did not like the look on old Jeb's face.

"Parson Small," said Jeb unctuously, "las' Sunday was yo' day." The men in the bushes thrust themselves farther out--they could hear every word--"an' this Sunday is mine."

"Every Sunday is the Lawd's, Jeb Mullins--profane it not."

"Well, mebbe He'll loan me this un, parson. You lambasted me afore all Happy Valley last Sunday an' now I'm a-goin' to lick you fer it." The parson's eye gleamed faintly and subsided.

"I'm on my way to preach the word of God, Jeb Mullins."

"You'll git thar in time, parson. Git off yo' hoss!"

"I've got my broadcloth on, Jeb Mullins, an' I don't want to muss it up--wait till I come back."

"You can take it off, parson, or brush off the dust atterwards--climb off yo' hoss." Again the parson's eye gleamed and this time did not subside.

"I reckon you'll give me time to say a prayer, Jeb Mullins!"

"Shore--you'll need it afore I git through with ye."

With a sigh the parson swung offside from Jeb, dexterously pulling a jackknife from his trousers-pocket, opening it, and

thrusting it in the high top of his right boot. Then he kneeled in the road with uplifted face and eyes closed:

[Illustration]

"O Lawd," he called sonorously, "thou knowest that I visit my fellow man with violence only with thy favor and in thy name. Thou knowest that when I laid Jim Thompson an' Si Marcum in thar graves it was by thy aid. Thou knowest how I disembowelled with my trusty knife the miserable sinner Hank Smith." Here the parson drew out his knife and began honing it on the leg of his boot. "An' hyeh's another who meddles with thy servant and profanes thy day. I know this hyeh Jeb Mullins is offensive in thy sight an' fergive me, O Lawd, but I'm a-goin' to cut his gizzard plum' out, an' O Lawd--"

Here Parson Small opened one eye and Jeb Mullins did not stand on the order of his going. As he went swiftly up the hill the committee sprang from the bushes with haw-haws and taunting yells. At the top of the hill Jeb turned:

"I was a-goin' anyhow," he shouted, and with his thumb at his nose he wriggled his fingers at them.

"He'll never come back now--he'll be ashamed."

"Friends," called the parson, "the Lawd is with me--peace be unto you." And the committee said:

"Amen!"

The Japanese say: Be not surprised if the surprising does not surprise. When Jeb walked into meeting the following Sunday no citizen of Happy Valley had the subtlety to note that of them all Pleasant Trouble alone, sitting far in the rear, showed no surprise. Pleasant's face was solemn, but in his eyes was an expectant smile. Women and men glared, and the parson stopped his exhortation to glare, but Jeb had timed his entrance with the parson's call for sinners to come to the mourners' bench. It was the only safe place for him and there he went and there he sat. The parson still glared, but he had to go on exhorting--he had to exhort even Jeb. And Jeb responded. He not only "wrestled with the Spirit" valiantly but he "came through"--that is, he burst from the gloom of evil and disbelief into the light of high purpose

and the glory of salvation. He rose to confess and he confessed a great deal; but, as many knew, not all--who does? He had driven the woman like Hagar into the wilderness; he would go out right now and the folks of Happy Valley should see him break up his own still with his own hands.

"Praise the Lawd," said the amazed and convinced parson; "lead the way, Brother Mullins." Brother Mullins! The smile in Pleasant's eyes almost leaped in a laugh from his open mouth. The congregation rose and, led by Jeb and the parson, started down the road and up a ravine. The parson raised a hymn--"Climbing up Zion's hill." At his shack Jeb caught up an axe which he had left on purpose apparently at his gate, and on they went to see Jeb bruise the head of the serpent

and prove his right to enter the fold. With a shout of glory Jeb plunged ahead on a run, disappeared down a thickened bank, and, as they pushed their way, singing, through the bushes, they could hear him below crashing right and left with his axe, and when they got to him it was nearly all over. Many wondered how he could create such havoc in so short a time, but the boiler was gashed with holes, the worms chopped into bits, and the mash-tub was in splinters.

Happy Valley dispersed to dinner. Lum Chapman took the parson and his newborn father-in-law home with him, his wife following with her apron at her eyes, wiping away grateful tears. At sunset Pleasant Trouble swung lightly up Wolf Run on his crutch and called Jeb down to the gate:

"You got a good home now, Jeb."

"I shore have." Jeb's religious ecstasy had died down but he looked content.

The parson was mounting his nag and Pleasant opened the gate for him.

"Hit's sort o' curious, parson," said Jeb, "but when you prayed that prayer jes' afore I was about to battle with ye I begun to see the errer o' my ways."

"The Lawd, Brother Mullins," said the parson, dryly but sincerely, "moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform." The two watched him ride away.

"The new still will be hyeh next week," said Pleasant out of one corner of his mouth. One solemn wink they exchanged and Pleasant Trouble swung lightly off into the woods.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE ON PIGEON

The sun of Christmas poured golden blessings on Happy Valley first; it leaped ten miles of intervening hills and shot winged shafts of yellow light into the mouth of Pigeon; it darted awakening arrows into the coves and hollows on the Head of Pigeon, between Brushy Ridge and Pine Mountain; and one searching ray flashed through the open door of the little log schoolhouse at the forks of

Pigeon and played like a smile over the waiting cedar that stood within--alone.

Down at the mines below, the young doctor had not waited the coming of that sun. He had sprung from his bed at dawn, had built his own fire, dressed hurriedly, and gone hurriedly on his rounds, leaving a pill here, a powder there, and a word of good cheer everywhere. That was his Christmas tree, the cedar in the little schoolhouse--his and Hers. The Marquise of Queensberry, he called her--and she was coming up from the Gap that day to dress that tree and spread the joy of Christmas among mountain folks, to whom the joy of Christmas was quite unknown.

An hour later the passing mail-carrier, from over Black Mountain, stopped with switch uplifted at his office-door.

"Them fellers over the Ridge air comin' over to shoot up yo' Christmas tree," he drawled.

The switch fell and he was gone. The young doctor dropped by his fire--stunned; for just that thing had happened ten years before to the only Christmas tree that had ever been heard of in those immediate hills, except his own. Out of that very schoolhouse some vandals from over Pine Mountain had driven the Pigeon Creek people after a short fight, and while the surprised men, frightened women and children, and the terrified teacher scurried to safety behind rocks and trees had shot the tree to

pieces. That was ten years before, but even now, though there were some old men and a few old women who knew the Bible from end to end, many grown people and most of the children had never heard of the Book, or of Christ, or knew that there was a day known as Christmas Day. That such things were so had hurt the doctor to the heart, and that was why, as Christmas drew near, he had gone through the out-of-the-way hollows at the Head of Pigeon and got the names and ages of all the mountain children; why now, long after that silly quarrel with the marquise, he had humbled his pride and written her please to come and help him; why she had left the Christmas of Happy Valley in St. Hilda's hands and was coming; and why now the cedar-tree stood in the little log schoolhouse at the forks of Pigeon. Moreover, there was yet

enmity between the mountaineers of Pigeon and the mountaineers over Pine Mountain, who were jealous and scornful of any signs of the foreign influence but recently come into the hills. The meeting-house, courthouse, and the schoolhouse were yet favorite places for fights among the mountaineers. There was yet no reverence at all for Christmas, and the same vandals might yet regard a Christmas tree as an imported frivolity to be sternly rebuked. The news was not only not incredible, it probably was true; and with this conclusion some very unpleasant lines came into the young doctor's kindly face, and he sprang for his horse.

Two hours later he had a burly mountaineer with a Winchester posted on the road leading over Pine Mountain,

another on the mountainside overlooking the little valley, several more similarly armed below, while he and two friends, with revolvers buckled on, waited for the marquis, with their horses hitched in front of his office-door. This Christmas tree was to be.

Meanwhile his mind was busy with memories of the previous summer. Once again he was bounding across a brook in a little ravine in Happy Valley to see two young mountaineers in a fierce fight--with his sweetheart and a one-legged man named Pleasant Trouble as referees, and once again that distracted sweetheart was rushing for refuge to his arms. She had got the two youths to fight with fists instead of pistols and according to such rules of the ring as she could remember, and that was why thereafter

he had called her the marquise. Then had come that silly quarrel and, instead of to the altar, she had gone back to Happy Valley to teach again. Now he would see her once more and his hopes were high. Outside he heard the creaking of wheels. A big spring wagon loaded with Christmas things drew up in front of his door and amidst them sat the superintendent's daughter and two girl friends, who shouted cheery greetings to him. He raised his eyes and high above saw the muffled figure of the marquise coming through the snowy bushes down the trail. Behind her rode a man with a crutch across his saddle-bows--Pleasant Trouble, self-made bodyguard to the little teacher: nowhere could she go without him at her heels. Pleasant grinned, and the faces of the lovers, suddenly suffused, made their story quite plain. The doctor lifted her

from her horse and helped her into the wagon, to meet three pairs of mischievous eyes, so that quite gruffly for him, he said:

"On your way now--and hustle!"

A black-snake whip cracked and up Pigeon the wagon bumped with the doctor, his two friends, and Pleasant Trouble on horseback alongside; past the long batteries of coke-ovens with grinning darkies, coke-pullers, and loaders idling about them; up the rough road through lanes of snow-covered rhododendrons winding among tall oaks, chestnuts, and hemlocks; through circles and arrows of gold with which the sun splashed the white earth--every cabin that they passed tenantless, for the inmates had gone ahead long ago--and on to the little

schoolhouse that sat on a tiny plateau in a small clearing, with snow-tufted bushes of laurel on every side and snowy mountains rising on either hand.

The door was wide open and smoke was curling from the chimney. A few horses and mules were hitched to the bushes near by. Men, boys, and dogs were gathered around a big fire in front of the building; and in a minute women, children, and more dogs poured out of the schoolhouse to watch the coming cavalcade. Since sunrise the motley group had been waiting there, and the tender heart of the little marquise began to ache: the women thinly clad in dresses of worsted or dark calico, and a shawl or short jacket or man's coat, with a sunbonnet or "fascinator" on their heads, and men's shoes on their feet--the older

ones stooped and thin, the younger ones carrying babies, and all with weather-beaten faces and bared hands; the men and boys without overcoats, their coarse shirts unbuttoned, their necks and upper chests bared to the biting cold, their hands thrust in their pockets as they stood about the fire, and below their short coat-sleeves their wrists showing chapped and red; while to the little boys and girls had fallen only such odds and ends of clothing as the older ones could spare. Quickly the doctor got his party indoors and to work on the Christmas tree. Not one did he tell of the impending danger, and the Colt's .45 bulging under this man's shoulder or on that man's hip, and the Winchester in the hollow of an arm here and there were sights too common in those hills to arouse suspicion in anybody's mind. The cedar-tree, shorn

of its branches at the base and banked with mosses, towered to the angle of the roof. There were no desks in the room except the one table once used by the teacher. Long, crude wooden benches with low backs faced the tree, with an aisle leading from the door between them. Lap-robies were hung over the windows, and soon a gorgeous figure of Santa Claus was smiling down from the very tiptop of the tree. With her flushed face, eager eyes, and golden hair the busy marquise looked like its patron saint. Ropes of gold and silver tinsel were swiftly draped around and up and down; enmeshed in these were little red Santas, gayly colored paper horns filled with candy, colored balls, white and yellow birds, little colored candles with holders to match, and other glittering things; while over the whole tree a glistening

powder was sprinkled like a mist of shining snow. Many presents were tied to the tree, and under it were the rest of the labelled ones in a big pile. In a semicircle about the base sat the dolls in pink, yellow, and blue, and looking down the aisle to the door. Packages of candy in colored Japanese napkins and tied with a narrow red ribbon were in another pile, with a pyramid of oranges at its foot. And yet there was still another pile for unexpected children, that the heart of none should be sore. Then the candles were lighted and the door flung open to the eager waiting crowd outside. In a moment every seat was silently filled by the women and children, and the men, stolid but expectant, lined the wall. The like of that tree no soul of them had ever seen before. Only a few of the older ones had ever seen a Christmas tree of any

kind, and they but one; and they had lost that in a free-for-all fight. And yet only the eyes of them showed surprise or pleasure. There was no word--no smile, only unwavering eyes mesmerically fixed on that wonderful tree.

The young doctor rose, and only the marquise saw and wondered that he was nervous, restless and pale. As best he could he told them what Christmas was and what it meant to the world; and he had scarcely finished when a hand beckoned to him from the door. Leaving one of his friends to distribute the presents, he went outside to discover that one vandal had come on ahead, drunk and boisterous. Promptly the doctor tied him to a tree and, leaving Pleasant Trouble to guard him, shouldered a Winchester and himself took

up a lonely vigil on the mountainside. Within, Christmas went on. When a name was called a child came forward silently, usually shoved to the front by some relative, took what was handed to it, and, dumb with delight, but too shy even to murmur a word of thanks, silently returned to its seat with the presents hugged to its breast--presents that were simple, but not to those mountain mites: colored pictures and illustrated books they were, red plush albums, simple games, fascinators, and mittens for the girls; pocket-knives, balls, firecrackers, horns, mittens, caps, and mufflers for the boys; a doll dressed in everything a doll should wear for each little girl, no one of whom had ever seen a doll before, except what was home-made from an old dress or apron tied in several knots to make the head and body. Twice only was the

silence broken. One boy quite forgot himself when given a pocket-knife. He looked at it suspiciously and incredulously, turned it over in his hand, opened it and felt the edge of the blade, and, panting with excitement, cried:

"Hit's a shore 'nough knife!"

And again when, to make sure that nobody had been left out, though all the presents were gone, the master of ceremonies asked if there was any other little boy or girl who had received nothing, there arose a bent, toothless old woman in a calico dress and baggy black coat, her gray hair straggling from under her black sunbonnet and her hands gnarled and knotted from work and rheumatism. Simply as a child she spoke:

"I ain't got nothin'."

Gravely the giver of the gifts asked her to come forward, and while, nonplussed, he searched the tree for the most glittering thing he could find, a tiny gold safety-pin was thrust into his hand, the whiter hollow of the marquise's white throat became visible, and that old woman was made till death the proudest in the hills. Then all the women pressed forward and then the men, until all the ornaments were gone, even the half-burned candles with their colored holders, which the men took eagerly and fastened in their coats, clasping the holders to their lapels or fastening the bent wire in their buttonholes, and pieces of tinsel rope, which they threw over their shoulders--so that the tree stood at last just as it was

when brought from the wild woods outside.

Straightway then the young doctor hurried the departure of the merry-makers. Already the horses stood hitched, and, while the lap-robies were being carried out, a mountaineer who had brought along a sack of apples lined up the men and boys, and at a given word started running down the road, pouring out the apples as he ran while the men and boys scrambled for them, rolling and tussling in the snow.

Just then a fusillade of shots rang from the top of the mountain, but nobody paid any heed. As the party moved away, the mountaineers waved their hands and shouted good-by to the doctor, too shy still to pay much heed to the other

"furriners" in the wagon. The doctor looked back once with a grateful sigh of relief, but no one in the wagon knew that there had been any danger that day. How great the danger had been not even the doctor knew till Pleasant Trouble galloped up and whispered behind his hand: the coming vandals had got as far as the top of the dividing ridge, had there quarrelled and fought among themselves, so that, as the party drove away, one invader was at the minute cursing his captors, who were setting him free, and high upon the ridge another lay dead in the snow.

That night the doctor and the marquise, well muffled against the cold, sat on the porch of the superintendent's bungalow while the daughter sat discreetly inside. The flame-light of the ovens licked the snowy ravine above and below; it was

their first chance for a talk, and they had it out to the happy end.

"You see," said the doctor, "there is even more to do over here than in Happy Valley."

"There is much to do everywhere in these hills," said the marquise.

"And I need you--oh, how I do need you!" Most untimely, the daughter appeared at the door.

"Then you shall have me," whispered the marquise.

"Bedtime!" called the girl, and only with his eyes--just then--could the doctor kiss the little marquise. But the next morning, when he went with her as far as the top

of the mountain and Pleasant Trouble rode whistling ahead, he had better luck.

"When?" he asked.

"Not till June," she said firmly. And again he asked:

"When?"

"Oh, about two o'clock," smiled the marquise.

"The first two o'clock?"

"Too early!"

"The second," he said decidedly. For answer the marquise leaned from her saddle toward him and he kissed her again.

Later, by just five months and one week, the doctor mounted his horse for Happy Valley. He had to go up Pigeon, and riding by the little schoolhouse, he stopped at the door and from his horse pushed it open. The Christmas tree stood just as he had left it on Christmas Day, only, like the evergreens on the wall and over the windows, it too was brown, withered, and dry. Gently he closed the door and rode on. And on the clock-stroke of two in Happy Valley there was a wedding that blessed first June afternoon.

———The End———

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