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OLE MAMMY'S TORMENT

BY
ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

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AND
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TO

TWO TORMENTS WHOM I KNOW

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ILLVSTRATIONS

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OLE MAMMY'S TORMENT.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE BILLY rested his axe on the log he was chopping, and turned his grizzly old head to one side, listening intently. A confusion of sounds came from the little cabin across the road. It was a dilapidated negro cabin, with its roof awry and the weather-boarding off in great patches; still, it was a place of interest to Uncle Billy. His sister lived there with three orphan grandchildren.

Leaning heavily on his axe-handle, he thrust out his under lip, and rolled his eyes in the direction of the uproar. A broad grin spread over his wrinkled black face as he heard the rapid spank of a shingle, the scolding tones of an angry voice, and a prolonged howl.

"John Jay an' he gran'mammy 'peah to be havin' a right sma't difference of opinion togethah this mawnin'," he chuckled.

He shaded his eyes with his stiff, crooked fingers for a better view. A pair of nimble black legs skipped back and forth across the open doorway, in a vain attempt to dodge the descending shingle, while a clatter of falling tinware followed old Mammy's portly figure, as she made awkward but surprising turns in her wrathful circuit of the crowded room.

"Ow! I'll be good! I'll be good! Oh, Mammy, don't! You'se a-killin' me!" came in a high shriek.

Then there was a sudden dash for the cabin door, and an eight-year-old colored boy scurried down the path like a little wild rabbit, as fast as his bare feet could carry him. The noise ended as suddenly as it had begun; so suddenly, indeed, that the silence seemed intense, although the air was full of all the low twitterings and

soft spring sounds that come with the early days of April.

Uncle Billy stood chuckling over the boy's escape. The situation had been made clear to him by the angry exclamations he had just overheard. John Jay, left in charge of the weekly washing, flapping on the line, had been unfaithful to his trust. A neighbor's goat had taken advantage of his absence to chew up a pillow-case and two aprons.

Really, the child was not so much to blame. It was the fault of the fish-pond, sparkling below the hill. But old Mammy cou'dn't understand that. She had never been a boy, with the water tempting her to come and angle for its shining minnows; with the budding willows beckoning her, and the warm winds luring her on. But Uncle Billy understood, and felt with a sympathetic tingle in every rheumatic old joint, that it was a temptation beyond the strength of any boy living to resist.

His chuckling suddenly stopped as the old woman appeared in the doorway. He fell to chopping again with such vigor that the chips flew wildly in all directions. He knew from the way that her broad feet slapped along the

beaten path that she was still angry, and he thought it safest to take no notice of her, beyond a cheery "Good mawnin', sis' Sheba."

"Huh! Not much good about it that I can see!" was her gloomy reply. Lowering the basket she carried from her head to a fence-post, she began the story of her grievances. It was an old story to Uncle Billy, somewhat on the order of "The house that Jack built;" for, after telling John Jay's latest pranks, she always repeated the long line of misdeeds of which he had been guilty since the first day he had found a home under her sagging rooftree.

Usually she found a sympathetic listener in Uncle Billy, but this morning the only comfort he offered was an old plantation proverb, spoken with brotherly frankness.

"Well, sis' Sheba, I 'low it'll be good for you in the long run. 'Troubles is seasonin'. 'Simmons ain't good twel dey er fros'bit,' you know."

He stole a sidelong glance at her from under his bushy eyebrows, to see the effect of his remark. She tossed her head defiantly. "I 'low if the choice was left to the 'simmon or you eithah, brer Billy, you'd both take the greenness an' the puckah befo' the fros'bite

every time." Then a tone of complaint trembled in her voice.

"I might a needed chastenin' in my youth, I don't 'spute that; but why should I now, a trim'lin' on the aidge of the tomb, almos', have to put up with that limb of a John Jay? If my poah Ellen knew what a tawment her boy is to her ole mammy, I know she couldn't rest easy in her grave."

"John Jay, he don't mean to be bad," remarked Uncle Billy soothingly. "It's jus' 'cause he's so young an' onthinkin'. An' aftah all, it ain't what he *does*. It's mo' like what the white folks say in they church up on the hill. 'I have lef' undone the things what I ought to 'uv done.'"

Doubled up out of sight, behind the bushes that lined the roadside ditch, John Jay held his breath and listened. When the ringing strokes of the axe began again, he ventured to poke out his woolly head until the whites of his eyes were visible. Sheba was trudging down the road with her basket on her head, to the place where she always washed on Tuesdays. She was far enough on her way now to make it safe for him to come out of hiding.

The tears had dried on the boy's long curling lashes, but his bare legs still smarted from the blows of the shingle, as he climbed slowly out of the bushes and started back to the cabin.

"Hey, Bud! Come on, Ivy!" he called cheerfully. Nobody answered. It was a part of the programme, whenever John Jay was punished, for the little brother and sister to run and hide under the back-door step. There they cowered, with covered heads, until the danger was over. Old Sheba had never frowned on the four-year-old Bud, or baby Ivy, but they scuttled out of sight like frightened mice at the first signal of her gathering wrath.

Ivy lay still with her thumb in her mouth, but Bud began solemnly crawling out from between the steps. Everything that Bud did seemed solemn. Even his smiles were slow-spreading and dignified. Some people called him Judge; but John Jay, wise in the negro lore of their neighborhood Uncle Remus, called him "Brer Tarrypin" for good reasons of his own.

"Wot we all gwine do now?" drawled Bud, with a turtle-like stretch of his little round head as he peered through the steps.

John Jay scanned the horizon on all sides, and thoughtfully rubbed his ear. His quick eyes saw unlimited possibilities for enjoyment, where older sight would have found but a dreary

outlook; but older sight is always on a strain for the birds in the bush. It is never satisfied with the one in the hand. Older sight would have seen only a poor shanty set in a patch of

weeds and briers, and a narrow path straggling down to the dust of the public road. But the outlook was satisfactory to John Jay. So was it to the neighbor's goat, standing motionless in the warm sunshine, with its eyes cast in the direction of a newly-made garden. So was it to the brood of little yellow goslings, waddling after their mother. They were out of their shells, and the world was wide.

Added to this same feeling of general contentment with his lot, John Jay had the peace that came from the certainty that, no matter what he might do, punishment could not possibly overtake him before nightfall. His grandmother was always late coming home on Tuesday.

"Wot we all gwine do now?" repeated Bud.

John Jay caught at the low branch of the apple-tree to which the clothes-line was tied, and drew himself slowly up. He did not reply until he had turned himself over the limb several times, and hung head downward by the knees.

"Go snake huntin', I reckon."

"But Mammy said not to take Ivy in the briah-patch again," said Bud solemnly.

"That's so," exclaimed John Jay, "an' shingle say so too," he added, with a grin, for his legs

still smarted. Loosening the grip of his knees on the apple-bough, he turned a summersault backward and landed on his feet as lightly as a cat.

"Ivy'll go to sleep aftah dinnah," suggested Bud. "She always do." It seemed a long time to wait until then, but with the remembrance of his last punishment still warm in mind and body, John Jay knew better than to take his little sister to the forbidden briar-patch.

"Well, we can dig a lot of fishin' worms," he decided, "an' put 'em in those tomato cans undah the ash-hoppah. Then we'll make us a mud oven an' roast us some duck aigs. Nobody but me knows where the nest is."

Bud's eyes shone. The prospect was an inviting one.

Most of the morning passed quickly, but the last half-hour was spent in impatiently waiting for their dinner. They knew it was spread out under a newspaper on the rickety old table, but they had strict orders not to touch it until Aunt Susan sounded her signal for Uncle Billy. So they sat watching the house across the road.

"Now it's time!" cried Bud excitedly. "I see Aunt Susan goin' around the end of the house with her spoon."

An old cross-cut saw hung by one handle from a peg in the stick chimney. As she beat upon it now with a long, rusty iron spoon, the din that filled the surrounding air was worse than any made by the noisiest gong ever beaten before a railroad restaurant. Uncle Billy, hoeing in a distant field, gave an answering whoop, and waved his old hat.

The children raced into the house and tore the newspaper from the table. Under it were three cold boiled potatoes, a dish of salt, a cup of molasses, and a big pone of corn-bread. As head of the family, John Jay divided everything but the salt exactly into thirds, and wasted no time in ceremonies before beginning. As soon as the last crumb was finished he spread an old quilt in front of the fireplace, where the embers, though covered deep in ashes, still kept the hearth warm.

No coaxing was needed to induce Ivy to lie down. Even if she had not been tired and sleepy she would have obeyed. John Jay's word was law in his grandmother's absence. Then he sat down on the doorstep and waited for her to go to sleep.

"If she wakes up and gets out on the road

while we're gone, won't I catch it, though!" he exclaimed to Bud in an undertone.

"Shet the doah," suggested Bud.

"No, she'd sut'n'ly get into some devilmint if she was shet in by herself," he answered.

"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done!" John Jay's roving eyes fell on a broken teacup on the window-sill, that Mammy kept as a catch-all for stray buttons and bits of twine. He remembered having seen some rusty tacks among the odds and ends. A loose brickbat stuck up suggestively from the sunken hearth. The idea had not much sooner popped into his head than the deed was done. Bending over breathlessly to make sure that the unsuspecting Ivy was asleep, he nailed her little pink dress to the floor with a row of rusty tacks. Then cautiously replacing the bit of broken brick, he made for the door, upsetting Bud in his hasty leave-taking.

Over in the briar-patch, out of sight of the house, two happy little darkeys played all the afternoon. They beat the ground with the stout clubs they carried. They pried up logs in search of snakes. They whooped, they sang,

they whistled. They rolled over and over each other, giggling as they wrestled, in the sheer delight of being alive on such a day. When they finally killed a harmless little chicken-snake, no prince of the royal blood, hunting tigers in Indian jungles, could have been prouder of his striped trophies than they were of theirs.

Meanwhile Ivy slept peacefully on, one little hand sticking to her plump, molasses-smeared cheek, the other holding fast to her headless doll. Beside her on the floor lay a tattered picture-book, a big bottle half full of red shelled corn, and John Jay's most precious treasure, a toy watch that could be endlessly wound up. He had heaped them all beside her, hoping they would keep her occupied until his return, in case she should waken earlier than usual.

The sun was well on its way to bed when the little hunters shouldered their clubs, with a snake dangling from each one, and started for the cabin.

"My! I didn't know it was so late!" exclaimed John Jay ruefully, as they met a long procession of home-going cows. "Ain't it

funny how soon sundown gets heah when yo' havin' a good time, and how long it is a-comin' when yo' isn't!"

A dusky little figure rose up out of the weeds ahead of them. "Land sakes! Ivy Hickman!" exclaimed John Jay, dropping his snake in surprise. "How did you get heah?"

Ivy stuck her thumb in her mouth without answering. He took her by the shoulder, about to shake a reply from her, when Bud exclaimed, in a frightened voice, "Law, I see Mammy comin'. Look! There she is now, in front of Uncle Billy's house!"

Throwing away his club, and catching Ivy up in his short arms, John Jay staggered up the path leading to the back of the house as fast as such a heavy load would allow, leaving Brer Tarrypin far in the rear. Just as he sank down at the back door, all out of breath, old Sheba reached the front one.

"John Jay," she called, "what you doing', chile?"

"Heah I is, Mammy," he answered. "I'se jus' takin' keer o' the chillun!"

"That's right, honey, I've got somethin' mighty good in my basket fo' we all's sup-

pah. Hurry up now, an' tote in some kin'lin' wood."

Never had John Jay sprung to obey as he did then. He shivered when he thought of his narrow escape. His arms were piled so full of wood that he could scarcely see over them, when he entered the poorly lighted little cabin. He stumbled over the bottle of corn and the picture-book. Maybe he would not have kicked them aside so gaily had he known that his precious watch was lying in the cow-path on the side of the hill where Ivy had dropped it.

Mammy was bending over, examining something at her feet. Five ragged strips of pink calico lay along the floor, each held fast at one end by a rusty tack driven into the puncheons. Ivy had grown tired of her bondage, and had tugged and twisted until she got away. The faithful tacks had held fast, but the pink calico, grown thin with long wear and many washings, tore in ragged strips. Mammy glanced from the floor to Ivy's tattered dress. and read the whole story.

Outside, across the road, Uncle Billy leaned over his front gate in the deepening twilight,

and peacefully puffed at his corn-cob pipe. As the smoke curled up he bent his head to listen, as he had done in the early morning. The day was ending as it had begun, with the whack of old Mammy's shingle, and the noise of John Jay's loud weeping.

CHAPTER II.

It was a warm night in May. The bright moonlight shone in through the chinks of the little cabin, and streamed across Ivy's face, where she lay asleep on Mammy's big feather bed. Bud was gently snoring in his corner of the trundle-bed below, but John Jay kicked restlessly beside him. He could not sleep with the moonlight in his eyes and the frogs croaking so mournfully in the pond back of the house. To begin with, it was too early to go to bed, and in the second place he wasn't a bit sleepy.

Mammy sat on a bench just outside of the door, with her elbows on her knees. She was crooning a dismal song softly to herself,— something about

> "Mary and Martha in deep distress,
> A-grievin' ovah brer Laz'rus' death."

It gave him such a creepy sort of feeling that he stuck his fingers in his ears to shut out the

sound. Thus barricaded, he did not hear slow footsteps shuffling up the path; but presently the powerful fumes of a rank pipe told of an approaching visitor. He took his fingers from his ears and sat up.

Uncle Billy and Aunt Susan had come over to gossip a while. Mammy groped her way into the house to drag out the wooden rocker for her sister-in-law, while Uncle Billy tilted himself back against the cabin in a straight splint-bottomed chair. The usual opening remarks about the state of the family health, the weather, and the crops were of very little interest to John Jay; indeed he nearly fell asleep while Aunt Susan was giving a detailed account of the way she cured the misery in her side. However, as soon as they began to discuss neighborhood happenings, he was all attention.

The more interested he grew, it seemed to him, the lower they pitched their voices. Creeping carefully across the floor, he curled up on his pillow just inside the doorway, where the shadows fell heaviest, and where he could enjoy every word of the conversation, without straining his ears to listen.

"Gawge Chadwick came home yestiddy," announced Uncle Billy.

"Sho now!" exclaimed Mammy. "Not lame Jintsey's boy! You don't mean it!"

"That's the ve'y one," persisted Uncle Billy. "Gawge Washington Chadwick. He's a ministah of the gospel now, home from college with a Rev'und befo' his name, an' a long-tailed black coat on. He does n't look much like the little pickaninny that b'long to Mars' Nat back in wah times."

"And Jintsey's dead, poah thing!" exclaimed Aunt Susan. "What a day it would have been for her, if she could have lived to see her boy in the pulpit!"

Conversation never kept on a straight road when these three were together. It was continually turning back by countless by-paths to the old slavery days. The rule of their master, Nat Chadwick, had been an easy one. There had always been plenty in the smoke-house and contentment in the quarters. These simple old souls, while rejoicing in their freedom, often looked tenderly back to the flesh-pots of their early Egypt.

John Jay had heard these reminiscences

dozens of times. He knew just what was coming next, when Uncle Billy began telling about the day that young Mars' Nat was christened. Mis' Alice gave a silver cup to Jintsey's baby, George Washington, because he was born on the same day as his little Mars' Nat. John Jay knew the whole family history. He was very proud of these people of gentle birth and breeding, whom Sheba spoke of as "ou' family." One by one they had been carried to the little Episcopal churchyard on the hill, until only one remained. The great estate had passed into the hands of strangers. Only to Billy and Susan and Sheba, faithful even unto death, was it still surrounded by the halo of its old-time grandeur.

Naturally, young Nat Chadwick, the last of the line, had fallen heir to all the love and respect with which they cherished any who bore the family name. To other people he was a luckless sort of fellow, who had sown his wild oats early, and met disappointment at every turn. It was passed about, too, that there was a romance in his life which had changed and embittered it. Certain it is, he suddenly seemed to lose all ambition and energy. Instead of

making the brilliant lawyer his friends expected, he had come down at last to be the keeper of the toll-gate on a country turnpike.

Lying on his pillow in the dense shadow, John Jay looked out into the white moonlight, and listened to the old story told all over again. But this time there was added the history of Jintsey's boy, who seemed to have been born with the ambition hot in his heart to win an education. He had done it. There was a quiver of pride in Uncle Billy's voice as he told how the boy had outstripped his young master in the long race; but there was a loyal and tender undercurrent of excuse for the unfortunate heir running through all his talk.

It had taken twenty years of struggle and work for the little black boy to realize his hopes. He had grown to be a grave man of thirty-three before it was accomplished. Now he had come home from a Northern college with his diploma and his degree.

"He have fought a good fight," said Uncle Billy in conclusion, finishing as usual with a scriptural quotation. "He have fought a good fight, and he have finished his co'se, but" —

here his voice sank almost to a whisper — "he have come home to die."

A chill seemed to creep all over John Jay's warm little body. He raised his head from the pillow to listen still more carefully.

"Yes, they say he got the gallopin' consumption while he was up Nawth, shovellin' snow an' such work, an' studyin' nights in a room 'thout no fiah. He took ole Mars's name an' he have brought honah upon it, but what good is it goin' to do him? Tell me that. For when the leaves go in the autumn time, then Jintsey's boy must go too."

"Where's he stayin' at now?" demanded Mammy sharply, although she drew the corner of her apron across her eyes.

"He's down to Mars' Nat's at the toll-gate cottage 'Peahs like it's the natch'el place for him to be. Neithah of 'em's got anybody else, and it's kind a like old times when they was chillun, playin' round the big house togethah. I stopped in to see him yestiddy. The cup Mis' Alice gave him was a-settin' on the mantel, an' Mars' Nat was stewin' up some sawt of cough tonic for him. The white folks up Nawth must a thought a heap of him. He'd

just got a lettah from one of the college professahs 'quirin' bout his health. Mars' Nat read out what was on the back of it : 'Rev'und Gawge W. Chadwick, an' some lettahs on the end that I kain't remembah. An' he said, laughin'-like, sezee, 'well, Uncle Billy, you'd nevah take that as meanin' Jintsey's boy, would you now? It's a mighty fine soundin' title,' sezee. Gawge gave a little moanful sawt of smile, same as to say, well, aftah all, it wasn't wuth what it cost him. An' it wasn't! No, it wasn't," repeated Uncle Billy, solemnly shaking the ashes from his pipe. "What's the good of a head full of book learnin' with a poah puny body that kaint tote it around?"

Somehow, Uncle Billy's solemn declaration, "he have fought a good fight," associated this colored preacher, in John Jay's simple little mind, with soldiers and fierce battles and a great victory. He lay back on his pillow, wishing they would go on talking about this man who had suddenly become such a hero in his boyish eyes. But their talk gradually drifted to the details of Mrs. Watson's last illness. He had heard them so many times that he soon felt his eyelids slowly closing. Then he dozed for

a few minutes, awakening with a start. They had gotten as far as the funeral now, and were discussing the sermon. They would soon be commenting on the way that each member of the family "took her death." That was so much more interesting, he thought he would just close his eyes again for a moment, until they came to that.

Their voices murmured on in a pleasing flow; his head sunk lower on the pillow, and his breathing was a little louder. Then his hand dropped down at his side. He was sound asleep just when Aunt Susan was about to begin one of her most thrilling ghost stories.

In the midst of an account of "a ha'nt that walked the graveyard every thirteenth Friday in the year," John Jay turned over in his sleep with a little snort. Aunt Susan nearly jumped out of her chair, and Uncle Billy dropped his pipe. There was a moment of frightened silence till Mammy said, "It must have been Bud, I reckon. John Jay is allus a-knockin' him in his sleep an' makin' him holler out. Go on, sis' Susan."

The moon had travelled well across the sky when Mammy's guests said good night. She

lingered outside after they had gone, to look far down the road, where a single point of light, shining through the trees, marked the toll-gate. It would not be so lonely for Mars' Nat, now that George had come home. She recalled the laughing face of the little black boy as she had known it long ago, and tried to call up in her imagination a picture of the man that Uncle Billy had described. Visions of the old days rose before her. As she stood there with her hands wrapped in her apron, it was not the moon-flooded night she looked into, but the warm, living daylight of a golden past.

At last, with a sigh, she turned to take the chairs into the house. Lifting the big rocker high in front of her, she stepped over the threshold and started to shuffle her way along to the candle shelf. The chair came down in the middle of the floor with a sudden bang, as she caught her foot in John Jay's pillow and sprawled across him.

The boy's first waking thought was that there had been an earthquake and that the cabin had caved in. He never could rightly remember the order of events that followed, but he had a confused memory of a shriek, a scratching of

matches, and the glimmer of a candle that made him sit up and blink his eyes. Then something struck him, first on one ear, then the other, cuffing him soundly. He was too dazed to know why. Some blind instinct helped him to find the bed and burrow down under the clothes, where he lay trying to think what possible fault of his could have raised such a cyclone about his ears. He was too deep under the bed-clothes to hear Mammy's grumbling remarks about his "tawmentin' ways" as she rubbed her skinned elbow with tallow from the candle.

CHAPTER III.

STANDING in the back door of Sheba's cabin one could see the red gables of the old Chadwick house, rising above the dark pine-trees that surrounded it. A wealthy city family by the name of Haven owned it now. It was open only during the summer months. The roses that Mistress Alice had set out with her own white hands years ago climbed all over the front of the house, twining around its tall pillars, and hanging down in festoons from its stately eaves. Cuttings from the same hardy plant had been trained along the fences, around the tree-trunks and over trellises, until the place had come to be known all around the country as "Rosehaven."

Sheba always had steady employment when the place was open, for the young ladies of the family kept her flat-irons busy with their endless tucks and ruffles. She found a good market, too, for all the eggs she could induce her buff

cochins to lay, and all the berries that she could make John Jay pick.

This bright June morning she stood in the door with a basket of fresh eggs in her hand, looking anxiously across the fields to the gables of Rosehaven, and grumbling to herself.

"Heah I done promise Miss Hallie these fresh aigs for her bufday cake, an' no way to get 'em to her. I'll nevah get all these clothes done up by night if I stop my i'onin', an' John Jay's done lit out again! little black rascal!" She lifted up her voice in another wavering call. "John Ja-a-y!" The beech woods opposite threw back the echo of her voice, sweet and clear,— "Ja-a-y!"

"Heah I come, Mammy!" cried a panting voice. "I was jus' turnin' the grine-stone for Uncle Billy."

She looked at him suspiciously an instant, then handed him the basket. "Take these aigs ovah to Miss Hallie," she ordered, "and mind you be quickah'n you was last time, or they might hatch befo' you get there."

"Law now, Mammy!" said John Jay, with a grin. He snatched at the basket, impatient to be off, for while standing before her he had

kept scratching his right shoulder with his left hand; not that there was any need to do so, but it gave him an excuse for holding together the jagged edges of a great tear in his new shirt. He was afraid it might be discovered before he could get away.

It was one of John Jay's peculiarities that in going on an errand he always chose the most roundabout route. Now, instead of following the narrow footpath that made a short cut through the cool beech woods, he went half a mile out of his way, along the sunny turnpike.

Mars' Nat stood outside his kitchen window, with his hands in his pockets, giving orders to the colored boy within, who did his bachelor housekeeping. Usually he had a joking word for old Sheba's grandson, but this morning he took no notice of the little fellow loitering by with such an appealing look on his face. John Jay had come past the toll-gate with a hope of seeing the "Rev'und Gawge," as he called him. It had been three weeks since the man had come home, and in that time John Jay's interest in him had grown into a sort of hero-worship. There had been a great deal of talk about him among the ignorant col-

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ored people. Wonderful stories were afloat of his experiences at the North, of his power as a preacher, and of the plans he had made to help his people. He would have been surprised could he have known how he was discussed, or how the stories grew as they travelled.

Those who had any claim whatever to a former acquaintance stopped at the cottage to see him. Their interest and the little offerings of fruit or flowers, which they often made their excuse for coming, touched him greatly. To all who came he spoke freely of his hopes. Realizing that he might have but the one opportunity, he talked as only a man can talk who feels the responsibilities of a lifetime crowded into one short hour. One by one they came and listened, and went away with a new expression on their faces, and a new ambition in their hearts.

To all these people he was "Brothah Chadwick;" to the three old slaves bound to him by ties almost as strong as those of kinship, he could never be other than Jintsey's boy; but to two persons he was known as the "Rev'und Gawge." Mars' Nat took to calling him that

in a joking way, but John Jay gave him the title almost with awe. It seemed to set him apart in the child's reverent affection as one who had come up out of great tribulation to highest honor. Old Sheba had not cuffed her grandson to church every week in vain. He had heard a great deal about white robes and palms of victory and "him that overcometh." By some twist of his simple little brain the term Reverend had come to mean all that to him, and much more. It meant not only some one set apart in a priestly way, but some one who was just slipping down into the mysterious valley of the shadow, with the shining of the New Jerusalem upon his face.

As long as the cottage was in sight John Jay kept rolling his eyes backward as he trudged along in the dust; but Mars' Nat was the only one in view. Twice he stumbled and almost spilled the eggs. A little farther along he concluded that he was tired enough to rest a while So he sat down on a log in a shady fence corner, and took a green apple from his pocket. He rolled it around in his hands and over his face, enjoying its tempting odor before he stuck his little white teeth into it. The first bite was

so sour that it drew his face all up into a pucker and made his eyes water. He raised his hand to throw it away, but paused with his arm in the air to listen. Somebody was playing on the organ in the church a few rods up the hill.

It was a quaint little stone church, all overgrown with ivy, that the Chadwicks had built generations ago. The high arched door was never opened of late years, except at long intervals, when some one came out from the city to hold services. But the side door was certainly ajar now, for the saddest music that John Jay had ever heard in all his life came trembling out on the warm summer air.

Forgetting all about his errand, he scrambled through the fence and up the gently rising knoll. His bare feet made no noise as he tiptoed up the steps and stood peering through the open door. It was dim and cool inside, with only the light that could sift through the violet and amber of the stained glass windows; but in one, the big one at the end, was the figure of a snowy dove, with outstretched wings. Through this silvery pane a long slanting ray of light, dazzling in its white radiance,

streamed across the keys of the organ and the man who played them, — the Reverend George.

It threw a strange light on the upturned face, — a face black as ebony, worn with suffering, but showing in every feature the refining touch of a noble spirit. His mournful eyes seemed looking into another world, while his fingers wandered over the keys with the musical instinct of his race.

John Jay slipped inside and crouched down behind a tall pew. The only music that he had been accustomed to was the kind that Uncle Billy scraped from his fiddle and plunked on his banjo. It was the gay, rollicking kind, that put his feet to jigging and every muscle in his body quivering in time. This made him want to cry; yet it was so sweet and deep and tender as it went rolling softly down the aisles, that he forgot all about the eggs and Miss Hallie. He forgot that he was John Jay. All he thought of was that upturned face with the strange unearthly light in its dark eyes, and the melody that swept over him.

A spell of coughing seized the rapt musician. After it had passed, he lay forward on the organ a while, with his head bowed on his arms. Then

he straightened himself up wearily, and began pushing the stops back into their places.

The silence brought John Jay to his senses. He crawled along the aisle and out of the door, blinkling like an owl as he came into the blinding sunshine. Many experiences had convinced him that he was born under an unlucky star. When he went leaping down the hill to the log where he had left his basket, it was with the sickening certainty that some evil had befallen the eggs. He was afraid to look for fear of finding a mass of broken shells strewn over the ground. It was with a feeling of surprise that he saw the white ends of the top layer of eggs peeping out of their bed of bran, just as he had left them. With a sigh of relief he picked up the basket; then whistling gaily as a mocking-bird, he set out once more in the direction of Rosehaven.

CHAPTER IV.

SOMETHING unusual was going on at Rosehaven. Awnings were spread over the lawn, gay colored lanterns were strung all about the grounds, and a stage for outdoor tableaux had been built near the house, where a dark clump of cedars served as a background.

John Jay had orders to take the eggs directly to the cook, but his curiosity kept him standing open-mouthed on the lawn, watching the hanging of the lanterns.

A group of pretty girls sat on the porch steps, between the white rose-twined pillars. One of them was tying up the cue of an old-fashioned wig with a black ribbon; another was mending the gold lace on a velvet coat, and the others were busy with the various costumes which they were to wear in the tableaux. Now and then a gay trill or a snatch from some popular song floated out above their laughing chatter. Suddenly one of them looked

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up and saw John Jay standing in the gravelled drive.

"Look, girls!" she exclaimed. "Here's the very thing we want for our old Virginia days! Hallie looks like a picture in that lovely brocaded satin of her grandmother's, and Raleigh Stanford does the cavalier to perfection in that farewell scene. All it lacks is some little Jim Crow to hold his horse, and there is one now. Oh, Hallie! come out here a minute!"

In response to her call, a beautiful dark-haired girl came out on the porch from the hall, carrying a pasteboard shield which she had just finished covering with tinfoil. John Jay's mouth opened still wider as it flashed a dazzling light into his eyes. He thought it was silver.

"Isn't it fine?" she asked, waltzing around with it on her arm for them to admire the effect. Then she dropped down on the step above them. "Was it you who called me, Sally Lou?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the girl, who had finished tying up the cue, and now had the wig pulled coquettishly over her blonde curls. "Look at the little darkey over there. I was just telling

the girls that he is all that is needed to complete your cavalier tableau. Call him over here and tell him that he must come to-night." Just then the boy turned and started on a trot to the kitchen. "Why, it's John Jay!" exclaimed Hallie. "Old Lucy has been scolding about those eggs for the last two hours. His grandmother promised to send them over immediately after breakfast. I'll go down and see what kept him so long. He is always getting into trouble."

"Make him come up here," begged Sally Lou, "and get him to talk for us. I know he'll be lots of fun, for he has such a bright face."

In a few moments the laughing young hostess was back among her guests, with John Jay following her. "Don't you want to see all my birthday presents?" she asked, leading the way into the library and beckoning the girls to follow. "See! I found this mandolin in my chair when I went to the breakfast-table this morning, and this watch was under my napkin. This tennis-racquet was on the piano when I came up-stairs, and I've been finding books and things all morning." She opened a great box

of chocolate bonbons as she spoke, and filled both his hands.

He looked about him with round, astonished

eyes, but never said a word in answer to the eager questions of the girls, beyond a bashful "yessa" or "no'm."

The arrival of Raleigh Stanford and one of his friends, on their wheels, put an end to the girls' interest in John Jay. He was dismissed with a message to Sheba that sent him flying home through the woods like an excited little whirlwind. The lid of the basket flopped up and down, in time to the motion of his scampering feet. At the foot of the hill he began calling "Mammy!" and kept it up until he reached the door. By that time, he was so out of breath that he could only gasp his message. Sheba was expected to be at Rosehaven at seven o'clock, and John Jay was to take part in the performance on the lawn.

It took a great deal of cross-questioning before Mammy fully understood the arrangement. She could readily see that her services might be desired in the kitchen, but it puzzled her to know what anybody could want of John Jay. She shook her head a great many times before she finally promised that he might go.

Bud had passed a very dull morning without his adventurous brother. Now he came up with a bit of rope with which to play horse. But John Jay was looking down on such sports at present.

"Aw, go way, boy," he said, with a lofty air. "I ain't no hawse. I'se goin' to a buthday-pa'ty to-night. Miss Hallie done give me an invite — me an' Mammy."

"Whose goin' to stay with me an' Ivy?" asked Bud, anxiously.

"Aunt Susan, I reckon," answered John Jay. "Mammy tole me to go ask her. Come along with me, an' I'll tell you what all Miss Hallie got for her buthday. I reckon she had mos' a thousand presents, an' a box of candy half as big as Ivy."

Bud opened his eyes in amazement.

"Deed she did," persisted John Jay, enjoying the sensation he was making. "She gave me some, and I saved a piece for you." After much searching through his pockets, John Jay handed out a big chocolate cream that had been mashed flat. Bud ate it gratefully as they walked on, and wiped his lips with his little red tongue, longing for more.

After supper, as Mammy and John Jay went down the narrow meadow path in Indian file, he ventured a question that he had pondered all day. "Mammy, does we all have buthdays same as white folks?"

"Of co'se," answered the old woman, tramping on ahead with her skirts held high out of the dewy grass.

"When's yoah's?" he asked, after a pause.

"Well," she began reflectively, not willing to acknowledge that she had never known the exact date, "I'm nevah ve'y p'tick'lah 'bout its obsa'vation. It's on a Monday, long in early garden-makin' time."

They had come to a little brook, bridged by a wide, hewed log. When they had crossed in careful silence, John Jay began again. "Mammy, when's my buthday?"

"I kaint tell 'zactly, honey," she answered, "'twel I adds it up." As she began counting on her fingers, her skirts slipped lower and lower from her grasp, until they brushed the dew of the wayside weeds.

"Yes, that's it," she announced at last. "Miss Hallie is nineteen this Satiddy, and you'll be nine next Satiddy. A week from to-day is yoah buthday. Pity it hadn't a-happened to be the same day, then maybe Mis' Haven mought a give you somethin' like Mis' Alice give Jintsey's boy."

John Jay had that same thought all the rest

of the way to Rosehaven, but after they entered the brilliantly illuminated grounds he seemed to stop thinking altogether. It was a sight beyond all that his wildest imaginings had pictured. He did not recognize the place. All the lanterns were lighted now, hanging like strings of stars around the porches, and from tree to tree. Violins played softly, somewhere out of sight, and everywhere on the night air was the breath of myriads of roses. Handsomely dressed people passed in and out of the house, and across the lawn. The light, the music, and the perfume made the place seem enchanted ground to the bewildered little John Jay, and when he reached the illuminated fountain just in front of the house, he clung to Mammy's skirts as if he had suddenly found himself in some strange Eden, and was frightened by its unearthly beauty.

The fountain into which, only that morning, he had thrust his hot little face for a drink, now seemed bewitched. It was no longer a flow of sparkling water, but of splashing rainbows. From palest green to ruby red, from amethyst to amber it paled and deepened and glowed.

All the evening he moved about like one in a dream. The tableaux with their shifting scenes

of knights and ladies and marble statuary were burned on his memory as heavenly visions. He knew nothing of the tinsel and flour and red lights which produced the effect. He stood about as Miss Hallie told him: he held a horse in one tableau, and posed as a bronze statue in another. Then he went back to the fountain, and sat dreamily watching it, while the violins played again,— in the long parlors this time, where the dancing had begun.

Raleigh Stanford, still in his cavalier costume, and with Miss Sally Lou on his arm, spied him as they passed by. "Oh, there's that funny little fellow that was here this morning!" she said. "We tried to make him talk, but he just kept his head on one side, and was too embarrassed to say anything."

"Hey, Sambo," called the young man suddenly in his ear. "What do you know?"

John Jay gave a start, and looked up at the amused faces above him. He took the question seriously, and thought he must really tell what he knew; but just at that moment he could remember only one thing in all the wide world. Every other bit of information seemed to desert him. So he stammered, "I—I know M—Miss

Hallie, she's nineteen this Satiddy, an' I'll be nine next Satiddy."

Miss Sally Lou laughed so gaily that her young cavalier made another effort to please her.

"Is that so!" he exclaimed, as if surprised. "It's a mighty lucky thing you told me that, now, or I never would have thought to bring you anything. You didn't know that I am a sort of birthday Santa Claus, did you? Just look out for me next Saturday. If I'm not there by breakfast-time, wait till noon, and if I don't get there by that time it'll be because something has happened; anyway, somebody'll be prancing along about sundown."

"Oh, come along, Raleigh," said Miss Sally Lou, moving off toward the house. "You're such a tease."

John Jay, sitting beside that wonderful fountain and surrounded by so many strange, beautiful things, did not think it at all queer that such an unheard-of person as a birthday Santa Claus should suddenly step out from the midst of the enchantment and speak to him.

"A blue velvet cape on," he said to himself, thinking how he should describe him to Bud.

"An' gole buckles on his shoes, an' a sword on, an' a long white feathah in his hat. Cricky! An' it was his hawse I done held! Maybe it will be somethin' mighty fine what he's goin' to bring me, 'cause I did that!"

Later he found his way to the kitchen, where Sheba was washing dishes. The cook gave him a plate of ice-cream and some scraps of cake. She was telling Sheba how beautiful Miss Hallie's birthday cake looked at dinner, with its nineteen little wax candles all aflame. That was the last thing John Jay remembered, until some one shook him, and told him it was time to go home. He had fallen asleep with a spoon in his hand.

Mammy was afraid to take the short cut through the woods after dark, so she led him away round by the toll-gate. He was so sleepy that he staggered up against her every few steps, and he would have dropped down on the first log he came to, if she had not kept tight hold of his hand all the way.

When they reached Uncle Billy's house, he had just gone out to draw a pitcher of water. Mammy stopped to get a drink, and John Jay leaned up against the well-shed. The rumbling

of the windlass and the fall of the bucket against the water below aroused him somewhat, and by the time he had swallowed half a gourdful of the cold well-water he was wide awake.

Uncle Billy went up to the cabin with them in order to hear an account of the party, and to walk back with Aunt Susan. John Jay fell behind. He could not remember ever having been out so late at night before, and he had never seen the sky so full of stars. They made him think of something that Aunt Susan had told him. She said that if he counted seven stars for seven nights, at the same time repeating a charm which she taught him, and making a wish, he'd certainly get what he wanted at the end of the week.

Now he stopped still in the path, and slowly pointing to each star with his little black forefinger, as he counted them, solemnly repeated the charm:

"Star-light, star bright,
Seventh star I've seen to-night;
I wish I may and I wish I might
Have the wish come true I wish to-night."

"Come on in, chile! What you gawkin' at?" called Mammy from the doorway. John Jay

made no answer. It would have broken the charm to have spoken again before going to sleep. He hurried into the house, glad that Mammy was so occupied with her company that she could pay no attention to him. She stood in the door with them so long that John Jay was in bed by the time she came in. Although he pretended to be asleep, inwardly he was in a quiver of excitement.

"I'll count 'em every night," he thought. The wish that burned in his little heart was a very earnest one, fraught with hopes for his coming birthday.

CHAPTER V.

LATE hours did not agree with John Jay. Next morning he felt too tired to stir. He groaned when he remembered that it was Sunday, for he thought of the long, hot walk down to Briar Crook church. To his great surprise, Mammy did not insist on his going with her: she had been offered a seat in a neighbor's spring-wagon, and there was no room for him.

So he spent a long, lazy morning, stretched out in the shade of the apple-tree. A smell of clover and ripening orchards filled the heated air. The hens clucked around drowsily with drooping wings. A warm breeze stirred the grasses where he lay.

Ivy dug in the dirt with a broken spoon, while Bud kicked up his heels beside John Jay, listening to a marvellous account of Miss Hallie's party. It lost nothing in the telling. For years after, John Jay looked back upon that night as a John of Patmos might have looked, remembering

some vision of the opened heavens. The lights, the music, the white-robed figures, and above all, that wonderful fountain looking as if it must have sprung from some "sea of glass mingled with fire," did not belong to the earth with which he was acquainted. He repeated some part of that recollection to Bud every

day for a week, always ending with the sentence uppermost in his thought: "And next Satiddy *I* has a buthday."

Of course he knew that his celebration could be nothing like Miss Hallie's; but he had a vague idea that something would happen to make the day unusual and delightful. Every

night after he had gone to bed, and when Mammy was drowsing on the doorstep, he raised himself to his knees, and looked through a wide hole in the wall where the chinking had dropped out from between the logs. Through this he could see a strip of sky studded with twinkling stars. One by one he pointed out the magic seven, repeating the charm and whispering the wish.

It was a long week, because he was in such a hurry for it to go by. But Friday night came at last; and, as he counted the stars for the seventh time, the little flutter of excitement in his veins made them seem to dance before his eyes.

Early Saturday morning he was awakened by Mammy's stirring around outside among the chickens, and instantly he remembered that the long-looked-for day had come. Somehow, a feeling of expectancy made it seem different from other days. He wanted it to last just as long as possible, so he lay there thinking about it, and wondering what would happen first.

As soon as he was dressed, Mammy sent him to the spring for water. He was gone some time, for he had a faint hope that the birthday

Santa Claus whom he had met at Miss Hallie's party might come early, and he spent several minutes looking down the road.

Breakfast was ready when he reached the house, and he set the pail down in such a hurry that some of the water slopped out on his bare toes. His wistful eyes scanned the table quickly. There was a better breakfast than usual — bacon and eggs this morning. There was no napkin on the table under which some gift might lie in hiding, but remembering Miss Hallie's other experiences, he pulled out his chair. A little shade of disappointment crept into his face when he found it empty.

After he had speared a piece of bacon with his two-tined fork, and landed it safely on his plate, he rolled his eyes around the table. "Did you know this is my buthday, Mammy?" he asked. "I'm nine yeahs ole to-day."

"That's so, honey," she answered, cheerfully. "You'se gettin' to be a big boy now, plenty big enough to keep out o' mischief an' take keer o' yo' clothes. I'll declare if there isn't anothah hole in yo' shirt this blessed minute!"

The lecture that followed was not of the gala-day kind, but John Jay consoled himself

by thinking that he would probably have had a cuffing instead had it happened on any other day.

After breakfast Mammy went away to do a day's scrubbing at Rosehaven. The children spent most of the morning in watching the road. Every cloud of dust that tokened an approaching traveller raised a new hope. Many people went by on horses or in carriages. Once in a while there was a stray bicycler, but nobody turned in towards the cabin.

After a while, in virtue of its being his especial holiday, John Jay ordered the smaller children to stay in the yard, while he took a swim in the pond. But the pleasure did not last long. He could only splash and paddle around dog-fashion, and the sun burnt his back so badly that he was glad to get out of the water.

Afternoon came, and nothing unusual had happened, but John Jay kept up his courage and looked around for something to do to occupy the time. A wide plank leaned up against the little shed at one side of the cabin. It made him think of Uncle Billy's cellar door, where he had spent many a happy hour sliding.

"I'm goin' to have a coast," he said to Bud. A smooth board which he found near the

woodpile furnished him with a fine toboggan. By the help of an overturned chicken-coop, which he dragged across the yard, he managed to climb to the top of the shed. Squatting down on the board, he gave himself a starting push with one hand. The downward progress was not so smooth or so rapid as he desired.

"Needs greasin'," he said, looking at the plank with a knowing frown. A rummage through the old corner cupboard where the provisions were kept provided him with a wide strip of bacon rind, such as Uncle Billy used to rub on his saw. John Jay carried it out of doors and carefully rubbed the plank from one end to the other. Then he greased the under-side of the little board on which he intended to sit. The result was all he could wish. He slid down the plank at a speed that took his breath. Up he climbed from the coop to the shed, carrying his board with him, and down he slid to the ground, time and again, yelling and laughing as he went, until Bud began to be anxious for his turn. When the little fellow was boosted to the shed, he did not make a noise as John Jay had done; he slid in solemn silence and unspoken delight.

Over an hour of such sport had gone by when Bud remarked, "Ivy's a-missin' all the fun."

"She's too little to go down by herself," answered John Jay; "but if I had another little board I'd take her down in front of me."

He began looking around the wood-pile for one. Then he caught sight of the big dish-pan, which had been set outside on the logs to sun.

"That's the ve'y thing!" he exclaimed. "It'll jus' hole her." The bacon rind was nearly rubbed dry by this time, but the pan, heated by sitting so long in the sun, drew out all the grease that remained. It took the united strength of both boys to get Ivy to the top of the shed, but at last she was seated, with John Jay just behind her on his little board, his legs thrown protectingly around the pan. They shot down so fast that Ivy was terrified. No sooner was she dumped out of the pan on to the ground than she retired to a safe distance, and stuck her thumb in her mouth. Nothing could induce her to get in again.

"I'm goin' down in the dish-pan by myself," announced Bud from the shed roof. "It jus' fits me."

John Jay grinned, and stood a little to one side to watch the performance. "Go it, Brer Tarrypin!" he shouted.

Maybe Bud leaned a little too much to one side. Maybe the pan missed the guiding legs that had held it steady before. At any rate something was amiss, for half-way down the plank it spun dizzily around to one side, and spilled the luckless Bud out on the chicken-coop. Usually he made very little fuss when he was hurt, but this time he set up such a roar that John Jay was frightened. When he saw blood trickling out of the child's mouth, he began to cry himself. He was just about to run for Aunt Susan, when Bud suddenly stopped crying, and turned toward him with a look of terror.

"Aw, I done knock a tooth out!" he exclaimed, and began crying harder than before, feeling that he had been damaged beyond repair.

John Jay laughed when he found that nothing worse had happened than the loss of a little white front tooth, and soon dried Bud's tears by promising that a new one would certainly fill the hole in time.

"Keep yoah mouf shet much as you can when Mammy comes home to-night," he cautioned; "for I sut'n'ly don't want to ketch a lickin' on my buthday. It's mighty lucky the pan didn't get a hole knocked in her."

Mammy came home just before dark. The children were on the fence waiting for her. John Jay felt sure that if Miss Hallie knew that it was his birthday she would send him something. He wondered if Mammy had told her. The basket on the old woman's head was always interesting to these children, for it never came back from Rosehaven empty. The cook always saved the scraps for Sheba's hungry little charges. This evening John Jay kept his eyes fixed on it expectantly, as he followed it up the walk. He had thrown one foot up behind him, and rested the toes of it in his clasped hands as he hopped along on the other. Maybe there might be a birthday cake in that basket, with little candles on it. He didn't know, of course, — but — *maybe*.

They all crowded around, as Sheba put the basket on the table and took out some scraps of boiled ham, a handful of cookies, and half of an apple pie. That was all. John Jay looked

at them a moment with misty eyes, and turned away with a lump in his throat. He was beginning to grow discouraged.

Mammy was so tired that she did not cook anything for supper, as she had intended, but set out the contents of the basket beside the corn bread left from dinner. Before they were through eating somebody called for sis' Sheba to come quick, that Aunt Susan was having one of her old spells.

"Like enough I won't get back for a good while," said Mammy, as she hurriedly left the table. "Put Ivy to bed as soon as you wash her face, John Jay, an' go yo'self when the propah time comes. Be a good boy now, and don't forget to close the doah tight when you go in."

When Ivy was safely tucked away among the pillows, the two boys sat down on the door-step to wait once more for the birthday Santa Claus. John Jay repeated what the thoughtless fellow had said:

"If I don't get there by noon, it'll be because something has happened; anyway, somebody'll be prancing along about sundown." In the week just passed, Bud had

come to believe in the birthday Santa Claus as firmly as John Jay.

"Wondah wot he's doin' now?" he said, after a long pause and an anxious glance down the darkening road.

Ah, well for those two trusting little hearts that they could not know! He was sitting on the steps of the porch at Rosehaven with a guitar on his knee, and smiling tenderly into Sally Lou's blue eyes as he sang, "Oh, yes, I ever will be true!"

It grew darker and darker. The katydids began their endless quarrel in the trees. A night-owl hooted dismally over in the woods. The children stopped talking, and sat in anxious silence. Presently Bud edged up closer, and put a sympathetic arm around his brother. A moment after, he began to cry.

"What you snufflin' for?" asked John Jay savagely. "'Tain't yo' buthday."

"But I'm afraid you ain't goin' to have any eithah," sobbed the little fellow, strangely wrought upon by this long silent waiting in the darkness.

"Aw, you go 'long to bed," said John Jay, with a careless, grown-up air. "If anything

comes I'll wake you up. No use for two of us to be settin' heah."

Bud was sleepy, and crept away obediently; but the day was spoiled, and he went to bed sore with his brother's disappointment.

John Jay sat down again to keep his lonely tryst. He looked up at the faithless stars. They had failed to help him, but in his desperation he determined to appeal to them once more. So he picked out the seven largest ones he could see and repeated very slowly, in a voice that would tremble, the old charm:

"Star-light, star bright,
Seventh star I've seen to-night;
I wish I may and I wish I might
Have the wish come true I wish to-night."

Then he made his wish again, with a heart felt earnestness that was almost an ache. Oh, surely the day was not going to end in this cruel silence! Just then he heard the thud of a horse's hoofs on the wooden bridge, far down the road. Nearer and louder it came. Somebody was prancing by at last. He stood up, straining his eyes in his smiling eagerness to see. Nearer and nearer the hoof-beats

came in the starlight. "*Bookity book! Bookity book!*" The horseman paused a moment in front of Uncle Billy's.

John Jay hopped from one foot to the other in his impatient gladness. Then his heart sank as the hoof-beats went on down the road, *Bookity book! Bookity book!* growing fainter and fainter, until at last they were drowned by the voices of the noisy katydids.

He stood still a moment, so bitterly disappointed that it seemed to him he could not possibly bear it. Then he went in and shut the door, — shut the door on all his bright hopes, on all his fond dreams, on the day that was to have held such happiness, but that had brought instead the cruelest disappointment of his life.

The tears ran down his little black face as he undressed himself. He sat on the edge of the trundle-bed a moment, whispering brokenly, "They wasn't anybody livin' that cared 'bout it's bein' my buthday!" Then throwing himself face downward on his pillow, he cried softly with long choking sobs, until he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

ALTHOUGH John Jay bore many a deep scar, both in mind and body, very little of his life had been given to sackcloth and ashes.

"Wish I could take trouble as easy as that boy," sighed Mammy. "It slides right off'n him like watah off a duck's back."

"He's like the rollin' stone that gethah's no moss," remarked Uncle Billy. "He goes rollickin' through the days, from sunup 'twel sundown, so fast that disappointment and sorrow get rubbed off befo' they kin strike root."

Despite all his troubles, if John Jay had been marking his good times with white stones, there would have been enough to build a wall all around the little cabin by the end of the summer. There were two days especially that he remembered with deepest satisfaction: one was the Saturday when Mars' Nat took him to the circus, and the other was the Fourth of July, when all the family went to the Oak Grove barbecue.

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But now blackberry season had begun, — a season that he hated, because Mammy expected him to help her early and late in the patch. So many of the shining berries slipped down his throat, so many things called his attention away from the brambly bushes, that sometimes it took hours for him to fill his battered quart cup.

Usually his reward was a juicy pie, but this year Mammy changed her plan. Berries were in demand at Rosehaven, and she had very little time to spend in going after them.

"I'll give you five cents a gallon for all you'll pick," she said to John Jay. He looked at her in amazement. As he had never had any money in his life, this seemed a princely offer. He was standing outside by the stick chimney when she made the promise. After one sidelong glance, to see if she were in earnest, he threw his feet wildly into the air and walked off on his hands; then, after two or three somersaults backward, he stood up, panting.

"Where's the buckets at?" he demanded. "I'm goin' to pick every bush in this neck o' woods as clean as you'd pick a chicken."

Now it was Mammy's turn to be surprised.

She had expected that her offer would lure him on for an hour or two, maybe for a whole day. She had not supposed that it would keep him faithfully at work for a week, but it did. His nimble fingers stripped every roadside vine within a mile of the cabin. His hands and legs, and even his face, were criss-crossed with many brier scratches. The sun beat down on him unmercifully, but he stuck to his task so closely that he seemed to see berries even when his eyes were shut. Every day great pailfuls of the shining black beads were sent over to Rosehaven, and every night he dropped a few more nickels into the stocking foot hidden under his pillow.

"Berries is all mighty nigh cleaned out," he said one noon, when he was about to start out again after dinner. "Uncle Billy says there's lots of 'em down in the gandah thicket, but I'se mos' afeered to go there."

"Nothin' won't tech you in daylight, honey," answered Mammy, encouragingly, "but I would n't go through there at night for love or money I'd as lief go into a lion's cage."

"Did you ever see any ghos'es down there Mammy?" asked John Jay with eager interest,

yet cautiously lowering his voice and taking a step nearer.

"No," admitted Mammy, "but oldah people than I have seen 'em. All night long there's great white gandahs flappin' round through that thicket 'thout any heads on. You know they's an awful wicked man buried down there in the woods, an' the sperrits of them he's inju'ed ha'nts the thicket every night. There isn't anybody, that I know of, that 'ud go down there aftah dark for anything on this livin' yearth."

"Then who sees 'em?" asked John Jay, with a skeptical grin.

"Who sees 'em?" repeated Mammy wrathfully, angry because of the doubt implied by his question and his face. "Who sees 'em? They've been seen by generations of them as is dead and gone. Who is you, I'd like to know, standin' up there a-mockin' at me so impident and a-askin' 'Who sees 'em?'"

She turned to begin her dish washing, with a scornful air that seemed to say that he was beneath any further notice. Still, no sooner had she piled the dishes up in the pan than she turned to him again, with her hands on her hips.

"Go down and ask Uncle Mose," she said, still indignant. "He can tell you tales that'll send cole chills up an' down yo' spine. He saw an awful thing in there once with his own eyes. 'Twan't a gandah, but somethin' long an' slim flyin' low in the bushes — he reckoned it was twenty feet long. It had a little thin head like a snake, an' yeahs that stuck up like rabbit's. It was all white, an' had fo' little short legs an' two little short wings, an' it was moah'n flesh an' blood could stand, he say, to see that long, slim, white thing runnin' an' a-flyin' at the same time through the bushes, low down neah the groun'. You jus' go ask him."

John Jay swung his buckets irresolutely. "I don't believe I'll go down there aftah berries," he said. "I don't know what to do. They isn't any moah anywhere else."

Mammy wished that she had not gone to such pains to convince him. "Nothin' evah comes around in the daytime," she insisted, "an' I reckon berries is mighty plentiful, too," she added, persuasively. "Nobody evah saw anything down there in the daylight, honey. I'd go if I was you."

John Jay stood on one foot. He was afraid

of the headless ganders, but he did want those berries. He walked out through the door, hesitated, and stood on one foot again. Then he went slowly down the hill. Mammy, standing in the door with her apron flung over her head, watched him climb up on the fence and sit there to consider. Finally, he dropped down to the other side, and started in the direction of the gander thicket.

It was a place that the negroes had been afraid of since her earliest recollection. It was only a little stretch of woodland, where the neglected underbrush had grown into a tangled thicket. No one remembered now what had given rise to the name, and no one living had ever seen the ghostly white ganders that were said to haunt the place at night. Still, the story was handed down from one to another, and the place was shunned as much as possible.

Brier Crook church stood at one end, with its desolate little graveyard, where the colored people buried their dead under its weeping willows and gloomy cedars.

John Jay avoided the lonely road that led in that direction, and took the one that wound around the other end of the thicket, past a de-

serted mill. Yet, when he reached the ruined old building, with its staring windows and sunken roof, he was half sorry that he had not gone the other way.

The berries were on the far side of the thicket, and he was obliged to pass either the graveyard or the old mill to reach them. The possibility of plunging boldly into the thicket and pushing his way through to the other side had never occurred to him, although it is doubtful if he would have dared to do so even had he thought of it. He ran down the dry bed of the stream, and past the silent moss-grown wheel, breathing a sigh of relief when he came out into an open field beyond.

Balancing himself on the top rail of the fence, he looked cautiously along the edge of the thicket. It did not look so dismal in there, after all. A woodpecker's cheerful tapping sounded somewhere within. Butterflies flitted fearlessly down into its shady ravines. A squirrel ran out on a limb, and sat chattering at him saucily. Then a big gray rabbit rustled through the leaves, and went loping away into the depths of the thicket.

"I don't believe there's anything skeery in

there at all!" exclaimed John Jay aloud. After starting several times, and stopping to look all around and listen, he followed the rabbit into the bushes. Plunging down a narrow cow-path which wound in and out, he came to an open space where a few trees had fallen. Here, with an exclamation of delight, he pounced upon the finest, largest berries he had ever seen. They dropped into the tin pail with a noisy thud at first, and then with scarcely a sound, as they rapidly piled higher and higher.

Both pails were filled in a much shorter time than usual, and then he sat down on a wide log to enjoy the lunch he had brought with him. There were two big slices of bread and jam in one pocket, and a big apple in the other. As he sat there, slowly munching, he began to feel drowsy. He had awakened early that morning, and had worked hard in the hot sun. He stretched himself out full length on the log, to rest his back while he finished eating his apple.

The branches overhead swayed gently back and forth. His eyes followed them as they kept up that slow, monotonous motion against the bright sky. He had no intention of

closing them; in fact, he did not know they were closed, for in that same moment he was sound asleep.

The woodpecker went on tapping; the squirrel whisked back and forth along the limb; the same gray rabbit came out and hopped along beside the log where he lay. Suddenly, it raised itself up to look at the strange sight, and then bounded away again. The sun dropped lower and lower. In the open fields there was still light, but the thicket was gray with the subdued shadows of the gloaming.

John Jay might have slept on all night had not a leaf fluttered slowly down from the tree above, and brushed across his face. He opened his eyes, looking all around him in a bewildered way. Then he sat up, and peered through the bushes. A cold perspiration covered him when he realized that it was dusk and that he was in the middle of the gander thicket. He snatched up the blackberries, a pail in each hand, and stood looking helplessly around him, for he could not decide which way to go. In front of him stretched half a mile of the haunted thicket. It was either to push his way through that as quickly as possible, or to go back by

the long, lonesome road over which he had come.

Just then a harmless flock of geese belonging to an old market-gardener who lived near came waddling up from the creek, on the way home to their barn-yard. They moved along in a silent procession, pushing their long, thin necks through the underbrush. John Jay was too terrified to see that their heads were properly in place, and that they were as harmless as the flock that fed in Aunt Susan's dooryard.

"They'll get me! They'll get me!" he whimpered, as they came nearer and nearer, for his feet seemed so heavy that he could not lift them when he tried to run. Made desperate by his fear, he raised first one pail of berries and then the other, hurling them at the startled geese with all the force his wiry little arms could muster.

Instantly their long white wings shot up through the bushes. There was an angry fluttering and hissing, as half running, half flying, they waddled faster towards home. John Jay did not look to see what direction they were taking. He was sure they were after him. He could hear their long wings flapping just

behind him; at least, he thought he could, but the noise he heard was the snapping of the twigs he trampled in his headlong flight. No greyhound ever bounded through a wood with lighter feet than those which carried him. His eyes were wide with fright. His heart beat so hard in his throat he thought he would surely die before he could reach the cabin. At every

step the light seemed to be growing dimmer and the thicket denser, although he thought he certainly must have been running long enough to have reached the clearing. Still he ran on, and on, and on. The recollection of one of Mammy's stories flashed across his mind.

Once a man had lost his way in this wood, and the ganders had chased him around and around until daylight. The thought made him

so weak in the knees that he was ready to drop from fright and exhaustion. Then he recalled a superstition that he had often heard, that anyone who has lost his way may find it again by turning his pocket wrong side out. He was twitching at his with trembling hands, looking with eyes too frightened to see, and fumbling with fingers too stiff with fear to feel, but the pocket seemed to have disappeared. "It's conju'ed too," he wailed, as he ran heedlessly on.

Something long and white slapped across his face. An unearthly, wavering voice sounded a hoarse, long-drawn "Moo-oo-oo!" just in front of him. He sank down in a helpless little heap, blubbering and groaning aloud, with his teeth chattering, and the tears running down his clammy face. There was a louder crackling, and out of the bushes walked an old spotted cow, calmly switching her white tail and looking at John Jay in gentle-eyed wonder.

Strength came back to the boy with that familiar sight, but not being sure that the cow was not as ghostly as the ganders, he scrambled to his feet and started to run again. To avoid passing the cow, he turned in another

direction. This time, it happened to be the right one, and in a few moments more he had dashed into the open. Then he saw that it was not yet dark in the fields.

Mammy heard the sound of rapid running up the path, and came to the door. John Jay dropped at her feet, trembling and cold, and so frightened that he could only cling to her skirts, sobbing piteously. When, at last, he found his breath, all he could gasp was, "Oh, Mammy! the gandahs are aftah me! the gandahs are aftah me!"

Big boy as he was, Mammy stooped and lifted him in her arms, and holding him close, with his head on her shoulder, rocked back and forth in the big wooden chair until he grew calmer. Not until he had sobbed out the whole story, and wiped his eyes several times on her apron, did he see that there was company in the room.

George Chadwick was sitting by the door. It was the first time he had been in the cabin since his return from college. He had ridden up from the toll-gate on a passing wagon to see his old friend, Sheba, and had been there the greater part of the afternoon, listening to

her tales of his mother in the old slavery days. He had not intended to accept her urgent invitation to stay to supper, but when he saw that she shared John Jay's fright, he decided to remain. Had it not been for his protecting presence in the house, Mammy was so affected by the boy's story that she would have barred every opening. Then, cowering around one little flickering candle, they would have fed each other's superstitious fears until bedtime. George knew this, and so he stayed to reassure them by his matter-of-fact explanations, and his cheerful common sense. While he could not convince them that they had been needlessly alarmed, he drew their attention to other things, by stories of college life and experiences at the North, while Sheba bustled about, bringing out the best of her meagre store to do him honor.

Ivy, scrubbed until she shone, and in a stiffly starched apron, sat on his knee and sucked her thumb. Bud squatted at his feet in silence, sticking his little red tongue in and out of the hole where the lost tooth had been. As for John Jay, his hero-worship passed that night into warmest love. From that time on, he would have gone through fire and water to

serve his "Rev'und Gawge," — anywhere in fact, save one place. Never any more was there motive deep enough or power strong enough to drag him within calling distance of the gander thicket.

CHAPTER VII.

Now that berry picking was at an end, John Jay slipped back into his old lazy ways. Errands were run with lagging feet; work was done in the easiest way possible, and everything was left undone that he could by any means avoid. Mammy scolded when she came home at night and found both water-pail and wood-box empty, but he went serenely on with his supper. No matter what happened, nothing ever interfered with his appetite.

"Those chillun are gettin' as bad as little young turkeys 'bout strayin' away from home," mumbled Aunt Susan one morning, as she watched them slip through the fence soon after Sheba had left the house. "An' they ain't anything wussah than young turkeys for runnin' off. 'Peahs like that kind of poultry is nevah satisfied with where they is, but always want to be where they isn't. It's the same with those chillun."

Although Aunt Susan did not know it, there was one place where John Jay and his flock of two were always content to stay; that was on the steps at the side door of the church. Nearly every afternoon found them sitting there in a solemn row, waiting for the shadows to grow long across the grass, for it was then that George oftenest came to play on the organ. He always smiled on the three grave little figures, waiting so patiently for the music of his vesper hymns.

It touched the lonely man to have John Jay follow him about, with that same wistful look in his eyes that a faithful dog has for its master. Sometimes he sat down on the steps beside the children and talked to them awhile, just to see the boy's face light up with pleasure.

It was a mystery to Sheba, how a dignified minister could care for the companionship of such a harum-scarum little creature as her grandson. She did know the tie that bound them, but their natures were as near akin as the acorn and the oak. In John Jay the man saw his own childhood with all its unanswered questions and dumb, groping ambitions; while the boy, looking up to his "Rev'und Gawge"

as the highest standard of all manliness, felt faint stirrings within, of the possibility of such growth for himself.

Early one morning George sent a message to Sheba, asking that John Jay might be allowed to spend the day with him and help watch the toll-gate, while Mars' Nat was in town. That morning still stands out in the boy's memory, as one of the happiest he ever spent.

Along in the middle of the afternoon, when travel on the turnpike had almost ceased on account of the heat, George went into his room and lay down. John Jay sat on the floor of the porch, holding the old hound's head in his lap, and lazily smoothing its long soft ears. He felt very important when a wagon rattled up and the toll was dropped into his fingers. He wished that everybody he knew would ride by and find him sitting there in charge; but no one else came for more than an hour. It had seemed as long as ten hours, with nothing to do but slap at the flies and talk to the sleepy hound. John Jay grinned when he saw the arrival, for it was a man whom he knew.

"Good evenin', Mistah Boden," he called, eagerly. The man stopped his horses.

"Hello!" he said. "You're in charge, are you? Where's the rest of the folks?"

"Mars' Nat, he's gone to town to-day," answered John Jay, proudly. "I'm keepin' toll-gate this evenin', Mistah Boden."

"So!" exclaimed the man, with a cunning gleam in his little eyes. "That's the lay of the land, is it?"

Instead of taking out his pocket-book, he threw one foot over his knee, and began to ask questions in a friendly manner that flattered John Jay.

"Let's see. Your name's Hickman, hain't it?"

"Yessa, John Jay Hickman," answered the boy.

"Yes," drawled the man, gnawing at a plug of tobacco which he took from his pocket. "I know all about you. Your mammy used to cook for my wife, and your gran'mammy washed at our house one summer. How is the old woman, anyhow?"

"She's well, thank you, Mistah Boden," was the pleased answer.

"And then there's that brother of her's—Billy! old Uncle Billy! How's he getting on?"

"Oh, he's mighty complainin', Mistah Boden; he's got such a misery in his back all the time that he say he jus' aint got ambition 'nuff to get out'n his own way."

"Is that so?" was the reply, in a tone of flattering interest. The man beckoned him with his whip to step closer.

"Look here, boy," he said, in a confidential tone, "it's a mighty lucky thing for me that Nat Chadwick left you here instead of a stranger. Every penny of change I started with this morning dropped out through a hole in my pocket somewhere. I didn't find it out until I got within sight of the place; then, thinks I to myself, 'oh, it won't make any difference. Nat and I are old friends; he'll pass me.' I guess you can do the same, can't you, being as you're in his place, and I'm an old friend of your family? You needn't say anything about it, and I'll do as much for you some day."

John Jay looked puzzled. Before he could reply George walked out on the porch and stood beside him. He bowed to the man politely. "I'll take the toll, if you please, Mr. Boden. Put up the bar, John."

The man hesitated a moment, then tossed him the change, and gave the horses a cut with his whip that sent them dashing down the road.

"If he wasn't jus' tryin' to sneak his way through 'thout payin'!" exclaimed John Jay, indignantly. George made no comment, but John Jay seemed unable to quit talking about the occurrence. Half an hour later he broke out again: "He thought 'cause I was jus' a little boy he could cheat me, an' nobody would evah know the difference. I nevah in all my life befo' heard tell of anything so mean!"

"Haven't you?" asked George, with such peculiar emphasis and such a queer little smile that John Jay felt guilty, although he could not have told why.

"No, I nevah did," he insisted.

George leaned against the door-casing, and looked thoughtfully across the fields. "There are more turnpikes in life than one, my boy," he said kindly, "and every one has its toll-gate. There is the road to learning. I gave up everything to get through that gate, even my health. One cannot be anything or do anything worth while without paying some sort of toll. It may

be time or strength or hard work or patience, and sometimes we have to give them all."

"'Peahs like I've nevah struck any such roads in my travellin'," answered John Jay, carelessly, who often understood George's little parables far better than he cared to acknowledge.

"But I know one road that you are on now, where you try to slip out of paying what you owe every day."

John Jay hung his head, and rubbed his bare feet together in embarrassed silence. If the Reverend George said it was so, it must be so, although he did not know just what he was hinting at.

"Mr. Boden knows very well," continued George, "that the money that is paid here goes to keep the road in good condition for him to travel over. He is very glad to have such a good pike provided for him, but he wants it for nothing. I know a poor old woman who keeps the road smooth for somebody. She works early and late, in hot weather and cold, to earn food and shelter and clothes for somebody; and that somebody eats her bread, and wears out the clothes, and sleeps under her roof, and

never pays any toll. He owes her thanks and willing service, — all the help he can give her poor, tired old body, but she never gets even the thanks. He takes all her drudgery as a matter of course."

John Jay's head dropped lower and lower, as he screwed his toes around in the dust of the path, mortified and embarrassed. All the whippings of his life had never stung him so deeply as George's quiet words. He was used to being scolded for his laziness. He never paid any attention to that; but to have his "Rev-'und Gawge" regard him as dishonest as Mr. Boden hurt him more than words could express.

Another wagon came rattling up in a cloud of dust. Without waiting to see the newcomer, he dodged around the corner of the house and ran down to the barn. A pair of puppies came frisking out ready for a romp, and an old Maltese cat, stretched out in the sun, stood up and arched its back at his approach. He took no notice of them, but crawling up into the hay, threw himself down in a dark corner with his face hidden in his arms.

Mars' Nat came home after awhile. John Jay could hear Ned putting the horse into the

stall, and throwing the corn into the feed-box. Then everything was still for a long time. The sun stole through the cracks of the barn in wide shining streaks, with little motes of dust dancing up and down in the golden light, but John Jay did not see them. A shadow darkened the doorway. He did not see that, for his face was still hidden. There was a step on the barn floor, and a rustling in the hay beside him; then George's hand rested lightly on his head, and his voice said, soothingly, "There, there! I wouldn't cry about it."

"Oh, I nevah thought about things that way befo'!" sobbed John Jay. "I'll nevah sneak out of the work again. I'll tote the wood and watah 'thout waitin' to be asked, an' I'll nevah lick out my tongue at her behine her back as long as I live!"

George bit his lips to keep from laughing, although he was touched by the little penitent's distress.

"Do you know why I said such hard things to you?" he asked. "It was to open your eyes. I want to make a man of you, John Jay. Let me tell you some things about your grandmother that you have never heard. Her whole

life has been a struggle, and such a very sad one."

John Jay rubbed his shirt sleeve across his eyes and gave a final snuffle. Some people never have the awakening that came to him that afternoon. Some people go along all their days with no other thought in life than to burrow through their own mole-hills. There in the hay, with the shining dust of the sunbeams falling athwart the old barn floor, the boy lay and listened. Thoughts that he had no words for, ambitions that he could not express, yet that filled him with vague longing, seemed to vibrate along the earnest voice, and tremble from the fulness of George's heart into his. Even after George stopped talking and began to whistle softly in the pause that followed, John Jay lay quite still with his face hidden in his arms.

Ned came in presently, rustling around through the hay after eggs, and singing at the top of his voice. The sound seemed to bring John Jay back to his common every-day self. He sat up, grinning as if he had never heard of such things as tears; but those he had shed must have made his eyesight clearer. As he

slid down from the hay and walked along beside George, he noticed for the first time how slow and faltering the steps beside his had grown. As they climbed up the hill to the church, it seemed to him that the beloved face looked unusually thin and haggard in the strong light of the sunset.

George did not play long this evening. He knew that the quiet little listener on the steps bent as readily to the changing moods of his melody as the clover does to the fitful breezes; so he changed abruptly from the minor chords that his fingers instinctively reached for, to an old hymn that smoothed away the pathetic pucker of the boy's forehead. Then he pulled out the stops and began a loud burst of martial music, so glad and triumphant, that, listening, one felt all great things possible of achievement. John Jay stood up, swinging his cap on the end of a stick which he carried, with all the curves and rythmic motions of a drum major.

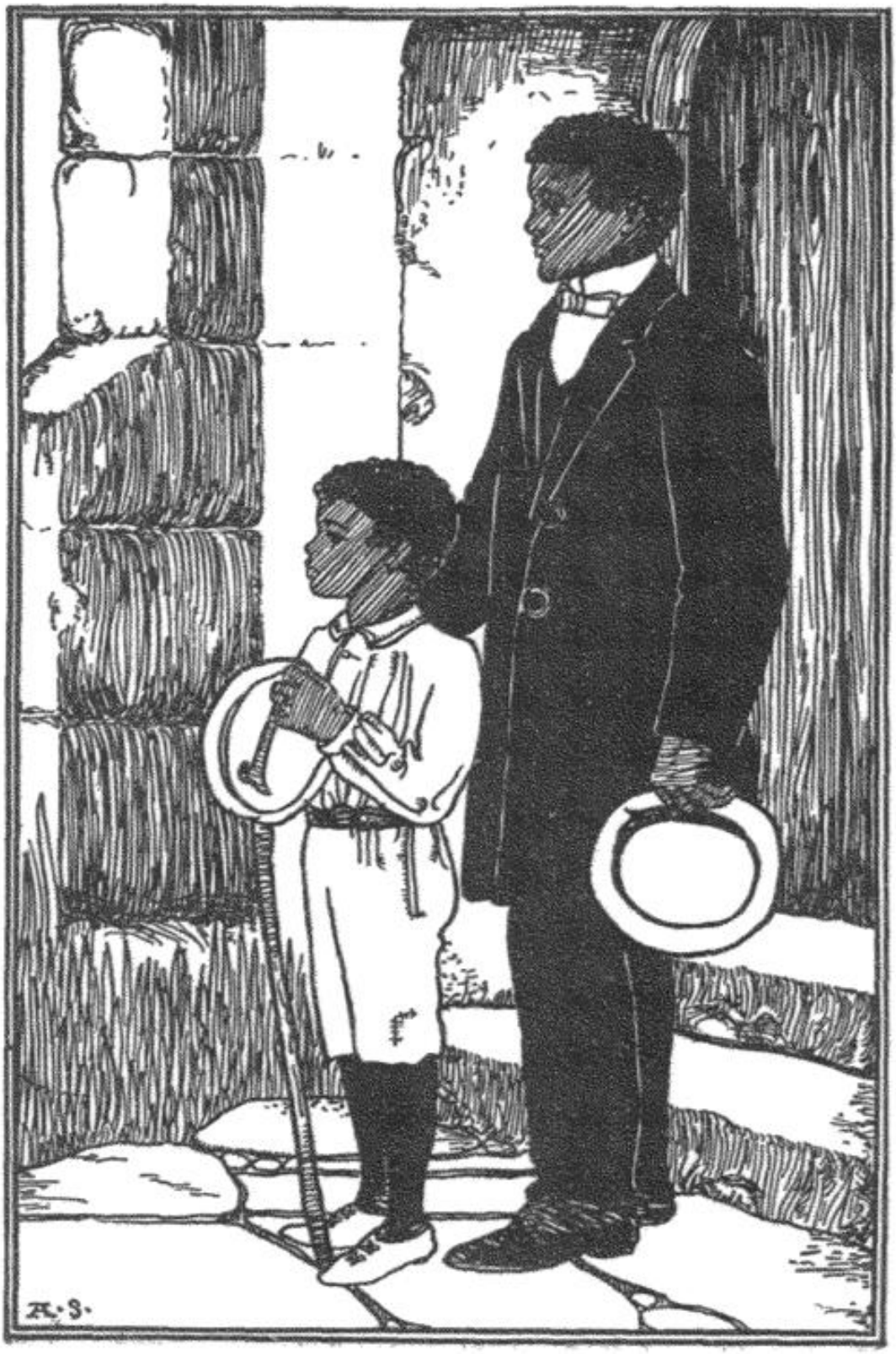
After George came out and locked the door, he stood for a moment looking out fondly across the peaceful fields, still fair with the fading glow of the summer sun. John Jay looked too, feeling at the same time the touch

of a caressing hand laid lightly on his bare head, but he could not see the lips above him that moved in a silent benediction.

When Mammy came home that night, there was wood in the box and water in the pail. The loose boards lying around the yard had been piled up neatly, and the paths were freshly swept. All that evening John Jay's eyes followed her with curious glances whichever way she turned, as if he found her changed. The change was in John Jay.

Next day, when she came home, she found the same state of affairs. It was early in the afternoon, and the children were out playing. She hung up her sun-bonnet, and dropped wearily down into a chair. Then, remembering a pile of clothes that must be mended before dark, she got up and began to hunt for her thimble and thread.

"That tawmentin' boy must have lost 'em," she exclaimed, after a vain search through her work-basket. The clothes were lying on the bed where she had put them. As she gathered them in her arms the thimble rolled out, and a spool of thread with a needle sticking in it fell to the floor.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She shook out Ivy's little blue dress, and began turning it around to find the seam that was ripped. It was drawn together with queer straggling stitches that only the most awkward of fingers could have made. The white buttons on Bud's shirt-waist had been sewed on with black thread, and a spot of blood told where somebody's thumb had felt the sharp thrust of a needle. John Jay's trousers lay at the bottom of the pile, with a little round, puckered patch of calico on each knee.

The tears came into Mammy's eyes as she saw the boy's poor attempt to help. "I'se afeerd he's goin' to die," she muttered in alarm. "I sut'n'ly is. Poah little fellow: he's mighty tryin' to a body's patience sometimes, an' he's made a mess of this mendin', for suah, but I reckon he means all right. He's not so onthinkin' an' onthankful aftah all." She laid the spool and thimble on the window-sill, and folded her hands to rest awhile. There was a tremulous smile on her careworn old face. For one day, at least, John Jay had paid his toll.

CHAPTER VIII.

Boys do not grow into saints in a single night, in the way that Jack's beanstalk grew from earth to sky. Sainthood comes slowly, like the blossom on a century plant; there must be a hundred years of thorny stem-life first.

Mammy soon lost all her fears of John Jay's dying. Although the promise made to George on the haymow was faithfully kept, he could no more avoid getting into mischief than a weathercock can keep from turning when the wind blows.

The October frosts came, sweetening the persimmons and ripening the nuts in the hazel copse; but it nipped the children's bare feet, and made the thinly clad little shoulders shiver. John Jay gladly shuffled into the old clothes sent over from Rosehaven. They were many sizes too big, but he turned back the coat sleeves and hitched up his suspenders, regardless of appearances. Bud fared better, for

the suit that fell to his lot was but slightly worn, and almost fitted him. As for Ivy, she was decked out in such finery that the boys scarcely dared to touch her. She had been given a long blue velvet cloak that the youngest Haven could no longer squeeze into. It was trimmed with shaggy fur that had once been white. Ivy admired it so much that when she was not wearing it out of doors she was carrying it around in the house in a big roll, as tenderly as if it had been a great doll.

It was an odd little procession that filed past Uncle Billy's house every day, on the way to the woods for autumn stores. John Jay came first, with a rickety wagon he had made out of a soap-box and two solid wooden wheels. He looked like a little old man, with his long coat and turned up trowsers. Bud came next in his new suit, but he had lost his hat, and was obliged to wear a handkerchief tied over his ears. Ivy brought up the rear, continually tripping on her long cloak, and jolting her white toboggan cap down over her eyes at almost every step.

Nuts and persimmons and wild fox-grapes filled the little wagon many times, and made

a welcome addition to Mammy's meagre bill of fare.

Late one evening John Jay came running up the path all out of breath. The yellow candle-light streamed out through the cabin window. He stopped and looked in, sniffing the air with keen enjoyment, for Mammy was stewing the rabbit he had caught that morning in a snare.

He could see Bud sitting on the floor, with his feet harnessed up as horses. He was saw-ing the reins back and forth and remorselessly switching his own legs until they flew up and down in fine style. John Jay watched him with a grin on his face.

Presently Mammy, turning to season the stew, saw the black face pressed close against the window-pane. With a startled shriek she gave the pepper-pot such a shake that the lid flew off, and nearly all of the pepper went into the stew.

"Jus' see what you done!" she scolded, as John Jay walked into the house an instant later. "Next time you come gawkin' in the window at me in the dar', I'll peppah *you* 'stid o' the rabbit!"

John Jay hastened to change the subject.

"I sole a bushel of hickory nuts to Mistah Bemis jus' now," he stammered, "an' he's goin' to take some mo' next week. I'm savin' up to get you all somethin' mighty nice for Chrismus." He jingled his pockets suggestively; but Mammy was too busy skimming the pepper out of the stew to make any reply.

One warm, mellow afternoon when the golden-rod was at its sunniest, and the iron-weed flaunted its royal purple across the fields in the trail of the Indian summer, John Jay went down to the toll-gate cottage. He found his Reverend George sitting on the porch in his overcoat, with a shawl thrown over his knees. A book lay in his lap, but his hands were folded on the open pages, and he was looking far away across the brown fields of tattered corn-stalks. He was much better than he had been for several weeks, and welcomed John Jay so gaily, that the child felt that a weight had somehow been lifted from him. Mammy and Uncle Billy had been whispering together many times of late, and the little listener shared their fears. He had made so many visits to the toll-gate

since the day he was left in charge, that he felt almost as much at home there as Mars' Nat himself. Once George did all the talking while John Jay listened with his head bashfully tipped to one side; now they seemed to have changed places. It was George who listened.

John Jay had been kept at home for several days, and had much to tell. For an hour or more he entertained George with accounts of his rabbit snares, his nutting expeditions, and his persimmon hunts. He told about the dye Mammy had made from the sumach berries which he had carried home, and how Ivy had dropped her pet duck into it. He imitated Bud's antics when he upset the kettle of soft soap, and he had much to say about the young owl which they had caught, and caged under a wash-tub.

He did not notice that he was doing all the talking this afternoon, but filled the pauses that sometimes fell between them by idly playing jack-stones with a handful of acorns. George was thinking as they sat there that this might be the last time that they two would ever sit in this way together, and he was searching for some words with which to prepare the child for

a sudden leave-taking in case it should be soon.

At last he cleared his throat. John Jay looked up expectantly, but just then Mars' Nat walked around the house.

"Here comes Doctor Leonard," he said, nodding towards a rapidly approaching horseman. "Howdy, Doc," he called, as the man drew rein, and felt in his pocket for some change to pay his toll. "What's your hurry?"

"I've a call over to Elk Ridge," he answered, handing him the money and quickly starting on. Then he pulled his horse up with a sudden jerk. "Here, Chadwick," he called, pitching the heavy overcoat he carried on his arm in the direction of the porch, "I wish you'd keep this for me until I get back. I'll be along this way before dark, and it's so much warmer than I thought it would be that such a heavy coat is a nuisance."

"All right," responded the toll-keeper. "Here! John Jay," he ordered, as the doctor disappeared around the bend in the road, "pick up the gentleman's coat and hang it on a chair inside the door there." Then he stuck his hands in his pockets, and whistling to his dog, walked off across the fields.

George turned to the child again. "John Jay," he said, "do you know that I'm going away soon?" Without waiting for an answer, he hurried on, lest another spell of coughing should interrupt him. "When I was a little fellow like you I heard so much about spirits and graveyards and haunted places that I had a horror of dying. I could not think of it without a shiver. But I've found out that death isn't a cold, ugly thing, my boy, and I want you to remember all your life every word I'm saying to you now. There is nothing to dread in simply going down this road and through the gate as Doctor Leonard did, and death is no more than that. We just go down the turnpike till we get to the end of this life, and then there's the toll-gate. We lay down our old worn-out bodies, just as Doctor Leonard left his coat here, because he wouldn't need it farther up the road. Then the bar flies up and lets us through. It drops so quickly that no one ever sees what lies on the other side, but we know that there is neither sorrow nor crying beyond it, nor any more pain. Listen, John Jay, this is what the Book tells us."

With fingers that trembled in his eagerness

to make himself understood, he lifted the volume that had been lying in his lap. The words that he read vibrated through the child's heart in the way that the organ music used to roll. Never again in the years that followed could he hear them read without seeing all the golden glory of that radiant October day, and hearing the mournful notes of some distant dove, falling at intervals through the Sabbath-like stillness.

He had a queer conception of what lies beyond the gates of this life. It was a curious jumble of crowns and harps and long, white-feathered wings. Mammy's favorite song said, "There's milk an' honey in heaven, I know;" and Aunt Susan often lifted up her cracked voice in the refrain, "Oh, them golden slippahs I'm agwine to wear, when Gabriel blows his trum-pet!" How Uncle Billy could sigh for the time to come when he might walk the shining pavements was beyond John Jay's understanding. Personally, he preferred the freedom of the neighboring woods and the pleasure of digging in the dirt to all the white robes and crowns that might be laid up somewhere in the skies.

But when George had finished reading, John

Jay was not gazing into the clouds for a glimpse of the city to which his friend was going; he was looking down the road. Crowned with all their autumn glory, the far hills stood up fair and golden in the westering sun. It was to some place just as real and beautiful as the hills he looked upon that George was going, not a crowded street with an endless procession of singing, white-robed figures. A far country, under whose waving trees health and strength would be given back to him. No, dying was not a cold, ugly thing.

"*They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!*"

George closed the book, and leaning wearily back in the chair, drew his hand over his eyes. "I want you to promise me one thing, John Jay," he said. "That when I am gone you will think of what I am telling you now, and when the colored people all gather around to see this tired body of mine laid aside, you'll remember Dr. Leonard's coat, and you'll say, 'George has left his behind too. He isn't here, but he's just on the other side of the toll-gate.' Will you do that, John Jay?"

There was a frightened look in the boy s

eyes. He had no words wherewith to answer him, but he nodded an assent as he went on nervously tossing the acorns from one hand to another.

There was a long silence, and when he looked up inquiringly, George had put his thin hands over his face to hide the tears that were slowly trickling down.

"What's the mattah?" he asked anxiously. "Shall I call Mars' Nat?"

"No," answered the man, steadying his voice. "I was only thinking that I had expected to go through the gate, when my turn came, with my arms piled full of sheaves, — but I've come to the end too soon. It seems so hard to come down to death empty-handed, when I have longed all these years to do so much for my people. Oh, my poor people!" he cried out desperately; "so helpless and so needy, and my life that was to have been given to them going out in vain! utterly in vain!"

It was not the first time that John Jay had heard that cry. In these weeks of constant companionship George had talked so much of his hopes and plans, that a faint spark of that same ambition had begun to smoulder slowly

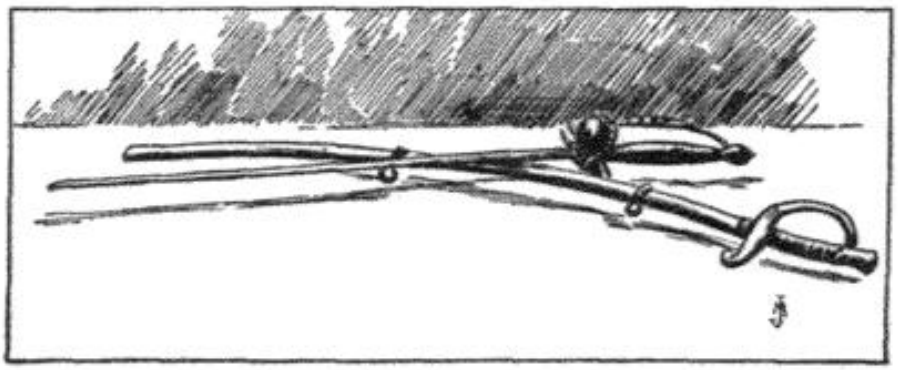
in the boy's ignorant little heart. Six months ago he could have had no understanding of such a grief as now made George's voice to tremble; but love had opened his eyes to many things, and made his sympathies keen. He drew nearer, saying almost in a whisper: "But Uncle Billy says you fought a good fight while you was gettin' ready to help us cul'ud folks, an' if you got so knocked up you can't do nothin' moah, maybe 'twon't be expected as you should have yo' hands full when you go through the gates. You've got yo' scars to show for what you've done."

George lifted up his head. There was an eager light in his eyes, not so much because of the comfort that had come from such an unexpected quarter, as because of a new hope that the words suggested. He lifted the boy's chin with a trembling hand, and looked wistfully into his eyes.

"You could do it, couldn't you?" he asked. "All that I must leave undone? The struggle would not be so great for you. There are schools near at hand now. You would not have the fearful odds to contend with that I had. *Will* you take up my battle? Shall

I leave you my sword, John Jay? Oh, you *do* understand me, don't you?" he cried, imploringly.

"Yes, I understand," answered the boy. Then, as if George had really placed an epaulet upon his shoulder, as if he had really given him a sword, he drew a long breath and said with all the solemnity of a promise: "Some day Uncle Billy shall say that about me, 'He have fought a good fight, — he have finished his co'se.'"



CHAPTER IX.

It came to pass as George had said. One cold, rainy day when the wind rustled the fallen leaves and sighed through all the bare branches, he came haltingly up to the end of his lonely pilgrimage. It was given to little John Jay to hold his hand and look into his eyes as Death swung up the bar and bade him pass on.

A wondering smile flitted across the beloved face; then that mysterious silence that bars all sight and speech fell between the freed spirit hastening up the eternal highway and the trembling boy left sobbing behind.

Mars' Nat turned away with tears in his eyes and looked out of the window. "Through thick and thin, he's the one soul who loved me and believed in me," he said, in a half whisper.

"His poor, black hands have upheld the old family standards and ideals far more faithfully than mine, both in his slavery and his freedom."

Because of this there was no grave made for George in the forsaken shadow of Brier Crook church. He was given a place on the hill, beside the Chadwicks, whose name he had borne unsullied, and to whose honor he had been proudly loyal.

"That was a gran' funeral occasion, sis' Sheba," exclaimed Aunt Susan, as she took off the rusty crape veil that had served at the funerals of two generations. "I reckon every cul'ud person around heah was present. Three ministahs a helpin', an' fo'teen white families sendin' flowahs with their cards on isn't to be seen every day in the yeah. I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

"No, indeed," answered Mammy, with a mournful shake of the head. "Dyin' would be somethin' to look forwa'ds to if we could all hope for such a buryin' as that. But I'm beat about John Jay. He do seem so onfeelin'. He loved that man bettah than anything on this yearth, an' I s'posed he'd take his death mighty hard;

but what you reckon he said to me this mawnin'. I was i'onin' my black aidged handkerchief to take, when he says to me, sezee, 'What you want to put on mo'nin' for Rev'und Gawge for? He said to tell you all that he jus' gone through the toll-gate.'"

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Aunt Susan. "That sut'n'ly sounds on-natchel in a chile like him."

"Yes," continued Mammy, "I haven't seen him shed a tear. He jus' wandahs around the yard, same as if nothin' had happened, and nevah says a word about it."

She did not know how many times he slipped away from the other children and sat alone by the church steps, where he had so often listened to George's vesper melodies. She did not know what mournful cadences of memory thrilled him, as he rocked himself back and forth among the dead weeds, with his arms around his knees and his head bowed on them. She knew nothing of the music that had sung wordless longings into his simple child-heart until it awakened answering voices of a deathless ambition. So her surprise knew no bounds when he came slowly into the cabin one evening,


M G Johnston

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and asked if he might be allowed to start to school the following week.

"Law, chile!" she answered. "They isn't any school for cul'ud folks less'n a mile an' a half away, an' besides, you hasn't clothes fitten to wear. The scholars would all laugh at you."

Still he persisted. "What put such a notion in yo' head, anyhow?" she demanded.

John Jay turned his face aside, and busied himself with taking another reef in his suspenders. "The Rev'und Gawge wanted me to go," he said, in a low tone. "Besides, how can I know what all's in the books he done left me 'thout I learn to read?"

"That's so," assented Mammy, looking proudly at the shelves now ornamenting one corner of the little cabin with George's well-worn school-books. Most of the volumes were upside down, because her untutored eyes knew no better than to replace them so, when she took them out to dust them with loving care. They were George's greatest treasures, and she allowed no one to touch them, not even John Jay, to whom they had been left.

"What does a little niggah like him want of schoolin'," she had once said to Uncle Billy,

when he had proposed sending the boy to school to keep him out of mischief. "Why, that John Jay he hasn't got any mo' mind than a grasshoppah. All he knows how to do is jus' to keep on a jumpin'. No, brer Billy, it would be a pure waste of good education to spend it on anybody like him."

John Jay had always cheerfully agreed with this opinion, which she never hesitated to express in his hearing. He had had no desire to give up his unlettered liberty until that day on the haymow when he had his awakening. Having heard Mammy's opinion so often, it was no wonder that he kept his head turned bashfully aside, and stumbled over his words when he timidly made his request. It was the sight of George's books that gave him courage to persist, and it was the sight of the books that decided Mammy's answer. She could remember the time when Jintsey's boy had been almost as light-headed and light-hearted as John Jay; so it was not past belief that even John Jay might settle down in time.

The thought that he might some day be able to read the books that George had pored

over, and that, possibly, some time in the far future he might be fitted to preach the gospel George had proclaimed, aroused all her grandmotherly pride. Some fragment of a half-forgotten sermon floated through her mind as she looked on the ragged little fellow standing before her.

"The mantle of the prophet 'Lijah done fell on his servant 'Lisha," she muttered under her breath. "What if the mantle of Gawge Chadwick have been left to my poah Ellen's boy, 'long with them books?"

John Jay was balancing himself on one foot, while he drew the toes of the other along a crack in the floor between the puncheons, anxiously awaiting her decision. Not knowing what was passing through her mind, he was not prepared for the abrupt change in both her speech and manner. He almost lost his balance when she suddenly gave her consent; but, regaining it quickly, he tumbled through the door, giving vent to his delight in a series of whoops that made Mammy's head ring, and brought her to the door, scolding crossly.

A few minutes later, a dusky little figure crept through the gloaming, and rustled softly

through the leaves lying on the path. Resting his arms on the fence, he looked across the dim fields to the darkly outlined tree-tops of the hill beyond.

"I wondah if he knows that I'm keepin' my promise," he whispered. "I wondah if he knows I'm tryin' to follow him."

Over the churchyard hill the new moon swung its slender crescent of light, and into its silvery wake there trembled out of the darkness a shining star.

The roadside ditches are covered with ice, these cold winter mornings. The ruts in the muddy pike are frozen as hard as stone. John Jay shuffles along in his big shoes on his way to school, out at the toes and out at his elbows ; but there is a broad smile all over his bright little face. Wherever he can find a strip of ice to slide across, he goes with a rush and a whoop. Sometimes there is only a raw turnip and a piece of corn pone in his pocket for dinner. His feet and fingers are always numb with cold by the time he reaches the school house, but his eyes still shine, and his whistle never loses its note of cheeriness.

There are whippings and scoldings in the schoolhouse, just as there have always been whippings and scoldings in the cabin; for no sooner is he thawed out after his long walk, than he begins to be the worry of his teacher's life, as he was the torment of Mammy's. It is not that he means to make trouble. Despite his many blunders into mischief, he is always at the head of his class, for he has a motive for hard study that the other pupils know nothing of.

Every evening Bud and Ivy watch for his home-coming with eager faces flattened against the cabin window, lit up by the red glare of the sunset. They see him come running up the road, snapping his cold fingers, and turning occasional handsprings into the snow-drifts in the fence corners.

Just before he comes whistling up the path with his face twisted into all sorts of ugly grimaces to make them laugh, he stops at the gate a moment. Do they wonder what he always sees across those snowy fields, as he stands and looks away towards Mars' Nat's cottage and the white churchyard on the hill?

Ah, Bud and Ivy have not had their awak ening; but the little brother and sister are not the only ones who fail to see more than the surface of John Jay's nature. Under the bubbles of his gay animal spirits runs the deep current of a strong purpose, and in these moments he is keeping silent tryst with a memory. He thinks of his promise, and his heart goes out to his Reverend George on the other side of the toll-gate.

THE END.

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