

Nils Nilsen Ronning

Lars Lee: The Boy From Norway



LutheranLibrary.org ● 616

Lars Lee: The Boy from Norway
With The Sequel: A Servant of the
Lord

Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org

- *What Can She Do? a novel* by Edward Roe.
- *The Passion for Life* by Joseph Hocking.



About The Lutheran Library



The Lutheran Library is a non-profit publisher of good Christian books. All are available in a variety of formats for use by anyone for free or at very little cost. There are never any licensing fees.

We are Bible believing Christians who subscribe wholeheartedly to the Augsburg Confession as an accurate summary of Scripture, the chief article of which is Justification by Faith. Our purpose is to make available solid and encouraging material to strengthen believers in Christ.

Prayers are requested for the next generation, that the Lord will plant in them a love of the truth, such that the hard-learned lessons of the past will not be forgotten.

Please let others know of these books and this completely volunteer endeavor. May God bless you and keep you, help you, defend you, and lead you to know the depths of His kindness and love.

Lars Lee: The Boy from Norway With The Sequel: A Servant of the Lord

Two Novels By

Nils Nilsen Ronning

Minneapolis, Minnesota
THE FRIEND
© 1928 AND 1931 / 2020
(CC BY 4.0)

LutheranLibrary.org

Contents

Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[Preface by Lutheran Librarian](#)

[A Note about Typos \[Typographical Errors\]](#)

[How the Story Came to be Written](#)

- [1. The Avalanche](#)
- [2. "Now We Must Be Brave!"](#)
- [3. "When Spring Comes."](#)
- [4. A Shock To A Sensitive Soul.](#)
- [5. A Summer In The Mountain Pastures](#)
- [6. The Tragic Story Of Halvor And Ielga.](#)
- [7. The Girl From America.](#)
- [8. The Land Of Legends.](#)
- [9. The Land Of Lincoln.](#)
- [10. The Queer Stranger.](#)
- [11. The Day Of Reckoning.](#)
- [12. A Strange Meeting.](#)
- [13. Confirmation.](#)
- [14. Plans For The Future.](#)
- [15. The Minister Causes A Sensation.](#)
- [16. The Dance.](#)
- [17. Died With A Curse On His Lips.](#)
- [18. Lars Goes To America.](#)
- [19. A Trace Of The Lost Uncle.](#)
- [20. People Who Had Passed Through A Great Experience.](#)
- [21. A Service Like The One At Home.](#)
- [22. She Had Forgotten How To Laugh.](#)
- [23. Shaken By Doubts.](#)
- [24. Two Letters From Helga Storlee.](#)

25. “Whosoever Cometh.”
26. A Mother’s Gethsemane.
27. The Boy Who Gave Away His Lunch.
28. An Agnostic And His Daughter.
29. In Time For Benediction.
A Servant of the Lord
Dedication to “A Servant of the Lord”
1. A Man Who Gave Away His All.
2. A Dream With A Message.
3. A Waif Of The Woods.
4. The Waif In The Forest Fire.
5. An Exciting Christmas Celebration.
6. The Most Beautiful Of All Stories.
7. “Mama, I Am Well.”
8. An Agnostic Tells His Story.
9. A Night At His Mother’s Grave.
10. Saloon Strikes Cruel Blow
11. An Agnostic Asks Questions.
12. An Enchanted Island.
13. Burning The Books.
14. The Stranger Who Was Not A Stranger.
15. Church Members Speak At Forenoon Service.
16. A Sad Man And A Bright Boy.
17. A Happy Reunion
◇ Books by Ronning
◇ The Friend
Copyright Notice
How Can You Find Peace With God?
Benediction
Encouraging Christian Books for You to Download and Enjoy

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

NILS NILSEN RØNNING (1870-1962) came to America from Norway when he was 17. He attended Red Wing Seminary (Haugean Lutheran) and the University of Minnesota, and published Christian books and pamphlets for Lutherans, most notably the magazine *The Friend*, which featured religious fiction. *Lars Lee: The Boy from Norway* is his best known book.

The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry finds, restores and republishes good, readable books from Lutheran authors and those of other sound Christian traditions. All titles are available at little to no cost in proofread and freshly typeset editions. Many free e-books are available at our website LutheranLibrary.org. Please enjoy this book and let others know about this completely volunteer service to God's people. May the Lord bless you and bring you peace.

A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]

Please have patience with us when you come across typos. Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

How the Story Came to be Written

I DID NOT MAKE UP THE STORY; Lars told it to me. It is his story.

When I first met him he was very bashful and I had to do most of the talking. When we became better acquainted, he did most of the talking.

Where he came from, when he called on me, I never knew. Where he went, I never knew. Now he was with me; now he was gone.

Often when I was walking alone in the evening under the silent stars and listening to the Whisper of the breeze in the swaying branches, there was Lars walking with me before I had sensed his presence.

It also happened quite often when I was attending a concert that Lars would slip into a seat next to mine and begin to tell me in a whisper so low that no one else heard him, about singing birds, purling brooks, and glorious sunsets. How he managed to get into the hall, I never understood. He was too poor to pay and too proud to beg. When the performer was through with his or her number, the audience applauded. I applauded too, but I applauded Lars, not the performer.

Even while I was listening to a sermon, Lars would suddenly appear at my side, but then I nudged him gently, and shook my head slowly. I had to move the head very slowly, otherwise the minister might see me and think that I disagreed with him.

When I was foolish enough to drink coffee late at night and could not sleep, Lars would come and sit beside the bed and tell me fairy tales or remind me of life on the mountains herding cattle. I could hear the lowing of the cows, the bleating of the lambs, the sighing of the Wind in the tree-tops, the tinkling and clanging of cowbells and the music of the cascades. I fell asleep, but Lars followed me into dreamland with his stories.

At other times he would bring with him a whole company of his friends, and little by little they too would tell me their stories.

This finally got on my nerves and I told Lars to stay away with his friends. “If you don’t let me alone,” I said, “I will publish your story.”

Do you think that helped? That was just what he wanted. There was nothing to do but to write the story of Lars and his friends.

It was easy to write the story, but not easy to put the real Lars and Olaf, Helga and Olga into the story. We do not understand ourselves; how can we understand others? Still the baffling mysteries of life are all the time challenging our interpretation. The most difficult thing I was to describe how some of these persons found the Way of Life—and that after all was the main reason for writing the story.

1. The Avalanche

IT WAS THE HEAVIEST SNOWFALL in the memory of the oldest people in the parish.

At times the snow fell silently for hours; then again it came sweeping down with a mighty roar. Snowdrifts grew into foothills, and main high-ways remained impassable for several days at a time.

On the brow of Brewing Mountain, the highest of the ranges which formed a wall around the parish, an immense snowdrift kept piling up, and hung on the edge of the precipice, towering and threatening.

The older folks expressed fear that the avalanches would do great damage when the thaw set in, and many a tale was told in the evenings, before the blazing hearth, when the northwind roared in the chimney, of small farms which had been struck with loss of life of man and beast.

The southwind came with a sudden thaw along towards spring, and one avalanche after another came thundering down the mountain sides by day and by night.

But the snowdrift on the brow of Brewing Mountain hung there towering and threatening.

One day, about noon, a terrific boom came from the mountain. People who were out of doors could see the huge avalanche plunging down the precipices on the mountain side, mowing the forest to right and left. All through the upper parish, windows rattled, plates and cups danced on the shelves, and doors flew open and shut again with a resounding bang.

Then it grew silent, ominously silent. Suddenly a cry was heard on the farm nearest the mountain. It was repeated on the next farm. Flew from mouth to mouth:

“The avalanche has struck the house at Lee!”

The Lee farm nestled in a glen near the top of one of the mountain slopes. Lower down was Storlee, one of the largest farms in the parish. There was a grove of birch trees between the two farms. Still lower down was a group of small farms and tenant places.

Helga Storlee was standing outside the house when she heard the roar of the avalanche. Avalanches were rather a common occurrence at this time of the year, but this one surpassed all in violence. Shortly afterwards her young son, Olaf, called to her:

“Mother, look at Lars!”

Helga saw Lars, the young boy at Lee, come running down toward the house. She suspected that something terrible had happened, and called the hired men to hurry up to Lee. She started ahead to meet Lars.

“What has happened?” she cried. He did not stop. He did not answer. When he had almost reached her, he stumbled and fell and did not rise again. The men soon gathered around them, but she told them to hurry on.

After a while Lars regained consciousness and looked at Helga, bewildered.

“Father is killed!”

When the men reached Lee, they found the barn and the stable untouched, but where the dwelling formerly stood there was a pile of lumber, logs, snow and gravel. A woman was frantically digging into it with bare hands. It was Anne Lee. In a moment the men were at her side. She pointed down, crying:

“He lies under that beam there. He is still alive. Oh, help him out!”

Strong arms pried and pulled. Soon the beam was pushed aside. Just then Helga Storlee reached them. She helped the men lift up Jens Lee’s bruised and bleeding body and placed him on a bare spot near by.

“He lives,” they whispered to each other. Several people had by this time arrived from the farms further down the slope. “He lives, he lives,” went from mouth to mouth.

Helga ordered the men to put hay on a sled and bring Jens to Storlee; one man was sent to fetch the doctor who lived at the lower end of the parish. As the procession moved down to Storlee, more and more people joined it.

Helga Storlee was walking beside Anne Lee. Olaf and Lars followed them.

“Is Thorgrim at home?” Anne asked in a tone of anxiety.

“No,” Helga answered sharply.

“But what will he say when he returns and finds us there?”

Anne felt Helga’s grip tightening on her arm.

“You ought to know, Anne, that when Helga Storlee says you can come, that settles it.”

The doctor came late in the afternoon. Though he examined Jens carefully he found no internal injury. He asked Anne, however, if Jens had ever complained of heart trouble. Yes, once when he returned from another parish he complained of pain in his chest. He told her that he and her brother, Halvor, had rowed too hard when they tried to rescue a man.

“He may recover if his heart does not fail him,” said the doctor.

A couple of days later Thorgrim came home. He had been away trading horses in another parish. He had heard what had happened at Lee before coming home.

Anne had good reason to fear, Thorgrim. It happened quite often that he was drunk when he returned home from a long trip, and then he was far from pleasant. At times even Helga was afraid of him.

Anne had been at Storlee once when Thorgrim, returning unexpectedly, had found the servants in the large summer kitchen. Olaf was playing the violin. One of the hired men had lent him his violin and had taught him how to play it. It was at a time of the day when the servants should have been at work.

Olaf was sitting on a low stool playing and keeping time with his feet, when Thorgrim suddenly appeared in the door. Olaf was so wrapped up in his playing that he neither saw nor heard him. Thorgrim tore the violin out of the hands of the boy and crushed it with a single blow against the table. Then he struck the boy so violently that he tumbled to the floor as if he had been shot. He was going to strike him again, when someone grabbed his arm. He started to swear and tried to tear himself loose, but suddenly stopped, when Helga in a voice quivering with anger cried: “Thorgrim, you had better stop this.”

When Thorgrim arrived home he was neither drunk nor unpleasant. No one could be more sympathetic than Thorgrim. It was just fine that they had brought Jens to Storlee, he said. But deep in his heart he rejoiced that the accident had happened and he hoped that Jens would never return home again, though this was something he naturally kept to himself.

Anne was the embodiment of stoical resignation. She never complained, never wept, though sometimes when alone she sighed deeply.

Lars remained much alone. Now and then he went in to see his father, but little was said between the two. Several times a day he went up to Lee.

Helga had ordered the men to clear away the snow and gravel and to pile up the timber.

Most of the household goods had been broken. What was in fairly good condition was brought down to Storlee, the rest was put in the barn.

When the men were through with the work, Lars began to dig in the debris. Every button, every spoon, every piece of a plate or a cup he put away carefully on the barn floor.

Then he went into the stable to see the cow, the calf, the sheep and the pig and remained there a long time, petting them and talking to them.

The people tried to comfort him by saying that his father would soon be well again, but when he saw how pale his father was, a great fear crept into his heart.

One night he dreamed that he was down in the parish.

Looking toward Storlee, he saw a funeral pyre. Now he was fully convinced that his father was going to die. He could not bring himself to tell the dream, not even to his mother. Neither did he want to cry so that anyone saw it.

One day when he was in the stable feeding the cattle, he found himself humming a sad melody. Suddenly he realized that it was a hymn sung at funerals. He threw his arms around the neck of the cow and burst into tears.

2. “Now We Must Be Brave!”

WHEN HELGA NOTICED that Jens Lee was growing weaker, she asked him if she should send for the minister.

“Well, yes, I would like to partake of the Lord’s Supper,” Jens replied slowly; “but perhaps we should not bother him. I suppose the road is bad.”

“Oh, it isn’t any worse for him than for others,” Helga answered sharply.

Rev. P. Hjort came rather reluctantly. He had never had any talk face to face with Jens Lee and was not anxious to have one now.

Jens Lee was one of the few pietists in the parish. Rev. Hjort did not like the pietists. They were a thorn in his flesh. Instinctively he felt that they questioned his conversion and his inner call to preach the Word of God. He could not deny that they were gentle and generous, thrifty and honest and the most regular churchgoers in the parish. Though most of the people attended church mainly on the great holidays, the pietists were in their pews every Sunday. But they were hypocrites, building their hope of salvation on being different from the world!

Both in public and in private he ridiculed them, and the only time he became eloquent was when he denounced pietism and fanaticism.

Without any preliminary remarks he brusquely asked Jens if he realized now, when facing death, that he had slighted the holy office of the ministry by taking part in the special meetings which the pietists had held in their homes.

Jens looked at him searchingly. No, he could not admit that. There was, however, one thing he did regret, and that was that he had not prayed for the minister as much as he ought to.

“That is just the great mistake you have made. You thought that you were better than others, even than your own pastor.”

Jens wearily turned his face toward the wall and sighed.

“Under these circumstances I have no right to administer to you the Lord’s Supper,” Rev. Hjort said with considerable unction.

Slowly Jens turned his face toward the minister, and said with a smile:

“The pastor must do what he thinks is right. I commit my soul into the hand of God.”

The next day the minister received an unexpected visit. Somebody knocked at the office door. It was not the ordinary timid knock of one of his parishioners. It was the knock of a strong hand. When the minister opened the door, there stood Helga Storlee.

“I understand that you have denied Jens Lee the sacrament,” she said.

“Come in and I will tell you why I did it,” he answered somewhat nervously.

Helga remained standing in the door.

“If you deny him the sacrament I shall report the matter to the bishop. He knows Jens well.”

“My dear Helga, just let me explain,” said the minister and went back to her. “I thought it would do Jens good to wait a while. I believe he will now realize that he has acted wrongfully by casting reflections on my holy office with these special meetings among the people. As you know, Kjetil Bakken is sick, and when I have called at his house and administered the holy sacrament, I shall call on Jens, and have one more talk with him.”

“Are you going to administer the sacrament to Kjetil Bakken?” cried Helga with blazing eyes. “A man who never goes to church except on Christmas day, and who even then remains outside, passing around the whisky bottle! Is he to receive the sacrament, while a God-fearing man like Jens Lee is denied it? We’ll see what the bishop has to say about this matter.”

Without another word she turned and left him.

The minister entered the office and dropped into a chair. This was the first time in his experience that a member of his congregation had dared to talk to him in such a manner. And a woman, at that! What was the world coming to?

Helga’s threat to report the case to the bishop, this “pietist-bishop,” disturbed him.

During the afternoon he drove to Storlee. When he came to a hill overlooking the farm he stopped the horse with a jerk. He saw a number of people walking slowly away from the house. Then they stopped and formed a ring. In a moment he saw smoke, then flame. It was a funeral pyre. Jens Lee was dead. The minister turned about and went home.

Jens Lee died peacefully. When Anne called at his room to find out if she could do anything for him he was dead.

Lars had gone up to Lee. Wishing to break the sad news herself, Helga went in search of him. She found him in the birch wood picking white anemones.

Intuitively he felt that something had happened. "What is it, Helga?" he asked, fear clutching his heart.

"Lars, let us sit down on this stone. I have something to tell you." She sat down, but Lars remained standing. The flowers had fallen on the ground.

"Yesterday I had a talk with your father," Helga began, looking toward the distant mountains. "He said he was soon going to be well again. Now all is well with him."

She arose and laid her hand on the boy's head. "Lars, now you must be brave—for the sake of your mother."

He gasped for breath. Then he threw himself on the ground and buried his face in his hands. His thin shoulders trembled, shook.

As Lars lay at her feet, Helga remembered another boy who many years ago had also lain at her feet in this very place, crying. He had lost his mother and had come to Helga with his sorrow. Although she was a daughter of one of the richest farmers in the parish and he the son of a poor widow, they had been playmates, together with his sister Anne, from earliest childhood. Oh, how she had tried to forget him! None dared to mention his name in her presence. Thorgrim had done it once, but only once. No, she could not forget Halvor. Even now, the boy in front of her became the boy of long ago, and the love of her youth wept in her soul.

Suddenly she turned to the weeping boy. "Lars, your mother is waiting for you."

Thorgrim Storlee was going to show the parish that he was a true friend of the widow and the fatherless boy. Not only the relatives and friends of the Lee family were invited to the funeral but all the neighbors on the slope. If Thorgrim saw to it that some day he was amply repaid, it was nobody's business but his own.

When the casket had been lowered, some of the men began at once to fill the grave with gravel and sand. A heavy clod of earth fell on the casket with a hollow sound. A boy's cry rang out: "O father, father!"

Helga stepped up to the men and asked them to wait. Then she led Anne and Lars to the carry-all.

All the invited guests returned to Storlee.

There was an abundance of food. It was customary at funerals as well as at weddings to serve strong drinks, but Helga objected to this at Jens Lee's funeral so vigorously that Thorgrim apparently had to desist. But a funeral without drinks was no funeral at all, Thorgrim thought.

After a while several of the men found a chance to leave the house. Helga became suspicious, went outside and listened. Then she walked rapidly to the barn and opened the door quietly.

Thorgrim stood in the middle of the floor. He held a bottle in one hand and a cup in the other.

"Drink to the memory of Jens Lee, my neighbors and friends!" he cried. "He was, as the Scripture says, a good husband, a kind father and a fine neighbor."

Before anyone noticed her, Helga stood behind Thorgrim and knocked the bottle out of his hand.

Thorgrim started an oath, but it froze on his lips when he turned around and saw Helga.

In a loud voice she said: "Is this the way to honor the memory of Jens Lee? He was too good a man for such a disgraceful act."

She turned on her heel and went out.

The men looked at each other sheepishly. Then said Peter Moen: "Helga Storlee ought to go to parliament."

When Helga returned to the house she asked for Anne and Lars. No one had seen them for quite a while. They looked for them, but could not find them.

Helga thought for a moment and then walked up to Lee. On a stone near the place where the house had stood sat Anne. Lars stood at her side. Helga went quietly over to Anne, sat down at her side and put her hand on Anne's arm. Anne sat there dry-eyed.

Thus they sat for a long time without speaking a word.

Then Helga very quietly began to sing: "I know of a sleep in Jesus' Name."

Lars sank down at their side.

Anne covered her face with her apron. Her shoulders rose and fell. "Don't cry, mother!" said Lars, "I will be so kind to you—"

3. “When Spring Comes.”

WINTER DRAGS ON AND ON. Is it never going to end?

Then one day there is a hint of spring in the air. The children are the first to sense it. It slips into the sickroom, steals in to the cattle in their stalls, and sends a thrill through the frozen earth.

A few days later, water begins to drip from the caves and tiny rills run down the hillsides. During the night there is a sharp frost. The next morning the children with rippling laughter follow the White quivering bubbles under the ice. They call them their watches and ask much other what time it was.

Soon one avalanche after another thunders down the mountains by day and by night.

The air is full of the sound of many waters, as the brooks come tumbling down the hills and valleys in a mad race for the icebound river. Had it not been for the white breath in the cascades, one would think that the river had fallen into an eternal sleep.

Tickled by hundreds of brooks, the giant awakes, breaks his bonds, rushes down the cascades and leaps into the deep gorges, carrying with him huge cakes of ice, logs and trees. The earth trembles and the whole parish is filled with his mighty roar.

When the snow has melted, the fields and meadows lie there bare and bleak. One morning there is a shimmer of green on hillsides turning toward the sun. The next day several green patches appear. They grow larger and larger, meet and merge, cover the hillside and creep into the hollows. Like a constantly increasing army the tiny blades of grass take possession of every nook and corner.

The swelling buds unfold and the blades fling their glistening banners to the breeze. Golden dandelions blaze in the dark-green meadows and white and blue anemones dance like fairies around the yellow alder stems.

From the sunny south birds are winging their way toward the newborn spring in the north. One morning there is a chirping on the roof, a flash of

Wings in the air and a song in the sky.

There is a fragrance of warm earth and sprouting grass. The whole parish is glad and smiles toward the sweet face of heaven.

Thorgrim Storlee had not intended to show his hand for some time, but when he heard some men talking about rebuilding the house at Lee he turned toward them and said with a smile: "I hear you are planning to rebuild the house for Anne Lee. Now that's very fine of you, I am sure, but I'll save you the trouble. I'll attend to that myself. I am her nearest neighbor, you know."

If outsiders were bent on meddling in this affair, he had better act quickly.

Ever since Thorgrim had come to Storlee, the Lee farm had been a thorn in his eye. The place had been a tenant place under Storlee until Helga's father had sold it to Jens, shortly after the latter's marriage to Anne Lee. Jens and Anne had improved the little farm a great deal. Foot upon foot had been added to the arable soil. They had built stone walls on the sandy, rocky hillside and had carried good soil from nooks and corners higher up on the mountain side, and terrace upon terrace of small patches of potato fields had been added year after year. They loved every inch of the ground and would not listen to Thorgrim when he offered to buy the farm. Thorgrim had mentioned to Helga the desirability of adding the small farm to Storlee, but only once.

The same evening Thorgrim spoke to Anne about his plan.

There was something important he must talk to her about, he began. He had put it off as long as possible as it would remind her of something disagreeable. But something had to be done before very long, and there was no one able to help her but himself. It would cost him a good deal of money, but there were times when money must not be considered.

She would undoubtedly remember, he said, that when her brother Halvor suddenly left the parish, a large sum of money was missing at the home of Anders Flaten. The rumor spread that Peder Flaten, the son, had seen Halvor slink away from the house the same night that he left. Thorgrim had seen to it that the rumor was stopped.

Of late, however, Peder Flaten had begun to revive the rumor. He had lost a great deal of money in the logging business and would probably soon have to turn his farm over to his creditors. He had taken to drinking and on several occasions had mumbled about the theft and had mentioned Halvor's name.

Thorgrim continued by saying that he had thought out a scheme which would silence Peder and at the same time work to the advantage of Anne and Lars, especially of Lars. He would be willing to buy Lee at such a price that they could pay Peder the amount that undoubtedly had been stolen by Halvor and at the same time leave Anne a neat sum of money. It would be a risky thing to rebuild the house. Another avalanche might crush the house any spring. Furthermore, it could not be very pleasant for her and Lars to live at a place which would always remind them of the tragedy. Lars ought to go to a higher school when confirmed. With the money she received she would be able to let him study. She would be more than welcome to stay at Storlee if she cared to.

Anne stood there as if paralyzed. Several times she tried to speak, but Thorgrim would not be interrupted.

When he was finally through, she said quietly: "I'll have to talk to Lars about this. One of the last things Jens spoke about in the presence of both of us was that, in case he did not get well again, we must have the house rebuilt, but in a safer place."

Then cried Thorgrim, trembling with rage: "Anne, let me tell you, and you know I always keep my word: If you mention it to a living soul, the whole parish will soon know that Halvor stole the money from old man Flaten!"

Anne knew Thorgrim well enough to realize that he would carry out his threat. There was nothing to do but to keep quiet.

The death of his father had come to Lars like a stunning blow. Even after the funeral it seemed like a horrific dream. The hollow sound of the heavy clod of earth which fell on the casket kept on sounding in his ears. Why had God taken his father away from his mother and him? There were many old men, bed-ridden men, in the neighborhood. They were a burden to themselves and to others. Why did not God let them die? What would become of his mother and him now? They had had a hard struggle for existence when the father lived and worked the little farm and also worked for others. Now

they were left to themselves, with the house ruined and part of the farm covered with sand and gravel.

His mother did not seem to be able to say much to him. When she tried to talk, fingering her apron, looking clown or looking far away, she often burst into tears.

“Your father is saved; your father has gone to heaven if ever a man went to heaven,” Helga had said to him once. Yes, Lars was sure that his father was in heaven, hut where was heaven? He had always believed that heaven was way up beyond the stars, but once, down in the store, a man from town had ridiculed the idea. “The earth moves around its own axis,” he said. “During the day we point up and say, ‘there is heaven.’ During the night we point up, but in reality in the opposite direction, and say, ‘there is heaven.’” Whereupon the man had laughed heartily and several men joined in the laugh.

That same evening Lars was on the point of asking his father, but he was afraid that he did not like such questions.

During the night, when he would wake up with a start, he thought of a story the teacher had told in school. “Eternity has no end,” the teacher had said. “If the Breving Mountain were made up of tiny grains of sand, and a bird came there once in a thousand years and carried away a grain, the mountain would some time be carried away, but eternity had at that time barely begun.”

Then, all at once, a thought came to him which filled him with joy, mixed with fear. His father had been like Jesus! Of all the men Lars had met, there was no one so mild and gentle as his father. Jesus Himself could not have been more mild and gentle. Once his father, while sitting in front of the lighted lamp and his mother and he sat in a darkened corner, read about Jesus healing the sick. Then his father’s face shone with great gladness. It made Lars think that Jesus must have looked that way on the Mount of Transfiguration.

His father’s glorified face came often to his mind during the days of sorrow and perplexity, but then again he would tremble with fear. Was it not wrong to think that his father was like Jesus? Nevertheless, deep down in his heart the thought brought him sweet consolation.

One night while sleeping in the same room as his mother, at Storlee, he dreamt that his father and a man of surpassing beauty came down the mountain slope together. He ran into the house and told his mother that such a

queer man came with his father. She went outside, shading her eyes with her hand, and said in a startled voice: "Oh, dear, who can this be?" Then she went hurriedly into the house. It would never do to stand outside and look at a stranger.

Lars remained outside. His father was carrying his hat in his hand. The stranger was also bareheaded, but he had no hat in his hand. He had long, dark hair, hanging in curls way down upon his shoulders. There was a ring of light around his head. When they reached the lawn in front of the house, the stranger smiled at Lars and stretched forth such a beautiful white hand, but he did not dare to clasp it.

"Don't you want to shake hands with me, Lars? We have been good friends for a long time, haven't we?"

Then Lars grew still more embarrassed and hid behind his father.

"Don't you know the man?" asked his father, and patted his head.

Then his mother came out. She brought a big cup of sweet milk and offered it to the stranger. "Perhaps the manger is thirsty; I hope he will not decline such a simple drink."

Strange that mother said "he" to this man. That was the way some of the women spoke to the minister.

The stranger took the cup and gave it to Jens. "You are more thirsty than I am, Jens."

But the father shook his head and handed the cup back to the stranger.

"Mother, mother," Lars cried and sat up in bed.

"What is it, Lars?" she exclaimed alarmed.

"Oh, I had such a queer dream. I dreamt that I saw father and, and — —"

Then he burst into tears, and no matter how much his mother urged him to tell her the dream, he would not tell.

Early next morning he went to the brook in the glen. Whenever he happened to think of something new, something strange, which often happened, he always wanted to be alone.

4. A Shock To A Sensitive Soul.

FROM THE TIME he was a little boy, it had been almost a passion with Lars to wander alone in the woods on the mountain slope or to sit down by the brook in the glen. His senses became startlingly acute to the sounds, the fragrance, and the forms all around him. When he entered solitude he did not pay much attention to anything in particular; but when, for instance, he sat at the foot of the tall pine, the fragrance of the flowers would fill his nostrils—no, his very soul—with indescribable sweetness. Then a bird would begin to sing in a tree near by. A perfect flood of melody flowed from its tiny throat. Then another bird in another tree began to sing, then another and still another. Gradually the whole forest became full of songsters. Every bird sang its own song, began when it listed, stopped when it felt like it, began again. And yet there was such a harmony, that Lars was no longer conscious of listening to the different birds. Their songs melted and merged together into a flood of praise to God.

At other times, while sitting on the soft carpet at the foot of the tall pine, it was so quiet that he could hear his own heart beating. Then there came floating on the air a gentle whisper, a soft sighing, from far, far away. It came nearer and nearer, grew louder and louder, till the treetops and branches swayed in a current of air and sound. Then it gradually decreased, became fainter and fainter, until it died out altogether. Thus he would sit for a long time, as the music rose and fell, rose and fell. His soul was strangely stirred with a gentle sadness, but at its depth there was a holy gladness.

Sometimes Lars climbed the highest peak of Brewing Mountain. A magnificent panorama spread out in all directions. Toward the north, mountain chains rolled away like mighty billows. In the middle of the vast expanse of green and blue rose a mountain peak to towering height with eternal snow on its brow.

Below him, deep down, was the parish, circled with mountains. In the middle of the parish, on both sides of the river which wound its way toward the ocean like a broad silver ribbon, were the largest farms. On a broad ele-

vation were the two churches, the old stone church in the middle of the cemetery with its hundreds of crosses; outside the cemetery the new church with its tall, slender spire glittering in the sunshine. Once while he was sitting there, thrilled by the majesty and beauty of the scene, he saw a funeral procession move slowly toward the church while the bells tolled their melancholy message. It filled him with a strange terror. When he passed through the pine wood he started to run toward his home. He felt that long arms with bony fingers tried to clutch him.

He reached his home all out of breath. His mother asked him what had happened, but he could not make himself tell her. He stayed away from the woods for several days. Then the call of the solitude became too strong and he had to obey the call.

One day he received a shock from which he did not fully recover for many years. Thorgrim Storlee had seen finally stopping at the pine tree looking intently up into its branches. On his way home Thorgrim met Anne Lee on the lawn in front of her house. He asked her if she knew where Lars was. No, she was not sure. He was probably over in the woods. Did he often go there? Yes, of late he quite often would slip away. "I believe you had better keep an eye on the boy. He is queer, to my notion. You remember Aslak Sletten who was sent to the insane asylum? Well, that's the way it began with him too."

Suddenly Anne noticed that Lars was standing right behind Thorgrim. She could see that he had heard every word. He turned quickly and ran into the house. After awhile she went up to the open door. Lars was lying on the bed, with his face buried in the pillow. She stood still for a moment. Then she hurried over to the woods and returned shortly with her arms full of flowers. Lars was sitting on the doorstep playing with a lamb. "Have you been in the woods, mother?" he cried, surprised.

"Yes, it is nice in the woods. When I was a little girl, Hjalvor and Helga and I used to spend hours there listening to the birds and picking flowers." She sat down beside him and put her hand tenderly on his head, a thing she had not done for a long time.

"Mother," he said, "why don't you tell me about Uncle Halvor? Why did he leave so suddenly? If he is alive why does he not write? Is it true that—"

When he noticed the sad expression in her face, he stopped all of a sudden.

“Some day I’ll tell you,” she said in a broken voice, got up and walked into the house.

5. A Summer In The Mountain Pastures

THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, followed by Thorgrim's threat to renew the rumor of her brother's theft and his attempt to get hold of her farm, gave Anne many anxious days and restless nights.

But she dared not share the burden of her soul with anyone. She suffered in silence.

It was therefore a welcome relief to her when it was arranged that she and Lars were to take the cattle to the mountain pastures, the Gronlee "sæter," and remain with them there for three months.

Before she was married she had spent several summers in the mountain pastures, and she knew that the great solitude would be a balm to her soul.

Thorgrim, too, was pleased with this arrangement; it would give him more time to perfect his plan to get possession of the Lee farm. Helga had mentioned a couple of times that they ought to rebuild the house for Anne. If Anne remained at Storlee, it was hard telling if she would keep quiet. It was much better that she did not see Helga for some time.

It was a busy morning at Storlee when they were making ready for the trip to the "sæter." Provisions, bed clothing and utensils had to be tied in bundles and placed on the backs of the horses.

When the cows had been let out of the stable, their collars were turned so that the bell rested on their necks.

They immediately understood that this meant a journey to the mountain pastures, and they expressed their delight by lusty bellowing and by fighting-each other. Lars and Olaf were busy keeping them together in front of the house.

When everything was ready, Thorgrim and one of the hired men started ahead with the two horses, each horse with a heavy load on its back. Anne followed, in company with Helga, and began to call to some of the cows by name. They fell in behind her and soon a long procession was formed. First

the cows in order of leadership won in fighting, then the calves, the sheep and lambs. Lars and Olaf closed the procession.

Further down the slope the cattle from other farms were driven up to the Storlee herd. There was much lighting and bellowing by the cows, and much bleating by the sheep and lambs as they were from time to time separated from each other.

Every now and then some of the cows would break away from the procession and make a wild run across the new-sown fields.

Helga Storlee went with Anne Lee till they reached the bridge. With the exception of some perfunctory remarks they had walked in silence.

“I hope you will have no accidents this summer, Anne. Lars will be of great help to you,” Helga finally remarked.

“Yes, Lars is a good boy. Do you know, he reminds me more and more of my brother every day...”

Anne stopped abruptly, realizing too late her mistake. “You must come and visit us,” she added weakly.

“I’ll never again set my foot on the Gronlee ‘sæter.’ Goodbye, Anne.”

She turned suddenly away from Anne and returned to Storlee.

Having crossed the bridge, the long procession wound its way up the slope on the other side of the river.

A wonderful panorama of the parish and the mountain ranges held Lars spellbound for several minutes. But Olaf told him that he had better keep his eyes on the calves that were all the time trying to slip away from them.

When they reached the Gronlee “sæter,” the cows began to bellow as if to announce: “Here we are again.”

The collars were turned, and with clanging and tinkling of bells the cows began to graze on the luscious grass on the wold.

While Thorgrim and the hired man were taking the loads off the horses, Anne went into the cabin. She soon came out again and asked Lars and Olaf to shovel out the snow pile still lying on the earthen floor.

The boys had soon finished the job and in the meantime Anne had built a roaring fire in the corner of the cabin.

With a small round stone Anne ground the coffee beans on a broad flat stone which had served that purpose many seasons. As soon as the men and

the boys smelled the odor of coffee and fried bacon, they left their work and went in without waiting to be called.

Thorgrim was in good humor. He told several stories and the hired man laughed heartily. He knew that Thorgrim favored people who enjoyed his stories. Anne pretended to be too busy to listen. She was not in the mood to laugh at Thorgrim. She knew that when he was most pleasant, he was often contemplating the most heartless acts. Once she happened to look at Olaf. He sat with his face turned away from his father, dark and silent. Lars was busy whittling with his knife.

Later in the day Olaf and Lars climbed one of the nearest knolls. Thorgrim saw them and called brusquely that they should come and help him build a fence.

A stern expression swept Olaf's face. He clenched his fist and cried: "You wait till I am confirmed, and I will show the old horse trader that he can't treat me like a slave."

Thorgrim and the hired man remained overnight. They slept in the barn. Anne and the boys slept in the cabin.

Olaf was so tired that he went to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. Lars was also so tired that he could hardly keep awake long enough to say the first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer.

Anne, on the other hand, could not sleep. She lay there and listened to the old, well-known sounds: the tinkling of the bells as the cows were chewing the cud, the roar of the waterfall, the moaning in the tree-tops, and the occasional cry of a startled bird in the woods. Many memories from the days when she was milkmaid at Gronlee "sæter" passed before her soul's eye. Her brother Halvor, had been with her and it often happened that Helga Storlee found her way here. Then Halvor forgot that he was a poor boy, and Helga did not remember that she was one of the richest girls in the parish. Anne felt sick at heart when she thought of the two as they played together: Halvor, tall and slender, with big, blue eyes and light curly hair, with a handsome face, that quickly radiated joy, only to turn melancholy the next moment; Helga, also tall and straight, with brown eyes, red cheeks, and a mass of black hair, self-willed and courageous.

What Halvor and Helga thought at that time she did not know, but Anne had already then the presentiment that the future had but little happiness in store for the two. It was not according to fate that they should walk together

through the years—and yet, if two human beings ever seemed to be created for each other, it was these two.

She was on the point of falling asleep, when she suddenly remembered Thorgrim's threat, and in a moment she was wide awake. To think that Halvor was accused of being a thief! No, she knew better. She knew the real reason for Halvor's sudden departure. Lars had often asked her about Halvor, but she had always answered that she would tell him later. The time had come when he should know the tragic story.

God be thanked that she had Lars! How he resembled her brother! May the good God save him from sorrow. Finally Anne read the Lord's Prayer and fell asleep.

6. The Tragic Story Of Halvor And Ielga.

BOTH LARS AND OLAF were preparing for confirmation that summer. Lars sometimes went to Storlee Friday evening and remained there overnight. Or he walked from the “sæter” to the parsonage Saturday morning and back again during the afternoon.

The lessons caused him no trouble. He had learned the Bible History and the Explanation so well that he needed only to read the lessons through a couple of times to memorize them. Hymns were easily learned, and the two chapters in the New Testament he read with interest.

Rev. Hjort spent most of his time with the confirmation class in having the children recite their lessons. If they answered the questions in the exact words of the book, he said: “That is correct.” As the books were written in Danish-Norwegian, and the children only spoke the dialect, it was difficult for them to answer in their own words.

About sixty boys and girls were to be confirmed that year. Lars realized the meaning of confirmation and was often filled with fear. The pietists, in private conversations and at their meetings, spoke a good deal about conversion and a new birth and a new heart. They were so different from most of the people in the parish that he knew they had been radically changed. Some of them had been among the most godless people. Now they had quit drinking, dancing, fighting and swearing. Yes, they had received a new heart. But had he received a new heart? No, he was afraid he had not. How was he to receive it? He dared not ask even his own mother, and neither his teacher nor pastor had said anything that helped him.

He knew he had a heart of flesh in his breast. Did that heart have to be exchanged for a new heart?

He believed in God but did not feel that he loved Him. God was a strict judge who read our innermost thoughts. Sometimes he thought he loved Jesus, but as long as he did not have a new heart he did not love Him enough.

He had prayed in his own words when his father was sick. Otherwise not. He said his morning and evening prayers as a rule, but sometimes he even forgot that. He dreaded the day when he was going to kneel at the altar in the church and renew his baptismal vow. But of course he had to do it. All the grown-up people in the parish had been confirmed except two idiots.

Lars was quiet and shy and stayed much by himself. Olaf, on the other hand, held his head high. With his bold bearing, black curly hair, pale face and sparkling eyes he won all hearts.

Lars was shocked by the fact that many of the boys in the confirmation class swore, played cards, chewed tobacco and used obscene language. Some of the girls were also apt to swear when they became angry. During recess several of the boys gathered behind the barn and played cards. They wanted Olaf to join them. He would have liked to do so, but he never played cards when Lars was present.

One day, as Olaf stood looking at the boys playing cards, Lars came strolling by. Then one of the boys cried: "Come here you little pietist and we'll teach you to play cards and chew tobacco." Lars walked on as if he had heard nothing, but Olaf threw himself at the boy, and began to rain blows on his head. Suddenly the minister appeared and parted the belligerents.

"What is up now?" asked the minister.

Olaf flushed. "He called Lars a pietist," he cried.

"What do I see?" asked the minister, apparently not hearing what Olaf said. "Do you play cards, too?" He picked up the cards, put them in his pocket and quietly entered his office.

It was a crowd of crestfallen and anxious boys that entered the classroom that afternoon. The guilty expected reprimand, and the innocent a lot of fun. Rev. Hjort continued his questions as if nothing had happened.

There was a girl over twenty years old in the class. She had so far failed to qualify for confirmation.

This afternoon the minister asked her the meaning of the statement that Adam and Eve fell. The answer was too much for her. The minister chanced to look through the window for a moment. Olaf improved the opportunity to whisper to her. In a high, singing voice she cried: "They fell down upon the earth."

The minister seemed to have forgotten his own question. He looked up surprised and then began to smile. The entire class burst out laughing. The

tension was over at once.

When the girl understood that Olaf had fooled her she turned around quickly and caught him by the hair.

“You, you rascal, you!” she hissed.

“Olaf, you are quite a theologian,” remarked the minister and smiled once more.

When Lars returned to the “sæter,” Anne understood that something had happened to him, but she knew it would do no good to ask him what the trouble was.

The next day a drizzling rain fell from morning till night. When Lars returned home he was wet to the skin. There was a fire on the hearth, however, so that his wet clothes could dry for the next day.

The fire was now almost out, only a few coals glowed in the ashes. The thick fog outside made it dark in the cabin. As mother and son sat there, gazing at the smouldering coals, Lars suddenly asked:

“Why do people make fun of the pietists?”

Anne now sensed the reason for his depressed mood.

He then told her of the scene at the parsonage, how one of the boys had called him a little pietist, and how the minister appeared as Olaf attacked the boy.

“Olaf should not have done that. He meant well, but it is not according to the word of God. Did the minister say anything?”

“No, he said nothing.”

It was quiet again. Now and then was heard the tinkling of a cow-bell. The sound of the waterfall rose and fell. Only one little glowing coal was left among the ashes.

“Lars,” said the mother, “you must not mind that they call you a pietist. It would be a great blessing if everyone in the parish read the word of God. Then life would soon be different. It is terrible to think that people who are baptized and confirmed, and who even partake of the Lord’s Supper, live worse than heathen people.

“But the worst of it is,” she continued, “that the boys and even some of the girls who are soon going to be confirmed are following in the footsteps of their elders. I am worried about Olaf. He is so like his mother. When she

was a young girl she was fond of company, and it is hard telling what might have happened to her had it not been for Halvor.”

“Was uncle Halvor a pietist too?” Lars asked.

Anne felt that the time had come when she had better tell her son the story of Halvor.

From the time they were small children Halvor and Helga had been playmates. Anne had joined them now and then, but gradually she felt instinctively that they preferred to be alone.

At school Halvor was by far the best scholar among the boys, and Helga among the girls. It was so also when they were preparing for confirmation.

They were often teased by the other children. Halvor said little and wanted to slip away, but Helga faced the crowd with flaming eyes and angry words.

At the last meeting before confirmation the minister announced that Helga was to be number one and thus stand at the head of the girls in church. Everybody had expected this announcement. There had been a good deal of guessing among the boys and girls as to which of the boys would be number one. All agreed that Halvor was entitled to the position, but as he was poor, a boy by the name of Thorgrim, son of one of the richest farmers in the parish would undoubtedly be given first place. Thorgrim was the leader of the rough element among the boys and seldom knew his lessons, but it had been the custom for generations that moral worth and educational qualifications were not the deciding factors.

When the minister read Thorgrim’s name first and Halvor’s second, Helga grew red in the face and clenched her fists. She was on the point of protesting, when a girl sitting next to her whispered to her: “Helga, don’t!”

That night Helga fell asleep, her face wet with tears.

Up to this time Helga’s father had apparently hardly noticed that his daughter had been a constant playmate of the Lee children, but now he told her that he did not want to see her in the company of a “ragged boy.”

But as Helga’s mother was in poor health and spent most of the time in bed and as her father was often away from home, Helga and Halvor were much together. Several times every summer Helga came to the Gronlee “sæter,” and then she and Halvor would stroll through the forest picking flowers, listening to the birds or climbing the nearby mountain peaks.

“But I knew all the time,” said Anne, “that this would not last very long. Fate would have it otherwise.”

The teacher helped Halvor to attend a seminary to be educated as a school teacher. Often Halvor would enclose in his letter to Anne a letter for Helga, and Anne's letters to him would contain a letter from Helga.

When Halvor had graduated from the seminary, this time at the head of his class, he accepted a position in a neighboring parish, and the exchange of letters continued the same way. During the summer vacation Halvor and Helga met in secret, but Helga's father kept her under strict surveillance. He had someone else in mind for Helga, namely Thorgrim.

Helga protested against this cold-blooded arrangement, and things were not pleasant at Storlee. At the deathbed of her mother Helga had to promise to marry Thorgrim. The minister was present and he begged Helga to grant her mother's last request.

In due time the banns of Thorgrim's and Helga's wedding were announced in church. Halvor was present at the service when the announcement was made. He grew as pale as a ghost. The same afternoon, without tasting food, he went into the woods and did not return until the next day. When he came to Lee he was so changed that Jens and Anne hardly recognized him. That evening he told them that he was going to start for America the same night. He had enough money for the journey and showed it to them. During the night Jens went with him to the boat landing at the head of the fjord. Halvor's last words were that he never again would set his foot on the soil of Norway.

When Helga was told that Halvor had left and that the rumor was abroad that he had stolen money at the Flaten farm, she flew into such a rage that she had to be kept in her room by force.

In the fall Helga was married to Thorgrim. There was a great wedding, and people said they had never seen a more stately bride, but her face seemed to be carved in stone.

It took Anne a long time to tell the story. Several times she was so overcome with emotion that she stopped and wiped away her tears. The story was not entirely new to Lars. Many a broken-off sentence or a quick turn of the conversation, when he had entered a group of gossipers, had given him material to construct an explanation of his uncle's sudden departure.

In the darkness of the cabin far up among the mountains, the simple peasant woman and her boy felt the undertow of the sorrows of life sweep against their soul, while the sound of the waterfall rose and fell like the rhythm of some mighty ancient tragedy.

“You had better go to bed, Lars,” Anne finally suggested. She wanted to tell him that he must pray for Halvor and for himself, but somehow words failed her. When she tried to pray that night, she did not know where to begin. All she could say was: “O God!”

A peace that passes understanding finally flooded her soul, and she fell asleep in the sweet assurance that an eye that does not slumber nor sleep would watch over all who were dear to her.

7. The Girl From America.

WHEN LARS STEPPED OUT OF THE CABIN next morning a heavy fog enveloped the whole landscape. He could barely see objects more than a couple of feet ahead of him. Not a breath of air was astir. An old saying came to his mind of fog being so thick that it could be cut with a knife.

After the cows had been milked, a slight movement in the air was perceptible and the fog had begun to flow toward the mountains in a slow, silent stream. Gradually a breeze sprang up and the stream of milky whiteness flowed faster and faster. A capricious gust of wind sent the fog whirling past him, rolled it into huge clouds which went scurrying above the tree tops, opening large vistas of mountain slopes and distant peaks. Soon the wold and lower stretches of the pastures lay there bathed in sunshine while fleecy clouds clung round the highest mountain tops.

Toward noon Lars heard someone calling his name. He recognized the voice at once. It was Olaf Storlee who unexpectedly had come to visit him. As the wind had driven away the fog, so Olaf's voice drove away from Lars' mind whatever depressing thoughts remained of the tragic story which he had heard the previous evening.

In the afternoon Anne took care of the cattle while the boys went picking berries on the slope on the other side of the river toward the Nystul "sæter."

Suddenly Lars stopped and said: "Somebody is singing in the clearing."

"Oh, it's only the wind in the pines," said Olaf and continued picking berries. "You always imagine you hear so many strange sounds in the woods. Say, I guess you are right, somebody is singing! It's probably Aslaug. Let's go up and scare her."

"No, it isn't Aslaug," remarked Lars, listening intently. "Can you hear what she sings?"

Olaf listened with a surprised look on his face. "It's a new melody, and a mighty fine voice. Let's climb up and see who it is."

Stealthily they moved up the steep slope. They stopped and listened. The singing had ceased. Soon the singer began again. It was a girl's voice,

singing in a strong, clear treble some words the boys did not understand. The glorious voice rang through and among the pines and echoed from the surrounding cliffs.

The boys looked at each other, their eyes filled with wonder.

“It must be a fairy,” whispered Lars. “A human being can’t sing like that.”

“Fairy, nothing,” sputtered Olaf. “She is singing the American national song. I heard the melody played last winter by a fiddler who had been in America.”

The song ended, followed by ringing laughter and a girl’s voice called out: “Aslaug, what do you think of our national song?”

“Oh, it isn’t bad,” Aslaug admitted; “but it can’t be compared to our national song, ‘Ja, vi elsker dette landet’.”

“Well, let us sing that together then,” cried the other girl; “I know at least the first verse. I guess that’s about all most of you know.”

The strange girl started the great national hymn with a fervor that made the boys listen in rapt wonder. Aslaug had joined in the singing, but the other girl’s voice rang out so loud and clear that Aslaug’s voice was merely heard.

“I guess I am a pretty good Norwegian, don’t you think so, Palaug?”

Olaf started to climb up higher.

“Where are you going?” whispered Lars excitedly.

“I am going to talk with the girls,” said Olaf and kept on climbing. “Come on, my boy.”

“Are you crazy?” cried Lars and tried to pull him back. He stepped on a stone, it loosened and went rolling down the steep slope.

“Aslaug, it’s a bear, let us run!” came a frightened cry from the clearing.

“Fiddlesticks, there isn’t a bear within a hundred miles.”

“It’s only we!” shouted Olaf.

“Who are we?” cried a teasing voice.

“You’ll soon see,” said Olaf and came out in the open.

There stood Aslaug, milkmaid at the Nystul “sæter,” and at her side stood another girl of about the same age, dressed like a girl from the city. She was bareheaded, light haired, and had a paler complexion than the girls of the parish.

“You are a rascal!” cried Aslaug. “You almost frightened the life out of Olga. She thought you were a bear.”

Olaf was somewhat crestfallen and did not know just what to say. Olga burst out laughing. Then Olaf also laughed.

“Lars,” he cried, “come here! You don’t need to be afraid. It is only a couple of girls.”

But Lars did not answer.

“Lars,” shouted Aslaug, “come here; we are not going to hurt you.”

No answer from Lars.

“He is bashful,” said Olaf. “He is frightened by strange girls.”

He then turned to Olga. “Where do you come from?” he asked.

“I come from a place east of the sun and west of the moon. Do you know where that is?”

“I think you must be a fairy,” said Olaf. “That’s what Lars thought, too.”

“You guessed right that time,” she answered in English.

“What kind of gibberish are you talking?”

“She talks English,” Aslaug explained. “She is from America. It is Olga Haugen, my cousin. You had better take off your hat, or she will think we have no manners here in Norway.”

“Is she so particular as all that?” said Olaf, removed his hat, and made a wide sweep with it and bowed low. “They don’t bow like that in America,” said Olga.

“Oh, you must come to Norway to see good manners,” answered Olaf.

“Lars,” he cried once more, “come here. Here is a girl from America.”

No answer.

“Poor kid, let him alone,” remarked the girl from America, again in English.

“Just wait, we shall soon get acquainted with Lars,” said Aslaug.

8. The Land Of Legends.

WHEN OLAF REACHED the foot of the slope, Lars had already picked two pails full of berries.

“Why didn’t you come and talk with the girls?” asked Olaf. “It was Aslaug and a girl from America. She is the finest girl I have ever seen.”

“I can’t show myself before strange people in these clothes,” said Lars, and looked at his patched trousers and wooden shoes.

Involuntarily Olaf looked at his own fine clothes and shoes. It was not the first time he realized that he and Lars did not belong to the same class. He himself was the son of one of the wealthiest men in the parish. Lars was the son of a poor widow. More than once Olaf had noticed that the children of the rich had kept their distance or that the game quieted down when Lars appeared, but never had it pained him as it did now.

“Oh, pshaw, nobody expects that a—a—that you can wear your Sunday clothes when you are herding cattle!” Olaf said with assumed briskness.

From his earliest childhood Lars had sensed what it meant to be the son of poor people, but the beauty and mystery of nature had given him a world of his own. He had known enough of Halvor’s and Helga’s story to know that though poor children and rich children might play together when they were small, their ways parted when they grew up. It was so ordained and it had so to be.

On the way back to the cabin Olaf described the girl from America. She was dressed like the city girls and had light hair, which stood straight out in all directions. She laughed nearly all the time, and when she did not laugh, she smiled.

“I bet you are in love with her,” said Lars and laughed.

“Say that again and you will get a licking,” threatened Olaf.

“That is easier said than done,” said Lars and set the pail on the ground.

The next day Olaf wanted to take the cattle in the direction of the Nystul “sæter” but Lars objected. There as such poor grazing in that direction, he said.

“Oh, you are afraid that we shall meet the girl from America,” said Olaf. There was a touch of mockery in his voice.

Lars blushed. He knew it was true that he shrank from meeting strange people the way he was dressed, but he also knew there was poor grazing in the direction of the Nystul “sæter.”

“Aslaug said they would soon meet you,” teased Olaf. “You had better look out, Lars.”

The next afternoon the boys again went berry-picking. Lars had noticed that Aslaug had driven the cattle on the other side of Nystul “sæter”; there was no danger of meeting the girl from America today.

While Lars picked berries Olaf listened intently every now and then, but when he neither heard the bells of the cattle from Nystul nor the song of the girls, he turned to Lars and said:

“I have a new violin, but father doesn’t know anything about it. I have it down at Asmund Helland’s place, and Asmund is teaching me some tunes. Soon I’ll play as well as ‘Møllargutten.’ After I’m confirmed I shall play at dances.”

“Aren’t you afraid your father will find out about your violin?” asked Lars. He had heard about the time Thorgrim had broken Olaf’s violin.

“You just wait awhile and I shall lick the old man if he touches my violin.” Olaf clenched his fist and held it under Lars’ nose. There was a baleful fire in his eyes.

“Are you crazy, Olaf? You must not talk about your father like this,” cried Lars, frightened.

“Do you know that father wants to scare your mother into selling him the farm Lee?”

“What do you say?” Lars turned pale.

“One evening, when father was drunk and mother was not at home, I heard him tell Peter Flaten that he had threatened your mother that if she did not sell him the Lee farm, he would tell people that your uncle Halvor had stolen money at the Flaten farm before he left for America. He did not know that I heard him.”

Now Lars understood why his mother had answered so evasively when he had asked if they should not rebuild the house at Lee. Now he also understood why she looked so sorrowful when she thought herself unobserved.

“Have you mentioned this to your mother?” asked Lars after a while.

“No, should father learn that I had told it to mother, he would kill me.”

It was two very serious looking boys that returned to the cabin.

“Have you seen ghosts?” asked Anne when she saw them.

“No,” Olaf answered quickly, “we only killed a couple of bears.”

Then they all laughed. But from that day Lars had something new to think about.

Next Sunday forenoon Lars climbed to the flat top of a cliff; the cattle were grazing on the slope below.

It had been dry weather for some time, but the night before there had been a heavy rain. The river which had dwindled down to a brook now overflowed its banks and made a roar that could be heard for miles. Scores of brooks came tumbling down the mountain sides and looked like white ribbons against the dark background. Autumn was approaching and the young maples blazed like bonfires.

Lars lay on his back upon the soft moss gazing at a lonely hawk which sailed on motionless wings in large circles in the sunshine way up in the air.

Suddenly he heard something rustle among the stones. He guessed what it was but pretended that he heard nothing. Sound of tripping feet came nearer and nearer. He felt a warm breath in his face. Two tiny feet were placed on his chest. Lars kept his eyes closed and remained motionless. Then the feet were removed and he received a gentle knock in the head.

He jumped up of a sudden, and a lamb scampered away, turned around, stamped its foot on the ground, then came over to him and wanted to be stroked. When he sat down again, the lamb lay down in his lap.

“Hello, Lars; here is swell company for you.” He knew the voice. It was Aslaug who very quietly had come up behind him. He turned his head. There stood Aslaug, and at her side another girl, laughing. She must be the girl from America.

“Hello,” Lars answered slowly. He put the lamb aside, arose and brushed the moss off his clothes.

The girl from America went over to the lamb and held her hand out to it. The lamb retreated, and then ran toward her with head down. She had to seek protection behind Aslaug.

“Have you taught your lamb to butt, too?” asked Aslaug and chased it away.

They sat down on the moss.

“This is the most beautiful view I have ever seen,” said Olga as she looked at the panorama of wooded slopes, towering peaks, silvery lakes and snow white brooks tumbling down the mountain sides. “Now I understand why the Norwegians in America talk so much about the old country.”

Lars turned toward her with shining eyes. Here was a girl who also was queer. Perhaps he was not crazy after all.

“Lars,” said Olga, struck by the new light in his eyes, “is it true that so many queer things happened here in the mountains in olden times?”

“Oh, it’s just foolish talk; nobody believes those stories any more,” he parried, growing red in the face.

Olga had touched a tender spot in the boy’s life. From the time he had been a tiny lad he had been in the grip of a passion for fairy tales and local legends. His mother was not much of a story teller and his father had told him mainly stories from the Bible, but an old cripple who traveled from farm to farm, making wooden shoes and whining pots and pans, had often spent several days at a time at Storlee. In the evening he would sit near the blazing hearth and tell one fairy tale after another, and Lars and Olaf and several members of the household would gather around him and listen in open-mouthed wonder and admiration.

Sometimes Lars had been so scared that Helga had to go with him, till they saw the light in the window at Lee.

He believed every word of the old man’s tale, and he was sure that hills and woods were peopled with strange beings, and the many local legends threw an atmosphere of romanticism over many a mountain.

Of late he had begun to doubt these stories. His father did not like to have him spend such evenings at Storlee, and the minister had recently said that those stories were all nonsense and remnants of paganism.

“Well, even if these stories are not true, they are very interesting,” suggested Olga. “Aslaug says that you can tell just splendidly. You tell me a story, and I’ll tell you something about America.”

That worked. Lars started to point to a distant mountain. Then he noticed the large patch on his knee. It looked ten times larger than ever before.

“I am just dying to hear it,” cried Olga, her face all smiles.

“Norwegians don’t die that way; they die only from old age,” remarked Aslaug sagely.

When Olga turned to Aslaug, Lars placed his cap over the patch on his knee.

He started to tell rather slowly, but when he noticed how Olga swallowed every word, he lost his self-consciousness and forgot the patch and the wooden shoes. He had entered that other world, and the girl from America went with him.

It was the story of the Kivle maidens. On the other side of the mountain to which he had pointed lies the Kivle valley. One Sunday forenoon while the good people were assembled in the little church and Hrr. Peder was just beginning to preach, wonderful music came floating in through the open windows. It was some girls, herding their goats on the mountain slopes, who were blowing on horns.

The people were so gripped by the strange music that they paid no attention to the preacher. One by one slipped out of the church, and before long the minister found himself alone.

Then Hrr. Peder became very indignant and strode out of church with resounding steps. He called to the girls in a loud voice, telling them to stop disturbing the holy service, but they paid no heed to him. Then Hrr. Peder in the name of God called for their punishment. The people were startled by a sudden crash of thunder from a cloudless sky and the marvelous music died away in such sad tones that the people had never heard anything so sad. Girls and goats were turned into stone and remain that way till the present time.

“Preachers had power in those days,” remarked Aslaug, but Olga said that it must be interesting to live in a land of legends.

Lars pointed in another direction, and asked: "Can you see the fjord way over by that mountain? Near the upper end of the fjord is a large oak tree which people come long distances to see.

"Every Christmas eve the people on the farm Tvedt carry down to the tree some of the best food in the house, in order to keep on good terms with the trolls who live in the surrounding hills and mountains, and who come to the tree to fetch the Christmas fare.

"Many hundred years ago there lived at Tvedt a rich family. The daughter, Helga, was the most beautiful girl in the whole parish. She had many suitors, but she said that she was too young to get married.

"One line summer night she was standing by the open window of her room and looked at the fjord and the mountains.

"Suddenly she heard music coming from the oak. She had never heard anything more beautiful. The music grew louder and before she knew what she was doing she walked out of the house and toward the tree. When she came nearer, she saw a handsome young man standing by the tree. He was playing on a harp. He began to move away from the tree, and she followed him. She had to follow him. He walked across the meadow, still playing. Helga followed. The music had bewitched her. He walked across the moor and through the woods toward the mountain. Helga did not stop, did not turn back. She had forgotten everything but the music.

"Helga's father woke up from a disturbed sleep. He felt that something was wrong, got up and dressed and walked out. Outside on the lawn he stopped and looked and listened. Then he heard faint strains of music. He turned in the direction of the music and saw a man walking toward the mountain, followed by a woman. It was Helga. He knew what it meant, picked up an axe, and started after them as fast as he could run. He cried 'Helga' with all his might, but she did not hear him. She followed at the heels of the strange man as if she were his shadow.

"The father gained on them every minute, and he was just on the point of throwing the axe over them, which would break the spell, when a door opened in the mountainside. The young man and Helga walked through the open door. The door swung back with a bang. The father stood face to face with the dark mountain.

"For a while he stood as if turned to stone. Then he marked with the axe the place where they had disappeared. His first thought was of the minister. If he could not help, then there was no help in the whole world for poor Helga. He hurried to the parsonage as fast as his feet could carry him, woke him up and told him of the terrible fate that had befallen his daughter. The minister said that there was only one thing to do: Next Thursday night they must bring one of the church bells to the mountain and ring it. That would help.

"Friends and neighbors of the family helped the father bring the church bell to the mountain the first Thursday evening. A great crowd of people gathered before the mountain wall. The bell was hung up and they began to ring it. It rang so it could be heard through the whole valley, and the echo came back from the distant mountains.

"The folks who had remained at home heard the ringing and it filled them with a great awe. From inside the mountain came strange sounds. The trolls moaned and wailed. The bell sounded like a judgment through the mountains.

"Suddenly a door sprang open and out stepped Helga Tvedt. Her face was white as a sheet, on her head she had a beautiful bridal crown. She looked neither to right nor left, but walked past the people toward her home. They kept on ringing the bell; for the spell would not be broken until she had entered the house. Helga's mother was standing in the doorway to receive her daughter. Just as she stretched forth her hands to grasp Helga, the rope to which the bell was tied snapped, and the bell crashed into the stones below and broke in many pieces. Helga suddenly disappeared, but those who stood near the mountain heard a cry so full of despair that it would have moved a stone to tears."

"Did she never get out of the mountain?" cried Olga.

"Oh, I don't think she ever went into the mountain," answered Aslaug. "I guess Lars is the only one who believes in such stories."

Aslaug's remark struck Lars' soul like a whip. He became all at once bashful again, rose up hurriedly, and left the two girls without a word.

9. The Land Of Lincoln.

UNTIL HIS FATHER'S DEATH the life of Lars Lee had been like a delightful fairy tale. Sometimes a few shadows had flitted across the landscape of his life, but most of the time the sun had smiled upon him from a cloudless sky.

Now ominous clouds covered the horizon and dark shadows flung themselves across his path.

The thoughts of eternity awakened by his father's death; the fear that perhaps he was "queer"; the attempt to make his mother sell her home; the consciousness that he was poor and would always remain poor; the approaching confirmation and his doubts about Whether he had a new heart; the taunt thrown at him for telling stories about strange folks in the hills and mountains—these things filled him with fear and distress.

There was none to whom he could open his heart. When not in too much of a hurry or too tired, he said his evening and morning prayers, but it never occurred to him that he might bring everything to God in prayer.

One day while he was looking at the mountains towering toward the blue vault of the sky he again came under the spell of their majesty and mystery. Suddenly a sentence ran through his mind like an electric current: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the mountains whence my help cometh."

The mountains were not mere huge piles of stone. They were not the home of trolls. They were the temples of the living God! God was not only way up in heaven. He was also here on earth. And the thought that thrilled the souls of men of God in days of old thrilled the soul of the boy that day among the mountains of Norway.

He would never again tell fairy tales. No, not even to the girl from America.

The very next day the girl from America found him on top of the cliff where he had met her the first time.

"I was sent with a message to your mother and when I heard the bells up here I knew where I could find you. You have been trying to keep away from us, haven't you?" She looked at him roguishly.

A flush of crimson leapt into his face and he fumbled nervously with his cap. He was so surprised that he did not know what to say.

“I want you to tell me the fairy tale, ‘East of the Sun and West of the Moon’!” she said and sat down.

“You have not told me about America yet?” he parried.

“All right, sit down and I will tell you about America’s greatest man, Abraham Lincoln; I read his biography just before I left home. Sit down, Lars; you are not afraid of me, are you?” she teased.

Lars sat down on a stone, but turned half away from her so she should not notice the patches on his trousers.

Olga told with growing enthusiasm the story about the boy who was born in a miserable cabin way out in the wilderness, the death of his mother and her funeral on a lonely hill in the woods, his hunger for books, his hatred of slavery, his election to the presidency, the terrible civil war, the liberation of millions of slaves, his kindness and mercy, and his death and the sorrow into which the nation had been plunged.

And as the strange but not altogether new story was unfolded to the poor peasant boy, he felt that the boy in the wilderness had also been a lonely lad. He knew that he, too, had patched clothes. Perhaps he too had loved flowers and birds and had listened to the sad song of the wind in the forest. And the heart of the little Norwegian boy went out in a wave of sympathy to the great and sad heart of Abraham Lincoln. Then and there Lars Lee became an American, and the call of the land of Lincoln came to him with compelling power.

“Now you tell me the fairy tale,” she coaxed and laid her hand on his arm.

Just then they heard Anne calling. Lars jumped up and said, “Oh, I must bring the cattle home.”

When Olga left him down by the cabin she shook her finger at him and said gravely: “Next time I see you, you will have to tell me the story.”

A couple of days afterwards when Lars saw Olga coming across the moor, he slipped away from the cabin and hid in the woods. Olga asked Anne where Lars was.

“I guess he ran away,” said Anne smiling. “He is so bashful in the presence of strangers.”

There was one person who was not bashful. The next day Olaf Storlee came to Gronlee. He said he had been calling on the girl from America and

was to tell Lars that she did not care a bit for his old stories.

Somehow Olaf did not enjoy his visit this time. A chasm had opened between him and Lars, and, try as he might, he could not bridge it.

The time for leaving the mountain pastures was drawing near. The days had been growing shorter and the nights longer. The young maples which had blazed like bonfires among the dark pines began to shed their leaves. The groves of older maples and oaks looked like waves of gorgeous colors. The berries of the mountain ash shone like blotches of blood. Birds gathered in great flocks and flew away, and the forest grew mysteriously silent. One morning the mountain tops were white with snow.

Before they left Gronlee, Thorgrim had told Anne that she and Lars had better stay at Storlee next winter. They could attend to the sale of the farm later on, he added.

10. The Queer Stranger.

ONE DAY Thorgrim was returning home from a trip to another parish. He had a new horse. He was in bad humor, and this time had evidently got the worst of the deal. As he sat there in the buggy, muttering to himself, interspersing his speech with one oath after another, he saw a man walking along the road carrying a knapsack on his back. As he was not dressed like the men of the parish, Thorgrim's interest was aroused at once. He let the horse feel the whip, and soon caught up with the stranger, who turned around and greeted him courteously. The man was tall and powerful and had a kind face.

"Are you a stranger here?" asked Thorgrim, stopping the horse.

"Yes, I am a stranger. I am on my way to my own country."

"What? Where are you bound for? Are you not a Norwegian? You speak Norwegian."

"I am on my way to heaven. That I hope you are also, my friend."

"Are you crazy, talking like that?"

"No, I am not crazy any longer, but was so for many years."

Thorgrim was just about to let the reins fall out of his hands, and uttered a coarse oath.

"I hear that you also are crazy," said the man. "I had it the same way."

"Do you say I am crazy? You had better look out. Perhaps you don't know there isn't a man in the parish I can't whip?"

"No, you are not a strong man; you are weak. You are not even your own master. You are a slave. You just mentioned your master. You asked him to take you. You don't need to ask him; he has you already."

"Hasn't a grown-up man the right to swear? I know what sort of a man you are. You are a pietist. I presume you have come here to convert us. You think we are heathen, don't you?"

This was followed by a volley of oaths.

The man came nearer. There was a singular light in his eyes. He no longer smiled. Thorgrim became frightened. This man had perhaps not only

been crazy. He was crazy.

“Yes, I understand from the way you talk what kind of Christianity you have in this parish. It is true, I am a pietist, but I have not been one very long. There was a time when I was the greatest fighter in my parish. But strong as I was, I was a slave of the devil, just like you and many others in this locality. I took the name of God in vain, and I had the devil’s name on my tongue early and late. And the devil was in my heart. But then I was conquered by one who was stronger still—Jesus. He is now my master, but at the same time I am a free man.”

“If you aren’t crazy you ought to be crazy,” said Thorgrim. He jerked the reins and wanted to drive on.

The stranger stretched forth his hand to lay it on Thorgrim’s shoulder. Thorgrim became frightened and struck at him with the whip and would have hit him in the face, had not the stranger quickly wrested it out of his hand.

“I don’t think you need any whip, either for me or the horse,” said the stranger, smiling. With that he threw the whip into the woods.

Thorgrim was so bewildered that he remained sitting in the buggy, staring at the queer stranger, who, stepping back from the buggy said:

“Tomorrow evening there will be a meeting at Haugen. I have something to say that I believe will be of particular interest to you and Peder Flaten.”

Thorgrim struck the horse with the reins and drove off at a gallop. Of course, the man was crazy!

The stranger followed him slowly. When he reached the neighborhood of Storlee, he turned into a path that led to Lee.

Neither human beings nor animals were to be seen on the little farm. The stranger first went to the place where the house had stood. Then down to the barn and the stable. Then to the little plots of grain. At last he went over to a stone in the middle of the yard and sat down, looking at the parish down below.

He hears voices. A woman and a young boy are coming. This must be Anne and Lars, he thinks. They see him and walk slower. This must be some one whom Thorgrim has sent here to arrange the sale, thought Anne. The man looked like a city man. Tears came into her eyes.

“Mother, are you sick?” asked Lars anxiously. Of late he had often noticed that she cried.

“Oh, no,” she said hurriedly. “Do you know that man over there?”

Lars had never seen him before.

The man arose and came to meet them.

He smiled and held out his hand to Anne, saying: "This is Anne Lee, is it not?"

Anne was greatly surprised but took his hand and replied that she was.

"And this is Lars?" He put his hand on the boy's head. Lars did not answer, but Anne said: "Yes, it is Lars. And who is the stranger, if I may ask?"

"Well, I am a stranger to you, but you are not strangers to me. I have in a way known you for many years."

"Is that so?" Anne looked at him with more surprise than ever.

"I was well acquainted with your husband," said the man to Anne, "and I also knew your brother, Halvor, well."

He looked at Lars. "You are very much like him, my son."

"Do you know if he is living?" Lars asked excitedly.

"You may well ask. I don't know."

The man became serious at once. He began looking over the little farm.

"And now my friend, Jens Lee, is with God. I owe those two men my life," he said, and looked at Anne.

"You are not Even Berge, are you?" asked Anne.

"Yes, I am Even Berge," he replied.

"Jens spoke of you so often. The day he died I heard him mentioning you in his prayer."

"Jens, Jens, it was just like you."

He looked down at the church yard. "Perhaps we could sit down here a while and talk." He sat down and Anne and Lars did likewise.

The stranger sat looking at Lars. He began smiling again. "So this is Lars," he said.

"Yes, this is Lars," said Lars and laughed.

The man laughed, too. "You are a fine little fellow, Lars."

Then Even Berge began asking Anne about the avalanche, about Jens' last days, about Reverend Hjort and Thorgrim and Helga.

Anne answered briefly.

"But why don't you rebuild the house?" he asked.

Lars looked quickly at his mother, then turned his face away. This did not escape Even Berge's attention.

Anne turned pale and looked down. She began to pull at her apron.

“I presume you would prefer to live on this farm that you and Jens have cleared so nicely?” he asked.

Anne began to weep.

When Lars heard his mother weeping, he turned quickly and said to the stranger: “Mother doesn’t dare to tell. She is afraid of Thorgrim Storlee.”

“Lars, Lars, what are you saying?” cried Anne and caught his arm. “Has Thorgrim said anything to you?”

“No, but I know it anyhow.” Lars spoke as a grown-up man.

“Anne,” said Even Berge, “I am beginning to understand. I believe that perhaps it is best that Lars tells all he knows. You can rely on me. Perhaps I can help you. I believe God has sent me here, just to help you.”

Lars related what Olaf had told him, without mentioning Olaf’s name.

As the boy proceeded, Even Berge’s face grew darker. Suddenly he laughed and said: “Don’t worry, we shall catch those foxes.”

He rose. Lars thought he had never seen such a fine man.

“Now, don’t let this cause you any loss of sleep, Anne. Don’t let Thorgrim trick you into striking a bargain before I have a chance to talk to you again, and to him!”

“Thank God!” cried Anne, “perhaps He will answer my prayer, and to think that I believed that I had no right to ask Him for earthly things.”

“Well, you are not the only one who has had such thoughts. Don’t you remember that Jesus has taught us to pray: ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ and what He said about the sparrows and the lilies? Widows and fatherless children have received a separate promise. Oh, Anne, how small we make our God with all our unbelief!”

Then he told them about the meeting to be held at Haugen the next evening. He asked them to tell Helga and the servants at Storlee about it. “Thorgrim knows about it already,” he added, smiling. “I guess he will come, too. Now I am going to call on Peder Flaten, and extend him an invitation.”

Even before the death of his father Peder Flaten had been engaged in the lumber business. Things went well to begin with, but then he turned to drink and soon lost what he had earned and more. After his father’s death he inherited the entire estate, but he soon lost everything and had to move

with his family to a small farm nearby. It was to this place Even Berge went.

Thorgrim Storlee asked for Anne as soon as he got home. When he learned that she and Lars had taken the path to Lee, he followed them at once. To his consternation he discovered them speaking to the stranger. He withdrew quickly and gave his feelings vent with all the oaths at his command, which were many. He hurried back to Storlee as fast as his legs would carry him and drove away as if all the imps of darkness were chasing him. When he arrived at the Flaten home, the wife and children were ungraciously asked by Thorgrim to go out. He had to talk with Peder alone.

When Even Berge knocked at the door, it was opened by Thorgrim.

11. The Day Of Reckoning.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?” Thorgrim cried, but Even, with a determined look in his eyes, pushed him aside and entered. Thorgrim sank down on a chair. Peder rose and shouted: “May I ask what all this means?”

“Sit down, Peder Flaten, and we three will have a little talk together.” Peder remained standing, looking at the stranger. “Sit down, please,” said Even Berge and offered him a chair. Then he sat down himself and Peder Flaten followed his example.

“Let us get to the bottom of this at once,” said Even, looking them firmly in the eyes. “I understand that you two have spread the rumor that Halvor Lee stole money from old Flaten that evening when he left the parish. Halvor Lee was not anywhere near Flaten that night. Someone else was the thief.”

“Do you mean to say that I stole the money?” cried Thorgrim furiously, rising from his chair. He clenched his fists and made a lunge at the stranger. Even Berge shook his head.

“Well, then you believe I am the thief!” cried Peder.

“I have not said as yet who is the thief. The thief himself knows who he is. I have only said that Halvor Lee did not steal the money. And now we shall soon find out who was the thief. Will you, Peder Flaten, explain from what source you received the money that you paid over to a merchant in Skien a few days after Halvor left? Perhaps you don’t remember that I was in the office that day, and that you told the merchant you had received the money from your father?”

“Oh, God help me,” cried Peder and buried his face in his hands.

Then Thorgrim gained his feet and began shaking Peder by the shoulders. “And you who told me that Halvor Lee had stolen the money!” he fairly screamed.

Then Peder sprang up, clenching his fist in Thorgrim’s face, and cried: “It was you, Thorgrim, who said I was to put the blame on Halvor. Dare you deny it?”

Mr. Berge took them by the shoulders and said quietly: "Sit down both of you." They sank down under the weight of his powerful grip.

"Now I think we shall soon get to the heart of the matter. Peder Flaten, now I ask you on your honor and conscience: Was it you who stole the money when the merchant threatened to sue you? Answer me now!"

Peder tried to twist out of the grip that held him as a vise.

His head sank down on his breast. "Yes, I did it." He spoke so low that Thorgrim did not hear it.

"What does he say?" cried Thorgrim.

"Look me in the eyes, and answer me," said Even Berge. "Did you steal the money?"

Slowly Peder raised his head. "Yes," he said.

Even Berge turned to Thorgrim.

"Yet another question. Was it not you who prevailed upon Peder to spread the rumor that Halvor Lee had stolen the money, and did you not help him spread it?"

Thorgrim sat looking at him, his mouth open and his face white with terror. He finally blurted out: "What do you care?"

"I care a great deal," said Even Berge. "When you stain a good man's reputation and cause his nearest kin sorrow and humiliation, that man must be a wretch indeed who can right the wrong and does not do so. Furthermore, Jens and Halvor were my two best friends. They were the two men who saved me physically and spiritually. I can thank them for everything I am today. They were Christian men and I shall try to act as a Christian in this case, and I shall help you two to act like men. I only ask one thing of you, that you be present at the meeting at Haugen tomorrow evening. I give you my word of honor that I shall not betray you. If you are not present at the meeting, you shall soon find out that there are laws in Norway."

12. A Strange Meeting.

THE NEXT EVENING one of the largest crowds that had ever attended a religious meeting in the parish assembled at the Haugen farm.

The fact that Even Berge, a former pugilist, was going to speak had attracted many people who otherwise did not attend such gatherings. It was of course out of the question to find room for such a crowd in the house at Haugen. Chairs and benches were placed in a semi-circle on the lawn in front of the house. Most of the people had to stand.

In the front row sat Helga Storlee. Next to her sat Anne Lee and Lars.

After a while Even Berge stepped out of the house and faced the audience. Seldom had the people seen a more athletic-looking man. There was nothing about him to suggest the ordinary pietist.

With an engaging smile on his handsome face and with a twinkle in his big blue eyes he said: "I know you folks have fine voices. Now join me heartily in singing this hymn that you all know by heart."

In a resonant voice he started to sing. At first he sang alone. Then a few timid voices took up the melody. Then a few more. Most of them remained silent.

"You can do better than that," he almost laughed saying it. "Let us start over again. You are not afraid to sing, are you?"

This time there rose such a volume of song from the audience that the like had never been heard before.

After a short prayer by the "American," Anders Haugen, who with his daughter, Olga, was visiting his old home, Even Berge stood a while as if looking for someone. He smiled and began speaking in a voice that carried way beyond the crowd, to a group of young men down by the barn.

"I have felt the urge for a long time to visit this parish," he began; "the reason for it you will soon see.

"I was born and bred in the parish of T. Of my youth much might be said, but it would redound little to my honor. It was a life in sin. I was a

prodigal son and lived the life of the prodigal son. Wherever there was thinking, dancing and fighting I was present.

"As a boy I learned to play the violin, and as I grew up I played at dances all over the parish and even beyond its borders. There were a few 'readers,' as we called them. The name was a term of reproach. In reality it is a term of honor, for they were about the only ones who read the Bible and religious books. They were the most quiet, unobtrusive, and generous people in the whole parish, but as their clean and God-fearing lives were a testimony against us, they were made targets of derision. I was the leader among those who made fun of them.

"Then there came to us a man from this parish. He was a meek, modest man, kind hearted and helpful, but the tact that he associated with the pietists marked him as an object of our ridicule. We worked together doing until work, and that gave me an opportunity to torment him. A little later there came another man, also from this parish. He was a school teacher. When we heard that he cautioned the children against sin and vice, we knew that he was striking at us. We looked upon him as a hypocrite and treated him accordingly.

"The first man was Jens Aasen, the other man was Halvor Lee."

The speaker happened to look at a stately woman sitting in front of him. When he mentioned Halvor Lee she gave a start. Then her face turned deathly pale and looked like a statue carved in stone.

"Once I had played at a wedding," he continued, "on the other side of the river. It had rained during the night and the river had risen far above its banks. I was drunk, and it was sheer madness to try to cross the river in a crude rowboat, but a drunken man is a witless man. I got along fairly well for a while, but when I entered the main current it was too much for me. The boat shot straight towards the roaring cataract below. Terror seized me, and I became sober at once. If I could not immediately get out of the current I was lost. I could see the smoke from the waterfall and hear its deafening thunder. While I was throwing my weight on the oars and rowing with the strength of despair, one oar slipped out of my hand and the boat spun around on the angry flood. My past life with all its sin and shame flashed before me like a swift-moving panorama. In a few seconds I would be hurled into everlasting perdition.

"Then I caught sight of the almost submerged island on the very edge of the cataract. I had often been there. I tried to steer the boat toward the is-

land, and next moment it struck a rock; I leaped out and the boat was hurled into the awful abyss below. I fell in a heap on the edge of the island.

“When I finally rose up I noticed a boat coming down the river. Two men were in it. The current on that side was not so strong. When they came into the main stream the boat turned. At first I thought they were going back again, but under perfect control they let it glide toward the island. They were trying to save me. I knew that it meant practically certain death to the two men. It was Jens and Halvor! I cried at the top of my voice: ‘Row back, row back!’ But my voice was swallowed by the thunder of the cataract. Then for the first time since I was confirmed I knelt. I prayed God to save them. They must not, they must not throw their lives away for such a wretch as I. The boat had now almost reached the island. They put their feet against the bottom of the boat and pulled at the oars till they were white in the face. The stern of the boat grated against the rock and was on the point of plunging into the yawning abyss, when I jumped into the boat. Inch by inch they forced their way against the current. Finally they swung to the left into almost smooth water. A group of men rushed toward us and dragged the boat on dry land.”

Even Berge stopped and drew a long breath. He had once more lived through those terrible moments.

Again Even Berge spoke: “It was then that Jens overexerted himself so that he never again was a strong man. When struck by the avalanche he had not the strength to withstand the shock. Under his and Halvor’s guidance I found peace with God. Now when I come here to thank them, they are not here. But probably I can do something in return for those who were dear to them. But before I go on, perhaps Anders Haugen and his daughter will sing a hymn.”

Sweet as the song of a lark in the sky came the song from Olga Haugen’s lips, joined by the deep bass of her father:

“Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in thee.”

Then for the first time in many years Helga Storlee wept.

A deep hush had fallen upon the audience. Strong men wiped their eyes and many women wept audibly.

Then in a clear and thrilling voice Even Berge again spoke.

"I understand that after the departure of my friend, Halvor Lee, a rumor was spread to the effect that he had stolen money from Flaten's. That rumor was false. I know it. I can prove it. There will be a chance to clear my friend's name, now and here.

"Before I leave this parish there is another thing I want to do. The house at Lee has not been rebuilt. Thorgrim Storlee has been generous enough to take care of the farm. Are some of you men willing to help me rebuild the house?"

Someone cried: "I will do that myself and alone."

It was Thorgrim Storlee who had spoken.

Even Berge smiled. Then he went through the startled crowd and stepped in front of Thorgrim. He put his hands on his shoulders and said, "Thank you, Thorgrim! That was fine!"

Then he turned to Peder Flaten and spoke to him in a low voice. Together the two walked up in front of the audience. "Peder Flaten has something to say," Berge announced.

Peder stood there with downcast eyes. He mumbled something, but no one heard what he said.

Then Even Berge raised his voice so it could be heard in the remotest edge of the crowd. There was a tone of triumph in it.

"Peder Flaten says that the rumor was false."

Helga Storlee jumped to her feet, then sank down again. Anne Lee buried her face in her apron, but the face of a boy by her side shone as a face transfigured.

Slowly the crowd dispersed.

When Lars was starting for home, he came face to face with Olga Haugen.

"Lars, oh, Lars!" she cried excitedly. "I did not mean a thing with the greeting I sent you. I am very sorry. Please forgive me."

Lars did not see her outstretched hand. He did not know what to say. When Olaf Storlee stepped up to them, Lars turned abruptly away and started for home.

But when he walked through the woods in the gathering twilight, the trees were whispering pleasant words to each other and when he stood in front of

the house at Storlee and looked up into the star-strewn sky, he heard the stars sing together as they so often had done before the great sorrow had swept his soul.

Thorgrim Storlee kept his promise to rebuild the house at Lee. He pretended that he was doing it cheerfully, but in his heart he cursed the bungling manner in which he had tried to get possession of the farm.

Shortly after Anne and Lars had moved to Lee, Thorgrim came home from one of his frequent trips to surrounding parishes. When Helga and Olaf saw him coming and noticed that he was drunk, they slipped out of the house without his seeing them.

On his way home Thorgrim had worked himself into a rage at the trick that Even Berge had played on him. He did not dare to face Mr. Berge, but it was different with Anne Lee. He blamed her for having informed Mr. Berge about his attempt to obtain her farm. She should at least get a piece of his mind.

Not finding anybody in the house at Storlee he started for Lee at once.

He found Anne and Lars down by the barn. They noticed that he was intoxicated and knew that he came on no pleasant errand.

Waving his arms and shaking his fist at Anne, Thorgrim shouted: "I know who told that rascal and hypocrite Berge about my offer to you to buy your miserable little farm. Now you are going to pay for your gossip!"

Anne was going to protest her innocence when she thought of the danger of betraying Lars. She stepped back. Thorgrim followed her, shaking his fist in her face.

Suddenly Lars stepped boldly in front of him and cried in a shrill voice:

"Don't you touch my mother! She never spoke a word about it either to Berge or to me."

"Who did tell him then?" Thorgrim screamed.

"You will never find out from me," Lars answered and held his ground.

"I'll tell you!" cried a voice right behind Thorgrim. They had been so excited that they had not noticed Olaf Storlee. When Thorgrim wheeled around he saw Olaf standing there with flashing eyes.

"How did you find out?" Thorgrim shouted and called his son a vile name.

“I heard you and Peder Flaten talk about it when you were both drunk.”

Thorgrim made a lunge for the boy, but Olaf stepped quickly aside and ran behind the house. Thorgrim ran after him, but it is not easy for a drunken man to catch a nimble footed boy. Olaf ran around the house, Thorgrim after him, bellowing like an angry ox, and calling on the devil to bite and flay and burn his son.

Suddenly the father stumbled against a stone and pitched headlong to the ground. He rolled on his back, pawing with his hands and kicking with his feet.

While Thorgrim was still lying on the ground Helga Storlee suddenly appeared on the scene. She seemed to have risen from the ground. She turned to Anne and asked what it all meant. Anne began to cry, but Olaf stepped up to his mother and was on the point of speaking, when he threw himself on the ground, crying bitterly.

Thorgrim had finally succeeded in sitting up. When he saw Helga, his rage suddenly left him. He managed to stand on his feet, brushed his clothes and began to laugh.

“I guess I am too old to run foot races with little rascals,” he remarked, still laughing.

Helga went over to Olaf and raised him up. Together they went home. But that day there was started a fire of hatred in Olaf’s soul that was to burn for many years.

13. Confirmation.

A FEW DAYS AFTER THORGRIM'S VISIT to Lee, Even Berge called on Anne and Lars.

It was a warm day late in autumn and Lars had let out the cow and the sheep to graze on the new growth of grass behind the barn.

There Even Berge found him reading his Explanation of Luther's Catechism. Next Sunday was confirmation day. Lars knew by heart his Explanation, his Bible History, and a large number of hymns. He was not a bit worried about the questions the ministers might ask him. But there was something that did worry him and that filled his heart with doubt and fear, and sometimes with unspeakable terror.

The other day he had met one of the strictest and gloomiest of the "readers."

"Lars," he had said in sepulchral tones, "you are going to be confirmed next Sunday. Don't go up to the altar and tell a lie. If you do not know that you have been born again, do not take God's holy name on your lips."

That was the very thing that had troubled the boy. He had searched his heart for proof that he was born again. Of course he had been regenerated in the Sacrament of Baptism, but had he not often forgotten to say his prayers? Had he not doubted whether a soul could burn forever in a real fire in hell? Had he not repeated in his heart some of the oaths he had heard? No, he was no longer in the baptismal grace. He must be born again. But how?

Today he had again read with hungry heart the questions and answers in the third article about justification, regeneration and sanctification. He knew the questions and answers by heart. Sometimes he thought he understood the different steps that must be taken, but then again they got all mixed up. How wise the author of the Explanation must have been to know all about justification, regeneration and sanctification! To know where one step in the way of salvation began and ended and where the next step began and ended!

The whole thing seemed at times so utterly hopeless that he gave up in despair. But the next moment he again tried to find out if he had entered upon the way of salvation.

And next Sunday he was to go up to the altar and say in the presence of a crowded church that he believed in God and that he would forever renounce the devil and all his works!

How could he do it? Would it be at all improbable that the lightning from God's judgment seat would strike him dead and hurl his soul to hell?

As far as he knew, the other boys and girls to be confirmed had no such fears. They looked forward to confirmation as a door that would swing open and let them rush into worldly pleasures with wide eyes and eager feet. Olaf Storlee had often said that as soon as he was confirmed he would play at dances and get drunk. If the old man objected, he would run away from home. And when he was older he would return and give the bully tenfold again for all the lickings he had received.

When Lars compared himself with some of the others who were going to be confirmed, he knew that he was much better than they. This gave him satisfaction until the thought came to him that such a comparison must be inspired by none other than the devil. No, he was not born again. Next Sunday he would stand in the presence of the holy God with a lie in his heart and blasphemy on his lips.

Such were the thoughts which tortured his soul at the moment Even Berge found him.

When Mr. Berge saw the Explanation in his hand, he remarked: "I understand you are going to be confirmed next Sunday. Your teacher tells me that you are well prepared. Of course it is not enough to know your books; the main thing is that you really believe in God and love God."

How Lars wished that he might open his heart to this friend of his father!

"Is there anything special that bothers you, my boy?" The kind man sat down beside him and put his hand on the boy's hand.

"I don't understand this page," said Lars and gave him the book.

Even took the book and read the questions and answers. He looked up and smiled.

"Nobody understands this," he said. "Thank God that we do not have to understand it. This is what they call theology, or dogmatics, or something like that. Lars, let me give you a word from the lips of Jesus Himself: 'Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' Forget about justifica-

tion, regeneration, and sanctification. Someday these terms may mean a great deal to you, but for the time being let the tender invitation of Jesus be enough. If you feel the need of Him, as I know you do, if you want to come to Him just the way you are, with all your doubts and fears, He will not turn you away. What is more, He will come to you. He will lead you in the way of salvation. He is the Way. Oh, Lars, if we only take Him at His word, all will be well, all will be well.”

After looking at the distant mountains and then at the two churches on the hill in the center of the parish, Even Berge folded his hands and began to pray aloud.

He thanked God for sending His Son to a fallen race, thanked Him for the salvation that had come to him personally, thanked Him for the blessing that had come to him through this boy’s father. And he prayed that Lars might accept the gracious invitation from Jesus and come to Him as he had come to his mother when he was a little child and she opened her arms to him and lifted him up in her lap.

As the ice melts before the warm rays of the sun in spring, so all the doubts and fears melted in the heart of the boy.

On confirmation day he answered some of the very questions which had bothered him the most, but all the time these words rang in his soul: “Whosoever cometh to me.”

When he knelt at the altar he was for a moment seized with a great fear, but the fear passed quickly away, and a sweet peace flooded his heart.

After he had returned home with his mother, she did something she had not done before. She took the testament and read the very words that had brought him peace. She next tried to pray aloud with her own words, but then she broke down and cried.

“Let us read the Lord’s prayer,” she said simply.

14. Plans For The Future.

“LARS, I want to have a plain talk with you. You are through with the public school. You are confirmed. You are the son of a poor widow. The time has come when you must think seriously of the future, the immediate future.”

It was Even Berge who spoke thus, after having returned to the parish.

"I do not know what plans you have, if you have any. There is no future for you in this parish; I might add, in this country. Your mother is not very strong and will, before very long, be dependent on you. You'll have to work for others: That will in all probability mean that you must associate day after day, and especially in the evenings, with people who swear, drink, and dance. You may now have the best intentions, but you are young, and temptations are many and powerful in a parish like this. Few young men, it seems, come through with a clean heart.

“I owe so much to your father and your uncle, that I feel as if I were your father. There is nothing within my power that I would not do for you. This is what I think should be done. Since Thorgrim Storlee has rebuilt the house for your mother, I can use the money I had intended for that purpose in some other way. A continuation school will be started here, as you know. I will pay your expenses and also help your mother. Then next spring, I think, you ought to go to America. I have a brother there who will be glad to help you. There will be a chance for you to attend a church school. Hundreds of young men have worked their way through, and are now ministers, teachers, business men. In this country most of them it would have remained common laborers.”

“Would mother go too?” asked Lars. He looked at the distant mountains.

“Hardly next spring. She might go later. You had better see how you like it.”

There was nothing that Lars desired more than to be able to study. He had heard about the continuation school which was going to begin in the

fall, but had not dared to hope that he could attend it. Now the door flew wide open at once. A door to the world of knowledge.

He had thought a great deal about America of late. The land of Lincoln, the land of opportunity, had beckoned to him on lonely walks and in his dreams. But it disturbed him that in his dreams the smiling face of a young girl often appeared. How could a boy, just confirmed, begin to think about a girl? Surely, this was a temptation. It was a proof that he was not born again.

A couple of days later Anders Haugen and Olga came to Lee to say goodbye. While Anders was talking with Anne, Olga went down to the barn where Lars was working.

“Lars,” she said, “you must not be angry with me any longer for sending you the foolish greeting with Olaf. I have been ashamed of myself ever since. You will forgive me, won’t you?”

A flood of crimson came into his face. “I have not been angry with you,” he said, looking away from her. “I don’t care for the foolish stories myself.”

“Now, you don’t mean that, Lars. Norway means ever so much more to me now since I learned about the wonderful literature which lives on the lips of the people. But there is something else I wanted to tell you. You ought to come to America—”

Just then her father called her. She was fumbling in her pocket for a small photograph of herself. She had intended to give it to Lars, but was afraid he would misunderstand her. She held out her hand. “Goodbye, Lars, when you come to America you must call on—on us.”

If Lars had been bashful, Olaf Storlee was not. When Olga was going to bid him farewell, he said: “Don’t go back to America; you can have more fun here in one day than in America in a whole year.”

“I am not so sure that I would like your fun here,” said Olga, and looked at him sharply.

“I hope you do not intend to become a pietist,” said Olaf, and tried to laugh.

“I might be something worse than that. A few more pietists here would not do any harm.”

Olaf lowered his eyes for a moment. Then he folded his hands and sighed deeply, took a few long steps, shook his head slowly and sighed again. “That’s the way the pietists act,” he said.

Olga laughed heartily. "They don't act that way in America," she remarked and she shook hands with him.

As she turned to go, a photograph fell out of her pocket. Olaf picked it up and kept it.

The same evening Olaf met Lars. "See what the girl from America gave me," he said, and showed the photograph to Lars. "When I get older I am going to America and marry that girl." That evening, when Lars stood at the foot of the tall pine, there were no stars in the sky and never had the sighing of the wind been more mournful.

15. The Minister Causes A Sensation.

REV. HJORT was going to leave and one Rev. Jørgensen was soon coming. When the rumor spread that Rev. Jørgensen was a pietist, though a very learned man, some of the leaders of the godless element talked about sending a letter of protest to the Church department, but no one wanted to take the initiative. The pietists, however, rejoiced.

When the new minister was installed, the church was so crowded that many had to stay outside. The sermon caused a sensation. It was a ringing call to repentance and an inspiring message to the people who had stepped out from the world and who had accepted Christ as their Saviour and Lord. The “readers” were elated without showing it. The others gathered in groups, shaking their heads and wondering if the Church department thought they were pagans.

Rev. Jørgensen was not lacking courage. He wanted the parish to know just where he stood. It came like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky when he announced that he had appointed three of the leading “readers” as his advisors.

But that was only the beginning. One evening he appeared at a dance. The violinist had begun to tune his instrument and did not see the minister before he stood in front of him. If a ghost had appeared before him he would not have been more surprised.

“My friend,” said the minister, “may I have your violin for a moment?”

By this time the violinist had regained his senses and said with a show of bravado: “Yes, you play and I’ll dance.”

This sally was followed by much laughter by some of the young men.

The minister took the violin and faced the crowd. He began to play the melody of a well known hymn. When he was through he returned the violin to its owner and said: “This wonderful instrument may also be used to the honor of God. You should no longer serve the devil with it, my friend.”

Then looking very earnestly and very kindly at the astonished young people, he told them that he had come as their friend to show them the better way. Young people must have enjoyment, he said, but it must be of such a nature as not to leave a bad conscience. The sin and the vice which accompanied dancing had wrecked hundreds of young souls. He would arrange for special meetings for the young people and invited them to come when such meetings were being held.

He closed with a fervent prayer. Some of the girls began to weep, some of the young men slipped out, muttering oaths under their breath, and still others did not know what to do.

Dancing gradually disappeared in the parish, and many young men and women, as well as older folk, began to seek God and found peace and assurance. Lars attended the devotional meetings, but came to no assurance. He was still searching his soul for evidence that he had been truly born again.

Several of the “readers” were scandalized when they heard that the minister had played the violin, this instrument of the devil. He told them that he had done it to show that the violin could be used to honor God, but since they could not see it that way he would not do it again. Christians must not let a thing like this part them, he said.

Lars had looked forward to the continuation school as a great event in his life. It became more than that. It became a revelation.

The teacher, Mr. Thor Kleven, won the hearts of the boys the very first day.

He was tall and straight as a Norway pine. He had a fine, clean-cut face; high, broad forehead; large, luminous eyes; long, black hair. He was a man that people turned around to look at when they met him.

Oh, yes, they used text books, but Mr. Kleven was not tied to the text books. He went ahead of the boys, as it were, and opened one door after another to the treasure chambers in the Bible, in the history of Norway, and in Norwegian literature, and the boys followed him with eager minds.

The Bible was no longer a closed book. The great heroic figures moved before the eyes of the boys as characters in a living panorama: Abraham on his way to Mount Moria to sacrifice his son; Jacob at the foot of the ladder that reached to heaven; Joseph, once a slave, finally next to the king in one of the greatest kingdoms of that time; Moses at the Red Sea; on Mount Sinai, fighting, preaching, giving laws—one of the greatest men in history;

David, the sweetest singer of all times; Elijah on Mount Carmel praying down fire from heaven.

Then with bare heads they entered the New Testament, and the noblest person who ever dwelt among the sons of men appeared before them as a living, loving, powerful personality. In simple words and gentle tones He spoke about the Kingdom to come. He went about doing good to all, especially to the sinful, the sick and the suffering. He put His finger on the eyelids of the blind and they looked up into a smiling face; He touched deaf ears and they heard a sweet voice; He put His hand on lepers and their flesh became like that of a child. He opened His arms to little children and they rushed to him with joy.

And then the teacher showed them, through promises and the fulfillment of promises, how God's plan of salvation swept across humanity like a beautiful rainbow from eternity to eternity.

Likewise he opened the door to the history of the Norwegian people. The boys accompanied the old Norsemen on their expeditions to England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Italy, Palestine. They attended their "thing" where laws were passed and justice meted out. They were present where the Vikings sacrificed to their mighty gods, and they became familiar with their wonderful mythology. At night they sat round the roaring fires and listened to the bards playing on their instruments and singing the praises of great heroes and mighty battles. The boys came to admire the strength, the courage, the honesty of their ancestors. Oh, it was great to have the blood of such men and women flowing in their veins!

None admired the teacher more than Lars. He fairly worshipped him. And the teacher was strangely moved when he looked into the blue eyes of the bashful boy. It seemed that he looked into the very depth of the soul of his people: serious, doubting, restless, seeking the truth, ever seeking it, but never sure they had found the truth.

One day while reading aloud some bird sketches, the teacher happened to look at Lars. Never in his life had he seen such an expression on the face and in the eyes of any boy. He was so startled that he lost the place. What was it that had made such a tremendous impression on the boy?

The teacher did not know that the boy had been driven almost to despair by the thought that perhaps he was not quite all there. Had not Thorgrim told his mother about a young man who had been sent to the insane asylum after having roamed around in the woods, watching the birds and listening

to the wind in the treetops? Lars had tried to suppress his passion for the beauty and the mystery of nature, but all of a sudden he would be caught in its overpowering grip.

Now he was listening to a description of the birds, written by a man who had studied them lovingly for many years. All his fears disappeared. He was sane! He was sane!

For several days Lars walked on sunlit clouds. His heart had gone out to the heart of Jesus of Nazareth, while listening to the teacher's glowing tribute, the greatest spirit of all ages, and his communion with nature became a holy communion.

But suddenly he was brought down to earth again and his heart was filled with doubt and fear. The same "reader" who had spoken such terrifying words before his confirmation, met him one day, and told him that his beloved teacher was an infidel, because he had heard that he, the teacher, had praised Bjørnson and Ibsen, the two great infidels.

If the teacher was not a Christian who then was a Christian? What's the use of trying to become a Christian?

But if Lars was tortured by doubt and fear Olaf Storlee was not. The blood was hot in his veins. Life called lustily and he answered the call.

Olaf's home life was becoming more and more unbearable. He hated his father and openly rebelled. Had it not been for his mother's interference it would have come to blows between father and son.

One day as Helga entered a room she saw Olaf drinking from a bottle he had taken from a cabinet. She had recently discovered that Olaf was attending dances and that he was learning to play the violin.

Hitherto her great mother-love had guided and guarded her boy. Now she realized, with a sinking heart, that powers, evil powers, over which she had no control, began to draw him away from her.

So weak she had never felt before. Was there nothing she could do? Yes, she could pray. Why had she not prayed before? Now it was perhaps already too late. Too late? It is never too late for a mother to pray.

16. The Dance.

TOWARD SPRING Lars was invited to a party that was to be held at the home of one of the boys who attended the continuation school.

“You don’t need to be afraid to come,” Olaf said. “We are only going to play some games.”

Lars had never left home without telling his mother where he was going. This time he said he was going on an errand with Olaf and might not be home till late.

When the two boys arrived at the home of the boy, Lars at once saw it was a dance. The violinist was already playing. Soon the young people were given home brewed beer. As everybody in the parish, even the “readers,” drank home brewed beer, Lars could see no harm in it and drank like the others.

The dance began. After a little there was more treating. Lars realized that someone had mixed brandy with the beer, but he pretended that he had not noticed it. In a few minutes the drink went to his head, and the tones of the violin made him beat time with his feet. A young girl grabbed him by the hand and pulled him with her out on the floor. They were caught in the whirl of the other dancers, and though Lars did not know how to dance he stamped his feet while the girl swung him around in the mad current.

He opened his eyes. Where was he? This was not his own room. He closed his eyes. He must be dreaming. How his head ached! Suddenly he sat up in bed. The whole scene from last evening stood before him. He grew hot, and the perspiration stood in beads upon his face. He looked at the room once more. He was at Storlee. How had he come here? His coat was on a chair, his shoes were on the floor. Otherwise he lay there fully dressed.

The door opened quietly and his mother came in. She was pale and had been weeping.

“You had better get up and we’ll go home,” she whispered. Lars threw himself back in bed and pulled the bed clothes over his head and began to cry.

Anne sank down on a chair. Finally Lars got up and put on his shoes. Then his coat. His head was aching so he had to lean against the wall. Then slowly, with bowed head, he went home with his mother.

When Lars did not come home, Anne went down to Storlee. The boys had not returned. Late in the night the two mothers, anxiously waiting, heard a noise in front of the house. As they opened the door, there were Olaf and Lars sound asleep. As it was impossible to wake them, the mothers carried them in, removed their coats and shoes, and put them to bed. Fortunately Thorgrim was not at home.

When Lars had slept far into the day he told his mother what had happened. He had given up all hope of becoming a Christian. He had come to feel that he, too, had right to enjoy life.

Anne did not know what to say. She stroked him gently on the head and then burst into tears.

“Mother, I’ll never, never do it again,” he cried.

After he had had his breakfast, Anne said it was too late to go to school that day.

“I’ll never go to school again,” he said. “I don’t want to see anybody. Oh, I wish I could go to America this very day.”

Thor Kleven sat in deep thought. He had heard about the party. Olaf had returned to school and seemed rather proud of his experience. Several days had now gone by, but Lars did not come.

At first the teacher had been filled with indignation. How was it possible that people in a Christian country had the heart to drag an innocent boy down into filth? Was it to be wondered at that the pietists took life so seriously, and had broken openly with the godless in the parish? He had criticized them in public and in private for their narrowness and their lack of appreciation of the things that made for culture. How could they care for such

things when the devil had taken possession of song, instrumental music and all kinds of amusements?

But was he himself without blame in regard to Lars's experience? Had he not stressed what made for the open mind, for beauty, for culture, and neglected to lead the boys to a clear-cut and definite acceptance of the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour? When temptations came, all these fine things did not give them the power to stand fast. Jesus alone, not as a great teacher, not as a matchless example, but as a living personality in their heart could give them that power.

What was his own relation to Christ? He had prepared for the ministry, but had not entered it, as deep down in his heart he felt that he had no right to.

That evening Thor Kleven went to Rev. Jørgensen, and the two sat up till late at night. Before they parted they knelt together and prayed.

The next day, late in the afternoon, Thor Kleven went to call on Lars. He knew that he was on his way to a wounded soul. What should he say? The great thoughts which formerly had carried him as on the wings of an eagle had become so pitifully small and insignificant.

When he saw the house at Lee, he stopped and prayed for guidance.

He met Anne down by the barn. Lars was in the house, she said.

Thor went up to the house and knocked at the door. No answer. No sound. He knocked again. The door was opened, slowly. There stood Lars, pale, bewildered.

The teacher entered and wanted to shake hands, but Lars had turned away from him. "Come, let us sit by the fire, Lars," he said, and sat down. Lars remained standing for a while, then sank down in a chair.

"Lars, I came to tell you that I am to blame for what has happened."

Lars gave him a searching glance. Had the teacher come to make fun of him?

Very frankly Thor Kleven told the boy that he now realized that trying to lead the boys to an appreciation of the beauty in life and literature, without also at the same time leading them into a conscious relation with Christ was a mistake.

"You must go to Christ, my young friend. He will give you power to overcome temptations. And tomorrow I want you to come back to school."

"I'll never go to school again in this parish," Lars cried.

The teacher put his hand on the boy's head and looked him earnestly in the eye.

“Look here, Lars. I don't want you to play the coward. If you quit school, people will think you are more guilty than you are. I have spoken to the boys about the affair. They are all shocked at what was done to you. Lars, I have prayed for you. I am going to pray for you. You will come back to school tomorrow, will you not?”

Lars looked into the dying embers of the fire.

“I will try to come,” he whispered.

17. Died With A Curse On His Lips.

ALTHOUGH LARS AT FIRST REFUSED to go back to school, he finally yielded to the teacher's strong urging.

When he was going up the steps to the schoolhouse next day one of the boys remarked: "It took 'Pietist-Lars' quite a while to sober up."

He heard a sudden blow, and a fall of a body on the ground. Turning quickly he saw Olaf Storlee standing there, white in the face, with blazing eyes. On the ground a boy lay sprawling. He tried to rise, but other boys formed a circle around him. "Take it back! Take it back!" they shouted.

When the boy saw the clenched fists and heard the chorus of angry voices, he muttered in a low voice: "I'll take it back."

The teacher stood in front of them. "What does this mean?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

Before Olaf could answer, Lars stepped down to him. They looked at each other a minute earnestly. Then Lars began to smile. "You must not kill anyone for my sake, Olaf," he said.

"Well, he won't say it again," replied Olaf and laughed.

"No, he won't say it again," said the teacher.

That day the teacher surpassed himself, it seemed to Lars. At the close of the afternoon session, Thor Kleven did something unusual. He had formerly closed the day by reading a verse from a hymn. This day he offered a short prayer in his own words.

When Thorgrim Storlee heard what had happened at the dance, he threatened Olaf that he would kill him if he ever went to another dance.

One evening when Thorgrim was away from home one of the servants told Olaf that he was going to a dance. "Poor kid," he said to Olaf, "I'd hate to be under the lash like you."

"Do you think I am afraid of the horse trader? I'll go with you," Olaf cried. And he went.

During the night Thorgrim returned home unexpectedly. He was drunk and in bad humor. He asked for Olaf. He wanted him to put the horse in the stable. One of the servants, without thinking of the consequences, blurted out that Olaf had gone to a dance at Elverud. Thorgrim jumped into the buggy and swore that he would show them who was master at Storlee.

For some time the young people had been afraid of the pastor, and dances had been held in out-of-the-way places, but as the spiritual awakening had gained momentum, especially among the young people, the opposition increased and the worldly element became more courageous. Now dances were held right in the middle of the parish.

At Elverud the dance was in full swing when someone came in and whispered to those standing at the door that Thorgrim Storlee was coming. Olaf was playing the fiddle and did not notice the commotion at the door. Suddenly Thorgrim stood in the middle of the floor with a whip in his lifted hand. He was just on the point of striking Olaf who still was playing, when several young men grabbed Thorgrim and carried him out of the house and put him into the buggy. Having placed the reins in his hand one of the men gave the horse a vicious blow with the whip, and the horse started off at a wild gallop.

Helga Storlee had heard of Thorgrim's sudden departure. She stood outside the house looking down into the parish. It was so light that every farm could clearly be seen.

"O God, have mercy on us," she cried, wringing her hands. She feared that something terrible might happen.

Suddenly she saw a horse coming dashing up the slope. She recognized the horse when it came nearer. It was covered with foam and only part of the harness was hanging on it.

Helga commanded a servant to harness another horse and told him to take her to Elverud as fast as possible.

When they approached Elverud they came to a sharp turn in the road. On one side was a deep gulch. A row of large stones had been placed on the brink of the gulch. A buggy, all smashed to pieces, was hanging on one of the stones.

Helga jumped out of the buggy, ran over to the brink and called loudly: "Thorgrim! Thorgrim!" Only the roar of the river came back to her.

"Drive to Elverud and ask them to come and bring ropes," she called to the servant, "and tell Olaf to come at once."

Then she began to climb down the precipice, taking hold of trees and bushes and trying to find a place for her feet. She noticed that something had rolled down. Bushes were bent and stones had been torn loose. On a sharp stone she saw blood. Further down she saw several red stones.

“Thorgrim! Thorgrim!” she shouted. No answer. A stone higher up loosened and struck her in the face. Her foot slipped, but clung to the root of a tree.

Looking down she caught sight of Thorgrim. He was lying against a tree with upturned, bloody face. She dared not go any further.

Stones and gravel began to roll down to her. She saw Olaf coming down with a rope round his body and caught sight of several men on the brink. Soon Olaf was at her side.

“There he lies, go down and see if he is alive,” she whispered hoarsely.

Another man was being lowered down. “He is alive,” cried the man when he came down to Thorgrim.

Slowly Thorgrim was brought up to the road. His face and hands were covered with blood and his clothes were torn to tatters.

Thorgrim was brought to Elverud, followed by a large and quiet crowd of young people. He was placed on a bed. He began to mumble something. Helga bent down to listen. He was cursing his son. With an oath on his lips he died. Died as he had lived.

18. Lars Goes To America.

IT WAS DECIDED that Lars was to go to America together with an “American” who had visited the parish during the winter.

And now took place at Lee what had taken place at thousands of homes in Norway since the “America fever” had entered the land. Days of silent anguish and nights of troubled sleep followed each other fast, inexplicably fast. The day of departure drew near, oh, so near.

Anne tried to be brave as she was busy sewing and mending. Never given to much speech, she found it difficult to express the thoughts in her mind and in her heart. She prayed much in silence but did not trust herself to pray aloud in the presence of her son. But when she looked at him, especially when he did not notice it, her eyes spoke the language of a mother’s unutterable love.

Lars also tried to be brave in the presence of his mother, but when alone he often cried. When sitting under the big pine tree he would read in the Testament which his teacher had given him, and the words fell like a benediction on his soul. It was easy to pray now. In his great need he found a great God in a very simple way.

The day before leaving, Lars climbed the highest mountain peak. From there he could see the Grønlee “sæter,” where he spent one glorious summer. He could see the cabin at the foot of the slope. He remembered the many nights he had listened to the sound of the rise and fall of the waterfall and the tinkling of cowbells. He could see the high knoll where he had met the girl from America and he remembered that it was there he for the first time had been seized with a longing to go to the land of Lincoln, the land of liberty and opportunity. Olga! The name sounded sweetly as the sound of a silver bell. Soon he might have an opportunity to see her again. But he knew of one she would rather see. Olaf. Had she not given him her picture? Olaf and Olga. Yes, that sounded well.

Was Lars ever again to see Grønlee “sæter?” Was he ever again to wander through the forests with their mysterious sounds, their flowers, their

lights and shadows, their flash of wings and sweet songs? Was he ever again to stand on the highest mountain peaks and bathe his soul in the beauty of the sunset and feel the presence of the living God?

“Don’t leave, don’t leave,” came the whisper from distant peaks and somber glens.

And as he returned home through the forest, the pines sang sadly: “Don’t leave, don’t leave,” and the song was taken up by the flowers, the heather, and the birds in the tree tops. “Don’t leave, don’t leave.”

Early the next morning he went down to the stable and petted the cow, the calf, and the sheep. They looked at him as if they understood that he was going away. There was such a sad expression in their eyes when he stood by the door and looked at them for the last time.

Oh, how could he leave them, how could he leave mother?

A man from Storlee had arrived with horse and buggy to bring him and his little wooden trunk to the dock at the lower end of the parish.

Anne had placed upon the table the best food in the house, but Lars could hardly taste it.

“You must eat, boy,” said the man. “It’s far to America.” He started to laugh, but stopped abruptly.

Then looking at his watch the man remarked as to himself, “I guess we had better start.” He picked up the trunk and carried it out.

Lars stood up but remained standing in the middle of the floor. His mother stood by the window looking through it with eyes that did not see. She wanted to say something to her son that she had planned to say for many days, but now she could not find the right words. And Lars was also trying to say something to his mother which he had thought of saying. But his heart was too full for words.

His mother turned slowly toward him. “In Jesus’ name, now you must go, Lars.”

He stretched forth his hand. She grasped it with one hand. Then with both hands——

The man sat in the buggy, looking at the distant mountains. Lars stepped into the buggy. The man tugged gently at the reins and the horse began to move slowly——

Lars did not turn around to look back before he came to a bend in the road. His mother was standing in the open door with folded hands.

“We are certainly having fine weather,” remarked the man, but Lars made no reply.

When they came to Storlee there stood Helga and Olaf.

The man stopped the horse and Helga stepped up to Lars and said: “Lars, I wish to talk to you just a minute.” Lars stepped down to her and they walked away a few steps.

“Goodbye, Lars; you have been a fine boy. God bless you. I’ll look after your mother. One thing I want you to promise me. If Olaf comes to America, will you be his best friend then as you have always been his best friend? He will need you, Lars.”

Lars went over to Olaf. When Olaf gave Lars his hand he held in it a small, thin package. Lars put it in his pocket.

“We must hurry up,” said the man; “otherwise Lars won’t get to America in a hundred years.”

When Lars came on board the little steamer, he opened the package. It was the picture of the girl from America.

About two or three weeks later an immigrant boat was slowly entering New York harbor. The deck was crowded with immigrants. The hardships of the journey were forgotten. There were smiles on all faces, and laughter and loud excited voices rose and fell like the waves of the sea.

“Lars, look at the statue of liberty. That’s the grandest monument in the world. Liberty—that’s America,” cried the “American.”

As Lars looked at the gigantic statue with its uplifted torch, a great joy swept through his soul.

19. A Trace Of The Lost Uncle.

LATE ONE AFTERNOON Lars stepped off the train at a town called New Norway. A man came up to him.

“Welcome to America, Lars. I could have picked you out in a crowd of a thousand people. You look so much like your uncle Halvor.” The man shook his hand heartily, patted him on the shoulder and laughed all the time.

They stopped outside a large house at the outskirts of the town. A smiling, motherly looking woman came out on the porch. “Welcome to America, Lars,” she said so heartily that Lars knew he had found good friends.

When they entered the house Lars thought he had never seen a finer home. Not even the parsonage could be compared with it. There was cloth with large decorations covering the whole floor, shades and curtains before the windows, large pictures in golden frames on the walls, and when he sat down in a large rocking chair it was as soft as a feather bed.

When he had washed he was asked to have supper with the family.

“Many thanks, but you should not bother. I am not hungry,” said Lars.

Thorsten Berge laughed aloud. “Lars, you are in America now.”

Lars was hungry and he had never tasted a better meal. But every now and then he stopped eating, and Mrs. Berge urged him to eat more. When he wanted more bread he half arose from his chair and reached half way down the table for it. Else, the young daughter, made big eyes, but Mrs. Berge gave her a knowing look.

As they were leaving the table, Lars did not forget his manners. He took each member of the family by the hand and thanked them for “the food.”

“I thought he was going to say goodbye,” whispered Else to her mother when they had gone into the kitchen.

Thorsten asked Lars to sit down on the sofa with him and tell him about Norway.

When Else had been in the dining room and carried out some dishes she remarked to her mother: “Father and Lars are talking about heaven. Heaven is in Norway, isn’t it, mother?”

Lars was a little bashful to begin with, but when he noticed how interested Thorsten was in every bit of information about things and persons in his parish, he forgot that he was talking to a man he had met only a few hours ago, and talked with growing enthusiasm.

Thorsten went over to a cabinet and took out a large picture. There were photographs of about twenty young men.

He handed it to Lars and asked him if he knew any of the young men.

"That is you," said Lars and pointed to a photograph. Suddenly Lars turned pale. "Who is that?" he asked excitedly.

"It seems to me he looks like you," remarked Thorsten.

"Is that my uncle Halvor?" Lars asked, turning to Thorsten.

"Yes, that's Halvor Lee. I thought you had seen the picture before. Probably Halvor took the picture with him when he left home," explained Thorsten.

Then Thorsten went on and told him that he and Halvor had attended the seminary together. Halvor secured a position as teacher, but he left for America. They had corresponded for some time, but after Halvor's leaving home he had not heard from him.

"Do you think Halvor is alive yet?" Lars asked, still looking at the photograph.

"I don't know if he is living now, but I am quite sure that he was alive ten years ago," Thorsten began slowly. "One day while I was waiting for a train in Minneapolis, a lot of people passed through the depot. Suddenly I noticed a man, carrying a small satchel, hurrying toward the door. There was something about his build and gait that reminded me of Halvor Lee. I jumped up and hurried after him, but bumped right against a bulky policeman. He grabbed me by the arm and wanted to know what I was thinking about. By the time I had explained and apologized, the man had disappeared in the crowd outside the depot.

"When I met you at the station this evening I was struck by the very same swing of the body and general appearance.

"I found out that the train had come from Chicago.

"For several days I roamed the streets of Minneapolis and visited every hotel, but no one had registered by the name Halvor Lee. I either was mistaken or he may have changed his name.

"But there is another reason for believing that Halvor was alive ten years ago. Shortly after this the prairie fire destroyed all the houses on the farm

where I then lived. The newspapers were full of news of the fire and the names of settlers who had lost everything were printed. One day I received a letter, post marked Chicago, containing one hundred dollars in paper bills. There was no letter inside. My name and address had been written on a typewriter. There was no clue as to the donor. Without knowing it, I must have thought of Halvor, for the next night I dreamt that he came to me and handed me a letter. I have an idea that Halvor is alive, and who knows but you may find him some day. At least we'll hope so."

20. People Who Had Passed Through A Great Experience.

ON THE FIRST SUNDAY that Lars spent in America, he attended divine service with the Berge family.

“You better go to our church today,” invited Thorsten. “We have no less than three Norwegian churches in this little burg of ours, and as you can’t go to all three of them at once, you might as well go to ours first.”

“I didn’t think there were so many Norwegian people in town that they couldn’t find room in one church,” reflected Lars.

“You are a newcomer, Lars,” laughed Thorsten; “you can’t be expected to know a great deal as yet about affairs in this country, and evidently you don’t.”

“Well, but there aren’t any dissenters in this country, are there?”

“Oh no! Far from it, my boy. We’re all genuine Lutherans—so dyed-in-the-wool that you can’t find anyone to beat us anywhere.”

And if that is the case, why don’t you all use the same church?”

“If I were to attempt to answer that question, my boy, I’m sure we’d come too late for the service today and maybe even for next Sunday’s service. And the worst of it is that most likely I wouldn’t have made things a bit clearer to you by that time than they are now. Perhaps you’ll find the answer yourself some day. And then it may all be, that you won’t have to. Four of our six synods are at present talking about getting together to form a union.”

Mrs. Berge had entered the room, and she overheard Thorsten’s last remark. “Talking about union is correct,” she put in, with emphasis on the word talking. “And talking is all it will ever amount to—that is, as long as the men-folk are to decide the matter.”

“Being a woman, you must be correct, mother,” chuckled Thorsten. “But don’t you know yet that women are to keep silence in the churches?”

“Well, even if they did talk, I don’t suppose there could possibly be any more gibberish than there is without them. For that matter, I don’t think there would be very many churches to keep silence in if it wasn’t for these ignorant women-folk of yours.”

“I guess there is something in that, too,” replied Thorsten. “But now we must not give Lars a sample of a church wrangling right here. He’ll get enough of that sort later. Nevertheless, though, there is going to be a church union some day, you see if there won’t.” With this hopeful prophecy, Thorsten left the house.

The two churches in his home locality in Norway were the only ones that Lars had ever been inside in all his life. One of them, the new one, was light and airy and pleasant, had big windows in it, a high vaulted ceiling, beautiful arches, a nicely carved altar, a fine pulpit. A tall steeple pointed upward to heaven, and the music of the bells in the tower was the most beautiful he had ever heard.

The church that he and the Berges came to this Sunday forenoon was small and low. No tower; no church bells. A pulpit and an altar, true enough, but no altar-painting. The church was fairly well filled.

The man who led the singing was an ordinary day laborer. “In Jesus’ name we shall sing number three,” he announced, and began to clear his throat vigorously.

The singing proceeded fairly well until the audience came to the middle of the verse. Then it became apparent that the leader had started in too high a key. One after another fell by the wayside, and finally the leader himself had to give the thing up. But an old woman in the crowd, nothing daunted, hit the high C and carried the melody on triumphantly. After a few measures, the tune again moved in a lower register and one after another down through the audience again chimed in, and thus the verse came to a successful close.

The leader began to clear his throat once more. And he started in humming, was exploring his way as it were. By and by he came upon the right pitch, and, now the singing went on loud and strong.

An old, tall man now got up, and very slowly, with his head bent low, he stepped to the front of the church. He turned about, over his spectacles looked out upon the audience, folded his hands close on his chest, looked up to the ceiling, and sighed heavily. He moistened his lips with his tongue,

and once more sighed so loudly that he could be heard all over the church. Lars heard several sighs round about him.

And so the man began to pray—slowly, in a subdued voice. But little by little he warmed up, and the words came faster. To begin with, he had used the book language; but presently he fell back upon his dialect. Lars did not understand all the words, but the man's intensely felt earnestness touched him. The praying man was no longer aware that he stood before an audience—he stood face to face with his God, the God he had forgot and had sinned against, the God who nevertheless had come out to seek him, had tenderly invited him to come back, had helped him to walk out of the swamps of sin, and had set his feet, finally, upon the firm foundation of faith. Then the man once more remembered that he was leading the audience in prayer: He prayed that the Spirit of God might speak through the pastor; he prayed for those who had not yet found peace for their soul; he prayed for the little flock who was despised and ridiculed, but who was, nevertheless, blessed—blessed because it was, after all, God's flock.

The pastor was an elderly man, tall, straight, and authoritative. His sermon was a combination of Scriptural exposition, of exhortation, and of the narration of experiences, his own and those of others. He used a peculiar language, thought Lars. When he cited the Bible, he pronounced the words exactly as written—silent letters and all. Every now and then he used forceful and very striking expressions from the dialect.

After the sermon another man stepped forward and prayed. He was of small stature, and had a low, soft voice. There was about his prayer something so touchingly beautiful that Lars felt the tears trickle down his cheeks.

Lars realized that these people were very much like the pietists at home. There was the same earnestness, the same testimony of having lived a life in sin, an awakening and a realization of their lost condition, a new birth and a sudden or gradual assurance of forgiveness of sin.

Deep down in his heart Lars felt that these people were the true Christians of today, and that in order to become such, one must pass through the same experiences and be able to express in words these experiences.

At times his soul had been filled with terror at the thought that he had not been truly converted. Oh, how earnestly he had tried to bring about sorrow of sin! That was the first step, he knew. But he had never succeeded in being terror-stricken on account of his sinful condition.

Was his own mother really a Christian? She never took part in prayer meetings. She had never spoken to him nor to others, as far as he knew, about her conversion. She often read the Bible, and every Sunday she read a sermon by Luther. At times she had read the Lord's Prayer aloud. On the day of his confirmation she tried to pray in her own words, but broke down and cried. She was very religious, and he was sure she loved Jesus, but was she a Christian?

Lars felt that it was almost sacrilege to ask such a question, but the question had come to him time and again.

When not under the spell of the pietists, he had found a certain kind of peace in just turning to God. On the day before his confirmation Even Berge had almost laughed at his worry concerning the different steps in the Way of Salvation as given in the Explanation of Luther's Catechism, and had suggested to him to listen to Jesus' invitation: "Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." That promise had for a while given him great peace.

When, however, his teacher, Thor Kleven, was accused of being an infidel because he had praised Bjørnson and Ibsen, his soul was again filled with doubt and fear. Then he gave up all attempts to become a Christian. What's the use of trying to become a Christian when his beloved teacher had not succeeded?

After his experience at the dance his teacher had somehow become a different man. Perhaps after all he had not been a Christian.

When it had been decided that he was going to America, Lars again turned to God with a hungry heart. He could not help it. It was as natural to pray and read the Testament as it was to breathe the air. A great need, a great God, a simple way to God. This gave him a certain satisfaction, a certain peace, but way down in his heart was the conviction that to become a real Christian one must pass through a great experience.

Thorsten Berge was very much like his brother Even. There was something so cheerful about them. They laughed and joked one minute and talked about God the next. Were there several kinds of Christians in the world?

When Lars had attended his first church service in America, disturbing thoughts again began to fill his mind. He had again come in contact with people who had passed through the great experience.

“Next Sunday you had better attend another Lutheran church,” said Thorsten Berge. “There you will hear doctrine pure and undefiled.”

21. A Service Like The One At Home.

WHEN LARS NEXT SUNDAY forenoon was on his way to Our Saviour's church he caught up with an elderly man, Hans Dalen, whom he had met in Thorsten Herge's store.

"Where are you going this morning?" Mr. Dalen asked him.

"I am going to Our Saviour's church," said Lars as he fell into step with him.

"Are you going to my church? What's up? Why don't you go to Anderson's church with the Berge family?"

"I was there last Sunday. Thorsten said I ought to go to Our Saviour's church today," answered Lars.

"Well, now I have never heard the beat!" exclaimed Mr. Dalen. "So Thorsten wants you to act as a spy! He doesn't want to come himself, so he sends you. I am glad, though, that you come. In our church you will find the same service as in the old country. I don't call the service in Andersons' church a service. It is just an ordinary pietist meeting. And still they call themselves Lutheran! Well, they are queer Lutherans to my way of thinking. If Martin Luther came here he would denounce them as a lot of ignorant hypocrites. What I can't understand is this that Anderson has the cheek to preach when he doesn't know the old languages. He doesn't even know the Norwegian book language. The ministers in our synod have all studied the old languages."

Lars had to admit that it was queer that a man could be a minister without having more schooling than the ordinary people, but Anderson's sermon had gripped him and he had heard many laymen preach powerful sermons. It might be all right for unlearned men to preach in the houses, but it did seem strange that they became ministers.

"Were there pietists where you came from?" Mr. Dalen asked abruptly. Lars got the impression that this man did not love pietists.

“Yes, quite a few of them. Our new minister was a pietist himself.”

Mr. Dalen stopped all of a sudden. He glowered at Lars as if he had uttered something sacrilegious. Then he spat a big chew of tobacco far into the street.

“Did your pastor know the old languages?” Mr. Dalen asked sternly.

“I guess he did,” said Lars. “He was a learned man, but he spoke only Norwegian when I heard him.”

“My boy,” said Mr. Dalen and put his hand on Lars’ shoulder, “let me tell you this: a man who has studied the old languages never becomes a pietist and he’ll never have anything to do with them. Only ignorant people become pietists.”

There was something so irritating about the man’s remarks that Lars was on the point of saying that that being the case Mr. Dalen would make a splendid pietist, but he did not dare to say it.

When they entered the church, Lars slipped into a pew in the rear while Mr. Dalen went up in front.

It was a very fine little church, with a beautiful altar and a striking painting of the resurrection. A young woman was playing softly on a small organ. He had heard the melody in his own church at home and a flood of tender memories filled his soul.

The congregational singing was very good. There was also singing by a small choir. This was the first time that Lars had seen and heard a choir, although, as he knew, there were choirs in many churches in Norway. He had never heard anything more beautiful. He understood that the choir sang four parts, and still there was a harmony as soothing as the singing of the birds in the glen at home.

He thought of Olga. Just now she was undoubtedly singing in a choir in Minneapolis. He saw her smiling face and felt the touch of her hand. Then he remembered Olaf, handsome, laughing, dashing. Small wonder that Olga had given him her picture. But why had Olaf given her picture to him?

When the minister began to chant, Lars came to himself with a start. A sense of guilt swept through his soul. Had he not been sitting there in God’s house and thinking of a girl!

The young minister read his sermon. Lars was charmed by the musical cadences of the language. Oh, yes, this was a real minister. There was no doubt about that.

The sermon itself did not interest him very much at first. The minister spoke about the false prophets. We should be very thankful to God, he said, that we have the pure doctrine. That was after all the greatest inheritance we had brought with us from Norway. It was our great privilege and sacred duty to see to it that this inheritance was handed to our children. He was sorry to say that false prophets had made their appearance among the Norwegian people from the very beginning of Norwegian immigration. They had also made their appearance in our dear synod and had led many astray. They taught that man could contribute something to his own salvation. They had left us and formed an organization of their own. It was better so. We must rally around the pure doctrine which had come to us, through the fathers, from Christ and His holy apostles.

Then the minister went on to say that there were other false prophets among the Norwegian Lutheran people. They relied on their own experience instead of on God's grace alone. May God help us to be loyal and true to His Word!

On his way home Lars was very much bewildered. Were there several kinds of Lutherans in the world? And which were right?

"What do you think of the services in Our Saviour's church?" Thorsten asked him when he entered the house.

"Pretty good," Lars answered, "but I did not know you had so many false prophets among the Norwegians in America. Are you one of them?"

Thorsten laughed uproariously. "It's a good thing you found out, Lars. Now you can be on the lookout for them," Thorsten remarked.

Mrs. Berge shook her head. "Don't be so sarcastic, Thorsten. You know you think a great deal of the minister in Our Saviour's church."

"Well, who wouldn't?" Thorsten asked.

Then she turned to Lars: "Did the minister read his sermon today, too?"

"Yes, I think he read it, at least part of the time."

Thorsten spoke up: "Mother, don't you say anything about written sermons to me. I'd rather listen to a written sermon than a sermon that rambles all over creation. A written sermon shows that the minister has been studying and does not rely on the inspiration of the moment."

"That may be true enough," Mrs. Berge shot back as she hurried toward the kitchen. "But if the minister can't remember his sermon, how can he expect others to remember it?"

Lars had written several letters to his mother and he now began to look for a letter from her.

It finally came. The spelling was not according to the rules, sometimes the nouns were written with small letters and the verbs with capital letters, and punctuation marks were rather scarce, but it was a letter from mother. Lars read it over and over again, till he knew it by heart, and what he read between the lines was even more significant and pathetic than the words themselves.

She began by saying that she had received two of his letters, and that she had thanked God for keeping His protecting hand over her boy. She knew it was God's will that he had gone to America where he might continue to go to school. In a few years he would return home.

The cow and the calf and all the sheep had been sent to Grønlee "sæter." She had been up there one day, and the cow was so glad to see her that Anne had to put her arm round her neck and cry. The cow had to be put in the barn when she, Anne, was going home, and she could hear her lowing till she had crossed the river.

She was alone now with only the cat and the kittens for company. He ought to see them play in the sunshine in front of the house!

Often she went over to the big pine tree. She loved to listen to the sighing of the winds in the branches, only it sounded more sad than ever before. She had picked a flower that she knew Lars liked, and she was enclosing it in the letter.

Helga Storlee had asked her to send Lars her best regards. Poor Helga, it seemed that she was to have nothing but sorrow in her life. Olaf had been staying at home a while after his father's death, but now he had begun to run to dances again. He had come home drunk several times, and his mother had no power over him.

Now Anne was more sure than ever that her brother Halvor was alive. Some day Lars would find him. Then they would come home together.

There were so many things she had intended to write to him, but she could not find the right words. She prayed for him every day, and it was a great consolation to know that while she was praying for him here at Lee, the good God would bless her son so far away from home.

One day Thorsten Berge returned from a trip to Minneapolis.

"I met some people who knew you, Lars; I was to bring you greetings from Anders Haugen and his daughter Olga," said Thorsten. "You never

told me that they had been in Norway last summer.”

“I didn’t know you knew them,” said Lars turning very red in his face.

“Yes, I know the Haugen family well. I stayed with them a whole week when I was delegate to our annual synodical meeting. Olga asked me to tell you that she had received a letter from a boy in Norway. I have forgotten his name now. He had written that he intended to come to America some day.”

Lars turned even more red at this bit of news. Thorsten suspected that there might be some special reason for Lars’s confusion and began to talk about something else.

Lars had kept Olga’s picture uppermost in his trunk. He often looked at it and wondered if he should write to her. When he again came up to his room, he put the picture at the bottom of his trunk. But the next night he dreamt that Olga was walking in through an open door in the mountain and that the door closed with a bang right in front of him as he ran after her to keep her back.

22. She Had Forgotten How To Laugh.

“I’M SORRY, LARS, but now you had better keep your promise. Mr. Skogen is not an easy man to work for. He does not spare himself and he certainly has not spared his wife and two boys. We have societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. We ought also to have societies for the prevention of cruelty to farmers’ wives and children.”

Thus spoke Thorsten Berge in his usually slashing manner, when Lars told him that he was going to work for Mr. Skogen till school opened.

“I thought Mr. Skogen was a very good man; he made a very nice prayer at the last prayer meeting,” Lars remarked.

“I didn’t say anything about his prayers,” Thorsten answered with considerable heat. “I spoke of his cruelty to his wife and boys.”

Lars had not stayed very long with the Skogen family before he regretted coming there.

Mrs. Skogen was a small and frail woman. She moved about the house like a shadow. Some years ago she had done farm work almost like a hired man. Now she was unable to do so. Her hands, however, were more than full, early and late, with the care of the cattle, the household washing, sewing and cooking.

There were two boys in the family, both younger than Lars. They stooped when walking, their steps being long and heavy as if they were following the plow. Their hands were large and rough, their faces dull. They had had but little schooling, read English poorly, but knew Norwegian well. The latter they could thank their mother for.

One evening, after the close of the day’s work, Lars was examining the few books which stood on a little bookshelf in the parlor. This small library consisted of a Bible, a collection of sermons, four or five other religious books, a calendar and a few copies of a church paper.

Mrs. Skogen stood behind him while he examined the books.

“Have you not any books for the boys?” Lars asked and turned toward her.

She looked away from while she was fumbling with her apron.

“There isn’t much time for reading on the farm,” she answered. “They don’t seem to care much for it, either.”

“Don’t you have Asbjornson’s and Moe’s Fairy Tales?”

“Oh, my no. Kjetil wouldn’t want them to read fairy tales,” she said, and turned away from him.

Lars realized that it was best not to say anything more on this subject, but he formed a resolution which he intended to follow next time he went to town.

The following Sunday when Lars attended service in town, he made use of the opportunity to obtain a copy of the book of fairy tales.

During the afternoon, while Kjetil was taking a nap, Lars and the two boys went up to the hay loft. Lars wanted to read them a fairy tale. He selected the best story in the book.

“Oh, that isn’t a true story,” cried the older boy. “Why don’t you get us a copy of Jesse James?”

Suddenly Kjetil stood in front of them. He grabbed the book from Lars’s hand and looked at it.

“So this is the swill you give my boys. Next time I suppose you will bring them a copy of Bjornson’s stories.”

He put the book in his pocket and climbed down the ladder.

Then the older boy shook his fist after his father, and hissed: “Hypocrite!”

“You must not talk that way about your father,” Lars admonished him.

“I don’t care,” sobbed the boy, “if it were not for mother I would leave home this very night.”

Had it not been for the kindness which Mrs. Skogen and the boys had shown him, and the pity he felt for them, Lars would have found it impossible to remain the whole summer.

When they had a leisure hour, which was not very often, the boys followed Lars like dogs. In the presence of their father they seldom spoke, but when alone with Lars they kept up a constant flow of conversation.

Late in the evening, after Mr. Skogen and the two boys had retired, Lars would sometimes sit in the kitchen and talk with Mrs. Skogen. As a rule Lars did most of the talking, but once when he had related some humorous

incidents from his life on the mountain pastures, she laughed aloud for the first time since he had come to the house. There was something uncanny about her laughter. She had forgotten how to laugh.

Then hurriedly, nervously, half laughing and half crying she told of an experience she had had while herding cattle in Norway. Gradually she grew more calm, and Lars listened with fascination mingled with awe as she described incident upon incident from her happy youth.

One night Lars was awakened by someone rushing noisily upstairs to his room.

“Lars, you must hurry up and fetch the doctor. You know where he lives. Mari is ill—she is dying.”

It was Mr. Skogen who cried thus in despair. Then he called the boys to come to their mother at once.

Lars got into his clothes as fast as possible. He glanced into the room where Mrs. Skogen was lying. In the dim lamplight he noticed that she was deadly pale and that she gasped for breath.

“Take Fanny and ride as fast as you can,” called Mr. Skogen.

Lars raced to the stable and in a few minutes he shot out of the yard on Fanny’s back. It was six miles to town. When Lars drew the reins at Dr. Larson’s home the horse was white with lather.

Dr. Larson had a team. Lars sat with him, and Fanny followed the buggy on the return trip.

“I have expected this for some time,” said the doctor. “Mrs. Skogen is like a worn-out machine. God alone knows how many of these farmer’s wives hold out so long. A fellow like that hypocrite Skogen ought to be hanged. He is a rich man but cannot afford to hire a girl. It is his wife who has helped him to become a wealthy man; but she receives not as much as thanks. When once I told him that she ought to take a trip to Norway and visit her aged parents and get a little flesh on her bones, he stared at me as if I had asked him to give up his life for her sake. If she dies now, there will undoubtedly be flowers and prayers—tears and a fine sermon. Though they arrange it as nicely as they please, Mr. Skogen is still a murderer before God. Maybe you think that I don’t believe in a God. Yes, I believe in a God—but it is not Mr. Skogen’s God.”

It did not take a long time to reach the farm. Mr. Skogen met the doctor in the yard.

“I thank you for coming so quickly. You must do your best for her.”

Dr. Larson did not seem to see or hear him. He ran into the house. When Lars had taken care of the horses, he went shortly up to the house. After awhile the doctor asked Mr. Skogen to come outside with him.

“Is there any hope for her?” he inquired of the doctor in a thick voice.

“There would have been much hope for her if you had followed my advice long since,” answered the doctor and looked him squarely in the face. “But you could not afford it—you said. Your money was dearer to you than your wife. You have forgotten that she toiled like a slave for you these many years—and the only reward for it all has been your scoldings, the reading of long sermons and pious talk. Now it is too late; it is only a question of a short time. The poor heart is worn out. Soon it will find rest; but you are a murderer before God!” Skogen’s face grew white; then the blood rushed to his head; he lifted his hand as if to strike, but the arm fell as if paralyzed to his side. “Lord have mercy upon me,” he prayed.

“Yes, that’s right, begin your prayers now,” said the doctor sarcastically. “For a sin like the one you have committed against your wife during all the past years there is no forgiveness. The hottest hell is too good for such tyrants like you.”

“Doctor Larson, Doctor Larson, for God’s sake don’t talk thus. Is there no hope for her, doctor? I am willing to give away all I have if she only can be well again.”

“Yes, so you say now; but if she should recover how long would it take before she is back to the same slavery?”

The doctor turned away from him and entered the house. Mr. Skogen remained standing on the same spot for a long time. He stood there like a crushed man, ready to collapse.

Then he walked slowly and with bent head to the barn. He threw himself on his face upon the bare floor. He wanted to pray, but found no words; he pounded the floor with his hands. “Murderer, you are a murderer!” resounded again and again in his ears. At last he arose and stumbled into the house. Mrs. Skogen seemed to be a little brighter.

“Is she better?” he whispered to the physician who shook his head only. Mr. Skogen approached the bed slowly. He sought to find her hand, but the doctor pushed him over. “Will you kill her?” he whispered into his ear.

Mr. Skogen fell on his knees at the bedside. He clasped his hands on her breast. "O, God, how frail and thin she is," he thought, and again the doctor's terrible accusation sounded like a judgment day through his soul.

"Mari! Mari! can you forgive me? You must not die. If you die, I become your murderer. O God, how I have sinned against you and our boys. I who preached to you have never been worthy of you. O miserable sinner that I am! O Mari, Mari!" His head dropped upon the edge of the bed.

Then a thin emaciated hand stole slowly and uncertainly over the bed quilt. It found the large head and began to stroke its coarse shock of hair. Then the strong man wept until he shook like an aspen leaf. The doctor turned toward the window. The sun was rising. A meadow lark sent forth its first mellow note. "I have nothing to forgive," she whispered. "You have been ————." Then she paused, but the words came like the cut of a whip upon her husband's heart. He arose slowly and laid his fumbling hand upon his wife's forehead. She grasped it with both hers and kissed it.

"Hush, she sleeps," whispered the physician and made signs that they should leave the room. The boys had looked at the scene with growing amazement. Thus they had never seen their father before. On tiptoe they passed into the next room, followed by their father. The doctor and Lars went outside.

Then the father drew near to his sons and said: "My boys, can you ever forgive me? I have been trying to take both your life and your mother's." The older looked at him with resentment, but the younger son threw himself into his father's arms and wept.

"Do you believe she is going to live?" asked Lars as he and the doctor stood in the yard.

"If I believed it, I would not tell it to him," said the doctor. "I was quite severe with him, but the heavy hammer strokes of the law, as Pastor Anderson says, are necessary in such cases. So many of our farmers came from a state of serfdom. They endured hardships for many years; they became accustomed to scrimp and save; it has entered their blood. They allow neither themselves nor their families any rest. One should expect a little more wisdom from these pious folk, but they excuse it by saying that they must be true stewards of God's manifold gifts."

During the afternoon Mr. Skogen went to his nearest neighbor and asked his oldest daughter to assist with the housework until he could obtain a servant girl.

Doctor Larson sent a nurse to the Skogen farm the same afternoon. He gave Mr. Skogen a long list of things which she needed.

“It will cost seventy-five dollars,” he said. Lars had to drive to town to make the purchases. He brought cash along.

Mrs. Skogen hovered between life and death for many days. Her husband kept himself at home the whole time, although there was much to do on the farm.

When he was given permission he sat by the sickbed, and—when the nurse did not see it—patted his wife’s hands.

As he sat there one day, the older son peeped into the room. When he discovered his father there, he withdrew suddenly. But his mother had noticed him and sent the nurse after him. He refused to enter the room, but the nurse took him by the nape of the neck and said: “Go in, young fellow.” A little while after both father and son came out. The boy cried and his father cried, but the latter’s arm lay lovingly about his son’s neck.

One day Doctor Larson declared that Mrs. Skogen was out of danger. Then her husband came into the sickroom and told her that next spring they would take a trip together to Norway. “Today your maid will be here,” he said. Then he went over to a trunk and took out a book. He gave Lars a ten dollar note and said: “I wish to buy this book for my boys. You may be able to get one in its place.”

“I have not much faith in conversions,” said Dr. Larson to Lars when he had seated himself in the buggy, “and I am not so sure how long this will last. I know this, however, that Mr. Skogen is going to take his wife to Norway. I’ll see to that. I am not much on preaching the gospel, but I know something about preaching the law.”

23. Shaken By Doubts.

DURING THE NEXT FOUR YEARS Lars attended school in the winter time, the first winter the common school in New Norway, the other winters a church school.

On his way to the church school the first year Lars stopped over Sunday in Minneapolis. He was in company with a student who insisted on going to the church where Olga Haugen was a member. Lars wanted to go to another church, but the student took him by the arm and said: "You come with me, young man, and I'll show you the most beautiful girl in America, and she is a mighty fine singer too."

The student went up to one of the front pews but Lars found a seat behind a post in the rear pew.

When the choir filed in, Lars saw Olga Haugen for the first time in America. Her hair was as unruly as ever, and the smile the same half-roguish, half-friendly smile.

The sermon was very eloquent and gripping, but Lars heard only snatches of it. When he did not look at the post in front of him, he stole a glimpse at the choir, and then ducked behind the post.

When the choir sang, Lars heard only one voice. It was the voice he had heard on the mountain side in Norway. Later Olga sang a solo. All that Lars had longed for and prayed for found expression in the song, as it rang through the church that day. He leaned to one side and looked straight at the singer. She saw him. For a moment she became confused and the audience thought she was going to break down, but the next moment she had regained control of herself and she finished the hymn with a fervor that brought tears to many eyes.

At the close of the service the student rushed up to her. But she barely shook his hand and hurried down to Lars.

"Hello, Lars; Why haven't you called on me—on us— before?"

Lars was so bewildered that he did not know what to say. Fortunately Anders Haugen came over to him, shook his hand heartily and said: "The

students must come with us.”

On the way from church Lars and Olga walked together. “So you are going to the seminary, Lars? I always thought you were going to become a minister,” she said in her brisk manner.

In the afternoon Olga and the student sang several duets together. Suddenly she turned to Lars and said: “Don’t you sing, Lars?”

Lars shook his head. He had never felt more uncomfortable. What a fool he was to travel together with this student! Next time he passed through Minneapolis he would go alone.

“Let’s go down to the park, Lars,” cried Olga. “I’ll show you some beautiful flowers, more beautiful than you ever showed me at Grønlee. And there are birds too.”

At first Lars had little to say, but when Olga pointed to a bird saying she did not know its name, Lars could tell her; for with the help of a book in Thorsten Berge’s library he had learned the name of all the birds in and outside of Norway.

His bashfulness left him at once. He told her about the many new birds and flowers he had found in America and ended by describing a beautiful sunset he had seen one day when driving across the prairie.

“You haven’t forgotten to tell things, Lars. You’ll make a splendid minister,” said Olga. But Lars became again bashful and confused.

“I suppose you know that Olaf Storlee intends to come to America,” she remarked casually. “I don’t understand what he wants to come to America for. Some day he will be the owner of Storlee. Have you heard that he drinks?”

“Perhaps he thinks it will be easier to quit drinking here,” said Lars. “Or perhaps there may be another reason.” He looked at her and smiled.

“What do you mean by that, Lars?” It was now Olga’s turn to become red in the face.

Just then Anders Haugen and the student came toward them.

Lars had hoped that his doubts would disappear when he had been some time at the church school. It worked the other way.

The students could be divided, he soon discovered, into two groups: On the one hand were the theological students and quite a number of students in the preparatory department who were outspoken in their Christian views and experiences. They were saved and they knew they were saved and they were very much concerned about the students who were not saved. On the

other hand were the students who had taken no definite stand; some were seekers after the truth, others were very outspoken in their criticism and ridicule of the “long faced” and “narrow minded” confessing Christians.

Lars did not feel at home with any particular group. Occasionally he attended the weekly prayer meetings, but as he did not take part he felt he did not belong there.

Three summers he taught parochial school in New Norway. At times he felt that he had no right to teach religion when he did not know whether he was a Christian or not, but Thorsten Berge encouraged him to continue, saying: “There is nothing that will be of greater help to you than to study and teach the Word of God.”

The last year he attended the church school Lars came face to face with new problems.

He began to read agnostic literature supplied him by a classmate, and the more he read the more he began to doubt some of the things which he had been taught from childhood.

Was it true that the world had been created only four thousand years before Christ when geology seemed to indicate that the earth was millions of years old? And what about evolution? Was every word in the Bible inspired by God? How could Christ’s physical body and blood be really present in the Lord’s supper? Was baptism more than a ceremony? How could a God who was love send the heathen to hell to suffer through all eternity although they had never heard about Christ and consequently could not believe in Christ?

During the Easter vacation Lars visited the Berge family. He had been intending to speak to one of the professors and to the local pastor about his doubts, but he was afraid they might condemn him as an agnostic. There was one man to whom, he could go without fear of being misunderstood. That was Thorsten Berge.

Thorsten sensed that something was troubling Lars’s mind, and after supper he asked him to go up to his den where they might talk undisturbed.

This den was really a library. It was the choicest library which Lars had ever seen in the home of a layman.

“Well, Lars, what’s on your mind?” Thorsten asked when they had seated themselves.

Lars did not know how to begin, but Thorsten was so frank and sympathetic that he told him all his doubts.

Thorsten sat and listened to him with closed eyes. Once Lars thought he heard him sigh and he saw tears trickle down his face. Was it possible that Thorsten, too, thought that he had become a prodigal son, a heretic, an agnostic? God knew how he had fought against these doubts and how he had prayed to get rid of them. He had struggled so hard to become a Christian, and he was further away than ever.

When Lars was finally through, Thorsten Berge opened his eyes and looked at him with a smile.

"Lars, my young friend, I am glad you have shown me this confidence. I want to be very frank with you. I may say things which will hurt you, but I do it because I want to help you.

"I cannot solve the problems for you. You must solve them yourself with the help of one who is wiser than I am. I have felt several times that I should have spoken to you about these and other matters, but I was afraid that you might rely on my words and make my experience your standard. You have had enough trouble with people who wanted to create your spiritual life in their image. Much harm is being done to young people in our church just that way. On the other hand much harm is done on the part of us older people by not winning the confidence of the young people. I know I could have come to clarity much sooner had I had the opportunity to pour out my heart to a Christian friend.

"I do not blame you for doubting. It is good for a young man to doubt, but it becomes dangerous when he refuses to seek light where light alone is found and when he becomes proud of his doubts.

"May I briefly tell you my personal views and experiences? Not as a standard, but as a guide. And by the way, serious as your problems are, you will meet problems in your Christian life which go deeper than these. These are mainly intellectual. The spiritual problems are the real ones which test the soul.

"So you have become interested in evolution or rather in the theory of evolution? That question, if ever settled, will be settled by scientific research and not by debates. The most serious phase of the theory of evolution is the implication that there is no need of the atonement of Christ. But this I know that I need that atonement, and all the scientists in the world cannot supply that need by anything they may tell me. Christ can; Christ has. Keep your mind open to the truth, Lars. Truth will vindicate itself. But beware of false and foolish prophets who pose as scientists.

"As to the age of the world, the Bible says that in the beginning God created heaven and earth. That is not very definite, but it is all we need to know. God is the creator; we are his creatures. Why should we figure out with pencil and paper what He does not require us to do?

"As to the verbal inspiration of the Bible, that troubled me a great deal as long as I read arguments pro and con. Then I read the Bible to find the way of salvation, and the conviction grew, till it became overwhelming, that the Bible in some way or other is inspired. How, nobody knows, and nobody should try to explain it to others. When Infinite mind speaks to finite mind through weak human language, which at best is a poor vehicle for thought, we have no business to formulate definitions and dogmas and demand others to subscribe to them.

"The same applies to the sacraments. In His infinite mercy God wants to bring us, children of the dust, spiritual blessings. When He in His Wisdom makes use of water and bread and wine, together with His living and life-giving Word, it is for us to accept the blessings in deep humility and with grateful hearts. How He does it, He has not explained to us. He could not explain it to us if He wanted to. Human language breaks down under the weight of eternal truth. It is a mystery and not a problem. Christ instituted the two sacraments. That's all. Shall I deny or neglect what my poor brain cannot understand?

"Are the heathen going to hell? A man asked Spurgeon that question. 'I don't know,' Spurgeon answered, 'but I know I'll go to hell if I don't have a part in sending them the Gospel.' We'll have to leave that to God. A missionary told me that the first time he went to China, he went there to save the heathen from hell. 'Now,' he said, 'I am going back, because it is the will of God!'

"But, Lars, there is another question of more importance than any question you have asked. When that is settled, the other questions will not trouble you much. I have felt that you have dodged that question. Lars, just what does Christ mean to you? Forget your doubts for a minute. What does Christ mean to you, Lars Lee?"

Lars grew red in the face. Thorsten was putting his finger on a sore spot.

"I don't know if I am a Christian or not," he finally answered.

"That does not answer my question. You are dodging. Quit digging in your own heart for proof that you are a Christian. You are looking in the wrong direction. You are looking at yourself and not at Christ. You become

a Christian when you become Christ's. When you go to Him with your intellectual doubts, but above all when you go to Him with yourself, your unbelief, your cold and unrepenting heart, your sin, your sinfulness, He will save you from yourself, for Himself, in His own way. He is the way. You are not going to Him with your whole self. You will go to Him when you have to go, when you must go. You have been trying to make yourself a Christian according to your own plans; you have not realized that the Holy Spirit has been trying to make you Christ's. So you have withstood the Holy Spirit. That is your great trouble."

"But I have to believe, don't I? And I must know whether I am a Christian or not?" Lars asked with some irritation.

"Lars, look here, you must go to Christ whether you are a Christian or not! As to faith, that is a gift of God. Did you hear that? Faith is the gift of God. And so is assurance, thank God! God gives us faith, creates in us faith, when we read and hear His Word with a prayerful heart. If you cannot pray, read anyway and you will pray. You have been reading what the enemies of God have written. You have discussed the Bible with people who know very little about the Bible. You are not reading the Bible to find life. Is that fair to God? Is that fair to yourself? You are playing a dangerous game. You are gambling with your own soul, and the devil is doing all he can that you may be the loser.

"Pardon me for talking so much. We poor mortals have the idea that we can solve the mysteries of life with a lot of words. Just this: In the Word of God you come face to face with Christ. Why don't you have a meeting with Him, Lars?"

Later on in the evening, going past Thorsten's den, Lars heard Thorsten speak with some one. He was praying. He heard him mention his name. That gripped him more than all Thorsten had said to him.

24. Two Letters From Helga Storlee.

WHEN LARS CAME BACK to the seminary, he found a letter from Norway. He recognized the handwriting of Helga Storlee. She had not written him before. Something special must have happened.

Tearing the letter open, he noticed a crude little cross drawn at the top of the first page. That had but one meaning. He read:

"Dear young friend:

"Lars, now you must be brave. I have a sad message for you. Your dear mother has passed away—"

The blow struck him with stunning force. He stared at the words with unseeing eyes. Then he gasped for breath, staggered over to the bed, and, violent sobs shaking his body, buried his face in the pillow.

"Mother, O mother—"

After a while he got up and finished reading the letter, but every now and then the words blurred before his eyes.

"As you know, your mother has been failing of late. She was really in poorer health when she wrote you some time ago than she cared to admit. She wanted to spare you from anxiety. That was her way.

"About a month ago she grew weaker, and she realized that the end was not very far off. It was hard for her to be reconciled to the thought that she was not to meet you again in this life, but she rejoiced in the knowledge that she would meet you in the land where there is no parting.

"Your mother was not much given to talking about spiritual matters, but as the end drew near she spoke to all who visited her, with great assurance. I was with her most of the time, and I shall never forget the closing hours of her life.

"When she realized that the time for departure had come, she asked me to turn to the twenty-third psalm. Lars, you know that I have not been a Bible-reading woman, but when I read that psalm I felt that the Good Shepherd was standing at the bed, holding out his open arms to a weary soul. If I had seen Him standing there, seen him with my own eyes, I would not have been startled. When I read the words, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,' a wonderful light came into your mother's eyes and a sweet smile overspread her face. In a strong, clear voice she said, 'I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me.' Before I realized it, she had passed away.

"O, my friend Lars, I know not what to say to you. I pray that God will bring you comfort and consolation in your great sorrow. You had a wonderful mother, sweet and gentle.

"Halvor Saga made a fine casket. 'If ever a woman deserved a fine casket, it is Anna Lee,' he said. She was carried to her final resting place Thursday.

"As friends and neighbors were leaving the hillside, snow began to fall. Before I left, the resting place was covered with a white sheet of snow...

"I am sending you a greeting from Olaf. He was very helpful to me and your mother. I know he was doing it for your sake. I shall write you before very long." Helga Storlee."

Lars knew that his roommate might come any time, and so he slipped out of the room, hurried past students coming and going and sought the solitude of the hills. There are Gethsemanes in the life of every human being when the soul must drink the cup of bitterness alone, all alone. But to the listening ear, in tune with the Infinite, there comes the soft sound of angels' wings.

A couple of weeks later Lars received another letter from Helga Storlee. The burden of it was that Olaf was going to America. He had tried to break away from his evil companions, but had been too weak. She believed that when he got away from his old friends, her son would become a good man. She understood that he had been corresponding with Olga Haugen. It was his intention to go to Minneapolis. Helga said that she had been surprised that Olaf and Lars had not corresponded more. She hoped that Olaf would write him as soon as he arrived at his destination, and that Lars would visit him and do all he could for him.

Lars was not in the mood to give much thought to Olaf and Olga. The mystery of life and the greater mystery of death had again gripped him, and the ordinary things of life did not matter.

He had definitely decided not to teach parochial school this summer. He would not and could not stand in front of little children as a hypocrite. He started out selling books.

A letter from Anders Haugen was forwarded to him. Anders wrote that Olaf Storlee had come to Minneapolis, and that he was sick in a hospital. It was of utmost importance that Lars come to him at once.

When Lars arrived at the Haugen residence next day, Olga met him at the door. She looked pale and excited.

“Oh, Lars, if you had only been here before!” she said.

“Is Olaf—am I too late?”

“Olaf has disappeared, and we have not the slightest idea where he has gone.”

A year passed by and no trace of Olaf had been found. His mother, receiving no letter from him, became almost frantic in her appeals to Lars and others she knew in America to find her son.

Then Lars received a letter, bearing the postmark Chicago. He saw that it was Olaf’s handwriting. The writing had been done in a shaking hand.

"My boyhood friend:

"I did not come to you, now you must come to me. I write these words with a trembling hand as you can see. It is the last letter I shall write. I just finished a letter to mother—

"I wanted to go home and die in my mother’s arms. I wanted to sleep in the soil of my native land. But it is not so to be.

"Let me try to tell you something about myself. You may come too late to see me or I may be too weak to speak to you.

"Here I am in a hospital. Have been here for three weeks. I was on my way home to mother, but was too weak to travel any further. It looked at first as if I were to die among total strangers, but I have found a new friend. I have told him about you and he urged me to write you at once.

"You know what sort of man father was and you know my mother's story. My home was not a happy one, and though I loved my mother I began early, as you remember, to seek pleasure not of the best kind outside my home.

"Then Olga Haugen came. Young as I was I loved her the moment I saw her on the mountainside. I guess she liked you better than she liked me, but you were so bashful and she thought she had offended you and that you were angry. The picture I gave you, I am sure was intended for you. She did not give it to me. I picked it up when it fell out of her pocket. When I saw you for the last time, I gave you the picture, you remember. I felt it belonged to you.

"I corresponded with her for several years, but as I was sinking lower into the mire, I did not dare to tell her what was in my heart.

"Then the thought came to me that if I went to America and met Olga again, it would be easy for me to live a decent life. I knew she was fond of Norway. Perhaps some day she might return with me to Storlee.

"I am writing only a few words at a time and must leave out a good deal I otherwise would have told you.

"Arriving in Minneapolis late one evening I went across the street from the depot to a saloon bearing a Norwegian name. I was tired and thirsty and asked for a drink of water. The saloon keeper told me that the water was not fit to drink. People who drank it died like flies. He offered me a glass of beer.

"One glass led to another. I was helped to a room on second floor and tumbled into bed. During the night I became terribly sick. The next morning when I woke up, Anders Haugen was standing beside the bed. The saloon keeper had found his address in my pocket and had sent for him. I told him what had happened and asked him not to mention it to Olga. He brought me to a hospital where I remained several days. Mr. Haugen called on me every day. He said that when I got well he would send me out in the country to a friend of his.

"One Sunday afternoon I heard some wonderful singing. I recognized the voice. It was the voice I had heard on the mountainside at home. Olga came to the door of the ward and looked in. I heard Anders Haugen saying: 'You had better not go in there. Come this way!' From my bed I caught a glimpse of her. I wanted to call out to her, but the next moment she had disappeared.

"I had to get away from Minneapolis. I did not trust myself. Some day I would return and then no one would need to be ashamed of me. The next day I left the hospital, went to the depot and took the first train for the west.

"Before long I fell in with drinking, carousing men. I shall not tire you with the story of my stay in the west. I did not write to mother or anyone else. One night I had stumbled in an alley. A policeman found me and brought me to the station. I got pneumonia, and later consumption set in. Then I decided to hurry home to mother. When I reached Chicago I was so weak that I had to go to a hospital.

"My doctor is a wonderful man. His name is Dr. Harry Jones. He wants you to come.

"Oh, Lars, come as soon as you can. I have not many days left. I am afraid to die. Pray for me; you have always been a Christian.

"Your friend,"Olaf Storlee."

Time and again Lars had to put the letter aside.

"Poor Olaf, poor Olaf."

25. “Whosoever Cometh.”

THE SAME DAY Lars was on a train bound for Chicago. He read Olaf’s letter and then, closing his eyes, he lived over again his childhood and boyhood, and in many of the scenes which passed through his mind there was Olaf with his bright eyes, his black hair, his hearty laughter.

Suddenly he remembered Olaf’s words: “Pray for me; you have always been a Christian.”

He was on his way to a dying friend who was afraid to die. Yes, he could pray for him, but could he pray with him? Could he show him the way to Christ when he was not sure of the way himself?

Since the memorable talk with Thorsten Berge more than a year ago, Lars had spent much time in reading the Bible. His former doubts had receded into the background, but new doubts had arisen. He had of late been thrown in contact with several confessing Christians who had impressed him as the most disagreeable and even brutal people he had ever met. Just what Christianity had done for them he failed to see. On the other hand he had met people who laid no claim to Christianity, who were among the finest men and women it had been his privilege to know. What did Christianity amount to after all?

While reading one gospel after another he was tremendously impressed by the gentle and at the same time powerful personality of Christ, and his heart went out in love and adoration to the Son of God and Son of Man, but little by little a new and startling question emerged that would not be brushed aside. Just what did Jesus do to save us and how can it save us? He had discussed the question of the atonement with theological students and with pastors. The more he discussed, the more bewildered he became.

But deep down in his heart he felt more and more that the mystery of the atonement carried with it full and complete salvation; new life, new strength. And something tremendously big to live for and work for. There was a great emptiness in his heart. Christ and Christ alone could fill the empty heart. But how and when?

“I am afraid to die!” This cry from his dying friend sounded in his ears as the train rolled and lurched onward.

What should he say to Olaf? Should he act the hypocrite and pretend that he was a Christian, with full assurance? Should he follow his friend into the valley of the shadow of death with lying words on his lips?

“O God, help me, help Olaf!”

Then a thought struck him with terror: Was he in reality asking God to help him, not for his own sake, but for Olaf’s sake?

Utterly bewildered and helpless he muttered: “Dear Jesus, I don’t know what to ask for or what to do.”

From the far off hills of Galilee there came a sweet and tender voice: “Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

He had heard that voice before, and yet he had never heard it.

Lars hurried to the hospital. A nurse showed him Olaf’s room. “He has been waiting for you,” she whispered as she opened the door.

In the bed he saw a very pale, thin face slightly turned toward the window. It was Olaf Storlee, a mere shadow of his former self. As Lars stepped quietly over to the bed, he noticed that Olaf was sleeping. A wave of tenderness swept through his soul for his boyhood friend, and tears filled his eyes. Life had been cruel to Olaf Storlee.

Olaf sensed his presence and turned his face toward him. “Lars, Lars,” he cried and stretched toward him both his hands. “I knew you would come, but, oh, how I have waited for you. I was afraid you would come too late.”

“Now you’ll get well, Olaf, and we’ll go home together,” Lars whispered in a choking voice, but he did not know what he was saying.

Olaf turned his face toward the window, while tears rolled down his face.

A violent coughing spell shook his emaciated body, so that Lars feared he would pass away then and there.

After a while he looked up with a smile and an almost unearthly light in those wonderful eyes of his.

“Yes, it would be fun for you and me to visit the old country. It is beautiful there now at this time of the year. During the last days and nights I have visited every foot of ground at Storlee and Lee. I have smelt the fragrance of flowers and new-mown hay, watched the swallows in their nests under the caves and heard the call of the cuckoo on the mountain side. Once I fell asleep and dreamed that I put my tired head in my mother’s lap and she

stroked my curls and patted me on the cheek. Poor mother, she must have been driven almost crazy when she received no message from me. Have you heard from her?"

Lars did not have the heart to tell him what he knew about his mother's fears and despair. "Yes, she was naturally distressed, but I always felt that sometime you would return to her."

For some time they were both silent. Then Olaf said piteously: "Lars, you must stay with me till—till the end. I want you to pray for me, I am afraid to—"

Another coughing spell seized him leaving him utterly exhausted.

The nurse opened the door and beckoned to Lars.

"You must sleep now, Olaf," Lars said to him, stroking the wet curls on his forehead. "I'll soon come in and see you again. I have prayed for you and will pray for you and with you. Please repeat this precious promise: 'Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'."

"Someone wishes to see you in the office," whispered the nurse to Lars when they came out in the corridor. "Come this way."

Lars entered the office, wondering who it was that wanted to see him. A man was standing over by the window, looking down into the street.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?" Lars asked.

The man remained standing. Finally he turned around. He was a middle-aged man, with pale face and light hair.

He took a step toward Lars, then steadied himself with one hand on the table.

"Lars, do you know me?" he said in a broken voice.

There was something in the man's face that made Lars tremble.

"Yes, you are my uncle Halvor."

The man came over to Lars and threw his arms around his shoulders and began to sob.

Finally he unlocked his arms, put his hand on Lars's forehead and looked him searchingly in the face. "Yes, this is Anne's son."

They sat down and looked at each other without speaking.

"Lars, you are the only relative I have seen for twenty years," Halvor said while fumbling with a book. "That's a long time... but I have not been ignorant of what has taken place. I have read off and on the correspondences in a Norwegian paper from the home parish. I did not know, how-

ever, that you were in this country. How long have you been here and what have you been doing?"

Lars told him hurriedly about himself, adding that Thorsten Berge believed that he had seen Halvor in Minneapolis and that it was he who had sent him the hundred dollars.

"Yes, he may have seen me; I was there once in consultation with another doctor. He got the hundred dollars, did he?" For the first time Halvor smiled.

"Mother always thought you were alive," Lars remarked, "but why did you never write?"

Halvor buried his face in his hands. Without looking up he asked: "You know what happened, don't you?"

Then he went over to the window and looked down into the street. Lars could see how his shoulders heaved and shook. At last he came back and sat down.

"Yes, mother told me all," Lars said quietly.

In Halvor's suite of rooms in a nearby hotel, Halvor told him his story. For years he had buried himself among strangers. He had been a man without a country and without his people. He had tried to forget but not to forgive. He rebelled against God Himself, and had never set foot in a church and never opened a Bible. After making his living by different kinds of work, he had studied medicine and changed his name to Harry Jones. Although he had tried to sever his connection with the past, he dreamed many a night of old friends and relatives and especially of what had wrecked his life and blasted his soul.

Gradually more peace had come to him. His work had become his passion. Then, recently, the old wounds had been torn open, and he had again suffered the pangs of a condemned soul.

A young man had been brought to the hospital. He understood at once that he was Norwegian. He helped the nurse get his history. Looking down into the boy's face he was so powerfully reminded of another face that he had to sit down.

He had spoken to the boy in Norwegian: "What is your name?"

"Olaf Storlee."

He had staggered from the room and walked the streets of Chicago for hours. Her son, her son! What a cruel trick fate was playing him!

The boy was his patient. He must be brave and strong. Going back to the hospital he had summoned all his skill, but he soon realized that there was no hope.

Olaf had told him his story. He told him about his mother and father, about Lars and Olga, about his wanderings in America and his hope to go home to his mother. When Olaf began to realize that he was going to die among strangers and said he was afraid to die, the doctor could stand it no longer.

“Olaf, you are not among strangers. I am your friend. I am Halvor Lee.”

During the night Lars was not able to sleep. His meeting with his uncle had shaken him to the depth of his soul. Every now and then Olaf’s piteous cry, “I want you to pray for me, I am afraid to—” sounded in his ears. He had to get out of bed and kneel down on the floor and pour out his heart for Olaf, for his uncle and for himself.

Then he felt wonderfully strengthened. Early next morning he hurried to Olaf.

Olaf greeted him with a radiant smile. “Lars,” he called out in a surprisingly strong, joyous voice, “thank you for reminding me of that promise. Last night I knew you were praying for me, and for the first time in my life I prayed earnestly for myself. I am sure that God sent me to this hospital where I was to meet Halvor and you. Over and over, the promise you gave me sounded in my ears. Lars, I am not afraid to die.”

The hospital room turned into a holy of holies.

In the afternoon, while the sunshine flooded the room, the doctor whispered to Lars, as they were standing beside the bed: “He is sinking fast.” Lars fell on his knees and put his hand on Olaf’s hand. Olaf was gasping for breath. Suddenly he said in a strong voice: “Mother, mother, I am coming!”

The next day Lars said to his uncle: “Where is he to be buried?”

Halvor put his hand on Lars’s shoulder and looked him in the eyes:

“Olaf’s wish shall be fulfilled. He shall be buried in the soil of his fatherland. Last night I fought the fiercest battle of my life. I am going to bring him home to his mother myself.”

26. A Mother's Gethsemane.

OLAF STORLEE had left his home for America on a beautiful spring morning. The apple trees were decked in white and the sweet fragrance of their blossoms filled the air. Hillsides and meadows were covered with a soft carpet of grass, and birds were pouring forth a perfect flood of melody. Brooks came tumbling down the slopes and filled the whole parish with their music. The river swept majestically onward on its way to the ocean.

Olaf promised his mother to write as soon as he arrived in Minneapolis.

Instead of a letter from Olaf she received one from Anders Haugen to the effect that her son had arrived, but that he had left the city without stating where he had gone.

A year passed by and no news came concerning her son. Then came a letter from him telling her that he was in Chicago, sick and dying. A few days later she received a message from Lars, informing her of her son's death.

The next mail brought another letter from Lars. He had found his uncle Halvor, and Halvor was going to bring her son's body home.

Halfway between Storlee and Lee is a glen where Halvor and Helga had often played in their childhood. On one side is a steep mountain side, covered with moss, heather, tufts of grass and small gnarled birch trees and spruce. At certain times of the year the wall is decked with a profusion of flowers.

About a month after receiving the message from Lars that Halvor Lee was alive and that he was bringing her son home, Helga had gone up to the glen. She had often sought this solitude of late. The last year had been one long torture. Why, oh, why had fate or God been so cruel to her? Separated from her lover, married to a man she despised, her son ruined before her own eyes, her whole life blasted!

The news that Halvor Lee was alive and that she soon was to see him threw her into a wild panic. Why did he return? Was it possible that he was returning for her sake?

As she sat in the glen this day, she remembered the many times she had met Halvor here. For a while the intervening years were forgotten. She was again a young girl listening for Halvor's footsteps as he came down the hillside and across the brook.

Suddenly she heard someone singing. It was an old song, weirdly sad. It was a song Halvor had sung at times when he had thought of the barriers that loomed up between them. It was Halvor's voice!

Helga jumped up and stared at the path on the other side of the brook. Her heart pounded, her breath came in gasps. A man came slowly down to the brook. He stopped and looked up. He saw her.

For a long while they stood there as two statues chiseled out of stone.

Finally Halvor spoke in a choking voice: "Helga, is it you?"

He jumped across the brook and came up to her, stretching forth his hand.

Helga looked at him as if he had risen from the dead.

Then the love of her youth and the sorrows of her womanhood cried out — "Halvor!"

Suddenly she began to tremble and sank down on a stone. She buried her face in her hands.

Halvor stood at her side, silent, helpless.

Finally he touched her shoulder gently and whispered: "Helga, you must not cry so."

But then she cried still harder.

Gradually she became more quiet. She removed her hands from her face and looked straight ahead. Now and then a sob shook her body.

Halvor sat down by her side. She turned toward him, with the old light in her eyes.

"Welcome Halvor. You have been gone so long— And thank you for what you have done for—my son."

"What little I did for him, I did for your sake, Helga. When I looked into his face I knew I was looking into the face of your son."

For a while they sat there silent and looked at each other. There was so much to be said, but human words seemed so empty and futile.

A bird started to sing in a tree near by.

Halvor looked up and laughed. "Well, well, if our bird is not singing yet."

Helga smiled and said: "He has been singing to me every summer."

“I wonder if he has his nest in the same place,” Halvor said and went quietly over to the tree. “Yes, here it is,” he cried, turning to Helga.

He came back to her, stopped at a stone and pointed at it. “Do you remember the time when I carried you over the brook and fell, striking my forehead against this stone?”

Helga stood up, took a step toward him and said earnestly: “Halvor, I remember everything.”

They reminded each other of one incident after another which had taken place in this glen. The door to their happy childhood swung wide open. Over there they had had their pastures with cows and sheep fashioned from cones. By the brookside Halvor had built his dam and his mill. Under the alder bushes the first anemones in the spring had danced in the breeze.

They talked like excited children, feverishly, fast, hardly knowing what they were saying. But every now and then their voices were on the point of breaking.

The evening before the funeral Helga Storlee sat by the coffin in the guest room till far into the night. She sat there like a statue of stone. The cry of millions of parents rose from her heart, “Oh, that I had died in your stead!”

But gradually, in the presence of death, a feeling of resignation came upon her. She knew that her son had left a world of sin and temptations and had entered into glory. She sank on her knees and prayed that she might be given power to forget and forgive. And while she knelt there, stroking the coffin gently with her hands, she tried to thank God, but words failed her. Then she covered her face with her hands and her heart melted in a flood of tears.

The day after the funeral Halvor Lee left the parish. He was going away for some months. He felt that a mother’s sorrow is a sacred sorrow and that the time had not yet come to tell her what had brought him back to his native land.

On his way back from Chicago, Lars Lee had time to review the many experiences he had passed through since receiving the letter from Olaf Storlee.

The impressions which had poured in upon him and the incidents which had taken place had stirred him to the depth of his soul. But beneath all was a feeling of peace, a deep sense of security. All speculations, all doubts, all fears had vanished. There was an open way. He felt a powerful Presence leading him lovingly, gently. The Word of God had become a living word; passages, known from childhood, which had meant very little to him, thrilled him through and through. The way of salvation was no longer a system to be studied and understood. It was something to be received.

One thought filled him with a sense of humility and at the same time with a feeling of unutterable joy: God had made use of him in a very simple way to lead a dying friend to Christ! It was just a word, just a promise. How simple it all was! When we could do nothing, God drew nigh and did everything.

Suddenly, as a flash of lightning reveals a whole landscape on a dark night, he saw his future as a messenger of the Gospel. He had experienced something so precious, so divine, that he must not keep it to himself. It was what the world needed.

For years he had been in doubt as to what life work to choose. The ministry had been out of the question; law, medicine, business did not appeal to him. There was left teaching. But he knew that his heart would not be in it.

In the fall he entered the theological department. He knew it was customary when applying for admission to describe in detail one's spiritual experiences, and to state that one felt a powerful inner call to preach the Gospel. Lars simply wrote that after many years of inner struggle he had found peace with God and that he thought the study of Scriptures under competent teachers would be of great benefit to him. He was not prepared to say what he would do in the future.

There was considerable discussion in the committee whether a man with such indefinite aim should be admitted, but the president said bluntly: "I would rather have such a man study theology than one who feels that he is already a full-fledged minister."

While Olaf lived Lars wanted to give him the right of way. He knew how passionately Olaf loved Olga and he believed that she felt more than kindly toward the impetuous, dashing, handsome lad. She could save him. She could make a man of him. He must not stand in his way.

Shortly after having returned to the seminary, Lars received a letter from his uncle Halvor Lee. The contents of the letter did not surprise Lars. It was

what he had expected. Halvor wrote that upon his return to the parish he had asked Helga Storlee to become his wife. The wedding had just taken place.

“Lars,” he wrote, “for the first time in twenty years I know what happiness means. I never dared to dream that this happiness would come to me. My life had become a burned-out crater. I was a man without God, without kin, without hope. I had vowed never to set my foot on the soil of my native land, but when I heard that Helga was free, all my resolutions crumbled. I knew I would go back to Norway and to Helga.

“Yesterday Helga and I went up to Lee. We walked all over the little farm; we visited every nook and corner. It was just like in days of old when Helga and I played together. I do not think Helga had been so happy since she was a young girl as she was yesterday.”

27. The Boy Who Gave Away His Lunch.

“HELLO, LARS, I am going to your school this summer; aren't you glad?”

“Of course I am glad, but—”

“Sure, pa will let me. He said it was all right when you're the teacher. Say, Lars, I know how to read Norwegian now. Ma had begun to teach me before she— before she died.”

Suddenly the sunshine faded from her face and her voice dropped to a whisper.

“And now, I understand, your papa has been teaching you. Well, I am afraid I can't teach you anything, Hilda,” Lars said laughingly.

Again the sunshine flooded her sweet face. “Lars, you are funny,” she cried, grasped his hand and fairly danced at his side as they approached the little church where the parochial school was to open that morning.

After the opening exercises, Lars took charge of the class to which Hilda Larson had been assigned. He knew that Dr. Larson, her father, would not want her to start in the Catechism class. So Lars put her in the Bible History class for beginners.

Lars held a Bible in his hand and asked the class what book it was. “The Bible,” the children cried in unison.

“This is a big book, as you see,” he said, “too big for you to read through yet. Some good men have picked out the best stories and put them into this Bible History. I know you will enjoy these stories.”

Hilda Larson held up her hand.

“What is it Hilda?” he asked surprised.

“Are they true stories?” she asked rather timidly.

“Why yes, of course they are true,” Lars said earnestly. “The parables, however, are not exactly true; they were told by Jesus to teach us some lesson. But all the other stories are true.”

Some of the children had turned around and looked at Hilda. She realized that she had made a mistake, and her face grew crimson.

When lessons had been assigned, Lars read the following story about the Boy who gave away his lunch:

His name? We do not know. His age? We do not know that either. All we know is that he was a little Boy who gave away his lunch when he was very hungry.

After all, it does not depend on name or age but willingness to serve. The Boy gave away all he had, gladly.

Strange rumors had come to the little hamlet of a miracle man. When the first rumors came, some people shook their head and said it could not be true; others just laughed; still others became angry.

As more and more stories were being told, and sometimes by people who had seen the Miracle Man and his miracles, the Boy was seized with a strong desire to see him. He would like to see him heal the blind, the deaf, and the crippled, but he was not sure that he would like to see him bring the dead back to life or drive out evil spirits. He was quite sure, though, that he would like to hear him tell stories. The Miracle Man was a great story teller, the Boy had been told.

His mother said one day in a hushed voice that perhaps the Miracle Man was the promised Messiah.

Then came the startling news to the hamlet that the Miracle Man was not far away. Many people started at once to see him.

The Boy rushed into the house and told his mother. "Mother, mother, may I go?"

A strange light leapt into her eyes and a faint flush came into her pale cheeks.

"Yes, my boy, you may go, and when you come back, you must tell me all about him. I am sorry I can not go myself."

The Boy wanted to start off at once, but his mother said he had better wait a few minutes, so she could prepare him a lunch.

When the Boy had traveled quite a distance he came to a lake. The further he had gone, the more people were going in the same direction. He noticed that many were carrying crippled children or leading by the hand blind boys and girls.

When the Boy came almost down to the lake, he saw a boat being pushed from the shore. Someone told him that the Miracle Man and his

friends were in the boat.

When the Boy had forced his way through the crowd and came down to the lake, the boat was already quite a distance from shore. He got a good look at the men in the boat. They were strong, sturdy, weather-beaten fellows. One of them looked different from the rest of them. That must be the Miracle Man.

While the crowd was standing there looking at the boat, the Boy noticed that it was headed for the shore toward the left. Others noticed it too, and at once the people started for the place where the boat was going to land. The Boy started to run. Other boys did likewise.

The Miracle Man and his friends had landed and came walking up the hillside. People came now streaming, it seemed, from all directions.

There was a good deal of talking and shouting, but when the Miracle Man came nearer, a great stillness fell upon the multitude. He stopped and looked at the people with such a tender look in his face, that the heart of the little Boy went out to him in love.

When the Miracle Man saw that many had brought with them their sick friends and relatives, he went over to a boy that was blind, put his fingers on his eyes and the boy looked up into a smiling face. Then a mother came with a girl that was deaf. The Miracle Man touched her ears with his fingers and spoke to her in a low voice. The Boy stood nearby, he could not hear what he said, but he noticed that the girl smiled. Then the mother spoke to the girl, and the girl threw herself weeping into her mother's arms.

When the Miracle Man had performed one amazing cure after another, he began to speak to the people. He stood at a place where all could see him and hear him. He talked in a mild, sweet voice. The Boy could not understand all he said, but then the Miracle Man began to tell a story. Then another story. They were stories about birds and flowers, sheep and fishermen. The Boy had never heard anyone tell such interesting stories before.

Then suddenly his voice rang out in angry tones, and it seemed to the Boy that the great crowd swayed like a wheat field in the morning breeze. Then almost as suddenly the voice became mild, and the words fell in cadences as sweet as the lapping of wavelets on a sandy shore.

When he finally finished speaking, he made a sign that the people should depart, but no one moved. Then he turned to one of his friends and said: "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" The man looked surprised. He spread out his hand and said: "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not

sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.” Then some of the other friends stepped closer and said: “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge and get food.”

Send them away!

Then the Miracle Man said: “They need not depart. Give ye them to eat.” His friends looked at each other bewildered. Then one of them said: “Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?”

“How many loaves have ye? Go and see!”

Then his friends hurried around and asked people if they had any bread. None had any. Then one of them passed by the Boy. “I don’t suppose you have any bread, my boy?” He looked at a package the Boy held in his hand. The Boy opened the package.

The man went up to the Miracle Man and said: “There is a boy here, who has five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?”

But he said: “Bring them hither to me!”

Then the man turned to the Boy and said: “The Master is asking for your lunch.”

“Here it is,” said the Boy and gave him the lunch.

That was doing quite a bit for a hungry boy! Would you have done it? Will you do it? Give all you have if the Master ask for it?

The Master took the loaves—(the size of our crackers) and the fishes—(the size of sardines). Then he made the people sit down in ranks, by hundreds and fifties. With their bright-colored dresses, sitting on the green grass, in the sunshine, the groups presented a striking scene.

All eyes were now turned to the Master. Was he going to eat the lunch himself? No, that was not like him.

He lifted his face toward heaven. The Boy thought he saw a soft light shine in the Master’s face. They could hear the lapping of the waves on the sandy shore and the singing of birds in a grove nearby.

The Master blessed the Boy’s lunch, broke it, gave the pieces to his friends, they carried them hurriedly to the groups, came back and got more, came back again.

The Boy got his share. Got more than he had given.

Yes, it tasted just like mother's bread. When he had eaten all he needed, he was surprised to see that he had some left in his hands.

When all had been taken care of, the Master also partook of the lunch.

Down the hillside, along the shore went the people.

The Master stood there alone. The boy that had been blind, turned around and waved his hand.

When the Boy looked back for the last time, he saw the Master walking slowly up to the mountain, alone.

Then the Boy started to run. Late in the evening he rushed into the house, dusty and out of breath. The mother ran toward him: "What is it, my boy?"

He tried to talk but could not. Finally he blurted out: "Mother, can you guess what happened today?"

"No, how can I? Did you see him?"

"See him? Well, I should say I did!"

"What did he say? What did he do?"

"He took my lunch!"

"Took your lunch? What are you saying?"

He told the whole story, hurriedly, disconnectedly. The mother had to sit down. He wanted to run out and tell the story to a boy who had not been along. But the mother shook her head. "No, not tonight."

It took him a long time before he could sleep. Then he remembered something he had omitted. "Mother!" he called. No answer. He got up and searched for her. He went up the steps leading to the roof.

There his mother was kneeling, her face turned toward the starry sky. And in her face shone the light he had seen in the Master's face when he looked up to heaven. He heard her whisper a name: "Messiah."

With a holy awe in his soul he went slowly and silently back to his couch.

28. An Agnostic And His Daughter.

IN THE EVENING Lars told Thorsten Berge what had happened in school.

Thorsten became grave and did not speak for a while. Finally he said: "I have often warned the doctor that he should not talk so freely in the presence of his child. The seed of doubt has already been sown in her mind. You have quite a job on your hands, Lars. I think you ought to talk to the doctor. He idolizes his child and would not knowingly rob her of the faith that her mother planted in her."

Lars was well acquainted with Dr. Larson and had often discussed with him religious questions. Dr. Larson was known to be an agnostic, but still he was very popular in the town and throughout the surrounding country. He was the only doctor within a radius of many miles. He had come from Norway upon having finished his medical education. The town of New Norway had only a few houses along a straggling street when he opened up an office there and began to minister to the early settlers. He had given his services without stint. No weather too severe, no roads too rough, no hour too late to keep him at home when duty called. Never was heart more tender, nor hand more cunning than his.

The second year he was in New Norway he brought his bride from St. Paul. She was the daughter of a Lutheran minister. Her father had warned her against marrying an agnostic, but the young doctor was so handsome, so cultured, and kind that her great love swept all obstacles aside.

A child was born. She was baptized Hilda. The baptism took place at home.

There was much happiness in the home on the hill, but sometimes a cloud would fling its shadow over the mother's heart.

One winter day, when Hilda was about seven years old, the doctor had gone to a homestead far out on the wide prairie. He remained there snow-bound several days. While he was absent, his wife had fought her way

through the snow drifts to bring medicine to a sick child. Arriving home late at night, dripping wet, and the house being cold, she was taken seriously sick. When the doctor returned, his skill was of no avail.

Ever since his wife had passed away, Dr. Larson had tried to spend some time every evening with his little girl. Sometimes they played together and Hilda's laughter rang through the house. At other times he told her fairy tales or just chatted with her.

After having started in the parochial school she told him Bible stories or other stories which she had heard in school. The story of the boy who gave away his lunch had made a great impression on her. "I wish I could give something to Jesus," she said while stroking his cheek.

For several evenings the doctor listened to her with great interest. It delighted him to see her so happy. But gradually, with the sensitive intuition of a child, Hilda became conscious of his lack of interest. She knew that he was thinking about something else.

One evening, while sitting in his lap, she suddenly looked him in the face and said: "Papa, you don't care for these stories, do you? You don't think they are true, do you?"

"Why Hilda, how you talk! What makes you think so?" he said shocked and aggrieved.

She threw her arms around his neck and burst into tears.

He did not know what to say. But though holding her tight in his arms, with a sense of wild despair he realized that a wide gulf had separated him from his own child.

For a while sobs shook the frail little body clasped to his bosom. When the governess came in to put Hilda to bed, he said in a low voice: "I'll put her to bed tonight."

He came back to his study, sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Was he awake or was he dreaming? There in front of him sat his wife, his beautiful wife, with little Hilda in her arms. There was a sad look in her eyes. She was singing softly a lullaby. He stretched his arms toward mother and child. Suddenly they disappeared and when he opened his eyes, the room was empty—

One evening Lars was walking past Dr. Larson's home. The doctor was sitting on the porch. He asked Lars to come and chat with him for a while.

"I must compliment you, Lars," he said, "on your ability as teacher. Hilda comes home all full of enthusiasm. It is the first time in my life that I

ever knew of a child that preferred the old Bible History to fairy tales. You are a miracle worker, Lars. Keep it up, but don't start to stuff the children with the dry and impossible dogmas that we had to swallow."

"I am glad Hilda likes the school," Lars answered, "and I am glad to find parents who share their children's enthusiasm."

Dr. Larson looked at him sharply. Then he said with a wry smile, "That's a good dig, Lars; you have more courage now than you used to have. I am not going to throw a wet blanket on anyone's enthusiasm, especially not that of a child, but I do object to teaching children all the doctrines concocted in the brains of theologians. By the way," he added with some hesitation, "how did you get your enthusiasm, Lars; I remember the time when you were a good deal of a doubter."

The question was asked in a matter of fact voice, but Lars sensed a new attitude on the part of the doctor. He had often wished for opportunity and courage to speak his mind freely to his friend. Opportunity there had often been, but courage had hitherto failed him.

While the evening breeze carried to them the fragrance of new-mown hay and whispered in the gently swaying branches in front of the house, and while star upon star began to twinkle in the cloudless sky, Lars told the doctor of his spiritual struggles from early childhood. Never before had he seen so clearly the way he had been led through doubts and fears, through perplexities created by customs and creeds, dead orthodoxy, narrow pietism and the clash between science and religion,—led back to the Christ as revealed in the Gospels.

While Lars was telling his story, the doctor had listened without a single interruption. At first he had been smoking his cigar with evident enjoyment, then he had to relight it time and time again. Finally he threw it away, and sat there with closed eyes.

After a while Lars continued:

"Pardon me for talking so much, Dr. Larson. You asked me a searching question. I have given the answer. I did not mean to preach to you. I don't think preaching will do you any good. I hope, though, that you will not think it presumptuous on my part to make a suggestion. I have been reading a book written by a physician, which impressed me very much. A noted French author has called it the most beautiful book in the world. I think it will appeal to you, too, because it is written by a learned man who uses the scientific, historical method. He made a thorough investigation of the

sources of his material. He deals with established facts and not with myths or fiction. I have in mind Luke who wrote one of the Gospels.”

The doctor threw his head back and laughed.

“Say, Lars, that’s a good one. Do you know, I have not opened the Bible since I was confirmed. Well, I did not intend to hurt your feelings. I have all kinds of respect for a man who has been trying to think things through for himself. Now you will have to excuse me. I must make a sick call.”

That night after Hilda had retired, the doctor took down from the shelf his wife’s Bible where it had remained untouched since her death.

He remembered with pain how often he had found her reading the Bible when she thought herself unobserved.

He turned the pages quite a while before he found Luke.

When he had read the four first verses he said to himself: “Either this man Luke is a brazen-faced liar or some of us are fools.”

With growing amazement, mingled with an uncomfortable sense of disillusionment he read again Luke’s declaration that the things set forth “are most surely believed among us”; that they were delivered by “eye-witnesses” and that he, the author, “had perfect understanding... from the very first.”

He regained to some extent his composure and cynical attitude when, as he read on, he met with supernatural incidents. “Angels,” “visions,” “miracles”——“fiddlesticks,” he said to himself.

But gradually the beauty of some of the passages fascinated him.

“Well, now, this is fine,” he said as he read the prophecy of Zacharias to his son:

“Yes, and thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High: For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people in the remission of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us, To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadows of death; To guide our feet into the ways of peace.”

As he read chapter upon chapter in the silent watches of the night a new Christ stepped into his mind.

He had thought of Christ as the meek and mild Nazarene, as a man of sorrows, as an impractical idealist, as the product of traditions, legends and myths. Luke’s Christ was in reality a great personality. He dominated every situation where he appeared. He made the wisest and craftiest look ex-

tremely foolish when they tried to catch him in words. With uncanny keenness he penetrated into the secret chambers of the human soul. With blazing indignation he laid bare the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. With astonishing recklessness he swept aside man-made customs, placing human worth and human happiness above everything else.

He could not help admiring this Christ, but in admiring him he had to admit that his former estimate of Christ was being revised.

To another phase of Christ's life Dr. Larson gave his warm-hearted tribute. Jesus was truly the Great Physician. His eyes seemed always to be looking for broken lives, and his hand was ever ready to mend such lives. Even miracles seemed perfectly natural to such a superman.

Yes, he was willing to admit that if this were the true Christ he himself and the Church, too, had had a one-sided view of him. A feeling of resentment filled his heart. Why had not the Church given this Christ to the world instead of a man who had to die a cruel death to satisfy an angry God?

He was thrilled at this discovery of Christ. If to follow such a life of service meant to be a Christian, then there might be some sense in being a Christian. But would there be a place for such a Christian in the Church? Scarcely that, he thought.

Some evenings he read several chapters in Luke; other evenings only a few verses; still other evenings nothing at all. Then he turned to some of his agnostic authors, but somehow he felt that they were not quite fair to the Christ in Luke. He was wondering if they had read Luke.

The record of Christ's last days on earth, his death and his resurrection filled him with conflicting thoughts.

Was this Jesus, with his lofty courage, his matchless self-control, moving in a world all by himself, with plans and purposes stretching beyond the grave, dreaming more ambitious dreams than any mortal ever before, was this Jesus a man only? Could such a pure, noble, towering personality rise out of weak, sordid humanity? If so, why not more Christs?

But where was the Jesus who by cruel death on the cross had satisfied an angry God? Not in Luke.

This thought gave Dr. Larson great comfort for a while. But very often a word spoken by Jesus the last night he was with his apostles rang in his ears: "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Did his death mean something after all?

Something immense? Something essential to mankind?

The thought thrilled him. But when he tried to see through it, to find some reason, some explanation, it was like the hand of a child trying to break through a wall of granite. He grew sick at heart and sank in his chair feeling utterly helpless.

Hurried footsteps on the sidewalk; on the porch. The doctor opened the door. A man living just outside town stepped in. Would the doctor come with him at once? His little daughter was very sick.

The two men ran through the dark and silent street. In a few minutes they reached the home. For a long time the doctor fought against death, and as often before he conquered.

He might have gone home, but remained at the bedside of the child. The mental anguish and spiritual distress he had just gone through had been lifted from his mind and soul while engaged in this mission of mercy. He sat back in a chair and closed his eyes...

What a mystery life was! Why sickness, pain, sorrow? Was there a meaning to it all?

The man he had read about in Luke had faced life. That Great Physician of old seemed to be drawn toward the poor, the sick, the heavy-laden. Sometimes he withdrew from the crowds to be alone with what he called his father, but apparently only to gather strength for new tasks. What was the mission of Jesus in the world?

The doctor himself had been engaged in somewhat the same kind of work. The thought pleased him.

But there was, he admitted, something about the work of Jesus as a healer that was unique. It was linked up with a spiritual vision. Jesus saw more than the sick or crippled body. He saw the soul. He was also the curer of souls. His main mission seemed to be a spiritual mission, and that concerned not only the sick but the well and strong.

There was something in the last chapter of Luke that he had passed over hurriedly. He had instinctively felt that if that passage were true, it would be impossible to brush Christ aside with an impatient wave of the hand.

He had told the parents to rest a while. A Bible was on the table. He opened it and turned to the passage. Why not face it? He read: "And he (Jesus) said unto them: 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the

promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high.””

The mother of the sick child had come into the room so quietly that he had not noticed her before she stood at the side of the bed.

Hurriedly he closed the book and put it on the table.

He stood up and said: “She is all right now. I’ll call again in the morning.”

The mother turned to him. She grasped his hand.

“Dr. Larson, God bless you!”

With a feeling of elation he walked slowly homeward. When he came to the top of the hill overlooking the town, the valley and the bluffs on the other side of the river, now all wrapt in the mantle of the summer night, he stopped and drew a deep breath. He took off his hat and stroked his hot forehead. A cool breeze came slipping up from the valley below, caressing softly his face and hands. There was a hint of the fragrance of flowers in the air, and soothing cadences of the cascades came floating from out of the shadows.

Then suddenly he became conscious of the transcendent glory of the midnight sky. The mighty dome, sweeping from horizon to horizon, was one mass of throbbing, trembling stars. The awful majesty of the scene held him spellbound, enthralled.

A word formed itself in his mind. It trembled on his lips. It was borne to him on the gentle breeze; it came floating with the fragrance of unseen flowers; it came out of the far stretches of the starry sky; it welled up from his innermost soul: God.

How he came home that night he never knew. He may have walked; he knew it not. He may have been carried on unseen hands; he knew it not. He found himself in his daughter’s bedroom. He saw the dim outline of the child in the bed. She moved, and sighed. The sigh struck him as a dagger, and his heart went out in a wave of sympathy to the lonely, perplexed, motherless child. Before he knew it, he was kneeling at the bedside. He wanted to pray, to confess, to plead, but words failed him. A sense of loneliness, a realization that his life was a failure, a feeling of futility overwhelmed him, crushed him.

Another word was formed in his mind. It came from the hills of Galilee down the centuries as a sweet song, it rose like incense from the sacred pages he had read, it was linked to the memories of his wife. It was the

name of a living, loving personality, the hope of humanity, the Savior of men: Jesus.

29. In Time For Benediction.

DURING THE SECOND WINTER at the seminary Lars was invited by Anders Haugen to give a talk at a Sunday School festival. The parents of the Sunday School children were going to be invited, Anders wrote, and it would be well if he addressed some words to them.

Lars began at once to prepare his speech. He chose as a subject "The Need of Religious Education." Having studied psychology, pedagogy and even some theology he thought himself in position to give a talk that would be worth listening to.

The speech was not only written but rewritten and learned by heart. He selected the proper places for gestures, and studied and practiced the gestures. It was going to be a good speech, to be delivered with force and elegance. After the speech and festival were over, he would have something to say to Miss Olga Haugen.

When Lars and Anders and Olga arrived at the bottom of the stairway leading up to the hall, they heard shouting and laughter. Lars was wondering what sort of audience he was going to face. There was a total absence of solemnity.

The hall was already crowded, but the teachers who had been appointed to be on time to meet the children had found themselves helpless. Children were running forth and back, some were standing on chairs, others were busy turning the leaves of the hymn books.

Olga stepped quickly up on the platform, sat down by the piano, struck a few notes and started to sing. Immediately everybody became quiet. As soon as she had finished a verse she arose and announced the hymn, struck the key on the piano, faced the audience, suggesting by a gesture that all were to stand up.

Lars had never heard more enthusiastic singing.

The hymn ended, Olga said quietly: "Shall we bow our heads in prayer?"

You could have heard a pin drop while she offered a short prayer.

After a few recitations and a song by a class of little girls, Lars was introduced by Mr. Haugen. He had met this young man in Norway, he said, and he knew that he had a message for old and young.

Scores of critical eyes turned to Lars when he faced the audience. Olga Haugen was sitting right in front of him. This was the first time she was to hear him speak.

For a few minutes he had the undivided attention of the audience and he felt the thrill that comes to a speaker who is sure of himself and sure of the hearers. When he was making his first gesture, a typical street urchin called out sharply: "Quit pinching me!" A dozen boys jumped to their feet, eager to witness a fight, but Lars, pointing his finger at the disturber called out: "Look here, young man, I am the speaker of the evening." A titter ran through the audience. The boys slid into their seats. Lars had held his own.

For a few seconds he had completely forgotten his speech, but then it came back to him. Before very long, however, the children grew restless. A girl turned her head and looked toward the rear of the hall and waved her hand to her mother. Another girl began to finger with the ribbon of her neighbor. Whispering and subdued giggling became general throughout the hall. The teachers, sitting with their classes, shook their heads at offending pupils.

All at once Lars forgot his speech. His mind was a perfect blank. The audience sensed that something was wrong, and it did not help matters when a boy whispered audibly: "The guy has forgotten his piece."

Then Olga Haugen, looking straight at Lars, whispered: "Tell them a story." A girl sitting next to her called out: "Tell us a story." The cry was taken up on all sides: "Tell us a story, tell us a story."

A story? There was not a story in the world that Lars could remember that moment. He had to make up one.

Then he made the fatal mistake of beginning: "Once upon a time—."

"Oh, that's an old chestnut," the first disturber called out, whereupon the whole crowd broke out in a loud laughter.

Lars was on the point of leaving the platform when Olga again whispered to him: "Sing, 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus' and tell the story of Jairus' daughter."

Lars regained his self-possession at once. With a smile he called out above the noise: "Everybody sing."

Beating time with his hand he started the verse in a loud voice. The song rose lustily from old and young.

“Now let the girls sing the verse, and then the boys.”

“We beat them, didn’t we?” called a girl.

“Yes, you bet you did,” Lars said, “and now I’ll tell you the story of a little girl, a story that is loved by boys and girls throughout the whole world. You have heard it before, but when you imagine you see her and imagine what happened to her you will think it a new story.”

Then he told the story of the little twelve-year-old girl of long ago, the only child in the family, told of her sickness, her parents’ despair, the father’s hurried trip to Jesus. When Jesus entered quietly the room where the little girl was lying dead and took her hand and said: “Little girl, arise,” and a soft flush stole into her face and a gentle quiver crept into her eyelids, and she looked up into a sweet face, the audience was in the room, heard the voice, saw life ebbing back and saw the girl arise.

For a minute there was absolute silence in the hall. Then a shrill voice came from a boy: “Tell us another story!” But Lars bowed and hurried back to his seat.

On the way home Lars and Olga walked side by side in silence. Anders Haugen had remained behind, saying he was going to make a sick call before returning home.

Finally Lars said: “Well, I know one man who is not going to become a preacher.”

“The speech was just splendid, Lars,” Olga answered, “but we should have told you what kind of audience you would have. You certainly got their attention when you told the story. I knew you could tell a story. Do you remember the first time we met?”

“Remember?” said Lars. “It is the only thing I do remember.”

He wanted to say a good deal more, but the path through the snow on the sidewalk was so narrow that they could not walk side by side.

When they had entered the house, Olga got busy preparing coffee and bringing in cake. Lars was silent as he felt more keenly than before the failure he had made with his speech. If it had not been for Olga, the failure of the evening would have been still more terrible. He was through with the idea of becoming a preacher.

Afterwards Olga played and sang. Lars knew she was trying to make him forget what he had gone through.

Suddenly she swung around and faced him. “Lars, don’t think for a minute that you are not suited for the ministry. A person who can hold such an audience in the hollow of his hand . . .”

“Well, if you were sitting in front telling me what to say, it would be different,” said Lars standing up and coming over to her.

Just then they heard Anders stamping his feet on the front porch. There was not much time to waste. Lars had to put aside the speech he had prepared.

“Olga,” he cried, “will you be—I have loved you since the first time I heard you.”

Anders was opening the outer door. Olga stood up. “I have loved you since the first time I heard of you.”

“Am I too late for refreshments? I smell coffee,” said Anders, as he stepped into the room.

Lars put his arm around Olga and kissed her. Then he turned to her father and said laughingly:

“I don’t know if you came too late for refreshments, but I do know you came just in time for the benediction.”

The End.

A Servant of the Lord

Dedication to “A Servant of the Lord”

Dedicated to the memory of my wife, at whose sickbed the first chapters were written and revised. Practically all I have written since we were married, I read to her. When she said, “You can make it better than that,” I revised it, if I possibly could find the time, till she said, “That’s fine.”

1. A Man Who Gave Away His All.

"LARS, I'll tell you something. You are a fool, a big fool, if you don't follow my advice. Here you have two calls. One from one of the largest and finest congregations in the whole synod, and one from the Home Mission Board to go up to northern Minnesota where the settlers are scattered far and wide, fighting stones and stumps. And you are in doubt which call to accept? I am sure that your lovely Olga will not be in doubt very long. What right have you to expect a girl who is used to the comforts of a modern city to make such a sacrifice?"

Thus spoke Lars's roommate, Henry Jacobson, with more force than elegance.

"What do you mean by one of the finest congregations?"

"Well, practically all the people in the community belong to it. Most of them are fairly well-to-do. Some of them are rich. You will get a good salary. Three annual offerings. There is a fine parsonage. What more can a young minister expect? If I get such a cull next spring I am not going to mope around wondering if I should accept it. If you return this call you will regret it the rest of your life. But don't forget Olga."

Having delivered himself of this advice, Mr. Jacobson left the room.

Yes, Lars thought, there was a good deal of truth in what his roommate had said. Especially in regard to Olga. Of course he was going to consult with her, but first he must be alone with his conscience and his God.

He could not think this matter through here. He must, as often before, find a solitary place out in God's out-of-doors.

He soon found himself sitting leaning against a tree on the brow of a bluff overlooking the broad valley through which the Mississippi river wound its way majestically to the sea. The sun shone gloriously on green meadows, brown bluffs and blue waters. An oriole was building a nest in one of the sweeping branches of an elm tree. A bluebird flashed in the sun.

A song sparrow poured forth a flood of golden melody. A balmy breeze caressed his face, his throat and his hands.

He had recently read a story which had made a great impression on him. It was the story of a young minister who gave his life in the same kind of field to which he now had been called.

This is the story—

One Sunday afternoon in the month of December the young minister started to walk to a place three miles distant where service was to be held.

It had been snowing off and on all day. There was but a single trail leading through the dense forest. The wind was rising but the minister had no fear. He was used to long trips on foot, often through uninhabited swamps and forests, in visiting his twelve preaching places.

He loved his work, and his greatest reward was the new light which came into the eyes of old and young.

He was exceedingly popular with the children. Many a time when he had a good excuse for not going to some far-off preaching place, the thought of boys and girls waiting for him gave him strength to go.

Even this day it was the thought of the children which swept aside whatever fear he might have had.

Last time he had been there, he had told them that the next service he would tell them a story. The right eyes and happy smiles which greeted this announcement, had warmed his heart on long and lonely walks. No, he must not disappoint them today.

The service was to begin at three o'clock.

They waited for the minister a long time, but finally came to the conclusion that he must have turned back.

When word was received Monday that he had started out and had not arrived at his destination, people began to fear that something terrible had happened.

In the blinding snow storm he must have lost all sense of direction. Instead of going south he had turned east. At some places it was seen where he had sunk into the ice and water up to his waist.

Monday it turned cold. They found him Tuesday evening.

His terrific fight was indicated by the fact that an area of about fifteen feet in diameter was tramped down so hard that it was like ice.

He had evidently retained his mental faculties to the very last. When overcome by cold, hunger and fatigue, he lay down and folded his arms across his breast, his Bible in his stiff fingers.

There was a challenge in this story which Lars could not escape. When he thought of the easy path, the picture of a young man staggering and stumbling to his death while people were waiting for his message, made him ashamed of himself.

Then Lars thought of his mother. She had been much on his mind of late. What would she have thought if she had known that some day he would enter the ministry?

Her faith had had much to do in shaping his life.

Once a man had told him that all the Christians he knew were hypocrites.

Then Lars had remarked quietly, "That may be your experience. I know one person who was not a hypocrite—my mother."

Her life had been the simple life of so many mothers in Norway. She had never been outside the chain of mountains surrounding the parish. Seldom had her thoughts gone beyond those mountains except when she thought of her brother who had left for America and never been heard from again. And then later her thoughts had gone out night and day to her son. He knew she had prayed for him early and late.

How strange that a poor, lonely woman in Norway could set in motion spiritual forces that came upon her son in far-off America as a blessing and a benediction!

Her life had been a simple life, and yet how rich! She had never heard the masterpieces of music, but the church bells had lifted her thoughts to God's throne and the host of singing saints and angels. She had never seen the wonderful paintings in the great art galleries of the world, but she loved to behold the sunsets in the sky and the delicate colors in the flowers in the woodland. She never said much, but in some mysterious way he had come to share her riches. How much he owed that sweet little mother of his!

He remembered the first time he had ever wished to become a minister. He smiled as he thought of it.

One day coming home from one of his visits to the woods, he saw a horse and carry-all outside the house. Lars was too bashful to go into the house; he went down to the stable to play with the goat and her new kid.

What do you think of that! There was the goat on top of the roof nibbling grass while the kid was bleating piteously on the rock from which the goat had jumped over on the roof.

Suddenly an animal — it must be a wolf — came bounding from the house down to the stable. When Lars saw it he gave one wild scream and made a dash for the rock, but he stumbled and rolled down just as the animal jumped on him.

He expected to be eaten alive, but the animal did not seem to be hungry for boys that day. It ran up on the rock where the kid was crouching terror stricken. The goat had been watching the performance with keen interest, but when she saw the kid in danger, she tossed her head and made a jump to the rock. The animal was taken by surprise when the goat dropped from the sky, and it was still more surprised when the goat dug her horns into its side and tossed it down on the ground. It went like a streak across the lawn, making for the house, the goat in hot pursuit.

Father and mother and minister came rushing out. When the minister had had time to analyze the situation, he laughed aloud. The animal slipped into the house, while father drove the goat away.

In the meantime Lars had picked himself up and had also picked up the kid, holding it in his arms.

The minister went to the door and called, “Come Trofast! Come here!”

The animal came out slowly. The minister patted it on its head and spoke kindly to it. Then the whole group came down to where Lars was standing.

“Did the dog scare you?” asked the minister, smiling.

“I don’t think he has seen a dog before,” remarked his father.

When the dog came slowly toward Lars, he shrank behind his father, still holding the kid firmly in his arms.

The minister took a stick and threw it toward the home. The dog ran after it, picked it up in his mouth and brought it back. Then Lars laughed.

“Now you throw a stick,” said the minister.

Lars threw one and again the dog brought it back.

When the minister had gone, he asked his father, "Can't I have a dog like that, too?"

Then father patted him on the head and said: "Yes, but you must become a minister first. The minister is the only person in the parish who has a dog."

He made up his mind to become a minister, but when the kid became more playful every day he forgot the dog and the ministry.

He realized now that the motive would not have been a very laudable one. He had never heard of a man who had become a minister in order to own a dog. Certainly not in America where the ownership of such an animal is the privilege of the humblest citizen.

This incident made him think of the next time the wish to become a minister had entered his mind. It was one of the most beautiful memories from his boyhood.

One Sunday forenoon he climbed to the top of the mountain back of his home. While standing there, the church bells down in the parish began to ring. He loved to listen to the bells on Sundays, but when they tolled mournfully at funerals a strange fear gripped his heart. Today they rang out joyfully, inviting old and young to come to God's house to worship.

Gradually he became conscious of soft notes coming from the parish church on the other side of the mountain. Now he heard the bells from two parishes! The thought flashed through his mind: The bells are ringing in the parishes of Siljord, Hitterdal, Lunde and Nes. They are ringing in all the parishes throughout the whole country! The tones are meeting and merging on mountain tops, flooding the whole land with sweet sounds!

Another thought came to him. In each church a minister is now standing in the pulpit telling people how to get to heaven. He too would be a minister.

The first time that he really had felt a call to enter the ministry was that memorable day when he had been called to Chicago by his boy friend, Olaf Storlee. When he found the formerly fine young man a wreck, physically and spiritually, crying piteously, "Lars, pray for me, I am afraid to die," God had given him light to lead his dying friend to Jesus Christ.

Surely, nothing in the world could be greater than to be a servant of the Lord.

Though the desire to become a minister had grown upon him, there was often a lurking suspicion in his mind that after all he was not “cut out” to enter the ministry.

He had a weakness, and how he had fought against it!

It dated back to his childhood. It had been part of his very life.

As a little boy he had lived in a world of wonders. There were invisible people in hills and mountains. Trees could talk and stars sang together. Often he had slipped away from his playmates to roam around in the forest or to sit at the foot of a whispering pine.

Then one day his wonder world crashed about his ears. His sensitive soul was struck a blow that hurt for years. A neighbor said to his mother—not knowing that Lars had come up right behind him—that her boy must be queer the way he was moping around in the forest. For years he had a haunting fear that something was wrong with him. Till one day he read some nature sketches. Then a great joy swept through his soul. Other people, noted people, had also lived in a wonder world.

Now it was said of him that he was a mystic. He still lived in a wonder world. Where others saw a fact, he saw a mystery. Where others were satisfied with a definition made centuries ago, he saw something so great that it could not be covered with words.

And especially was this so in God’s dealings with man.

He had had sense enough to keep this to himself. Yes, he could talk to Olga about it. She understood him. Few others did. But one evening he had opened his heart to a classmate. His classmate listened to him with a puzzled expression. Finally he said, not unkindly, “If the leaders knew what a hazy theology you have, I doubt if they would ordain you.”

Lars did not answer but he thought, “It may be true that my theology is too hazy to become a minister, but I do know in whom I believe, and He will lead me unto all truth.”

His faith had not come to him as something inherited, as something true just because it had been so taught him. Neither had it come after some great spiritual upheaval. From childhood there had been in his soul a longing for

God. Then doubts and perplexities set in upon him. After trying in vain to grasp the meaning of repentance, conversion, regeneration, justification and sanctification, one little word had come to him like a breath from heaven. It was the word "Come."

A change was brought about. It came like the dawning of a new day. In his great need he found a great God in a simple way. How, he could not explain. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." Human thought cannot trace the delicate working of the Spirit of God.

As a theological student he had learned the value of creeds and confessions, but even as a boy he had sensed that eternal truth cannot be enclosed in human speech. When doubts arose he did not go to creeds and confessions. He went to Christ.

Christianity was a doctrine or a set of doctrines, but it was more than that. It was life. And that life Christ had given him. In Him he had found pardon, peace and power. And, oh, how he wished that all men might have that experience. Life would mean very little to him if he could not give the best there was in him, give his all, to cooperate with Christ in building His kingdom—the most beautiful thing in the world; beautiful because it came from heaven and led to heaven.

2. A Dream With A Message.

HE MUST TALK WITH SOMEONE with an understanding heart. He must have a talk with Prof. Hill. He would understand.

“Will you do me a favor?” Lars asked when they had talked a while about matters in general.

“I’ll do anything in the world for you, Lars. Ever since you wrote your first composition in my class I have felt toward you as only a father can feel toward his son.”

Then in the quiet room Lars opened his heart as he had opened it to no other person.

Prof. Hill listened to him with closed eyes. Once in a while he would nod or smile.

When Lars was through, the professor remained silent for a long time. Finally he surprised Lars by saying, “May I tell you a dream?”

“Why, yes, I shall be glad to hear it.”

This is what the professor told him.

"I had a friend, such a good friend. He has been dead these many years, but is still my friend, as you will see.

"The first time we met it seemed that we had always known each other.

"There was hardly a week that we did not spend at least two evenings together. Sometimes we just talked and talked, frankly, freely, without reservation. A friend is not a friend until you can say anything you please. At other times we sat there without saying a word.

"One afternoon in the fall I asked him to take a walk with me. There was something I wanted to show him. When we came to a certain point along the lake we sat down.

“‘Look at the lake along the shore on the other side,’ I said. He looked and then turned to me saying, with a puzzled expression on his face, ‘I don’t see anything special. What is it?’”

"‘Look again,’ I said, ‘Look a long time at the reflection in the lake.’

"‘That’s pretty, isn’t it?’ he said and kept on looking.

"Then I saw that the spell was upon him. I cannot describe what I myself saw in the lake. It would be futile to try it. When you see something as beautiful as that, feeble indeed is human speech!

"On the other side was a gentle slope covered with trees, shrubs and clusters of flowers. The leaves of the dark oaks were drenched in red wine. The leaves of the white stemmed birches glistened in the sun like silver. The young maples blazed like bonfires. There was a riot of colors.

"But the reflection in the smooth lake of the trees and the shrubs and the flowers and the hillside itself soon held you captive. The trees were all straight and very tall, pointing downward, of course. Such beautiful blending of colors no artist could ever lure to his canvas. And the longer you looked, feasting your eye on every detail, every shade of color, the more fantastic, the more unearthly it all became.

"My friend sat there perfectly quiet for a long time, entranced. Gradually his face was transfigured. It shone like an angel's, but when he finally turned around and looked at me, his eyes were filled with tears.

"Reverently he whispered in a shaking voice, 'My God, I never saw anything more beautiful.'

"Do you know—the look in his face filled me with a premonition.

"That same evening when we sat under the swaying trees he was very quiet. I did not want to disturb him. He was still under the spell of what he had seen. Such a silence is sacred.

"The next year we laid him to rest on a hillside ablaze in autumn colors.

"Recently I was very depressed. I was carrying a burden that seemed too heavy to bear. Then I began to reason with myself: I have no right to be depressed. Others have greater burdens than I have. I have health and strength and many friends. The good God may not take away my burden, but He will give me strength to carry it.

"But no matter how I reasoned with myself, I was still depressed. Oh, if my friend had lived, I thought.

"Then one night I dreamt I was sitting in a strange room. It was at the close of day. Gradually the feeling came upon me that I was not alone, though no footsteps had fallen on the floor. I looked around. Nobody there. I still felt a presence. Then slowly, out of the twilight, a face and a figure emerged. It was my friend!

"He looked at me with a wonderful smile. Then he drew closer and stretched forth his hands and almost touched my face. Slowly he moved his hands up and down and his face shone just the same way as that afternoon long ago. I understood that he wanted to lift the burden of care. And when I smiled at him, I saw that it pleased him.

"He walked slowly away, and when he had gone some distance, he turned way around to me, still smiling. Then he waved his hand. I waved mine and wanted to call him back, but I could not speak. Gradually he disappeared. I woke up with a start. Something was the matter with my face. I felt of it. It was wet with tears.

"I could sleep no more that night. I was too profoundly moved. I believed then and I believe now that God wanted to bring me a message of cheer through that dream.

"Your queerness as a boy, your mysticism as a man, in not a bane; it's a blessing, Thank God for it. Instead of making you unfit for the ministry, it will be a source of strength. It will help you to understand people. God reveals Himself most direct through His word, through Christ. He comes into closest contact with us through His sacraments. But we must not limit Him to the so-called means of grace. The seeing eye will catch glimpses of His majesty and beauty all through the universe, and the listening ear will hear His voice in the laughter of little children and in the song of the lark."

There was a long but eloquent silence.

There was a time when Lars did not go to Communion. The crude way in which some tried to explain it repelled him. Why did men say more than God had said?

Then he began to reason with himself: Was it right to neglect what God offered because certain interpretations offended him?

There was no doubt in his mind that Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper. The finest spirits down through the ages had found it a source of strength and inspiration.

He had not intended to go to Communion that Sunday, but the minister's sermon made him long for a more intimate fellowship with Christ. When others arose and went up to the altar, he joined them.

While waiting to kneel down something strange happened. It seemed to him that he was in the presence of men sitting at a table drinking, playing cards and swearing. He had never heard so much swearing in his life. One oath followed another. Then he realized that he was standing in front of the altar and that he was going to partake of the Lord's Supper.

He began to tremble. His hands shook so that he was afraid people might notice it. No, it would never do to kneel down in the presence of Christ Himself with this filth flowing through his mind. He must turn around and rush out of the church.

God, was it possible that all this profanity had slumbered in the secret chambers of his soul all these years and now had been awakened as the minister said over and over again, "This is Christ's body—this is Christ's blood."

Then suddenly he could have shouted aloud: "Devil, I know you are here. But there is one present who is mightier than you. He invited me to come, and I am coming!"

Then he knelt down at the altar.

A sense of victory swept through him. Since that time his own unworthiness became an incentive to go to Communion. When infinite Love stoops down to a child of the dust, it is not for reason to ask questions. It is for faith to receive gratefully and humbly.

Many were the thoughts and memories which crowded upon him that afternoon on the hillside. He had gone there to think about the two calls. He had not been able to think much about the calls—

Because his heart had already made a choice.

That evening he wrote a letter to Olga Haugen, telling her about the two calls and the advantages and disadvantages of each. He asked her to think the matter over carefully and prayerfully.

But all the time while he was writing he saw wistful faces of boys and girls who were waiting for someone to come and tell them a story.

He received a letter from her by return mail. It was the shortest letter she had-ever written him. Just one sentence: "A servant of the Lord must go

where he can do the most good.”

3. A Waif Of The Woods.

“HERE’S A MAN who isn’t going to wish you welcome. He made life a burden for our former pastor.”

“That’s good news,” answered Rev. Lars Lee and laughed. Then he became very serious and turned to Mr. Olaf Gunderson with whom he was driving to the latter’s home out in the woods.

“Who is he?” Lars asked.

“His name is Carlson, Peter Carlson.”

“Is he a bachelor?” Lars was looking at the small cabin in the clearing.

“No, he has a wife, and they have a little girl; she is a cripple.”

“So Mr. Carlson doesn’t like ministers?”

“No, I should say not. He likes saloonkeepers a good deal better.”

“He drinks?”

“Drinks is the word. Sometimes I think he tries to quit.”

“What has he got against ministers?”

“He is an agnostic. He is a bright fellow and a great reader. Paine and Ingersoll are his favorite authors. I think he knows them by heart.”

“What about his wife? Does she share his views?”

“No, I don’t think she does, but she says very little. Kind of lost interest in everything. Except in her little girl. Mrs. Carlson, I understand, comes from a fine family. She married against her parents’ wish. She must have been a very beautiful woman.”

“Did you say the daughter was a cripple?”

“Yes, from early childhood. She is lame. Something the matter with the hip joint, I guess. Clara is her name. She is a wonderful child. Fine features, curly hair and eyes as blue and beautiful as the sky.”

Lars looked sharply at Mr. Gunderson. This was a man worth knowing. He was going to ask some more questions but they had now come to a corduroy road (logs laid side by side transversely across a swamp). The wagon heaved and shook so Lars had to take hold of the seat on which he was sitting with both hands. No use to talk under such conditions. They finally got

across, and a fine piece of road stretched ahead, on one side a beautiful grove of birch trees, on the other at brook, clear as crystal.

Mr. Gunderson was the first one to speak. "I'll say this for Mr. Carlson, he is very fond of his daughter."

Lars again saw wistful faces of children who were waiting for someone to come and tell them a story. "A little child shall lead them," flashed through his mind.

He little realized how soon an opportunity would come to test his manhood to the point of death on behalf of this little girl.

"I noticed there was a little flower garden by the cabin," Lars remarked.

"Yes, I thought you did and that you would mention it. The little girl is passionately fond of flowers. So her father built a fence round a little patch of ground, and mother and daughter planted flowers there."

After a pleasant visit with the Gunderson family, Lars walked back to town. He had passed a very interesting scene near the Carlson cabin which he wanted to observe more closely. Possibly he hoped that he might meet some representative of the Carlson family. He was not to be disappointed.

When he came opposite the Carlson cabin, he heard the sharp, angry barking of a dog. Presently the dog came crashing through the underbrush.

A shrill childish voice called: "Fido, come here, come here." The dog slunk back.

Looking in the direction of the voice, Lars saw a little girl coming toward him. He noticed that she limped a good deal. When he saw her face, something clutched his heart. She was a strangely beautiful child, this waif of the woods.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking straight at him.

Lars was going to say that he was the new minister when he caught himself.

"Oh, just a stranger walking through the woods." He stopped all of a sudden, then whispered excitedly, "Say, there's a fawn."

"That's my fawn," she cried joyfully. A silvery laugh rippled in the sunshine. "I'll have it come nearer," she said. "Come here, fawn, come here."

Slowly the fawn approached. Stopped. Took a step. Head raised. Its large, luminous eyes one moment on the girl, the next on the stranger.

Lars had never seen anything more graceful. There was something almost spiritual about it.

Clara limped slowly toward it, put her arms round its neck, and crooning in a velvety voice whispered in its ear, "Don't be afraid, little fawn. He won't hurt you. He's a nice man."

Then looking at Lars roguishly she said, "You are a nice man, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am a nice man," he said and smiled at her. "And you are a nice girl and you have a nice fawn, but I don't love your dog."

She left the fawn and came back to Lars.

"Well, I do. It's the best dog in the world. Yesterday he chased away a bear."

"A bear?" Lars pretended that he was scared.

"No—o-o. It was just a rabbit."

"Do you want to see my farm? I have cows and sheeps—sheep I mean—and pigs."

"Of course I do. I used to herd cattle when I was a boy."

"Come here then." She limped ahead. The dog followed her, turning every now and then and looking at Lars with a not particularly friendly glint in his eyes.

Shortly they came to one of the prettiest scenes Lars had ever seen. On the edge of the clearing a brook came tumbling down a cliff. At the foot was a wide pool. The brook continued across smooth pebbles, forming one tiny cascade after another, then flowed slowly into the lake farther down. On both sides were large bunches of bluebells waving in the breeze.

Near the brook, by the side of the pool, was a huge boulder, flat on top as a floor. Steps of stones had been made on one side. The little girl climbed up. Lars followed.

On the top were groups of cones and smooth pebbles. Tiny threads of moss ran hither and thither in the cracks of the boulder.

The little girl fell on her knees, pointed to the cones and said, "These are my cows. And these are my sheep," pointing to the smaller pine cones, "and these are my pigs," pointing to the pebbles.

"You like to play here, don't you?"

"Of course I do. And I like to hear the brook sing. Do you hear it sing?" She listened intently, looking at Lars. While listening her eyes turned to a

bunch of bluebells on the edge of the boulder. “Look at the bells,” she whispered. “See them swing. Sometimes I can hear them ringing.”

Lars looked at the bluebells, swinging—swinging—ringing—ringing. Then he looked at the sweet face and a mist rose before his eyes. Poor little waif of the woods! No, not poor. To her nature revealed secrets which only the pure of heart and sensitive of soul can see and hear.

“God made the flowers very beautiful,” Lars said quietly.

A startled look came into her face and she looked sharply down the road.

Then hurriedly she picked up a large cone. “This cow is no good. She doesn’t give any milk. Shall I spank her?”

“Yes, that might do a lot of good,” Lars said.

“Do you know any stories? I know a song about a story, but I don’t know the story.”

“Read it to me.”

Still kneeling, she read slowly—

“I think when I read the sweet story of old.”

“That’s all I know.”

“I know that hymn,” Lars said almost in a whisper.

“Him? You are funny. That’s a song.”

“Yes, a song. Shall I sing it to you?”

She nodded her head vigorously. Curls flying.

Lars sang—

*“I think when I read the sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then.”*

Again a startled look in her face.

“What are you crying for?” she asked and drew closer.

I did not know I was crying,” Lars said and tried to laugh.

Suddenly Clara called out, looking down the road, “Papa, mama, I’m here!”

Then she turned to Lars and whispered excitedly, “Say, you are the new minister. Why did you fool me? Papa don’t want me to talk to you.”

The man got out of the wagon and came unsteadily toward them.

“What are you doing here?” he shouted.

Lars met him. “I was walking past here and your daughter asked me to see her farm, as she called it.”

“She did, did she? She didn’t know that you are a preacher. You leave at once or I’ll show you something.”

In the meantime the woman had come down to them. She laid her hand on her husband’s arm, but he brushed her roughly aside.

With an oath he again told Lars to leave.

Then the little girl came limping over to her father and said, “Papa, he’s a nice man. He played with me.”

Lars went closer up to Mr. Carlson. He looked the angry man straight in the eyes and said quietly, “I am sorry that I have offended you. But let me tell you one thing: If you want to live without God yourself, no man can prevent you from doing it, but you have no right...”

He got no further, for Mr. Carlson raised his arm as though going to strike him with the whip. Lars grabbed the raised arm, and held it tight. The quick and unexpected move on the part of Lars had an immediate and stunning effect on Mr. Carlson. He stood there helpless and bewildered.

“Some day you and I are going to be good friends,” Lars said with a smile. “Goodbye, Mrs. Carlson, goodbye, Clara.”

4. The Waif In The Forest Fire.

LARS HAD NOT BEEN VERY LONG IN THE FIELD before he discovered that the saloons were the greatest hindrance to his work. He had intended to enter upon his mission with meekness and mildness. That was according to his nature. But a swift change came upon him. He owed it to the women and children among whom he was going to labor to take up the fight against the liquor traffic. Soft words meant weak words. He felt the fire burning in his heart which had burnt in the hearts of the prophets of old.

He announced an open air meeting. A great crowd gathered. He saw several saloonkeepers and a large number of lumberjacks. Many sad faced women were standing on the outskirts of the crowd.

He had prepared his speech but when he saw the sea of faces, some with threatening looks, and heard raw laughter evidently in response to vulgar jokes, he forgot his speech and in words burning with hot indignation launched into a denunciation of the liquor traffic.

There was some scattered applause. But it came to an abrupt stop when a lumberjack pressed his way up to the platform. His face was vivid with rage. Shaking his fist at Lars he shouted, "You mind your own business."

"This is my business," Lars said earnestly.

Openly and secretly Lars was thanked for his speech, but in the back room of one of the saloons a conspiracy was formed to drive the new minister out of town some dark night.

Some time after the great temperance rally Lars was standing with a group of men on the sidewalk in front of the post office. He had just returned from a sick call and had tied his bronco to a post near by.

Lars noticed that the Carlson team was standing in front of a saloon. Mrs. Carlson was coming out of a store on the other side of the street.

The men were talking about the dry weather. No rain had fallen for several weeks.

A startling cry by Mrs. Carlson, "Oh, there's fire. Clara is home alone," caused the men to look in the direction of the Carlson homestead. A short

distance north of the clearing a heavy smoke was being driven straight south. Flames were leaping up in the air.

Mrs. Carlson came running across the street. Frantically she cried to the men: "For God's sake save my girl!"

The commotion on the sidewalk brought the men out of the saloon. If there was a fight they wanted to see it.

Mr. Carlson came also reeling out. His wife rushed over to him and tried to make him understand their daughter's danger. "I'll take care of that," he shouted and started for his team, but stumbled in a heap on the sidewalk.

While people had been shouting and running back and forth, Lars had immediately dashed to the bronco, unloosened it, leaped into the saddle and raced down the street in the direction of the Carlson home.

The fire was spreading out like a fan, east and west. In a few minutes it would cut off all approach to the home. The bronco seemed to sense the danger as it fairly flew through the smoke filled forest. The air came as blasts from a furnace. The fire was roaring like a hundred railroad trains. Tongues of flames darted across the road. "God, save the girl!" Lars cried aloud, as he bent forward, his head close to the mane of the bronco. Urging it on with frantic cries, he plunged through a cloud of lurid smoke, and was out in the clearing.

To his dismay Lars saw that the cabin was already burning. If Clara had been indoors and remained there, rescue would be impossible. The fire had swept through the grass down to the wagon road leading up to the cabin; there it had stopped. On the other side of the road the grass had been cut. In front of the cabin and leading down toward the lake was a small potato field.

Above the roar of the fire he thought he heard the barking of a dog. At the lower end of the potato field Fido was pulling at something, letting go of it, again pulling. In a second Lars was there, and to his unspeakable joy he saw Clara lying on the ground, untouched by the fire.

"Oh, my foot, my foot," she cried as Lars lifted her up. Then he noticed that she was clutching a kitten in her arms.

The heat here too was almost intolerable. The fire was now raging in the dry tamarac swamp on the other side of the field. It would be impossible to

remain here any longer.

Then Lars thought of the cascade and the big boulder. It was close at hand and the way clear. Carrying Clara in his arms and leading the horse, he ran down to the brook.

He placed the bronco standing in the pool while he, with the girl in his arms, let the spray of the cascade fall upon them. Fido was crouching beside them. The kitten didn't like to get wet, so Lars managed to release it from Clara's hands and put it in his coat pocket.

The tall weeds along the shore had been licked up and Lars saw it would now be possible to get down to the lakeside. From there he might possibly get back to town, riding along the shore.

By leading the bronco up to the boulder he managed to get into the saddle with the little girl held in front of him. She was still crying, complaining of the pain in her foot.

For some distance he could ride along the shore. At a place where the burning timber came down to the very edge of the lake, he rode out in the shallow water. Before very long he was beyond the zone where the fire had been burning.

There he met a large group of people. When they saw him with the girl in his arms, there arose a mighty shout.

A woman, with disheveled hair and wild eyes, came rushing toward him. She stretched her arms toward the girl, but Lars told the mother that Clara had hurt her foot and that he was taking her to his landlady.

Then a man came up to him. He walked as if dazed. He tried to speak, but could only mumble some incoherent words.

"Everything is all right, Mr. Carlson," Lars cried.

Just as he was starting to ride on, a kitten could be heard crying piteously.

"Where's the kitten? Where's the kitten?" several children cried and began to look for it in the crowd.

Lars saw no need to furnish them with the information.

It was discovered that Clara had wrenched her ankle so badly that it was deemed advisable to send her at once to Minneapolis for treatment.

"I can't go. I have no money and don't know what to do," said Mr. Carlson.

"I'll go with her, gladly," said Lars. "I'll do anything in the world for your girl."

Mr. Carlson stretched forth his hand as a person groping in darkness. Lars grasped it and said, "Everything will be all right, Mr. Carlson. Everything."

Lars brought Clara to a hospital where she was immediately taken care of. He called up Olga who came at once to the hospital. Olga fell in love with the little waif of the woods as soon as she saw her. The love was mutual.

It did not take long before Clara was fully recovered. She had only one anxiety. What had become of the fawn and the kitten?

Olga took her to her home. She could not bear to think of the girl going away for a long time.

While reading a newspaper one evening Olga uttered a cry of surprise. She handed the paper to Lars. "Read that!" she said excitedly. Lars read the item and exclaimed, "I see what you mean. Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

He began to pace the floor. "Wouldn't that be wonderful." He repeated the words over and over. "We must do something about it at once."

"Let us sit down and talk it over quietly," Olga said. But she was far from quiet.

The result of the conversation was that Olga wrote to Mrs. Carlson saying that she would like to have Clara stay till she herself could bring her home after the wedding.

When Olga told her father that Lars and she intended to make a trip to Chicago and take Clara with them, he asked in surprise, "Is this an elopement? Is Clara to be the flower girl?"

Olga showed him a clipping from a newspaper.

He read it twice with a puzzled expression. Then a tender light came into his eyes. "God be with you," he said in a husky voice.

"That's a dear," said Olga and patted his cheek.

The first snow had fallen. The mantle of white covered nature's scars as love covers all infirmities. The icebound lakes looked like a glistening sea and every spruce and pine stood there as a bride ready to meet the bridegroom at the altar.

In a sled drawn by a team of frisky horses, with bells ringing merrily in the frosty air, sat Lars Lee, his wife Olga, and in her lap a little girl with curly hair sticking out in all directions from under a red cap, with pale cheeks and very bright blue-eyes.

When they came to the waterfall and the big boulder, Lars stopped and pointed out the place to Olga. It was here he had first met Clara and where they had found refuge while the fire raged all around them.

The cabin had been rebuilt. Smoke rose straight up from the chimney. A dog came running toward them. Then stopped. Clara was now sitting up. "Fido! Fido!" she cried almost hysterically. The dog recognized the voice and came leaping through the snow fleet as the wind. He would have jumped into the sled had not Lars prevented it.

"My fawn, my fawn," rang out a shrill voice. And sure enough. By the rebuilt stable the fawn was standing, graceful and expectant.

A man and a woman came rushing out of the house. Then Lars drove slowly up toward the homestead.

Olga let the little girl down into the path. Then, miracle of miracles! She ran perfectly whole into her mother's arms.

Mrs. Carlson suddenly, almost rudely, pushed the girl from her. She looked at her a second, then again gathered her into her-arms and fell on her knees. Mr. Carlson stood there a minute stunned and bewildered. Then he threw his arms around wife and child.

As they entered the house, a kitten, very sleek and too big to find room in Lars's pocket, came slowly into the room. It stopped when it saw strangers and ran back into the bedroom, followed by Clara. "Is that my kitten, mama?" she cried. Then Mrs. Carlson smiled through tears, and Lars noticed that she again had become a very beautiful woman.

Clara came back with the kitten in her arms. Then she went over to her father. "Papa, I want to see the fawn." He stroked her hand, and said with an attempt to smile, "We must first let our friends have something to eat. And you, too, must eat now."

"Where did you find the fawn?" Lars asked when they sat down at the table.

Mr. Carlson told the story very minutely. It was to the effect that shortly after the fire he had been on the other side of the lake. There he saw a fawn. It ran away, but when he called it, it came slowly up to him. It went down to the lake with him and swam after the boat when he rowed back. They had

not written Clara about it, as you never knew when such an animal might take a notion to join its kind.

When he had finished, he looked at Lars intently. Finally he asked hesitatingly, "What did they do to her?"

It was a long story, but the gist of it was, that when they had read in the paper that a famous Austrian physician was coming to Chicago to demonstrate his skill in curing just such cases, they had decided to take Clara with them to see him. When the case was brought to his attention he enthusiastically made Clara one of his first patients.

Olga had not dared to speak so far. She could not trust her voice. Now she said with a smile: "The greatest difficulty was to keep you folks in the dark."

"Well," Lars said, putting his hand on Carlson's arm, "it is dark no more, is it, my friend?"

5. An Exciting Christmas Celebration.

OLGA HAD BEEN VERY BUSY preparing the children for the first Christmas program ever held in the town. Children from the surrounding country were also going to take part.

The program was to be given in a large hall.

A large Christmas tree had been placed on the platform. With the help of many willing hands Olga had seen to it that it was beautifully decorated.

The long expected evening came. The snow was crunching under many feet wending their way to the hall in the moonlight.

The hall was filled to suffocation. The children in front, then the parents; further back young people. In the rear of the hall a group of lumberjacks.

The program began with singing, by a group of girls, "Silent night, holy night." As the beautiful hymn with all its tender memories floated through the hall, many eyes grew moist for the first time in years.

A little boy had been selected to read some words of welcome. When Olga saw him mounting the platform, she gave a gasp and then closed her eyes. She knew something would happen. It did.

The boy had yielded to the temptation of opening a bag of peanuts and to the still greater temptation of eating them. When he turned to the audience he was munching fast and swallowing hard.

A titter ran through the hall. Just as he was going to read his piece, part of a peanut had come a little too close to his windpipe for comfort. He was seized by a violent fit of coughing. He grew red in the face, sputtered and reeled. Olga made a dash for the boy and began to pound his back to the accompaniment of a gale of laughter. She dragged him off the platform and led him to his seat. But that was not the end of it. When he was going to sit down another boy laughed right in his face. With flying fists he went at his tormentor till the latter howled with fright and pain.

Pandemonium broke loose. Lars had to start singing a hymn before quiet was restored.

Now songs and recitations followed each other, listened to with rapt attention. Lars and Olga felt a thrill of joy. "A servant of God must go where he can do the most good."

Then Lars announced: "We shall listen to a song by Clara Carlson."

Dressed in white Clara ran rapidly up on the platform. When the audience caught sight of her, forgotten was the minister's injunction not to applaud. Someone started to clap. Then a veritable storm swept the hall.

Clara stood there bewildered and was on the point of crying when Olga stepped up to her and put her arm round her shoulder. Then Olga went to the piano and began to play the accompaniment.

In a voice so sweet that it thrilled all hearts, Clara sang—

*I think when I read the sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then.*

*I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me,
And that I might have seen His kind look as He said,
"Let the little ones come unto me."*

Clara saw not the sea of faces in front of her. She was looking at a woman who again had become beautiful and at a man who sat with his face buried in his hands.

Just as Lars was going to announce the last hymn, there was a sudden commotion in the back of the hall. To his amazement he saw the lumberjack who had interrupted him at the temperance rally come striding up the center aisle. He came briskly up on the platform where Lars was standing, and said, "I want to say something." Lars asked him, "What do you want to say?"

With a whimsical look the lumberjack answered, "You will soon find out."

Then he turned to the surprised audience.

There was something in the lumberjack's look which made Lars feel that he could trust him—something kind and friendly.

Last time Lars had seen him, his face was distorted with anger; now he was smiling. Then he was dressed as a typical lumberjack; now he looked like a prosperous young business man. What a handsome man he was! Dark, wavy hair, noble forehead, large luminous, blue eyes. He looked like an athlete—lithe of limbs, full of life, alert. Surely this man was no ordinary working man.

With a graceful bow to Lars and Olga and then to the audience, he began to speak, amidst deep silence, in a clear, well modulated voice—

"My friends, you are undoubtedly surprised that I placed myself on the program. I shall speak only a few minutes. I know you boys and girls are anxious to get home and open your candy bags. I want to thank you for the fine program you have rendered. This is the first Christmas tree celebration I have attended in this country.

"I have spoken with Rev. Lee only once. I am not proud of the part I played in that meeting, but I will come to that later. I have just returned from a visit to Minneapolis and while there I heard some things about the new pastor and his wife which you should know. They would not tell it themselves, not that they are ashamed of it, but they are too modest to do so.

"A friend of theirs told me that Rev. Lee had an opportunity to go to a large congregation. But he returned the call and came here.

"This same friend told me that Miss Olga Haugen —it seemed that everybody down there called her Olga —was one of the finest soloists in the city. We know she is a good instructor by the way the children have been singing here this evening. More than that; for several years she has been conducting a mission Sunday school.

"But what interested me especially and what will interest you is what she did for the little girl who sang so beautifully for us this evening. Miss Haugen spent hours and hours at the hospital at her bedside, and when Clara was well enough to be up, she brought her to her own home. Then it was that the future Mrs. Lee read in the newspaper about the famous doctor. She and Rev. Lee took the girl to him and the result you know.

"When I heard that a new preacher was coming here, I made up my mind to make it hot for him if he came snooping around my lumber camp, and I wanted no preacher to look at me with disapproval in his eyes when I got drunk in town. When I saw him the first time I did not think we would have much to fear. He looked meek and mild.

"Imagine my surprise when I heard that he was going to attack the liquor traffic at an open-air meeting. Well, he could count on me being present, and if nobody else had the courage to tell him to mind his own business, I knew one who had it. For a while he had me guessing. It was the most scathing denunciation of the liquor traffic I had ever heard, and I knew that every word was true. I had to bolster up my courage with several drinks I had with me. When I interrupted him, he said quietly and firmly, 'This is my business,' I knew I was facing neither a fool nor a fanatic. I was facing a man. It took all the fight out of me. But later, in the evening, I joined some of my friends in planning to drive him out of town some dark night.

"Then something happened. I was in town the day the fire swept through the forest out in the country. I made up my mind that I would show the preacher that if he could save souls I could save the life of the little girl. But I was too drunk to do anything. When I saw him dash down the street on his bronco and saw the fire sweeping toward the cabin, I knew he was driving straight into the jaws of death. I hoped he had sense enough to stop. He did not stop as I and others undoubtedly would have done. He saved the girl! I should have gone straight to him and apologized and congratulated him on his heroism, but I was not in condition to do so. The next day I had to go to another camp.

"What I should have done then, I am going to do now. Public and secretly I have wronged Rev. Lee. Publicly I want to beg his pardon and express my admiration for him."

Then amidst the deathly silence of the audience, Mr. Halvor Tvedt—that was his name——walked toward Lars and said in a voice shaking with emotion, "Pastor, my pastor, will you forgive me?"

Lars met him with outstretched hand. Before he could say anything, someone started to applaud and a veritable cyclone swept the hall. The two young men stood there with hands firmly grasped, looking into each other's face, and the look that passed between them was a beginning of a friendship that was destined to mean much to both of them.

When the incident was over, Halvor Tvedt again turned to the audience.

"Just a few words more. Many of you know me. During the time I have been here I have been a frequent visitor to the saloons, but I have never attended a religious service. I know my example has not been good. I want to apologize especially to the young men. Since I saw Rev. Lee ride into the

forest fire, not a drop of strong drinks has touched my lips, and with the help of God never shall.”

It was Lars who led the applause. Someone back in the audience shouted, “We’ll see!” Halvor was on the point of rushing at him, when he suddenly stuck his hand in his pocket. Several men leaped to their feet as he turned to Lars and Olga.

“My friends, some of us boys want to show our appreciation of what you have done and what we know you will do. Will you accept this modest purse? I am going to hand it to Mrs. Lee, as I know ministers are poor financiers.”

When Olga stepped on the platform it was remarkable that the roof was not raised by the thunderous applause.

6. The Most Beautiful Of All Stories.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND BETTER Clara's spiritual development, it may be well to go back to the time when the little girl was brought to the hospital in Minneapolis.

The first morning after Clara came to the hospital Olga called on her. In her white nightgown, her curly hair spread out on the pillow, with her pale face and large blue eyes she looked so sweet that Olga wanted to rush toward her and fold her in her arms.

After a while some of the nurses began to sing, but at first they were so far away that the words could not be heard. Olga recognized the melody as that of her familiar hymn, "Rock of Ages." As the nurses came slowly down the corridor the hymn grew louder and the words became more distinct.

Clara opened her eyes and listened breathlessly. Then she whispered, "Who are singing? Is it angels?"

"Angels? Who are they?"

"They are little children with wings and dressed in white, but we can't see them."

"No, these are nurses. Some day we shall hear the angels sing too." That was all Olga dared to say.

But the hymn which has brought comfort and consolation to millions of sad and sorrowing souls in many climes, kept on floating into the rooms and wards where the patients were lying on their beds—some happy because they were soon to be reunited with their families in fear of death—and some who had committed themselves into the hands of a loving Father and whose soul was filled with the peace of heaven.

The next day, as the twilight came seeping in through the windows of Clara's room, Olga asked her, "Shall I tell you a story?"

Clara's large blue eyes brightened at once. "Oh, yes, do!" Then she added rather shyly, "Is it a story about —about Jesus?"

Olga was taken by surprise. It was the very thing she had intended to do. Lars had told her about his meeting the little girl. It was his impression that Clara had consciously and unconsciously picked up not a few fragments of religious truth and that, imaginative as she undoubtedly was, she had constructed a spiritual world of her own. After her talk with Clara about angels the other morning, Olga was sure such was the case. Just how much had she absorbed, what use had she made of it in her spiritual isolation, how to deal with her fear of her father were matters not easy to determine. Now Clara's timid question opened the way.

Olga drew closer to the bed, placed her hand tenderly on the girl's white forehead and said cheerfully, "Yes, dear Clara, it is a story about Jesus. It is the most beautiful story in the world."

"Tell it. Say, where is Jesus now?" she asked abruptly.

"He is here."

"Oh, you are trying to fool me."

"No, no, no, little Clara. It is true! It is true! But now let me tell you the story."

Olga had often told the story in Sunday school, but she had never felt less able to do it justice than now. She breathed a prayer for guidance and began.

"When Jesus walked here on earth, he came one day down a country road together with some friends. These friends were called apostles. They asked him questions and he answered them. There was no one who could answer questions the way Jesus could. Then the apostles saw some women come down a green hill to the road. Some of them carried babes in their arms. A group of small boys and girls followed them. When the apostles understood that the women wanted to see Jesus they made motions with their hands that the mothers with their children should move back. The apostles also shook their heads with angry scowls on their faces. Jesus had seen the group ahead in the road and smiled. But when he saw that his apostles wanted the mothers to get out of the way, the smile died in his face, and he looked very stern. He waved his friends aside, and said, "Let the little children come unto me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"What did he mean?" Clara asked.

“He meant that he loves little children and that they would love him when they learned to know him.” Olga was on the point of saying that Jesus did not like people who tried to keep little children away from him, but she was glad that she did not say it.

“Then what did Jesus do?” Clara was all excitement now.

“He stepped closer to the group, and held out his arms toward the boys and girls who were standing there, some of them trying to hide behind the mothers, because the apostles had scared them. When they saw Jesus’s smiling face they ran toward him as fast as they could. Then he put his hand on the head of one after the other and prayed, and all the time he was smiling, and he called them pretty names, and stroked their cheeks.

“Then he went up to the mother who held a sweet, curly-haired babe in her arms. The babe was dusty and rugged, but Jesus did not mind. When he held out his arms it stretched its chubby hands toward him and wanted to go to him. Jesus took the babe and put it on his left arm, and then he put his right hand on its forehead, smiled and prayed a little prayer. He took one babe after another, till he had blessed all of them. After saying a few words to the mothers, he walked on, but every now and then he turned around and waved his hand, and the children waved their hands joyously toward him. When he and his apostles came to the top of a hill, they could still see the group in the road.”

Clara had raised herself in the bed and looked at Olga with beaming eyes. Then all at once the sunshine in her face faded away and she asked, in a husky voice, “Why did they kill Jesus?”

Olga was so startled that she did not know what to say. Finally she asked, “Who told you that they killed him?”

“I don’t know. Somebody.”

“Some other day I will tell you. Just think of how nice he was to the children, how he loved them, and—and how he loves you.”

“Oh, I love him too,” Clara whispered, then closed her eyes. In a few minutes she was sound asleep. A beautiful smile hovered on her face.

“Poor little waif of the woods,” Olga whispered and walked on tip-toe out of the room.

Olga brought a book with biblical pictures to Clara. The little girl was looking at John the Baptist baptizing Jesus.

“What’s this man doing to Jesus?” she asked.

“He is baptizing him.”

“Oh!” she cried, her face beaming. “I have been baptized too—”

She stopped all of a sudden, covered her mouth with her hands and looked scared.

Olga realized that there was a story back of her alarm which she at this time had no right to look into.

Another time Clara asked, “Will you tell me another story?” Her eyes sparkled.

“What kind of a story shall I tell you?”

“Oh, let me see now.” She looked up in the ceiling and was thinking hard. Turning her eyes to Olga she said timidly, “Are there any more stories about Jesus?”

“Oh, yes, shall I tell you the story about a little girl?”

“What’s her name?”

“Well, I never thought of that. I don’t know. We’ll just call her the Little Girl. Something wonderful happened to her. I don’t think anything so wonderful happened to any other girl in the whole world.”

“What was that?”

“Wait a little while, and you’ll find out. The Little Girl was twelve years old when this wonderful thing happened. I think she was the only child in the family. Her father and mother loved her very dearly, and she loved them. They lived in one of the finest houses in town.

“One day when she had been playing outside in the sunshine with some other girls she came into the house and complained that she did not feel well. Her mother saw that she was very flushed in the face. Her father came in and said that she had fever. They put her to bed and sent at once for the doctor. The doctor gave her some medicine and said that next day she would be well again.

“She was not well the next day. She was worse. Again they sent for the doctor. When he came back from her room he shook his head, and said that he was afraid that he could not do anything more for her. ‘You must do something for her,’ the mother pleaded. ‘She must not leave us, she must not leave us!’ The father stood by the window and looked out, but he could see nothing. His shoulders shook and he had to take hold of a chair. Then he

suddenly turned to the mother and said, 'I am going to find Jesus of Nazareth. I know he can save her.' Then he rushed out of the house.

"The father's name was Jairus. He was one of the rulers of the synagogue. That is he had something to do with the church. Jesus had been in the church, and Jairus knew that he had cured many who were sick. Oh, if he could only find him before it was too late. As he ran he prayed to God all the time.

"Somebody told him that Jesus had just come across the lake and that he was down by the shore. In a few minutes Jairus reached the lake. There was a big crowd of people, and more people kept on coming. He saw Jesus standing in the midst of the crowd. He ran toward him, pushing the people aside, fell on his knees and put his forehead down to the ground at the feet of Jesus and cried, 'My little daughter is at the point of death, I pray thee, come and lay thy hand on her, that she may be healed and she shall live.'

"And Jesus went with him and much people followed. It was hard to walk, because everybody wanted to be near Jesus.

"In the crowd was a woman who had been sick for many years. She had tried one doctor after another, but no one could heal her. Oh, if she only could come near Jesus! She thought that if she could just touch his clothes, that she would get well. She pressed through the crowd. Now she was close to him. She stretched out her hand and touched the white tassel of clothes, and at once she knew that she was well. Jesus turned around and said to her, 'Daughter, be of good cheer, thy faith hath made thee well.'

"But the poor father was almost wild with fear that Jesus would come too late to save the girl. Just then one of his servants came running toward him, and cried, 'Your daughter is dead; why trouble the Master?' The father's face became white as a sheet, and he would have fallen had not Jesus taken him by the arm. Then Jesus bent toward him and said in a mild, steady voice, 'Don't be afraid, only believe.'

"'What does that mean?' Clara asked.

"It means that he should be sure that Jesus would save the girl. Then Jesus said to the people that they should not follow him any further. He made a motion with his hand that three of his apostles should go with him. They hurried on toward the house.

"'When they came near the house they could hear people crying and weeping. Jesus told them not to make all this noise. 'The child is not dead,' he said," 'She only sleeps.'

"Then some of them began to laugh at him. They knew that she was dead. What was the matter with him? They had seen her. Jesus told them to leave the house, and when they saw the look in his face, they went out as fast as they could.

"Jesus went quietly into the room where the Little Girl was, and her father and mother and the three friends followed slowly. There on the bed lay the Little Girl. Her face was very white. The dark curls moved just a little bit as a breeze slipped in through the open window.

"Jesus stood and looked down upon her sweet face for a minute, and he became very sad. Then a tender smile came to his face. He stretched forth his hand and took the white hand of the Little Girl, and in a very sweet voice he said, 'Little girl, I say unto you, arise!'

"A faint flush crept across her face. Her eyelids begun to quiver. Then slowly she opened her eyes and looked into a sweet, smiling face. She had seen him before. It was Jesus of Nazareth. And she smiled. Before her mother could move, the Little Girl arose and ran into her arms."

Clara's eyes were filled with tears. She heaved a sigh, and said slowly, "Jesus is a nice man, isn't he?"

7. “Mama, I Am Well.”

ANOTHER TIME OLGA READ HER a story she had written.

"The mother was sitting on the porch looking at a group of boys playing on the greensward. The sun had set behind a veil of golden clouds, its glory still resting on Mount Hermon's towering height. The joyous laughter of the boys stabbed the mother's heart like daggers, for her own little boy was lying limp and pale on his couch in a room inside the house. He had had one of his terrible spells when an evil spirit tore him and dashed him down, and there he would be lying, writhing in agony, foaming at his mouth and gnashing his teeth.

"After a while she went in. She heard rapid footsteps. Her husband stood in the door. She noticed that he was excited. 'Rachel,' he cried, 'Jesus of Nazareth is over by Mount Hermon. Early tomorrow morning I will take Joseph to him. I just heard of some remarkable miracles he has performed. Surely he is the Messiah.'

"'Yes, do. Oh, if he could help our boy!'

"'If we only can believe,' the father added.

"Early next morning the father started off with the boy. When he came near the mountain he found nine of the apostles and many other people there, but Jesus was not there. The day before he had gone up into the mountain with three of his apostles.

"When the apostles saw the poor boy and heard the father tell how the evil spirit would torment him they tried to cure him, but they could not. Some of the people in the crowd laughed aloud and made fun of them.

"Then someone cried, 'There comes the Master!' They all turned in the direction where the man pointed, and sure enough, there came Jesus with three of his Apostles. Some people said afterwards that there was at light in his face. He came from his transfiguration."

"'What's that?' Clara asked.

"'I'll tell you some other time,'" said Olga. "Just listen to the story now.

"Jesus turned to some men called scribes and asked them sharply what they were asking his apostles. Then the father threw himself on the ground in front of Jesus and cried, 'Master, I have brought unto thee my only child. Lord, have mercy on him! I spoke to your disciples and they could not do anything for him.'

"Jesus was sorry that his apostles had not had faith strong enough to cure the boy. Then he said, 'Bring him unto me.' Some of the people ran to the boy and lead him toward Jesus, and when he saw Jesus the evil spirit began to tear the boy something terrible. Jesus felt so sorry for the boy that he was on the point of crying. He turned to the father, and asked him quietly, 'How long has he been this way?' The father was hardly able to talk. 'From the time he was a little child,' he whispered. Then he continued, 'And it casts him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him, but if thou canst do anything, have pity on us and help us.'

"'If thou canst believe; all things are possible for him that believeth.'

"The father cried, while tears coursed down his face, 'I believe; help thou my unbelief!'

"When Jesus noticed how the people came running together, he stepped closer to the boy and cried in a loud voice to the unclean spirit, 'Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I command thee, come out of him, and enter him no more!'

"And the spirit screamed and tore the boy and came out and the lad lay on the ground as though he were dead. Someone leaned over him and whispered, 'He is dead!' And the whisper spread through the crowd, 'He is dead, he is dead.' So that was all Jesus could do!

"The Master stepped still closer to the boy, bent down and took the little white hand with his right hand, placed the left under his head and lifted him up.

"And those who stood near by noticed that the boy's face was sweet and fair.

"Then all of a sudden someone cried, 'Hozanna, thou son of David!' Others took up the cry, but not all.

"In the little home the mother was walking from one room to another all day long. Now and then she would go into an inner room, fall on her knees and call upon the God of her fathers.

"Late in the afternoon she heard a shout. Another shout. Friends and neighbors had gathered outside. They were all looking toward Mount Her-

mon. A boy, a neighbor's boy, came running in. 'They are coming!' he cried and dashed out again.

"The mother was too weak to go out. Her heart was torn between hope and fear. The crowd outside had grown quiet, very quiet. She heard footsteps, swift footsteps.

"'Mama, mama!' a shrill, joyous voice rang out. 'I'm well! I'm well!'"

Clara lay quiet a long time. Olga saw there was something on her mind. "What is it, little girl?" she asked tenderly.

"Can—can Jesus make me well?"

The father's confession and cry rang through Olga's soul, "I believe, help thou my unbelief!"

"Yes, dear Clara, he can. We must pray and we must—believe."

It was the same evening that Olga read in the newspaper about the famous physician who was coming to Chicago.

Olga had told Lars about Clara's remark that she too was baptized but that the little girl felt that she had made a mistake in telling it. Lars had looked up the records of the previous pastor in regard to baptisms, but there was no record of Clara's. He had asked Mr. Olaf Gunderson casually, who was well acquainted with the Carlson family since the daughter's birth, but he had heard nothing. Had the girl just imagined it or was it so? Sooner than they had expected the story was to be told them.

One day when Lars was going to call on a family, Olga went with him as far as the Carlsons'. She was going to wait for him there till his return. Mr. Carlson had gone to the lumber camp and Clara was visiting a neighbor. A wonderful transformation had taken place with Mrs. Carlson. Again she was smiling and Olga heard her singing as she came up to the door to the cabin.

After they had had coffee, Mrs. Carlson said hesitatingly, "There is something I have been wanting to talk to Rev. Lee about. Sometimes I think it was the right thing to do; sometimes I am not so sure. It seems to me I have heard that a minister has to do it over again if—if the child lived—"

"You know, I suppose, that my husband has been down on ministers. When Clara was born he did not want her baptized and I did not want to make any fuss about it. As she grew up, he did not want her to know anything about religion. It was all humbug, he said.

'Our neighbor's little girl, Mary, used to tell Clara what her mother had been telling her, and Clara asked me questions, but I was—well, I didn't care to go against her father, so I kind of put her off. Then one day when my husband was away from home, Clara must have eaten something, some berries or something, which made her awfully sick. I thought surely she was going to die. I could not leave her and get a neighbor to go for a doctor or—or a minister. I was afraid to let her die without being baptized. For the first time in many years I cried to God and asked what I should do. Then I remember hearing about a babe being baptized by her own mother. Clara had a terrible spell. Then she grew very quiet and I thought she was dying. I poured some water in a cup—I put some water on her forehead and said, 'Clara Carlson, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!'"

She had been telling the story with many pauses and in a low voice. Now she was weeping quietly. Olga put her arm around her shoulder. "You did the right thing, my friend. Clara is as truly baptized as you and I."

Mrs. Carlson looked up with a smile. "When I had baptized her she fell asleep and slept a long time. When she awoke she seemed to be a good deal better and she looked at me with, oh, such a beautiful smile."

"Does your husband know that you baptized her?"

"Yes, I told him the other day. He said he was glad I had done it. He is not the same man since—since the fire and Clara got well. He thinks Rev. Lee is just all right. He is going to have a talk with him some day, he said, but he does not believe very much in religion— yet."

Lars was almost wishing that Olga would not read it. If he tore the page out of the church paper she would notice that. If he hid the paper away she might ask for it. And as a minister he could not, of course, tell a lie.

Next moment he felt ashamed of himself. Did he not know his wife any better than that?

“Olga, come here a minute. I’ll read you a story about what would have happened to us.” He called her in a cheerful voice.

Olga came from the kitchen.

“And that in the official organ of our church?”

She looked surprised. Then sat down.

“It’s about a surprise party.”

“Does it say that the speaker presented the gift in well chosen words?” She looked at him roguishly.

“A minister’s wife should not show any levity when her husband is going to read something in the church paper.”

Lars looked at her very sternly.

“All right. I’ll be very sober. Fire away!”

Lars laughed. “Now you are in the proper frame of mind.”

It was a story about a surprise party given in honor of the minister who had accepted the call which Lars had returned.

It stated that it was a complete surprise to the new minister and his wife. A family living in the woods by the river had invited the minister and his wife for dinner. In the afternoon one of the deacons came and said that someone wanted to see the minister at the parsonage.

When the minister came on top of the hill from where the parsonage could be seen, he saw scores of teams standing around the house.

“I bet you he began to prepare a speech,” Olga interrupted.

“No levity,” Lars warned.

After a splendid lunch which the women had prepared and brought along, there was the singing of a hymn. Then a former parochial teacher made a speech. “In well chosen words” he wanted to express, on behalf of the congregation, the deep and heartfelt appreciation that the minister had come to them as their shepherd, and for the fine work he already had done. They wanted to express their appreciation not in words only, but by a gift, which they hoped he would not refuse. Therewith he presented the minister with a purse of \$174.00.

“Of course he wouldn’t refuse,” injected Olga. “Did not his wife get anything?”

Lars continued. The president of the Ladies’ Aid then took the floor and in well chosen words she presented the minister’s wife with a complete set of silver flatware. Whereupon the minister, on his own and his wife’s behalf, made a very appropriate speech. After which they went home, that is

the members of the congregation, feeling that they had had a very pleasant time.

“So had the minister and his wife,” added Olga.

Lars looked out of the window. Without turning his head he asked, “Are you sorry we did not go there?”

Olga jumped up and shook him. “Of course I am sorry. Sorry I was not there to make a speech. Rev. Lars Lee, do you remember what I wrote you? ‘A servant of the Lord must go where he can do the most good.’”

“Olga, you are a brick,” Lars said, and drew her to him.

8. An Agnostic Tells His Story.

LARS WAS DELIGHTED to learn that Mr. Carlson had approved of his daughter's baptism.

It indicated, at least to some extent, that his attitude toward religion was changing.

True, he had not attended any of the church services, but he had been present at the Christmas celebration and had been deeply moved when his little daughter sang her song.

Time and again Lars had said to himself, "Oh, that this man might be won for Christ!"

What would not that mean to himself, and to his daughter and to his wife?

What would it not mean to the community?

Before Lars had been very long in the community he discovered that Mr. Carlson had not kept his ideas concerning religion to himself. No, he had been far from silent. In saloons, in stores, out on the street, wherever people would listen to him, he had ridiculed religion and all who professed it. He had even given books by infidels and agnostics to several young people. And the seed sown had taken root.

One day a mother had told Lars that her fifteen-year old boy had said in her hearing—he did not know that she heard him—that the new minister must think people were pretty superstitious when he tried to make them believe that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Shortly afterwards she had found a book by Ingersoll in her son's room, hid away in an old trunk.

Small wonder that he was hoping that Mr. Carlson might be won for Christ. The most bitter enemies of Christ had sometimes become the most enthusiastic crusaders in the holy cause.

Lars was a bit worried, however, as to what he should say to Mr. Carlson who had expressed a desire to have a talk with him. Would he come to argue or would he come in search of truth?

One evening when Lars was sitting in his little study and Olga was playing on the piano in the next room— there was a low fire in the fireplace and no lamp lit— someone rapped at the door.

He heard Olga going to the door.

“Oh, good evening, Mr. Carlson. Come in. Glad to see you. Take off your coat and sit by the fire. I’ll light a lamp.”

“Good evening, Mrs. Lee. My but this looks cozy! Please don’t light the lamp for my sake.”

After a while he said, wistfully, “I heard you playing. I never heard anything more beautiful. It’s funny with music. I looked up at the stars, and though I have looked at them many a time, I never thought they were more brilliant or more of them.”

“I am glad that my husband and I are not the only ones who are crazy about stars,” Olga remarked in her enthusiastic way. “That’s one advantage of being away from a large city. You can see the stars. How’s the family, Mr. Carlson?”

“Fine and dandy,” he answered cheerfully. “Isn’t Rev. Lee at home?”

“Yes, he is at home,” Lars said laughingly, as he stepped into the room. “How are you?”

“Oh, I can’t complain.”

“Well, that’s good. Lot of people can complain if they can’t do anything else.”

Lars seated himself by the fire and threw a few sticks of birch wood into it. Soon the flames leaped up the chimney, throwing a brilliant, flickering light into the room.

Olga excused herself. She had something to do in the kitchen. It would be better that the two men were alone.

She stood still on the kitchen floor several minutes. There was a glad light in her eyes.

For some time neither of the two men spoke. The only sound was the crackling of the fire.

Without looking up from the dancing flames Mr. Carlson said in a low voice as if struggling with his emotions, “I have been wanting to talk with

you, Rev. Lee. I owe you an apology for the way I treated you the first time I spoke to you.”

“Oh, I have forgotten that a long time ago,” Lars said.

“Well, I have not.” He turned to Lars and said, “Can you forgive me?”

Lars gave him his hand. “Of course I forgive you, Mr. Carlson. Let’s talk no more about it. How is Clara?”

“Clara is all right.” He brightened up. “She is a queer little duck, Clara is. I must tell you something which happened the other day.

“Her mother had gone out and Clara was sitting alone in the house. She was looking at the pictures in the book which your wife gave her. I understand that when I was not at home she would ask her mother to read some of the stories to her.”

“Is she afraid to ask her mother to do it when you are in?”

Lars knew it was a cruel question to ask, but if the man did not realize how he had sinned against his own child by trying to keep her in ignorance of the Christian religion, it was time that he should realize it.

Mr. Carlson was struck to the quick. He looked pathetically at Lars. Finally he mumbled, “I am afraid she is.” Then he smiled as he added, “Or rather was.”

“Oh, she has changed? I am so glad to hear you say that, Mr. Carlson.”

“Well, this is the way it happened. I came into the house and sat down near the table where Clara was standing. I picked up a newspaper. Clara thought it was her mother who had come in. Excitedly she cried, ‘Oh, mama, look at these dirty pigs and look at this tramp. Will you read me the story?’ She turned around and when she saw me instead of her mother, she grew red in the face and covered her mouth with her hand as children will do when they have made a mistake. You will never understand how that hurt me. ‘Don’t you think I can read, too, Clara?’ I managed to ask with a smile. I’ll read you the story.’

“I never saw a happier child in my life. Feverishly she picked up the book, placed herself at my knee and pointed to the picture. ‘Say, papa, aren’t those pigs awful?’”

“I saw at a glance that it was an illustration to the Prodigal Son. For a moment I was tempted to throw the book away.”

Mr. Carlson’s face had suddenly become stern.

“Lars realized that Mr. Carlson’s attitude toward religion was not of recent date.

“Would you mind telling me why?” Lars asked cautiously.

“Oh, I don’t know. I have tried to forget that miserable chapter in my life, but the story brought it back all of a sudden.”

“You tell me your story. There is nothing like sitting down and talking about things in a perfectly frank manner.”

“Well, it’s a long story. I’ll try to make it short.

“I was given plenty religion when I was a kid. It was religion from early morning till late at night. That was when I was in the house. And on Sundays I was given a double dose of it.

“My father had got religion at a revival meeting. He had been a pretty hard case, the way it sounded. Drinking and swearing and fighting.

“Every morning father read a chapter in the Bible and then offered a long prayer. When I had done something wrong, which happened often, he would pray for me. In the evening there was another chapter and another prayer. Sometimes I was so sleepy that I had to take hold of the chair with both hands and squeeze it so as not to fall asleep.”

Lars could readily see that that kind of family worship would not make a very good impression on young minds. The reading and the prayer might be of interest to grown-up people, but not of interest to children.

A good deal was said and written about the importance of family worship, but very little about how to make it interesting also to children.

Many a time Lars had been present where several small children would be sitting around the table looking hungrily at the food but compelled to listen to the reading of a long chapter, preferably from the Romans, of which they hardly understood a single word. He had sometimes wondered what impression such family worship would make on grown—up people, if they had to listen day after day to a long chapter read in a language they did not understand.

Why should not the worship attended by children be made so simple, so happy, so cheerful that they would cherish the memory as long as they live?

“What about your mother?” Lars asked quietly.

“My mother died when I was three years old. People have told me that she was a wonderful woman. I can’t remember very much about her. One incident, though, is very distinct in my mind. One day we were walking through a field of daisies. I remembered the field was all white. We sat down on a hill. I often went there later and sat down when I was sad and

lonely. Somehow I felt that mother was there. Many a time I have dreamt about her, and it was always in a field of daisies and the sun shining. She picked some of the flowers and made a chain and threw about my neck. Then she took me in her lap and kissed me..."

"That's a beautiful memory," Lars said quietly.

After a while Mr. Carlson looked up again.

"I have another memory of her," he continued slowly and hesitatingly. "She was in her coffin. Father lifted me up to look at her. Her face was very white, but, oh, how beautiful..."

In the presence of a holy sorrow Lars felt that he had no right to speak.

Mr. Carlson straightened up. "Pardon me," he said in a strong voice. "I have never told this to anyone.

"I got a new mother. She wanted me to call her mother and she licked me when I refused. Mother? No, not mother. Tyrant. She too was religious, very religious. She had a son of her own of my age. If there ever was a sneak, he was one. When there was any dirty work to do, I had to do it. He would tell his mother all kinds of lies about me, and when I denied it, she always took his part. And then she would tell father. Many a night I was so sore that I could not lie down. I cried myself to sleep, and sometimes I dreamt about mother. I would wake up all of a sudden and my face was wet with tears.

"Sundays were the hardest of all. Bible reading and a long prayer in the morning. Then to church and a long sermon. In the afternoon I had to learn my lessons in religion by heart. I was not allowed to go to the neighbors and play with other boys, and boys did not dare to come to my home.

"One Sunday afternoon I was to learn by heart the story about the Prodigal Son. I had to go and bring the cows home. When I went up to the house, a neighbor boy passed by. He showed me a new ball he had just gotten. We went behind the barn and threw it to each other. My step-brother must have seen me and told my mother, because suddenly father came upon us. He had a switch in his hand. When the boy saw him, he ran away, but I stood there as petrified. I knew what was coming, and it came. Father dragged me into the barn. For three days and nights I had to stay in bed. Oh, yes, I remember the Prodigal Son.

"When I got up, my stepmother took me into the bedroom, and wanted me to kneel down and pray God to me. I tore away from her and ran to a neighbor's. The wife there wanted to know what they had done to me, but I

would not tell. I felt faint and she put me to bed. When I touched the bed with my back, I cried out in pain. She must have guessed what was the matter, for she came over to me and turned me around. She threw herself down at the bedside, put her hand on my head, and cried and cried. Then suddenly got up and walked out of the room. She met father at the door of the house. Talk about tongue lashing! she went at him like a fury. Then he heard what kind of a father and Christian he was. And she did not spare my stepmother. Then she shouted 'You leave that poor boy with me till he gets well. And if you ever lay your cruel hands on him again, I'll report you to the sheriff.'"

"In a few days she went home with me. All she said to father was, 'Remember what I told you!'

"After that they did not lay their hands on me, but I was made to feel that I was a great sinner. Father did not mention me by name in his morning and evening prayer, but I knew whom he meant. Stepmother went around sighing. Then she would admonish her own son, but her words were meant for me.

"I liked to read, but the only books we had were religious books. It was a sin to read stories which were not true. A neighbor boy let me have a story book. I admit it was not the kind of a story that a boy ought to read.

"A doctor in town who had been raised in the same neighborhood as my mother offered to give me board and room and a chance to go to school if I took care of his horses. I did not dare to tell them at home about it. He must have spoken to father, because I heard stepmother say to him that it was no use to let me go to school. I would never make any good use of it. It would be better to send her son to a church school, because she had prayed ever since he was born that he might become a minister of the Gospel.

"Well, he went to the church school and I had to stay at home. Life became unbearable. Nothing but hard work, constant nagging, Bible reading and prayer. I cannot remember a word of praise or encouragement.

"One day when I was sent on an errand to town, I met the doctor on the street. He said that he was sorry that I had not come to stay with him. He told me that my grandfather on my mother's side had given him twenty-five dollars when he needed that much money to finish a term at school. Now he wanted me to take that amount. I did not want to take the money, but he stuck the money in my coat pocket and patted me on the head.

9. A Night At His Mother's Grave.

"THEN I SAW MY WAY CLEAR to do something I had been thinking about a long time—to run away from home. In a story I had read it told about a boy running away from home. He took the evening train to a town fifty miles away. Then changed for another train. Next morning he took still another train. He rode all day, then got off at a village and walked several miles out in the country. I had studied the map at a neighbor and had it all planned. One night I left home, never to return."

As Mr. Carlson had been telling his story, he seemed to live through his sad experiences. He had kept himself under good control, but Lars could hear the bitterness in his voice.

And while listening to him Lars remembered another boy. A boy who had been raised in a home where love radiated; whose father had taken him on trips to the mountains; and who in the winter evenings told him beautiful stories from the Bible; whose mother said very little, but whose voice was sweet and whose hand was soft and soothing. This boy hardly knew a day in his life when he had not associated with the finest kind of Christian men and women.

Oh, what a privilege to have had a cheerful, happy Christian home and be surrounded by influences reflecting the love of Jesus.

The fire had almost died down to embers and ashes. It was dark in the room and the two men sat there in silence.

Then Lars arose and lit a lamp.

Coming back to his chair he put his hand on Mr. Carlson's shoulder and said, "Thank you for telling me this. Would you mind telling me the rest of your story. I know it's painful, but I believe it's good for you and it may help me to help you."

"There was one thing I did not tell you," continued Mr. Carlson. "I did not think I was able to. I'll try to tell you."

“In leaving home that night I had to go past the cemetery. I used to run past it at night as fast as I could. I knew where my mother was—was—sleeping, but no one had taken me there and I had not felt like going there myself. But that night I had no fear. It was a moonlight night. Then suddenly there came to my mind the picture of mother and myself in a field of white flowers. I felt her presence. Then I went to her grave...”

“Don’t try to tell any more about that sacred moment,” Lars said gently.

After a while Mr. Carlson again continued:

"There is no need of going into details. I attended school one winter. Then I began to drift about. Worked in the harvest fields in the summer and in the lumber camps in the winter. Not all the men were bad. In fact most of them were fine fellows, but when we came from the harvest fields in the fall, we spent what we had earned, drinking, carousing, and when we got through in the woods in the spring, we spent what we had left, if we had anything left, in the saloons.

“One winter I spent in Chicago. My roommate was a great admirer of Robert Ingersoll, and we went and heard him lecture on the ‘Mistakes of Moses’ and other topics like that. He was one of the greatest speakers I have ever heard. We got his books and fairly devoured them. I then found out what I already had suspected, that religion is nothing but superstition, and that the Christians are hypocrites.”

“Yes,” Lars said sharply, “I know. My father and mother were hypocrites, my wife is a hypocrite and I am a hypocrite. Christianity is nothing but a lie.”

Mr. Carlson turned to him with an appealing look in his face. “Oh, Rev. Lee, you must not talk like that. You don’t mean it.”

“Why should I not mean it? If you and Ingersoll are right, then I am wrong. I am wasting my life, my wife is wasting her life, in coming here to make people hypocrites if they are not already. The man to work here a man like yourself. I understand that you have been working. You have tried to shut God out of the life of your own little daughter. You have tried to shut Him out of the life of some of the young people in this community. And you have succeeded. You have been a successful missionary, Mr. Carlson. I hope you are proud of it.”

“Don’t, please don’t talk like that, pastor,” Mr. Carlson pleaded. “You are just making fun of me. Why do you do it?”

“Well, look me in the eye, and tell me straight out, that I am a hypocrite. Let’s call in Olga and tell her the same.”

“You know that I don’t think that you and your wife are hypocrites, after all you have done for us.”

“What we have done, people without any religion would have done. What makes a person a Christian is not what he does. It’s something else.”

“What’s that?”

“Well, we may come to that later. But let me ask you a few questions: Have you never in your life met with people who were confessing Christians and who still were good and gentle?”

Mr. Carlson thought for a while. Then he smiled.

“Yes, I have met such people. I stayed one summer with such a family. If there are real Christians in the world, it’s that family.”

“Glad to hear it,” Lars said and laughed. “But suppose you had been a son in that family, don’t you think you would have gone out in life with different ideas of religion?”

“I guess so.”

“Yes, you had better guess so. Now, let me ask you another question: Should your attitude toward religion be determined by your father and your stepmother and by men, no matter how brilliant, who may be misrepresenting real Christianity?”

“Well, can you blame me?” asked Mr. Carlson and picked up a stick and threw into the ashes.

“No, I don’t blame you for getting a wrong impression of Christianity, but I blame you now if you do not honestly and earnestly face facts.”

“What facts?”

“Mr. Carlson, you are facing a great opportunity in your life. I believe the greatest. You got wrong impressions of Christianity in your home. I think your father meant well, but he did not understand boys. Later in life you have been under the influence of the enemies of Christ. You have never given Him a fair chance. You have never let Him talk for Himself. My friend, the trouble is that you do not know Jesus Christ.”

Mr. Carlson began to fidget. “How do we know that He ever lived?” he asked with some heat.

“Well, we have His life in the New Testament. Somebody wrote it. Could bad men write such a story? But, as I said, I’ll come to that later. I want you to read about Jesus with an open mind. Read any of the Gospels. Preferably St. Luke. Will you promise me to do that? You have not a Bible? I’ll give you this Testament.”

Mr. Carlson took the Testament and put it in his pocket. “Yes, I’ll promise to do that.”

“I can smell coffee,” Lars said with a smile. “I think we agree on one thing anyway, and that is that we both like coffee.”

Mr. Carlson laughed heartily. “You are not an ordinary preacher.”

“No, he is a very extraordinary preacher!” Olga said, as she stepped in with a tray of coffee and sandwiches.

“He ought to have an extraordinary wife,” Mr. Carlson remarked dryly.

“He has,” said Olga quietly. “You want sugar *with* or *in* the coffee?”

“Don’t you know that I am a Norwegian?” Carlson said, as he took a piece of loaf sugar and placed it beside the cup.

After chatting pleasantly for some time, Mr. Carlson asked Olga if she would be so kind as to play and sing it little before he left.

“Sure, I’ll be glad to,” Olga said cheerfully and went to the piano. “Anything special you want me to play?”

“Have you got ‘Napoleon’s March Over the Alps?’”

“No, I am sorry to say I have not.”

She looked at several pieces of music. Then put them aside, and began to play a medley of Norwegian folk melodies. And while the stars blazed outside in the evening sky, and the wind soughed in the pine trees and played along the snow; and while the two men, so far apart and yet brothers in humanity sat there by the fireside there poured forth from the instrument a flood of bewitching music. Now soft and sweet as a mother’s lullaby, now sprightly as a dance of fairies, now rushing along like a wind through the forest. There was the singing of birds, the bells of the grazing herd on the mountain slope, the rippling of brooks in silvery cascades.

Then came the tones of church bells, at first faint and far away. Then they clanged and crashed in wild joy. Grew fainter and fainter. Died away into palpitating silence.

How it happened Lars never knew, but before he realized what he was doing he started to sing, Olga joining him with her golden soprano:

“Built on the Rock the Church doth stand
Even when steeples are falling;
Crumbled have spires in every land,
Bells are still chiming and calling;
Calling the young and old to rest,
But above all the soul distressed
Longing for rest everlasting.”

They had often sung this hymn together before, sometimes before large audiences. But never had the glorious, gripping melody poured forth from their very soul as they sang it to the man whose life had been bitter, lonely, sad. A man who had known few of the fine things in life. A man who perhaps longed for truth and beauty more than anyone realized.

Mr. Carlson sat with bowed head. When they were through he looked up and said, “My, but that was nice. Music is a wonderful thing, is it not? But now it’s time for me to get home to wife and kiddy.”

Olga brought him his coat and cap. “Thank you for calling on us, Mr. Carlson. You must call again. And greet your wife and Clara. And the stars,” she added, laughingly.

Carlson shook hands with Lars. “You will never know how much I have enjoyed this evening, Rev. Lee. I am going to do what you suggested, but next time I see you, I am going to ask you some pretty hard questions.”

10. Saloon Strikes Cruel Blow

FROM BABYHOOD Clara had been afraid of her father. The smile left her face and laughter died on her lips when she heard him coming.

At times he had tried to win her confidence and love. He brought her presents and played with her. But the haunted look in her eyes was always there.

He knew the reason why. How often had he not come home so drunk that he stumbled against the doorsteps and fell sprawling on the floor right in front of her and her mother.

But since her return from the trip to Minneapolis and Chicago he had been a different man, and when he had begun to read Bible stories to her, her heart had gone out to him full and free. "Love casteth out fear," says the Bible, and so it is.

She followed him around in the farm yard and to the stable when he fed the cow. When one morning he told her that a calf had arrived and that it was to be her calf, her joy knew no bounds. The calf took the place in her heart after the fawn one day had left the farm and joined its own kin in the forest.

It puzzled her that he read in a little book only when her mother was not in. When Mrs. Carlson returned from a neighbor or from town he hurriedly put the book in his pocket, picked up another book or a newspaper and pretended that he had been reading it. Clara did not dare to ask him but she often wondered what kind of a book it was.

Mr. Carlson often spoke about the time he had called at the parsonage. Never had he heard anyone play and sing the way Olga did. She might have become famous he said, if she had entered upon a musical career. Instead of that she was burying herself in this wilderness. And the minister was certainly a prince of a fellow. He was not afraid to speak his mind and at the same time he was full of fun.

Mr. Carlson did not, however, attend church, but he offered no objection when his wife and child went to religious services.

If they had seen him when he was home alone, they would have noticed that he was reading the little book with great interest. Sometimes he would read one of Ingersoll's books, but less and less often now.

It had been a long, hard winter. One heavy snowfall followed another, and the pines and spruces on the other side of the lake stood decked in sparkling white. One afternoon Clara had gone with Lars and Olga to a farmstead out in the country. On the way home they drove through a long lane of snow covered pines. It was moonlight. Myriads of stars blazed and burned in the heavens. Small fleecy clouds sailed across the sky. At times it looked as if they stood still and that the moon and the stars were racing across the heavens. The bells rang out merrily in the frosty air as the swift horses sped through the forest. When they came to the top of a ridge, with a lake on one side and the forest on the other, Lars stopped the horses. They sat there in silence and looked at the landscape bathed in the soft moonlight, and at the racing moon and stars overhead. Then Lars had said, "When I was a little boy I believed that the stars sang and the trees talked. I am not so sure that I was mistaken."

Finally spring came. As the sun rose higher and higher in the sky and the south wind came skipping over the hills, the snow melted; brooks and rivers flung off their icy chains and went swirling down glades and glen. One night the wind came sweeping down on the lakes, and the next morning the ice was piled up along the north shore and the waves danced in wild glee over their newborn freedom.

Olga had made quite a study of birds. Living on the edge of the town near the woods she now had greater opportunity than ever to observe bird life.

Early one morning she was wakened by the singing of a robin. There he was, tripping over the lawn, hopping every now and then, listening for the movements of worms in the ground. He flew to the top of the stable and began to sing. No other bird is able to give so many shades of meaning to a single note.

A few days later Olga heard soft, plaintive warbling and she caught a flash of blue as a bird flew through the sunshine. The same day she was thrilled by the flood of melody that poured from a song-sparrow, perched on

a high branch of a cottonwood. He and his mate must have decided to build their nest there because she heard him at all times of the day, and even late at night.

One day, walking at the edge of a swamp, she heard the lisping, saucy note of a red-winged blackbird and soon a whole flock circled over her head, scolding her lustily. Crossing a pasture, the clear piercing whistle of the meadowlark announced his arrival. And over by the willows, the cat-bird, flitting about gracefully, made his catcalls, followed by a long glorious song.

The next morning she was awakened by a regular alarm clock as a wren was defending its home against the chattering sparrows. Later in the day there was a flush of fire in the air as an oriole swept past the window.

Dandelions blazed on the lawn, and anemones, white m snow, blue as the sky, waved in the wind down by the willows.

But while the heavens smiled and the earth was glad Lars thought of the line, "That every prospect pleases and only man is vile."

He was becoming appalled by the vileness and wickedness of man. He remembered the words of a prominent churchman, that it was hard at times not to have contempt for humanity.

He was not a stranger to the havoc wrought by strong drink. Several of his school mates were already in drunkards' graves. One of them, his best friend.

This town was one of the strongholds of the saloon element. Recently he had been shocked by the blow which the element had dealt Mr. Carlson and Halvor Tvedt. The latter had not only quit drinking, but he had privately and openly denounced the saloons. He had been active in starting a temperance society in another town, and had brought there one of the leading temperance lecturers in the state.

The former friends of Carlson and Tvedt had vowed that they would "get them." Lars had heard of the threat and he knew that they would stoop to any means, no matter how foul. He was especially concerned about Mr. Carlson, because he realized the terrific fight he must be waging against a lifelong habit.

There was a large floating population in town; men who had no homes and perhaps no family connections and therefore felt themselves under no restraint. For years there had been a large saw mill which gave employment to many log drivers, lumberjacks and mill hands.

In the summer many of these men went to the harvest fields. When they came back to town they had a good deal of money to spend. The same was the case with many of the farmers who had not cleared their land. There were more than twenty saloons in town, all of them doing good business. "Going to town" for many meant a visit from saloon to saloon until late at night when they returned home to their frightened families.

It was a pitiful sight to see a farmer who had come to town with his wife, hitch up his horse and start for home. Many a time he decided that he must have one more drink before going home; so the team was stopped in front of a saloon with the wife in the high seat of the wagon outside. Sometimes she would have to sit there for hours waiting for her husband who continued drinking until nearly midnight.

The homes of most of these farmers were poverty stricken and they continued to live in the same primitive way they did in the beginning because their money was spent for liquor instead of farm improvements and family comforts. When the mortgage on these farms was foreclosed these men either moved out or came to town. A young man, brought up on a farm, said that he often at night heard drunk farmers driving their horses at a gallop, singing and shouting. In the middle of the night it always caused a shiver of fear as he heard them shout and heard the rattle of the lumber wagons, and he crawled down with the quilts over his head.

At election time the farmers especially liked to go to towns because the candidates for public office were there waiting for them as honored guests, and they were treated liberally. If a man was not a frequenter of the saloons, then the candidates drove out with a big bottle of whiskey and visited him at his home.

A great deal of gambling went on in connection with the saloons and, of course, there were a number of evil resorts in town. Some of the lower and tougher saloons put knockout drops in the liquor of strange lumberjacks and harvest hands. When they went to sleep they were locked up in the back room. The next morning they found all their money gone. They had completely forgotten what had happened the night before. If a policeman was called in, a present of five dollars from the saloon keeper induced him to

verify that he had spent his money like water and the victim was convinced that he had received his money's worth. Out of generosity the saloon keeper usually gave him a ticket home and probably a few dollars in cash, and he went on his way rejoicing in the belief that he had had a big time and that the saloon keeper was a good friend of his.

The conspirators, for such they were, knew that it would be no easy matter to "get" Mr. Tvedt. He was too strong a character for that, but he had a young friend who might prove less vulnerable, one Mr. Hans Iverson, who had recently come to America. Mr. Tvedt had furnished him with ticket and had brought him along to the woods. When Mr. Tvedt quit drinking he had persuaded his friend to do the same. When he went to another logging camp Mr. Iverson remained behind. This was the time to "get" him and indirectly strike at his older friend.

Mr. Iverson played the violin with considerable skill. It was decided in the back room of a saloon one night to offer him a good amount of money if he would come and play at a dance. He accepted the offer.

When the dance had been in progress for some time in a stiflingly hot hall, a former boon companion of Mr. Iverson said to him that he knew he did not drink beer and whisky, but by this time he must be thirsty and he would send him a glass of lemonade. Mr. Iverson said he would appreciate it very much.

He was called aside to a small room and handed the glass by a man he did not know. He swallowed it with a gulp. Then everything went black before his eyes. Another fiddler had been provided and the dance went merrily on. But from time to time men would come into the room, slap each other on the back and laugh uproariously. They had "got" him pretty slick. Now, what would Mr. Tvedt say?

Next morning Mr. Iverson awoke in the room. He was alone. Everything around him was quiet. Where was he? What had happened? His head ached and his throat was dry. "Give me something to drink!" he cried. "I am dying."

Then he heard footsteps and the friend who had offered him the lemonade stuck his head through the open door.

"Say, old chap, I am awfully sorry. I could not bring you the lemonade myself and asked someone else to bring it to you. He must have put something in it, for you fell asleep at once, and it was impossible to awake you.

Gee, but I am sorry. If I could only find him, I would make him suffer for this.”

Mr. Iverson heard him in a daze. “Oh, my head is splitting. Give me something to drink,” he cried.

“I’ll bring you something which will cure you in a jiffy,” said his friend. He was gone only a few minutes when he returned with a bottle.

The next morning when Lars went past a saloon, he heard much laughter. Mr. Iverson came reeling out and fell in a heap right in front of him. The door to the saloon closed hurriedly, and the laughter grew still louder. What a joke on the minister! It was just killing. That’s what it was.

Lars commandeered a farmer to bring Mr. Iverson to the parsonage in his lumber wagon. Later Lars heard the whole story. To think that human beings could be that low, that despicable!

Encouraged by their success the conspirators laid their plans for Mr. Carlson. That was not so easy, as he seldom came to town and kept away from former companions. But if he would not come to the saloon, why not bring the saloon to him? Yes, that’s what they must do. But they must be clever about it.

One day a man came to Mr. Carlson and asked him if he would go with him and rebuild a cabin which had been destroyed by the forest fire. Yes, Mr. Carlson would be glad to do that. He needed the money.

Off they went and worked at the cabin several days. When it was ready, the man brought forth a bottle of whisky. “It is customary when a house is ready to take a drink, but I know you don’t drink whisky. I honor you for it. You have great will power, Mr. Carlson. When you make up your mind to do a thing or to let a thing alone, you do it. Not all men can do that. I should say not.”

Then he drank of the bottle and put it right under Mr. Carlson’s nose and said with a laugh, “That doesn’t smell very bad, does it?” Then he put the bottle on the table.

Mr. Carlson was tired and thirsty. The smell of the whisky set the blood in his veins on fire. But he gritted his teeth together and shook his head. The man went over to his satchel and said, “Well, I knew you would not drink whisky. You have made up your mind not to, and that settles it, but a man with your will power can take a glass of harmless beer and let it alone. Here take this. This is all I have.”

He shoved the flask right into Mr. Carlson's hand, and before he knew what he was doing he had taken a big swallow. He took another one. Then emptied the flask.

All his resolutions had been swept away as cobwebs before a gale. Every nerve in his body cried for drink, drink. Forgotten was wife, forgotten was Clara, forgotten was the little book. The man went out of the room, leaving the bottle of whisky open on the table. When he returned, the bottle was empty. He pretended not to see it.

Late that evening Mrs. Carlson, having sent Clara to bed, was sitting reading. She heard the rattle of a lumber wagon coming up to the house. She hurried out to the kitchen to prepare a meal for her husband.

She heard the door open, then something or somebody fell heavily on the floor. She rushed in. There on the floor was her husband.

The news that Mr. Carlson had been lying drunk in a lumber wagon as it passed through town spread like wildfire from saloon to saloon and through town. When Lars and Olga heard it, their faces grew white. Something like this Lars had feared, but when the blow came, it came with staggering force.

"Poor Mrs. Carlson, poor Clara," Olga finally said.

"Yes, and poor Mr. Carlson," Lars added, and went slowly and with bowed head to his study.

At first he sat as in a daze. Then the thought came to him: When Mr. Tvedt returns and he hears what they have done to his friend, the fight will be on. To what extent, if any, should he as a minister of the gospel, take part in the fight? Lars felt that he should have kept in closer touch with Mr. Carlson. The servants of the devil spared no effort to win recruits and to keep them. Why were the servants of the Lord less zealous?

11. An Agnostic Asks Questions.

ONE DAY Lars suggested to Olga that they call on the Carlsons. After visiting with them for awhile Olga might suggest to Mrs. Carlson and Clara that they take a walk or that they row across the lake and pick flowers. That would give him an opportunity to have a good talk with Mr. Carlson.

This was carried out just as planned.

Mr. Carlson looked very depressed and scarcely spoke when Lars was making remarks about ordinary matters.

Finally he said, without looking up from the floor, "Well, I suppose you have heard what has happened?"

"Yes, I have heard. I am very sorry. I know what a struggle you must have carried on this winter," Lars said quietly.

Carlson looked up at him sharply. "Thank you, pastor. I do not try to excuse myself. Nobody who can not speak from experience knows what it means to have to fight against the awful craving for strong drinks. I thought I had conquered. But now I am afraid it's hopeless. It has been terrible for my wife. She has been so happy this winter. Now she has been crying till she can cry no more. But she does not scold me. I sometimes wish that she would. I deserve it."

"Does Clara know?" Lars asked timidly.

"No, not yet, but someone may be mean enough to tell her. If she should find out, God knows it would kill her."

He bent his head and covered his face with his hands.

"God knows?" Lars asked, but Mr. Carlson just shook his head.

After a while he looked up and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Have you read anything in the Testament I gave you?" Lars inquired.

"Oh, yes, I read quite a bit, but after this happened I was not interested. I am a hopeless case."

"This is the time when you should be interested," Lars remarked.

“Oh, it’s all these doubts. Whenever I read in the book, someone seems to whisper in my ear, ‘How do you know this is true?’”

“What are some of these doubts? I know from personal experience that it helps to talk to a friend.”

“Did you ever doubt?” Carlson asked surprised.

“Yes, once upon a time I read agnostic literature more than I read the Bible. Now be perfectly frank,” Lars urged.

“Last time I talked with you, pastor, I asked you how we might know that Jesus ever lived. Many educated men claim that the stories about Him are just made up. I don’t remember what you answered.”

“I don’t agree with you that many educated men say so. But let that go. What do you think of Jesus? You have been reading about Him of late.”

“Well, I guess that the men who made up these stories must have been pretty smart men,” Carlson admitted.

“Yes, they must have been very smart men to make up stories about the greatest personality we know. I don’t believe that bad men could have done it; I don’t believe that good men would have done it.”

After a while Mr. Carlson proceeded. “You say that the Bible is inspired. You say that God dictated every word the way a man dictates to his stenographer.”

“No, I have not said that,” Lars remarked, smilingly. “There was a time when I had my doubts concerning the inspiration of the Bible, but when I began to read it with a more open mind, the conviction grew upon me that God does speak to us in the Bible. I believe with my whole heart that it is inspired. How, I do not know.”

“Well, but how can you preach that the blood of Jesus cleanses a soul, a spirit? And how can you preach that people eat flesh and drink blood in the Lord’s Supper? And do you honestly believe that there is real fire in hell and real serpents?”

“Do you mean to say that you have heard me say so? You never heard me preach,” Lars protested.

“I mean the church?”

“What church?”

“Your church and the church I was brought up in.”

“How long since you heard a sermon?”

“Oh, I know what they preach,” answered Carlson impatiently.

Lars realized that he must not rub his friend the wrong way. So he spoke more slowly. “Mr. Carlson, what the church preaches is one thing. What the enemies of the church claim it preaches is usually another thing. The main thing is: What does Christianity teach?”

“What does Christianity teach concerning the things I mentioned?”

“I am not going to give you my ideas. You must find out for yourself. But I will leave a thought with you which may help you. It helped me.

“We’ll take for granted that there is a God and that God wants to reveal Himself to man, that He wants to make known to man some of His thoughts. Now, God is infinite; man is finite. God knows everything. What does man know? One way to make known His thoughts is to use our language. Suppose a professor wants to explain something to an ordinary man; something that the man knows nothing about. The professor must use the words that the man uses. To make himself understood the professor makes use of illustrations and stories and even makes drawings on paper. Still he has a hard job of it.”

“Well, I guess you will find it a hard job to explain things to me,” Mr. Carlson interrupted.

“Oh, you are no ordinary man,” Lars laughed. “I did not have you in mind.”

“Thank you, you are very kind. But go on.”

“Jesus went about it the same way. He told parables, asked questions, pointed to flowers and birds and little children. Still His disciples were slow in grasping His meaning. Some of the greatest truths they did not grasp before He later sent them the Holy Spirit.

“What I mean is this, that spiritual truth can only in a very inadequate way be conveyed to the mind of man through human speech. It is worth while to keep this thought before you when you read the Bible.

“Now another thought,” Lars continued. “In the Old Testament God not only spoke words to His people. He made use of ceremonies, sacrifices of animals and blood of animals. That was something man could see and hear and touch with his senses. There was something spiritual back of it, a shadow of things to come. In the New Testament He not only speaks words but He makes use of water and bread and wine. That too was something which man could see and touch and even taste with his senses. But with

these things He gives something spiritual. Just what that is and how He gives it is a mystery. Poor human reason cannot grasp it. It must be accepted in faith, if accepted at all.

"Of course a mystery will challenge man's intellect. No wonder people try to explain. But there are things which cannot be explained. You spoke about blood. There is a good deal about the blood of animals in the Old Testament and the blood of Jesus in the New Testament. Some people take everything in a literal way.

They do not sense what blood stands for. Others take offense because they, too, believe that it is meant in a literal way. Blood stands for life. Jesus gave his life, He poured out His life. Isaiah says that he poured out his soul.

"We are now touching on the most baffling of all doctrines, that of the atonement. Theologians have written libraries on that subject. But when you expect them to say the final word, the word, they do not say it. They cannot say it, but some of them don't want to admit it.

"Personally, I believe with my whole heart that Jesus died for me, that He shed His blood for me, that He gave His life for me. Why He had to do it I cannot explain. When I think of it I look into a boundless deep. When I realized my sin, my lost condition, I turned to Jesus as my Redeemer. I do not only think of the shedding of His blood on the cross. I think of His suffering, His death and His resurrection. I do not only think of what He did two thousand years ago. I think of Him as a living, loving, ever present, powerful personality who has admitted me into His fellowship. He saved and He saves.

"Now, my friend, this is the kind of Savior you need. You need Him badly, desperately. You are not happy. You are not free. You know that. You have no hope for this life—you just said so. You have no hope for the next life. Why not accept Jesus as your Savior?"

"What does that mean?"

"Well, then, let me use His own words. They are very simple. 'Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' And, 'Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest!'"

"How can I come?"

"He comes to you first. When you read His word, hear His word, meditate on His word, He makes you conscious of your sins and leads your thoughts, your heart, to Himself. You will begin to pray. You will have to

pray. Thus He helps you to come to Him. But if you neglect His word, He cannot do anything for you. You have found that out.”

“But if all sorts of doubts and even bad thoughts come to me when I read, what then?” Mr. Carlson looked at him searchingly.

“That shows how the devil is trying to keep you in his power. But the more the devil pesters you, the more you will feel the need to be cleansed and purged. My friend, a terrible fight is going on between the devil and Jesus concerning your soul. Who is going to win? Whom do you want to win?”

12. An Enchanted Island.

THAT THE TWO MEN might talk more freely together, Olga suggested to Mrs. Carlson that they row across the lake to the large island. "There we'll have a surprise party," she said.

"May I go with you?" Clara cried as she jumped up and down in front of her mother. "May I go with you?" she repeated, turning to Olga.

"How could we go without you?" her mother said laughingly.

Clara danced around, clapping her hands. This brought the dog "Fido" to the door, barking loudly. "He says he wants to go along too," Clara interpreted while patting his head.

Without waiting for any permission or objection in regard to the dog, Clara ran ahead down to the shore, "Fido" running rings around her and barking joyously.

Olga took the oars and rowed with steady strokes across the lake toward the island. The water was smooth as glass, reflecting the fleecy clouds and the blue heaven above.

The surrounding country had long been denuded of timber. Huge stumps were the sole reminders of the forest of white pines which had reared their majestic crowns against the sky. But neither lumberjack's swinging axe nor devastating fires had ever touched the island. Down through the centuries all kinds of trees, bushes, grasses and flowers had gathered there. Seeds had been blown there by the wind, carried by waves, brought by birds and animals from far and near, and had found fertile soil.

The island was a perfect Mecca for birds. In the fall most of them went to sunny climes, through the vast pathless spaces, across plains and mountains and oceans. In the spring they returned along the same uncharted routes, guided by Him without whose will not even a little bird falls to the ground.

When the boat neared the island, Olga pulled in the oars and they glided gently through a bed of white and yellow water lilies toward the graceful curves of the sandy shore.

“Listen, oh, listen,” Clara cried. “Listen to the birds. Don’t you bark, ‘Fido’; you listen too.”

And listen they did. It seemed that all the trees and bushes were full of birds and that every bird was pouring out its very heart in rapture. Though the different songsters sang their own way, stopped when they listed, began again when they felt like it, there was a harmony so touchingly tender as when the heavenly host sang on the fields of Bethlehem long ago.

The boat crunched in the soft sand. A squirrel went scampering up a tree and scolded lustily from a dry branch. A few red-winged blackbirds joined the unfriendly demonstration. The three stepped ashore.

Clara was permitted to pick pebbles. She would be safe there with “Fido” as a guard. Olga and Mrs. Carlson walked up a flower-decked slope and sat down at the foot of a majestic pine.

“What a beautiful scene,” Olga said reflectively. “This is a perfect day if there ever was one. One should think that everybody would be happy on such a day.”

When she saw Mrs. Carlson’s sad face, she wished she had not said it.

“What is it, Mrs. Carlson?” she cried sympathetically. “Something is the matter. Please tell me. Perhaps I can help you.”

“Thank you, but I guess nobody can help me. We have been so happy this winter. We can never thank you and Rev. Lee enough for what you have done for us. Since this terrible thing happened with my husband he has given up all hope. He does not trust himself anymore. And now my father —”

“Oh, he has not passed away, has he?” Olga put her hand on Mrs. Carlson’s arm.

“No, he is coming to spend the summer at the Wagner’s summer resort.”

“Well, are you not glad to see him?” asked Olga, surprised.

“In a way I would, but since this happened to my husband there is no chance to—to make up again. I was beginning to hope—”

“Has your father written you?” Olga had never heard her talk about her parents. She had sensed that there was a story back of the silence.

“Oh, no, he has not written to me since I left home— since I ran away from home.”

“My friend,” said Olga quietly, “I must not pry into your affairs, but it may be easier to help you if you tell me about it.”

Mrs. Carlson had picked a flower and was plucking it to pieces. Just then Clara was waving to her mother, but the mother was barely able to lift her hand and wave weakly back at her.

Then she began slowly to tell her story.

“I was born in Chicago. Mother died when I was only six years old. Father has been so wonderful to me. He lived for me and for me only. He had a fine business and he gave me everything I wanted. I am afraid he spoiled me. Oh, how I have missed him!”

It seemed strange to Olga that such a woman had married Mr. Carlson, having heard his story.

“How did you happen to meet Mr. Carlson?” Olga asked.

“Well, that was rather strange. You see, he saved my life.”

“Quite romantic,” Olga said, smiling.

“It was more exciting than anything else, at first. It came about this way,” Mrs. Carlson continued. “One evening I had gone to a dance with a young man. He was driving a rather spirited horse. On the way home late that night—well, I guess he had been drinking too much—he was losing control of the horse. I wanted to drive, as I was used to horses, but he would not let me. He began to use the whip and one of the reins fell out of his hand. The horse made a sudden turn and my friend was pitched out of the buggy, carrying the other rein with him. The horse went on a wild gallop down the street. I expected every moment to be thrown out. Then I saw a man come running from the sidewalk. He grabbed the horse by the bridle and brought him to a stop. I must have fainted. When I came to, the stranger, a young man, was sitting beside me. That’s the first time I met Carlson.”

“That was plucky,” exclaimed Olga. “Just like Mr. Carlson, I should say.”

Mrs. Carlson looked at her with a smile.

“Yes, that’s what father thought too. Carlson drove me home, but I was too excited to ask him his name. I rushed into the house and threw myself into the arms of father who always used to sit up and wait for me when I was out late. When father went out to see my rescuer, he found the horse tied in front of the house, but the young man had gone.”

“You evidently met him again?”

“Yes, I must have,” Mrs. Carlson answered, her face brightening. “One day shortly afterwards, father and I were walking in a park. On a bench I

saw a young man that it seemed I had seen before. When we came nearer, he looked up. It was Carlson. I guess father must have been surprised when I rushed up to the young man and shook his hand heartily. Then I told father who it was.

“After that Carlson often came to our home. Father thought a great deal of him.”

“And you no less, I suppose?”

“I guess not. After a while they began to discuss religion. Father was a very strict churchman and got easily stirred up when people did not agree with him. I guess Carlson got the better of him sometimes. Father noticed that we were falling in love with each other. At first he warned me not to see Carlson so often. When he had seen him enter a saloon with some other young men, he forbade me ever see him again.”

“What did you think when you heard that he frequented the saloon?”

“Oh, I did not think much about it. It was a common thing for young men to drink,” Mrs. Carlson answered apologetically.

“Did not his ideas about religion disturb you?”

“Not very much. I am afraid religion did not mean a great deal to me.”

“You said that your father was a churchman. Didn’t he speak to you about religion?”

“When I come to think of it, I don’t think that he ever did.”

“Pardon me for interrupting your story. That was not the end of it.”

Mrs. Carlson continued, “After that Carlson and I often met without father knowing it. Then we made up our mind to run away and get married. I wrote to father telling him about the marriage, but he did not answer my letter. My husband found it difficult to obtain work and after a while we came here. I am sorry we came, for there was so much drinking and it was not easy for my husband to be different from the others.”

“Clara was born here, was she not?”

“Yes, we were very happy until it was discovered that she was a cripple. That made my husband still more bitter against religion. Of late he has changed much. He says that he knows at least two people who are not hypocrites. And do you know,” Mrs. Carlson continued, “he used to read in the Testament before this happened. He did not want me to see that he read, but I know he did.”

Olga did not know what to say for some time. Then— “I understand now why you don’t care to see your father.”

“You don’t know how I have missed him. We were such friends. Often I dream that I am a little girl and that we play together as we used to. I have been hoping for years that I could meet him again and that—— but now there is nothing to do. If we do not happen to meet him, he will not know we are here, because my husband changed his name before we came here. I wish I might see him, though, if he did not see me.”

“How did you find out that your father is coming here this summer?” Olga enquired.

“I saw it in a newspaper item. I am sure my husband does not know, because I cut out the item before he read the paper.”

Olga looked across the lake at the Carlson cabin. There, she knew, a man was trying to lead a soul out of the night of doubt to the light of a new day. And here, on this island, the call had come to her to lead another soul from the night of despair to hope and happiness.

How strange, that while nature itself this day was in sweet harmony with its Creator, human hearts should be bowed down with grief.

The Carlson family had been much on the mind of Lars and Olga of late. For the first time in their life they had agonized in intercessory prayer. “There is more to the ministry,” Lars had said, “than preaching regular sermons and going through prescribed ceremonies. I realize more and more that it is or should be a struggle for souls.”

A feeling of utter helplessness came upon Olga. She would do anything in the world for Mrs. Carlson, but what could she do?

Then there came to her mind the memory of a man who long ago went about mending broken lives. Blind eyes looked up to a smiling face, and deaf ears heard a sweet voice. Words of forgiveness were spoken to contrite hearts and freedom was given to souls held in the bondage of sin. Across the centuries there came still to weary and worried humanity, words of infinite tenderness, “Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Had she not read this very morning, “He is able to save them the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

To the uttermost! No case was hopeless. When every door seems to be closed and securely locked, there comes a voice of great assurance, “I am the door!” and lo, there is an open door.

A shout came from the other side of the lake. Lars and Carlson were waving their hats as they came down to the shore. Carlson was carrying a basket.

“Good for you, Mr. Carlson,” shouted Olga and waved her hand. “He is bringing lunch,” she said to Mrs. Carlson.

“So that is the surprise party. Olga—pardon me— Mrs. Lee, you are wonderful.”

“Call me Olga. That’s my name. I’ll call you Hannah after this. Shake!”

They shook hands very solemnly, then laughed aloud as two happy girls.

Clara had also heard the shouting. She was dancing wildly. The dog was barking furiously. Then Clara came bounding up the hillside to her mother.

When Olga saw the little girl running toward them, her white curls flying and her shrill voice crying, “Mother, they are coming!” there flashed through her mind the old prophecy, “A little child shall lead them.”

Olga turned impulsively to Hannah, and with eyes full of tears she said earnestly, “My friend, everything will turn out all right. But, oh, we must pray.”

“I have prayed,” said Hannah simply. Then added regretfully, “I wish I had prayed more before and things might have been different.”

“Yes,” Olga answered with glad conviction, “prayer changes things.”

The boat came shooting across the lake toward the island. The waiting group heard cheerful voices and every now and then Carlson’s hearty laughter. Hannah’s face lit up with a happy smile. It was a long time since he had laughed or smiled.

When the basket was opened it was revealed that Lars and Olga had brought with them from town the greater part of its contents. The coffee pot and the coffee, dishes, knives and forks and spoons had been added by Carlson.

“I am an authority on building a fire,” said Lars and began to pick dry sticks.

“And I am an authority on cooking coffee,” Carlson remarked laughingly.

“What’s ’thority?” asked Clara.

“When I tell you to chase that fly from the butter, that’s ’thority,” said Mrs. Carlson.

A breeze had sprung up rippling the surface of the lake and making tiny wavelets running a race along the smooth sandy shore. The sun was slip-

ping down behind crimson clouds in the west, and a song sparrow in a nearby tree was pouring forth a flood of golden melody. The fire was crackling under the coffee pot and the blue smoke drifted lazily away and melted into the air.

For a while hearts that had been heavy became light and gay.

When the bountiful lunch had been spread on the white tablecloth on the green hillside, Lars said quietly, "Shall we pray?"

Heads were bowed and hands folded as Lars began:

"Our dear heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this wonderful day. We thank Thee for singing bird and fragrant flower, for blue sky and meadows green. We thank Thee for revealing Thy love to us through the beauty of things fashioned by Thy hand. Especially do we thank Thee for the greatest of all gifts—Jesus. We thank Thee for the love and light which He brought to the world. We are glad to know that He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities and that through Him we may come boldly unto Thy throne of grace. Bless us who are gathered here. May our hearts be drawn unto Thee in simple childlike faith. Amen."

"I can smell that good coffee," remarked Olga. "Mr. Carlson, you must tell how you cooked it."

"The main thing about cooking good coffee," said Lars, "is to have a good fire."

"I guess you men are 'thorities all right enough," added Hannah as she handed Clara a sandwich.

"Talking about coffee reminds me of a story," said Lars as he picked an ant from his sandwich. "There was a man in our parish who never praised anything or anybody. When anything did please him, the most he would say was, 'that was not so worse.' Once this man, Ole was his name, was thrashing for Mr. Fossum. Mr. Fossum was an expert in cooking coffee like Mr. Carlson here. One afternoon he sent for Ole to come in and get coffee. It was so strong that it was a wonder the cup did not fly in pieces. Ole showed every sign of enjoying it. 'Well now, Ole, isn't this good coffee?' 'This isn't so worse,' was his reply. 'Don't you want another cup?' Sure, Ole would not refuse that. 'What have you to say now?' Mr. Fossum asked. Again the same testimony. 'Can you drink a third cup?' Certainly. The third

cup disappeared with smacking of lips and evident relish. 'Don't you admit now that's good coffee?'

"Finally it looked as if he was going to commit himself more strongly. 'Well,' he drawled, 'I can tell you this, Mr. Fossum, that it isn't so worse.'

"Ole went back to the barn to continue his work. The flail was flying with lightning rapidity. Never had the strokes fallen swifter or harder in the Fossum barn. After a while, however, the strokes came slower and slower, lighter and lighter. Then all of a sudden they stopped.

"Mr. Fossum had to investigate. When he entered the barn, there was Ole, lying with his face in the straw. The farmer turned him around and shook him. 'Say, Ole, wasn't that good coffee?' Ole opened slowly his eyes. Then he mumbled scarcely audible, 'Oh, it wasn't so worse.'"

"Well, I can say the same thing about the minister's fire," said Carlson.

When the "table" had been cleared and things put back into the basket, Clara said to her father, "Papa, you go down with me and look at my pebbles."

"Yes, I'll go with you." He took her by the hand and off they started. Clara stopped abruptly and turned around. "Mother," she called, "you go with us too."

Mr. Carlson also turned to his wife and said heartily, "Yes, come with us." "Will you pardon us," Mrs. Carlson said politely to Lars and Olga and ran down to her husband and child.

As the three walked down the hillside toward the setting sun, an outsider would have said, "What a happy family."

But outsiders do not know the dank shadows thrown across many human hearts.

"You must have had a fine talk together," Olga said while looking at the three.

"God grant that it may do some good," answered Lars soberly. "What have you been doing?"

She told him the story she had heard and that Mrs. Carlson's father was coming. "She is very much worried," she added. "I understand that her father must have fairly worshipped her. She got everything she might wish for. Now for years she has lived a lonesome, unhappy life. She has been longing for her father all the time and regretted her rash action. Now when Clara was cured and her husband had quit drinking and begun to read the Testament, she had without knowing it, perhaps, begun to think of her fa-

ther with the hope that she again might meet him as a father. Now she feels reconciliation is out of the question.”

“Well, what can we do?” Lars. asked.

“I have a plan, but it depends on Mr. Carlson more than anyone else. It’s up to him.”

“Are you going to tell him so?”

“Oh, my no. That would spoil everything.”

“I admit, I don’t know what you have in mind, but you can do it if anyone can,” Lars said and looked admiringly at her.

13. Burning The Books.

Lars and Olga returned from their visit to Carlson's very happy, and with renewed hope that everything would turn out well. Never before had they had an opportunity to talk so freely with the husband and wife. Lars realized more than ever that in order to render real help to a person, you must know what's the matter with the person.

A transformation was taking place with Mr. and Mrs. Carlson. The shadows which had settled upon them with deepening darkness were being lifted. There was a new light in the husband's eyes and a new ring in his voice. That the minister still had confidence in him gave him confidence in himself.

Somehow he was losing interest in questions which he formerly so eagerly had debated. He had again begun to read the New Testament. By reading the four gospels the question came to him with increasing force: If Jesus had never lived, if he had not said and done these marvelous things, who in the world had invented them, and why?

Mr. Carlson never read the New Testament in his wife's presence. He would read when she was outside or when he found a few spare moments while grubbing on the hillside. Some day he was going to show her the Testament and perhaps read to her. He was sorry that she did not have a Bible in the house. It was his fault, he knew, and it troubled him.

Mrs. Carlson was again at times singing while at work. But then she would suddenly stop and the light of hope died in her eyes. She managed to hide her feelings from her husband, but she could not conceal them from the sensitive soul of her child.

Oh, yes, she had a Bible, and now she was again reading it. It was her mother's Bible, picked up, she did not know why, as she was packing the trunk and leaving home. Until recently it had remained undisturbed in the bottom of the trunk.

Some day she was going to tell her husband about the Bible. She would like to show him some of the verses which her mother had underscored and

which had come to mean so much to herself. It was not only God's voice that spoke through these verses; her mother's voice, now so long silent, spoke to her in cadences sweet and low.

Then something happened which was to bring husband and wife together in close understanding and spiritual fellowship. Again little Clara was to play her part in the drama of her parents.

Shortly after Lars and Olga had visited with the Carlson family, Clara asked her mother if she might visit a girl friend who lived on the other side of the slough. She had often been to Jenson's with her mother, but had never gone alone. Her mother hesitated for some time, but her father could not see the slightest danger in letting her go. All she had to do was to follow the path on the left side of the slough. He himself was going to town and the mother was washing, so that neither of them could go with her.

"Can't 'Fido' go with me?" Clara asked. He'll take care of me."

No, the father said, she had better not take the dog along, for one of Jenson's cows did not like dogs. She had recently jumped the fence of the pasture and attacked a dog that was passing by.

So Clara started off alone and very cheerfully. She carried with her some cookies which she and her friend would eat when they had their picnic.

She had gone about half the distance when she saw a little fawn in the road ahead. It stood and looked at her till she came close up to it when it suddenly leaped into the tall grass. Clara remembered the fawn she had had, and thought that if she came so close to it that she could stroke it, it might follow her home. Into the grass she plunged. On the other side of the patch of grass, on an open knoll, stood the fawn. She called to it and held out her hand, but again the fawn darted off some distance, stopped, but only for a second. Then in long, gracefully leaps it disappeared into the timber.

Not seeing it, Clara decided to turn back to the path, but she could not find it. She came to the edge of another slough. There was water in the middle of it, so there was nothing to do but to go round it. Instead of turning to the right, she turned to the left and this led her farther and farther away from the right path. Soon she got tired of walking through the heavy brush and across the many logs. Her courage began to fail her. She called loudly for her mother, then started back and finally came to a path which led to a small lake which she had not seen before. Now she knew that she was lost.

She stumbled against a log and fell sprawling into the brush. Still she was clinging to her cookies, but the paper bag broke and the cookies scat-

tered all around her.

She got up on her feet and began to pick up the cookies. Then she heard someone crashing through the brush near by, and the next minute a big dog, as she thought, stood looking at her. She began to speak to it, "Nice doggie, you won't hurt me, will you?" The "dog" came a little nearer. Clara held out her hand and offered him a cookie. He stood looking at her a long time. Then she threw a cookie toward him. It fell right in front of him. He was on the point of turning away, then sniffed at it, picked it up with his mouth and munched it with evident relish. Now he came so close up to the girl that he could pick a cookie right from her open hand. He devoured one after another, till they were all gone.

Mr. Carlson returned after a while and began to work in the potato field. When his wife came outside the house he asked her if it was not time for Clara to return. Yes, she had promised to come back at four o'clock and it was long past that time now. He had better go and meet her or, if she had not started, bring her home.

He hurried toward the Jenson farm. It was the first time he had gone to this farm since the Jenson family had come there. The Jensons were "pietists," and Mr. Carlson had not been particularly fond of "pietists." Still he had to admit that these people were different. They were full of fun, laughed a good deal when talking and it seemed that one or more were always singing when you went past.

Every now and then he could see his daughter's footsteps in the soft soil in the path as it had recently rained. Then he came upon the footprints of an animal. It must have been a fawn. With alarm he noted that Clara had turned into the forest. Probably she had followed the fawn. Had she got lost or had she gone to the Jenson farm? He started on a run toward the neighbor. He saw a little girl playing outside the house, but Clara was not there. He called to the girl, "Where is Clara? Is she in the house?" The girl shook her head. Then the mother came out on the steps. "Clara?" she said. "No, she has not been here. Did she intend to come here?"

Mr. Jenson and his two sons also came out on the steps.

"Clara isn't lost, is she?" asked Mr. Jenson anxiously.

Hurriedly Carlson told them what had happened and begged them to help him search for her.

When they came to the place where Clara's footsteps were visible in the path, one of the boys cried, "She has turned in to the woods here. Look at the broken twigs!"

The men had not gone very far before they saw the footprints of a fawn and also of a child. Then for some distance no signs could be seen. The men tramped around and around on the knoll, till Mr. Carlson again came upon the footprints, only to have them disappear again.

Suddenly he gave a cry of alarm. "Here are footprints of a bear," he called. They rushed up to the place where he was standing. In the mud were the unmistakable footprints of a bear. They ran in the direction where the animal had gone, then again came upon dry land.

One of the boys went to the left and after a while he called to the other men. He was standing by the soft spot where again appeared the tiny footprints of a child. Striking out in the direction where the footprints pointed they came upon the clearly defined footprints of a bear, but they were smaller. It must have been a cub which had passed by that way.

Mr. Carlson began to call frantically: "Clara! Clara!" But no response.

Then a little bit louder than the breeze in the tree tops came the faint whimper of a child. The men dashed in the direction where the voice had come from.

"Clara!" the father called hysterically, and the next minute he had gathered his little daughter in his arms, as he picked her from the ground.

"Don't cry, little girl," he whispered softly as she threw her tiny arms around his neck and sobbed.

"Thank God," said the neighbor reverently. The two boys went up to Mr. Carlson and patted Clara on the head. "You are all right now, Clara."

The other men wanted to help Mr. Carlson carry his precious burden to her home, but he would not let her go. She was not going to get out of his arms now before he had placed her in the arms of her mother.

They met Mrs. Carlson and Mrs. Jenson at the edge of the clearing. The latter had hurried to the Carlson home as soon as the men had left the house.

When Mrs. Carlson saw her husband carrying Clara, she rushed toward him and threw her arms round him and the girl.

By this time Clara was again smiling. “What are you crying for, mama? I tried to catch a fawn but it ran away from me. The big doggie came up to me, and ate all my cookies, the mean thing. When I did not have any more he ran away.”

“We ought at least to have a good cup of coffee for our trouble,” boomed Mr. Jenson. Turning to Mrs. Carlson he said with a roguish look in his keen blue eyes, “I hope you have some cookies left. I hate to think that the cub got all of them.”

“Have you no shame?” cried Mrs. Jenson. “Didn’t you sit and drink coffee for the fifth or sixth time when Carlson came?”

“My dear, you are mistaken as usual. I have had coffee only three times today. Look! Mrs. Carlson is already in the kitchen. My, that’s a woman for you,” he cried as he patted his wife on the head.

“Oh, these men!” laughed Mrs. Jenson and hurried out into the kitchen.

When they had finished the simple repast, Mr. Carlson turned to Mr. Jenson and said earnestly, “May I ask a favor of you, neighbor?”

Jenson grew suddenly serious, put his hand on Carlson’s arm and looking him in the face with his large expressive eyes said slowly, “I’ll do anything in world for you, my friend. What is it?”

Carlson looked at his wife and then at Clara and then again at his neighbor.

“When we were looking for Clara,” he said slowly, “I did something that will perhaps surprise; I prayed to God as I never prayed to Him before. And I made Him a promise, that if we found her safe and sound—”

He took his Testament out of his pocket and gave it to Mr. Jenson. “Will you read by yourself these verses, and then offer a prayer of thanks for what God has done to this house today?”

Jenson read the verses in silence, smiled and said, “I see what you mean. Shall we pray?”

Amidst deep silence Jenson thanked God for having kept His protecting hand over the little girl as she was stumbling through the forest. And he thanked Him that as they today had been seeking the child that was lost, so He, the heavenly father, was seeking those who had wandered away from Him.

They all joined in the Lord's prayer, Clara's sweet voice rising above the rest.

"Well, are you not glad I asked for coffee?" said Jenson turning to his wife. "You seem to like good coffee too!" He threw his head back and laughed till the tears rolled down his face. It was the first time that Carlson had seen a "pietist" laugh till he cried.

After chatting pleasantly together for some time, Mrs. Carlson noticed that Clara was getting sleepy and she carried her tenderly into the bedroom and placed her on the bed. Softly she closed the door, then fell on her knees with her hand on the little girl's forehead.

Carlson again turned to his neighbor and said quietly, "I have another favor to ask of you. Will you build a fire over by the rocks? I'll be with you in a moment. And there I want you to read aloud the passage pointed out."

"Good for you," Jenson cried. Then as Carlson went into another room he said to the two women, "You go with me."

Hurriedly he built a brisk fire. "I believe they have gone crazy," said Mrs. Jenson. "What in the world are they going to do?" she asked Mrs. Carlson. The latter shook her head.

In a few minutes Mr. Carlson came out of the house and joined them at the side of the fire. He was carrying some books in his arms.

"Now you read," he said to Jenson. And Jenson read: "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

"Well, these books did not cost me much when I bought them, but they have cost me much anyway. Here they go."

One after another he threw the paper covered volumes into the fire. One fly leaf was lifted up by the flame. "Mistakes of Moses by Robert Ingersoll" could be read distinctly by all present.

As Mr. Jenson stirred in the fire with a long stick, the flames leaped up and soon there was left only a heap of ashes.

Then he looked at Mr. Carlson and said reverently, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."

Mrs. Carlson's face was shining though tears were rolling down her cheeks. She went over to her husband, and as they shook hands solemnly, she said, "Thank you, Peter."

Later on in the evening husband and wife walked down to the big boulder by the cascade. The breeze was whispering in the tree tops. The sound of cowbells came faintly from the hillside. Overhead the constellations of the sky hung like electric frames as they, imperceptible to human eye, swung in the majestic courses across the heavens.

The two sat down on the boulder. None of them spoke. There are times when soul communes with soul, and words are not needed.

Finally the wife said quietly, "My dear, oh, I am so glad that you have a Testament. I did not know you had one and were reading it. Did you know that I have been reading my mother's Bible? Peter, now I know that you believe in God and that you, too, pray."

The husband put his arms tenderly about his wife, and she leaned against his bosom, she wept softly, but it was not tears of sorrow.

14. The Stranger Who Was Not A Stranger.

“MR. HOLT is coming next Friday,” was the telephone message from Mrs. Wagner to Olga.

“Thank you for telling me,” said Olga. “Now keep tight,” she added with her ringing laugh.

“Sure, you can count on me.”

Olga turned to Lars. “Mrs. Carlson’s father is coming from Chicago next Friday; Mrs. Wagner just told me. I hope everything turns out well.”

“I think it will. I am sure that Mrs. Wagner will help you,” he answered rather absentmindedly. He was looking at a piece of paper he had in front of him on the table.

Olga was instantly at his side. Looking over his shoulder, she cried excitedly, “When did you become an architect? A church! Are you really going to build a new church? Glory be! Say, is there going to be a basement for Sunday school and ladies aid’s meetings?”

“No, there is going to be no basement. There is going to be a sub-auditorium, if you know what that means. By the way, can you guess who suggested that we build a new church?”

“No, I can’t remember that I did suggest it, but I have thought of it.”

“Always joking, aren’t you, Olga?” He looked up and smiled.

“Always? Will you help me reform?”

“Forgive me. Please do not reform. Always be the Olga I met on the mountains of Norway, Olga the true, Olga the good. But you have not guessed yet. Guess!”

“Oh, now I remember. Who suggested that we build a new church? Let’s see. Mr. Carlson.”

“Who told you?” Lars asked surprised.

“He told me himself. Last Sunday he came too late to church to get inside. When I met him next day he said that he was going to suggest that we

build a new church. He said nothing, however, about a sub—what kind of a sub was it? Say Lars, do you remember the first time you met Mr. Carlson? He did not suggest that you build a new church then. And do you remember the lumberjack who interrupted you when you made your first temperance speech? And now he has organized a temperance society here, and Mr. Carlson was the first to join. Isn't it wonderful, Lars? Aren't you glad that you came here?"

"Yes, Olga, I am glad that someone wrote me that 'the servant of the Lord must go where he can do the most good.' What could I have done without you?"

"What could we have done without God?" Olga asked, and this time she did not laugh or smile.

Mr. C. Holt arrived on the morning train and Mrs. Wagner was there to meet him together with her nine-year—old son Victor. She had left the old horse in care of her boy on the other side of the depot while she waited for the train.

An elderly, tall, straight, distinguished looking gentleman came down the steps of the coach. "That's my new boarder," said Mrs. Wagner to herself, and so it was.

When Victor saw the stranger and his mother coming toward him, he began to pull violently the reins of the sleeping nag and shouted, "Stand still there, will you? What's the matter with you anyway? I'll fix you if you don't behave."

Mr. Holt looked at Mrs. Wagner, winked at her and said under his breath, "You've got some boy there."

"Yes, some boy," answered the mother and heaved a sigh.

"How do you do, young man," said Mr. Holt and extended his hand.

"How do you do," answered Victor. "I can't shake hands with you. I must hold the reins tight or this crazy horse will run away."

"Well, I am glad I am in the hands of such a careful driver," remarked Mr. Holt as he was helping a man lift his trunk into the wagon.

"Oh, ma won't let me drive. I bet you I could drive if she would only let me."

Mr. Holt evidently had taken to Victor at once and suggested that the boy sit with him in the back seat.

“What’s your name?”

“Victor James Wagner. What’s your name?”

Mrs. Wagner turned her head quickly and glared at her offspring.

“Victor James Wagner, where are your manners? I never saw such a boy in my life. Isn’t he terrible, Mr. Holt?” Then she burst out laughing so heartily that she probably did not think he was so terrible after all.

“Any fishing out your way, Victor James Wagner?” asked Mr. Holt, as he looked at the boy with a suppressed chuckle.

“Oh, you don’t need to call me all that. Just call me Vic. Yes, there is good fishing if you know where to go.”

“Well, suppose there should be a little bright boy who knew where to go, would he point out the places if he got a dollar?”

“I know such a boy,” said Victor.

“Do you? Isn’t that wonderful. What’s his name?”

“Victor James Wagner.”

“Isn’t he just awful?” came from the front seat, but there was just a little touch of admiration in her voice.

The new boarder and Victor became great pals. Mr. Holt’s old friends would have been very much surprised if they had seen him playing ball with the little boy and heard his happy laughter. Since his daughter had left him, there had been no play and little laughter in his life.

One day the two crossed a piece of burnt over timberland. Mr. Holt made the observation that the fire must have swept through there recently.

“Yes,” Victor informed him, “it was the time that young minister saved Clara Carlson.”

“How did that happen?” Mr. Holt asked with interest.

In his own boyish manner Victor told the story already known to the readers.

“Gee, I guess that minister is afraid of nothing,” he burst out admiringly. “And the minister’s wife took Clara to a doctor, and when she came home she was all right.”

“What was the matter with her?” inquired Mr. Holt.

“Oh, she could hardly walk. Now she can run almost as fast as I can even if she is a girl.”

“I’d like to meet your little friend. Does she come here sometimes?”

“Yes, ma said she is coming tomorrow. The minister’s wife is coming with her.”

When Olga told Lars that Mr. Carlson had been reading his New Testament and that his wife had been reading the Bible without one knowing what the other was doing, they could not help smiling, but then they saw the pathetic side of it. Yes, it was pathetic that husband and wife were afraid to let each other know they were reading the Word of God. But a hopeful sign it was that they had read it, and very promising when they now read the Bible together. For so they did.

And this is the way it happened. One evening Clara having been put to bed, remembered that she had left her doll on the big boulder down by the cascade. It would never do to leave her there all night. In case of rain the doll might catch cold, get sick and die, or a bear might come along and carry her off into the forest. She rose hurriedly and came tripping into the dining room. There her mother was sitting and reading a big book, a book which Clara had not seen before.

“Oh mama,” she cried, “is that a story book? Read me a story.”

“Why Clara,” said her father, who was sitting at a table reading a newspaper, “I thought you were asleep long ago. What’s the matter?”

She ran to him and he lifted her up on his knee.

“Papa, you get my doll, will you? She is down by the big stone. I forgot to bring her in. Oh,” she cried excitedly, “There she is! Who brought her in? Did you?” She looked smilingly up into his face.

“The doll?” he said; “No, I didn’t bring her in, she came in herself. A little while ago we heard a tiny knock at the door. It was the tiniest knock you ever heard. Just like picking at the door with your little finger. When I opened the door, there stood the doll, with a very sad face and her eyes full of tears. I picked her up in my hand and carried her into the room. She told me between sobs that she had fallen asleep. When she awoke it was dark all around her. She called for you, but you did not answer. Then she saw a light in the window and started for the house. She stubbed her bare little toes against the pebbles in the road, stepped on her dress and fell down time and again. She thought she would never reach the house. She was so tired and scared that she could scarcely knock at the door.”

“Ah you, that isn’t true. You’re just making it up. A doll can’t talk or walk or anything. I bet you found her and carried her in.”

“Yes, perhaps I did,” he said stroking her curly head.

Suddenly she turned to her mother who was looking and listening with a radiant smile. "Is that a story book? Please, mama, read me a story" she pleaded.

Mother became very serious. She did not know what to answer. To think that her own daughter had never seen a Bible in her home or in her mother's hand!

The father came to her rescue.

"Clara, it's your grandma's Bible. She gave it to your mama when she was a little girl."

"Oh—may I see it?"

She slid down from her father's knee and ran to her mother's side.

"That's a beautiful book isn't it? Are there stories in it?"

Then she grew suddenly quiet. Looking up into her mother's face she whispered, "Where is grandma?"

Her mother threw her arms impulsively around her little girl and lifted her up into her lap.

She bent over the child and said gently, "Your grandma is in heaven. God called her when I was a little bit younger than you are now."

"Was she as beautiful as you are?" she asked, beaming upon her mother.

"Your grandma was very beautiful," said Mrs. Carlson slowly. Then she laughed aloud, drew her girl closer to her, and said:

"You are a queer little thing aren't you? Sure I'll read you stories from grandma's Bible; some that she read to me. But now you must go to bed again."

When Mrs. Carlson returned from Clara's bedroom there was a very tender light in her large blue eyes.

While she was putting her daughter to bed Mr. Carlson had been turning the pages of the Bible. He noticed that many verses both in the Old and New Testaments had been underscored.

"Your mother must have been a careful Bible reader," he said quietly as his wife stood behind him with her hand on his shoulder. "Won't you read some of your mother's favorite verses?"

She seated herself beside him and began to turn the pages.

"She has selected some wonderful passages," she said slowly. "I did not know there were such wonderful verses in the Bible."

And then in the stillness of night, only broken by the murmur of the cascade, the chirping of crickets and an occasional piping of a bird, Mrs. Carl-

son in trembling voice read aloud for the first time in the Bible in the presence of her husband the precious words which had meant so much to her mother and to millions of souls down through the ages. They were words of infinite comfort and consolation; prayers from distressed hearts; jubilant praise and thanksgiving for peace and pardon, for guidance through life and hope of eternal glory.

The silver-tipped wavelets rolled with a low whispering swish-swash along the sandy shore; the cascade murmured in rhythmic cadences; the crickets chirped incessantly; and an occasional clang of the cowbell came floating from the pasture.

And over the dwellings of men and the lairs of beasts and the nests of birds arched the mighty dome of the sky softly aglow with the faint star light.

15. Church Members Speak At Forenoon Service.

LARS WAS WALKING RAPIDLY along the narrow winding trail out in the country and was now only half a mile from town. Coming to a log lying across the trail, he took a good start and jumped over it. Coming down, one of his feet struck a slippery branch and he pitched headlong into the brush. A sharp pain shot through the ankle. Painfully he tried to arise, but had to lean against a stone. He fairly dragged himself home, leaning heavily on an improvised cane.

The sprained ankle yielded somewhat to Olga's deft hands, but he knew it would not be advisable to stand on his feet during the sermon the next day.

"I guess you'll have to preach tomorrow," he said to his wife.

"A woman preach?" Olga asked in mock surprise. "You want the church council to get after you?"

"Well, we let woman missionaries stand on the platform and tell of their experiences on the mission field and to impress on people Christ's great commission. If that isn't preaching, it comes rather dangerously close to it," said Lars, nursing his ankle.

"I tell you what you can do," Olga said seriously. "You sit in a chair by the pulpit, make a few introductory remarks and then ask the members of the congregation to offer testimonies and prayer. They have heard so many sermons that it might be interesting to see what they have gotten out of all they have heard."

"You are a trifle sarcastic, Olga but it's a good idea."

And so it proved to be. Lars explained why he was limping and had to sit, and then after Scripture reading and prayer suggested that anyone who wished to might mention some passage in the Bible which had meant a great deal to them and make some comment if they felt like it.

He asked Mr. Jenson to begin. Mr. Jenson immediately arose and read, "Thou givest him perfect peace whose mind is staid on thee, because he trusted in thee," and told in a few words how much this passage had meant to him. Then an old woman started to sing the verse of a familiar hymn. At first she sang alone, then Olga joined her, and soon the whole congregation. It seemed to Lars that the congregation had never sung more heartily than now.

Several men read passages that they had learned by heart and most of them made a few brief remarks.

Mr. Carlson was sitting in the back part of the church. The testimonies evidently made a great impression on him, Lars observed. When there was a lull in the unique service, Lars, looked straight at Mr. Carlson and said, "There may be someone here who has not taken part with testimony or prayer at a public meeting before, but who now feels a desire to do so. If you feel the impulse to say something, I believe that impulse comes from God, and you should not disobey it."

He saw how Carlson was struggling with himself and he smiled encouragingly at him.

Mr. Carlson arose slowly. "May I say a few words?" he asked in a husky voice. Many turned around and looked at him in surprise.

"Certainly," said Lars gladly, "Would mind coming up in front and face the congregation? I know our brother has a message this morning."

Mr. Carlson hesitated a moment, then came slowly and with bowed head to the front and faced the startled congregation.

"Friends and neighbors," he began in a low voice, "You think it strange, I am sure, that I speak to you and that in a church. But I have felt for some time that I would like to speak to you.

"Most of you know the kind of life I have lived since I came here. I am not proud of it. I have asked God to forgive me all my sins, and I ask you to forgive me for the bad influence I have been in this community. I believe God has forgiven me and I hope you will. I cannot undo the bad things I have done. Would to God that I could! But I pray that from now on I may in some small measure make up for it.

"I want to thank Rev. Lee and his wife for all they have done for me and my family."

He looked at his wife and his little girl. Clara looked bewildered and surprised. His wife looked at him with a radiant face and tear-dimmed eyes.

“The first time I met Rev. Lee I tried to drive him away with angry words. I even wanted to strike him, but as a true follower of Jesus he spoke earnestly but kindly to me. You all know what he and his wife have done for us. I thought I believed that there was no God and that the Christians were hypocrites. I had to admit that the minister and his wife were not hypocrites. I knew they were not working here for what there was in it in a material way. They won my confidence, and my, well, my love.”

A winning smile spread across his fine and intelligent face and he spoke with greater assurance.

“Rev. Lee did not want to debate with me. He gave his personal testimony and referred me to the Word of God. I began to read the Testament which he gave me and I became interested in it. Then you know what happened.”

It was almost painfully still in the church. Every eye was riveted on his face. He looked down for a minute. Then continued:

"I lost all hope of reforming, but Rev. Lee did not lose confidence in me, or rather in God. I shall not tell you about what took place in my heart. As I read about Jesus, I felt at times as though I could sink into the ground. I was ashamed that I denied Him and even cursed Him. Then I thought of all the cruel words I had spoken about Him in the presence of old and young. I thought of the books I had let some of the people have. I have burned the infidel books I had at home, but I can not remove the impression made by the books others have read. If you come across any of them, see to it that they are burned, too.

“One evening my wife showed me her mother’s Bible and she read aloud several passages which her mother had marked. We tried to read the Lord’s prayer together but broke down. Then I went out into the night. For a long time I walked through the forest while my wife was praying for me at home as she afterwards told me. My sins rose before me like a huge mountain. Then I sank down on my knees but could not pray. But as I was kneeling, there ran through my mind over and over again a verse which my wife had read: ‘Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’ I felt I did not know how to come, though I wanted to come. Then gradually my thoughts grew more quiet. ‘Whosoever cometh’ kept on, ringing in my mind.- It seemed that Jesus was standing there right in front of me, with hands outstretched. I could see the marks in the hands. He smiled and I called aloud, ‘Dear Jesus, here I am. Take me as I am.’ I knew there was a

chance for me. I knew He would take me, and a great gladness came into my soul. I got up and fairly ran home through the night. When I came into the house, my wife met me and cried ‘Peter, you have found God!’”

“Yes, my friends, I have found God.” He wanted to Say more, but words failed him. Helplessly he turned to look at Lars. And people said with hushed voice when telling about it, that the face of Lars shone like the face of an angel.

Lars arose and limped over to Carlson. He took his hand, and said, “God be praised. God be praised.”

With bowed head Mr. Carlson walked slowly down the aisle.

Then Olga, sitting by the organ, began to play softly. With a voice, trembling at first with deep emotions, she sang—

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.”

Lars rose slowly to his feet. Leaning one hand on the back of the chair, he asked the congregation to arise. With his right hand lifted he announced the benediction:

“The Lord bless and keep thee
The Lord make His face shine upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee.
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee,
And give thee peace.”

In the evening Lars and Olga sat on the porch talking about the service. It had made a deep impression on both of them. They had come to a hard field and had often been discouraged. They had faithfully sown the precious seed of the living word. Now they were beginning to reap with rejoicing.

Finally Lars remarked that though he had read and heard much about the priesthood of believers, there was not given the “priests” much of an opportunity to bear witness in a public way. “I believe,” he added, “that it would be a good thing if all pastors at least once during their ministry would jump across a log. Then they might discover that they have men and women who

do not only have something to say but can say it, and even quit when they have said it.”

“Well, Lars,” said Olga, looking at him and shaking her head, “that may be all right for young ministers but you must remember that you no longer are a young man. By the way, since you are showing up the weakness in this matter of the ministers may I add my contribution by reminding you of the story you once told of the layman who said to his pastor, ‘Why do you pastors answer so many questions that we do not ask.’”

“Olga, Olga,” cried Lars, putting on a good deal of dignity, “this is going too far. First you tell me that I am an old man and then you intimate that we do not know what people are thinking about or, what is more serious, that we dare not talk about it.”

16. A Sad Man And A Bright Boy.

MR. HOLT, Mrs. Carlson's father, and Victor became great friends. Victor followed at the heels of the old gentleman like a dog, and "Tips" followed both of them.

When Mr. Holt started out for a walk, Victor invariably asked him, "Where are you going?" And invariably Mr. Holt would say that he was going to walk to the top of the hill.

"No, don't let us walk up that old hill. Let's walk up to the store."

"To the store? I don't want anything at the store. Do you want to buy something?"

"Yes, but I have no money."

"How do you know that I have money to spend. I have to pay your mother, don't I?"

"Can't you write to Chicago for money. They have lots of money there. That's what you told mama."

"That isn't my money."

"Well, let us take a walk up there anyway. Come on 'Tips.'"

In the direction of the store they went. "Tips" was running around in wide circles. Then he would leap upon the boy with an angry growl, and the boy cried: "Oh, you crazy dog. What are you trying to knock me down for? Shame on you."

Then "Tips" would lie down in front of him wag his tail and look up into his master's face penitently. When Victor patted him on the head, "Tips" leaped up and began to run around with joyous barks.

When they came to the store, Mr. Holt pretended that he was going to walk on, but Victor hung back. "Oh, gee, but I am tired. Don't let us walk any further. Let's go into the store and rest."

"Yes," Mr. Holt answered, "that's a splendid idea. How in the world did you happen to think of it?"

So into the store they went. Victor, no longer tired, ran ahead and very politely opened the door for his friend.

Inside, Mr. Holt engaged in an animated conversation with the young clerk, while Victor was inspecting candy in the show case, casting furtive glances at Mr. Holt.

Finally the old gentleman would start for the door, calling to Victor, "I guess it's time to meander home, young man."

A rather crestfallen little boy came slowly up to him and said, "Have we not forgotten something?"

"I am afraid I have. Can you think of something we should buy?"

"Were you not going to buy an ice cream cone and some candy?"

"Well, well, how could I forget? That's what we came here for, didn't we? Candy and ice cream cone, Mr. Clerk! Victor will pay."

"You pay," cried the boy. "When I get big I'll pay for you too."

The clerk laughed and said, "Mr. Holt, it looks as if Victor has adopted you."

Mr. Holt stroked Victor's head and said, "Well, I wish I had a little boy like Victor."

"Wouldn't a little girl do?" Victor mumbled with his mouth full of ice cream. "Have you never had a little girl?"

On the way home Victor was telling his friend how "Tips" had once been chasing a skunk. "Mama wouldn't let him in the house for a whole week. She told him to go out in the woods and hate himself."

But the old gentleman did not seem to hear him. He was walking very slowly and did not answer when Victor fired one question at him after another.

"Are you sorry that you went to the store?" Victor asked and looked up in his face. "Here, take some candy."

Returning from one of their regular trips to the store, Victor shouted, "Oh, here is Clara, and there is the minister's wife. Hello Clara, here's some candy for you."

Clara came running toward them with hair flying round her shoulders.

“Hello, Victor,” she cried. Then she saw Mr. Holt, and became bashful.

Mr. Holt smiled down upon her. “So this is Clara,” he said. “Victor has been telling me about you.”

Then a startled expression came to his face. He stroked his hand over his forehead. “So this is Clara,” he repeated and kept on looking at her, till Clara grew still more confused and took Victor by the hand.

“Let’s run a race,” cried Victor. “I bet you I can run up to the barn and back to the house before you can get to the house.”

Off they started with shouts of laughter.

But the old man remained standing in the same place till the children all out of breath, came back to him.

When Mr. Holt, holding Victor by one hand and Clara by the other, followed by “Tips,” came up to the house he was introduced to Olga by the landlady.

He extended his hand, looked at her intently and a startled expression came into his face. “Why, I have seen you somewhere before, Mrs. Lee, but I can’t remember where it was or when it was.”

“No, I can’t remember having met you or seen you before,” Olga answered, “but I am very glad to meet you now.”

“Well, that’s what I should have said in the first place,” Mr. Holt remarked apologetically. “I am very glad indeed to meet you. Of course there are so many of us in the world that it’s strange that not more do look alike.”

Olga turned to Victor who had come up to her. “How is my little friend today?”

“Oh, I am all right. You want some candy?”

“Thank you, Victor. You are generous as always.”

“What are you calling me anyway?” he asked brusquely.

“I said you’re a little rascal. If you don’t know what that means, I’ll tell you. You are a sweet little boy.”

“I ain’t sweet, but candy is sweet,” he mumbled, having stuck another piece in his mouth.

While this bantering took place between Olga and the boy, Mr. Holt had been looking fixedly at Clara. Olga was noticing this and thought it would not be well to remain there any longer. The old gentleman might ask disconcerting questions.

When she said that they had to leave, Mr. Holt looked disappointed, but said with a graceful bow, “I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting

Rev. Lee, too. Victor has been telling me so much about you folks that I was anxious to see you.”

Then he bent down toward Clara and took her little hand in his. “Good-bye, Clara. I want to meet you again also.” Still holding her hand and looking into her upturned and smiling face he added solemnly, “God bless you, my little girl.”

When Olga brought Clara home, Mrs. Carlson met them in front of the house. Clara ran toward her and exclaimed, “Oh, mama, I met such a nice old man. He said, ‘God bless you,’ when he said goodbye to me.”

Then she saw her father coming home from the field and ran toward him.

Mrs. Carlson asked, visibly agitated, “Did you see—— him?”

“Yes, I saw him. He’s a wonderful man. Very tall and straight and still handsome... He took a great fancy to Clara. He kept on looking at her all the time. I was afraid he might ask questions and I left rather hurriedly. Hannah, I know things will turn out all right. There was something so gentle about your father. At times a shadow of sadness would all of a sudden flit across his face. I am sure he is missing you and that his greatest wish is to meet you again.”

“Do you really think so?”

“Yes, I do think so. I am certain of it. He was anxious to meet my husband and he said he hoped he might soon see Clara again. I’ll ask Lars to call on him one of the first days.”

The next morning while Lars and Olga were sitting at the breakfast table, the door bell rang furiously and a boy’s shrill voice rang through the house, the door being open: “Hello, this is me!”

“Who is ‘me’?” called Olga. Then—“Come in, Victor. What brings you to town so early?”

“You must come to the door. Mr. Holt is here.”

Both Lars and Olga stood up and hurried to the door. There stood Mr. Holt, and Victor beside him.

Olga introduced the old gentleman to Lars and asked him to step inside.

Victor said he had to run an errand for his mother further down the street and would come back later.

"You must pardon me for calling so early," Mr. Holt began as soon as he had seated himself, "but I simply had to come. Something strange happened yesterday. When I was up to the store with Victor he asked me if I had a little girl. I don't know why it was that such a question should have affected me so greatly. The fact is that I did have a little girl. I might just as well tell you now, that when she was a grown-up girl she left me. Shortly after Victor had asked me the question, there came running toward me a little girl whose every feature and every action and whose very voice was that of my own girl. And then another strange thing happened. When I met you, Mrs. Lee, it seemed that one time or other I had seen you before. I was so puzzled that you must have thought I was rather queer. I had intended to ask you about Clara but there was no chance as you left so hurriedly, and then the children were standing there.

"I asked the landlady about Clara. Then I became still more puzzled. She became very nervous and said that she did not know much about the family and that I had better see the minister and his wife. She had no sooner said it before she became still more confused as though she regretted having said it.

"It took me a long time before I could fall asleep. When I did sleep I had a remarkable dream. I thought I saw my own daughter when she was of Clara's age coming running toward me. I could see her face as clearly as I can see your faces. She was just beaming at me. Her eyes were sparkling. I stretched out my arms toward her—and then I awoke all of a sudden and I found myself stretching forth my hands. I was so deeply moved that I had to arise and stayed up the rest of the night. I never in my life had a dream in which I saw a human face so real, so lifelike. It's strange, is it not, that in our mind, in our brain, without knowing it, we are carrying the exact image of our dear ones, and sometimes it stands before us as real as if it were flesh and blood.

"Then while I was pacing the floor still under the spell of the vision, there suddenly flashed through my mind the scene which I had witnessed less than a year ago. One day I was walking through a corridor in a hospital in Chicago. The door to one of the rooms was open. On the bed was lying a sweet little girl. By her bed was sitting a young lady. I just caught the profile of her face. That's the time I first saw you, Mrs. Lee."

“Why!” gasped Olga. “To think that you—” Then she stopped abruptly and looked beseechingly at Lars.

“Well, you’ve had some remarkable experiences of late, Mr. Holt,” Lars said in as much of a matter of fact voice as he could command. “We sometimes do have strange dreams,” he added.

Mr. Holt did not seem to be greatly impressed by Lars’ philosophic remark. He continued:

“I made up my mind to call on you folks as soon as morning came. And here I am.”

“Well, I am certainly glad you came,” Lars was still speaking as a self-possessed minister should speak. “Now just what is it you would like to know?”

“I want to know who is this Clara. I asked Victor. He says that her name is Clara. That’s the only name she has.”

“That sounds like Victor,” said Olga who had by this time regained some of her self-control.

“Her full name is Clara Carlson,” Lars explained. “Her parents live on a farm a couple of miles out in the country. We have known the family ever since we came here. In fact I met them before I was married.”

“Carlson?” repeated Mr. Holt and sank lower into the chair. A wave of disappointment seemed to sweep over him.

He sat a while looking at the floor as in deep thought. Then he lifted his head and spoke as though he feared the answer to his question:

“What’s her mother’s first name and how does she look? How old do you think she is?”

“You better tell,” said Lars to his wife.

“She has been and still is a very beautiful woman,” Olga answered. “I think she is about thirty years old. Her name is Hannah; her husband’s first name is Peter.”

“My God,” cried Mr. Holt leaping to his feet. “That’s my daughter’s name, and Peter was the name of the man she married. It must be my daughter.”

Lars stood up and put his hand on the old gentleman’s shoulder and said quietly, “It is.”

Mr. Holt began to sway, and Lars steadied him as he again sat down.

“Yes,” he said, “Now I remember that he wrote his name Peter C. Stormo. He must have changed his name.”

“That’s what he did,” Lars informed him.

“Tell me everything you know about them. How do my daughter and her husband feel toward me? Have they mentioned me?”

And Lars and Olga told him all the fine things they knew about Hannah and Peter and Clara. Lars took particular pains to tell him that Carlson had given up his atheistic ideas and that only the other Sunday, at a forenoon service, he had given an impressive testimony concerning his Christian faith. And Olga told with bits of humor about his daughter and granddaughter. Oh, yes, the Carlsons were the finest people in the community and their best friends.

Mr. Holt drank in every word. Sometimes his eyes filled with tears. Then again he laughed heartily.

When the narrative had come to an end he sat silent for a while. Finally he said:

“You will never know what all this means to me. I have not had a happy day since Hannah left me. I tried to trace them, but the change of name prevented me from finding them. I have come to realize that I was much to blame. I was eager to defend the doctrines of the Christian religion but true, living Christianity I knew but little about from experience. When I had a change of heart—my sorrow had much to do with it— I saw that instead of debating with Peter I should have done the way you did, Rev. Lee. I am afraid Hannah did not get much help from me in spiritual matters. A blessing it was that she had a Christian mother and that she took her mother’s Bible with her. That thought gave me comfort. In regards to drinking—I condemned those who drank but did nothing to stop the liquor traffic. I am glad that Hannah feels so kindly toward me. I wonder how we may know just how her husband feels toward me?”

“You need have no fear concerning Mr. Carlson,” Lars assured him. “But to be sure in that matter I will call on him this afternoon, and tomorrow morning I will let you know, Mr. Holt.”

They heard the patter of hurrying feet on the sidewalk and the next moment Victor stood in the open door, flushed and excited.

“Say, Mr. Holt, if you want to go back with me, you must hurry. The old horse is tired of waiting.”

“Have you got time to wait for a glass of lemonade and a piece of cake, Victor?” Olga asked soberly.

“Yes, plenty time. I guess the horse likes to rest a little while longer.”

“By the way Victor, Mr. Holt is Clara’s grandfather,” Olga said as she shoved a chair toward him.

He sat down and grinned up in her face. “You are trying to stuff me, ain’t you?”

17. A Happy Reunion

IN THE AFTERNOON Lars walked out to the Carlson farmstead. Instead of following the wagon road he took a trail leading through a forest untouched by the fire. There was nothing which made for clarity of thought and calmness of soul as a walk through the woods.

Things were happening faster than he had anticipated.

What a strange, what a mysterious thing life was. Often it seemed that life was without any meaning at all, without plan or purpose, without rhyme or reason. At other times one could easily trace the hand of God in the history of the world or the small world of the individual.

How wonderfully God had led him from childhood's earliest days till this very moment. He could see the cabin on the mountain slope, around which clustered so many precious memories; there was father, wise and patient; mother, meek and mild; on the greenward he could see the cow and the sheep. He thought of the many splendid people it had been his privilege to meet; the years of schooling; the call to be a servant of the Lord. Then his heart grew warm and tender as he thought of the wonderful gift God had given him in Olga, and he thanked Him for her love and loyalty, her faith and fortitude, her never failing cheerfulness. But greatest of all blessings which had entered into his life—the gift that glorified all other gifts—was Jesus Christ. Life without Him would be darkness and despair; life with Him, in Him, was a divine melody, a never ending source of light and love, noble aims and high endeavor.

And yet how often was he not unbelieving, doubting, indifferent. With what infinite patience God was leading him. Oh, that he henceforth might dedicate all that was in him to the service of God as an expression of his debt and gratitude to Him for the many blessings which He had showered upon him. But he had, in spite of his weakness, faith to believe that He who had so graciously helped to this day, would help him the rest of the way.

There in front of him was the Carlson farmstead.

What a transformation had been wrought, not only in the people but on the farm. Mr. Carlson had broken up several acres of land; foot upon foot he conquered the wilderness. The house had been considerably renovated. There were no longer broken window panes covered with newspapers. A beautiful flower garden had been planted on the south side of the cabin. The whole place was as neat and nice as willing hands had been able to make it.

Mr. Carlson was cutting down a tree. The strong, steady strokes reverberated in the forest. When he saw Lars approaching, he flung the axe aside and came toward him with a beaming face and outstretched hand.

They sat down on a log and chatted together pleasantly. Mrs. Carlson saw them through the open door and every now and then she could hear them laugh. And the laughter was sweet in her ears.

“By the way, Mr. Carlson, have you folks ever heard anything concerning Mr. Holt, your father-in-law?”

Mr. Carlson was silent for quite a while. He picked up a dry stick and began to break it into small pieces.

Finally he said slowly and quietly, “No, we have not. It’s my fault. I never encouraged my wife to talk about the past. Of late I have felt more and more that I have wronged her. In the first place leaving him the way we did, and in the second place for not trying to get in touch with him.”

“How do you feel toward him, Mr. Carlson?”

“Feel? Why, I would be only too glad to meet him and ask his forgiveness.”

“And suppose that he had been trying to find you folks?”

“That might not be impossible. He thought the world of his daughter. I can’t believe that he has been anxious to meet me, though.”

“Would you like to meet him now?”

Mr. Carlson looked at him sharply. “What do you mean, pastor? Meet him? That would be the happiest day in my life—for Hannah’s sake.”

“You shall meet him tomorrow.”

Mr. Carlson arose hurriedly and faced Lars. “Do you mean what you are saying? I must tell Hannah.”

“Wait a minute. She knows that he is here. Sit down and I’ll tell you all I know about this matter.”

Mrs. Carlson had noticed her husband’s agitation. There was no longer any laughter. Lars was talking and her husband was listening intently. Every now and then he was looking toward the house.

Finally the men arose and came slowly toward the cabin.

Mrs. Carlson met them at the door and greeted Lars with a puzzled look on her face.

“I have good news for you, Mrs. Carlson. Your father called on us this morning. You had better sit down and I’ll tell you what I have just told your husband.”

When he was through, Carlson sat there with bowed head, but Hannah’s face shone like one transfigured. She went over to her husband, placed her hand on his shoulder and said, “Peter, isn’t this wonderful?”

Next morning. Lars notified Mr. Holt of his visit to the Carlsons. He would be glad to bring him to his daughter and her husband and child.

The old gentleman just sat and stared at Lars. He shook his head slowly and whispered as to himself, “Hannah, my daughter. Clara, my granddaughter.”

“And Peter?” Lars said.

Then a smile spread across his face, and he said, “And Peter, of course.” He stood up, tall and straight. “Wait a few minutes and I’ll go with you.”

On the way to town Mr. Holt was silent and Lars did not want to disturb him. They picked up Olga and proceeded to the Carlson farmstead.

“It’s all too wonderful to believe,” he said. But he did believe it. And had he been silent going to town, he now talked fast and at times almost incoherently.

“Do you believe in prayers, Rev. Lee? Of course you do. I guess I don’t know what I am saying. This is a moment I have prayed for many a time.”

Then after a pause he added, looking at Olga who was sitting in the back seat, “I guess others must have prayed and planned, too.”

Olga usually did not lack words, but this time she did not trust herself to answer. She smiled at him, smiled through tears.

When they came to a sudden turn in the road, Lars called out cheerfully, “Well, here we are.”

They passed by the cascade and the big boulder. “What a pretty place,” Mr. Holt remarked.

As they drew near the house, the door opened and Mr. Carlson stepped out, followed by his wife and Clara. They were dressed in their best clothes,

Olga noticed.

When they were within a short distance of the cabin, Lars stopped the horses, and Mr. Holt got out slowly. Mr. Carlson advanced; he carried his head high. His face was shining. But Mrs. Carlson leaned against the door post.

Just then a little girl, dressed in white and with curls flying, ran past her father and fairly leaped into the old man's arms.

"You are my grandpa, aren't you?"

Lars turned the horses and drove slowly homeward. "Thank you, Lars," whispered Olga. Then she buried her face in her hands.

The autumn sun shone in a cloudless sky. The leaves were beginning to turn yellow and purple. The young maples blazed like bonfires amidst the dark green spruce. Large flocks of birds were flying in wide circles. A blue-bird flew softly across the road. A flicker was drumming on the top of a dry tree. A song sparrow made the sunlit air thrill with his jubilant praise. God was good. Folks were good. Life was good. Let all the earth praise His holy name.

Lars stopped the team when a glittering lake suddenly spread out in front of them. Olga looked at him. It was the same dear old Lars and yet a new Lars. His face was sharp, almost stern, but when he turned toward her there was a tender light in his eyes.

"What are you thinking about, Lars?"

He put his hand gently on hers.

"I was thinking of what the most wonderful person in the world wrote me once upon a time."

There was a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Who was he and what did he write, if I may ask?"

"It was the person who wrote: 'A servant of the Lord must go where he can do the most good!'"

"Lars, you know how to say it, don't you?"

"Yes, it's easy to say it when the heart is full of it."

BOOKS BY N. N. RØNNING

In English

“A Summer in Telemarken”

“Jesus in Prayer”

“The Sunday School Lesson”

“A Call to Lutheran Laymen”

In Norwegian

“A Summer in Telemarken”

“Abraham Lincoln”

“Just for Fun”

“When the Stars Sang”

“The Boy from Norway”



“THE FRIEND”

A Monthly Family Magazine

Edited by N. N. RØNNING

THE FRIEND was started in the fall of 1923. It met a wonderful reception from the very beginning. Has now, in 1928, 18,000 subscribers.

THE FRIEND is noted for its interesting, clean stories, inspiring biographies, articles on timely topics, frank and fearless editorials, fine poems, beautiful pictures.

THE FRIEND has, besides, the following departments: “For Boys,” “For Girls,” “Missionary Survey of the World,” “Church Workers’ Forum.”

Subscription price, \$1.50 per year.

Sample copies free on application.



THE CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CO.

406 6th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Copyright Notice

This book was published 2020 by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org. Some (hopefully unobtrusive) updates to spelling, punctuation, and paragraph divisions have been made. Unabridged.

“Lars Lee” was originally published 1928 and “Servant of the Lord”, 1931 by The Friend, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Image on imprint page is *Still Life With Bible* by Vincent Van Gogh.

This LutheranLibrary.org book is released under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, which means you may freely use, share, copy, or translate it as long as you provide attribution to LutheranLibrary.org, and place on it no further restrictions.

The text and artwork within are believed to be in the U.S. public domain.

616 – v5

ISBN: 9798628736265 (paperback)

How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Encouraging Christian Books for You to Download and Enjoy

Devotional

- *The Sermons of Theophilus Stork: A Devotional Treasure*
- Simon Peter Long. *The Way Made Plain*

Theology

- Matthias Loy. *The Doctrine of Justification*
- Henry Eyster Jacobs. *Summary of the Christian Faith*
- Theodore Schmauk. *The Confessional Principle*

Novels

- Edward Roe. *Without a Home*
- Joseph Hocking. *The Passion for Life*

Essential Lutheran Library

- The Augsburg Confession with Saxon Visitation Articles
- Luther's Small Catechism
- Luther's Large Catechism
- Melancthon's Apology
- The Formula of Concord

The full catalog is available at LutheranLibrary.org. Paperback Editions of some titles at Amazon.