

***HAROLD BELL
WRIGHT***



***THE CALLING
OF DAN
MATTHEWS***

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The Calling of Dan Matthews

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CHAPTER I.

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THE HOME OF THE ALLY

"And because the town of this story is what it is, there came to dwell in it a Spirit—a strange, mysterious power—playful, vicious, deadly; a Something to be at once feared and courted; to be denied—yet confessed in the denial; a deadly enemy, a welcome friend, an all-powerful Ally."

This story began in the Ozark Mountains. It follows the trail that is nobody knows how old. But mostly this story happened in Corinth, a town of the middle class in a Middle Western state.

There is nothing peculiar about Corinth. The story might have happened just as well in any other place, for the only distinguishing feature about this town is its utter lack of any distinguishing feature whatever. In all the essential elements of its life, so far as this story goes, Corinth is exactly like every other village, town or city in the land. This, indeed, is why the story happened in this particular place.

Years ago, when the railroad first climbed the backbone of the Ozarks, it found Corinth already located on the summit. Even before the war, this county-seat town was a

place of no little importance, and many a good tale might be told of those exciting days when the woods were full of guerrillas and bushwhackers, and the village was raided first by one side, then by the other. Many a good tale is told, indeed; for the fathers and mothers of Corinth love to talk of the war times, and to point out in Old Town the bullet-marked buildings and the scenes of many thrilling events.

But the sons and daughters of the passing generation, with their sons and daughters, like better to talk of the great things that are going to be—when the proposed shoe-factory comes, the talked-of mills are established, the dreamed-of electric line is built out from the city, or the Capitalist from Somewhere-else arrives to invest in vacant lots, thereon to build new hotels and business blocks.

The Doctor says that in the whole history of Corinth there are only two events. The first was the coming of the railroad; the second was the death of the Doctor's good friend, the Statesman.

The railroad did not actually enter Corinth. It stopped at the front gate. But with Judge Strong's assistance the fathers and mothers recognized their "golden opportunity" and took the step which the eloquent Judge assured them would result in a "glorious future." They left the beautiful, well-drained site chosen by those who cleared the wilderness, and stretched themselves out along the mud-flat on either side of the sacred right-of-way—that same mud-flat being, incidentally, the property of the patriotic Judge.

Thus Corinth took the railroad to her heart, literally. The depot, the yards, the red section-house and the water-tank are all in the very center of the town. Every train while

stopping for water (and they all stop) blocks two of the three principal streets. And when, after waiting in the rain or snow until his patience is nearly exhausted, the humble Corinthian goes to the only remaining crossing, he always gets there just in time to meet a long freight backing onto the siding. Nowhere in the whole place can one escape the screaming whistle, clanging bell, and crashing drawbar. Day and night the rumble of the heavy trains jars and disturbs the peacefulness of the little village.

But the railroad did something for Corinth; not too much, but something. It did more for Judge Strong. For a time the town grew rapidly. Fulfillment of the Judge's prophecies seemed immediate and certain. Then, as mysteriously as they had come, the boom days departed. The mills, factories and shops that were going to be, established themselves elsewhere. The sound of the builder's hammer was no longer heard. The Doctor says that Judge Strong had come to believe in his own prediction, or at least, fearing that his prophecy might prove true, refused to part with more land except at prices that would be justified only in a great metropolis.

Neighboring towns that were born when Corinth was middle-aged, flourished and have become cities of importance. The country round about has grown rich and prosperous. Each year more and heavier trains thunder past on their way to and from the great city by the distant river, stopping only to take water. But in this swiftly moving stream of life Corinth is caught in an eddy. Her small world has come to swing in a very small circle—it can scarcely be said to swing at all. The very children stop growing when

they become men and women, and are content to dream the dreams their fathers' fathers dreamed, even as they live in the houses the fathers of their fathers built. Only the trees that line the unpaved streets have grown—grown and grown until overhead their great tops touch to shut out the sky with an arch of green, and their mighty trunks crowd contemptuously aside the old sidewalks, with their decayed and broken boards.

Old Town, a mile away, is given over to the negroes. The few buildings that remain are fallen into ruin, save as they are patched up by their dusky tenants. And on the hill, the old Academy with its broken windows, crumbling walls, and fallen chimneys, stands a pitiful witness of an honor and dignity that is gone.

Poor Corinth! So are gone the days of her true glory—the glory of her usefulness, while the days of her promised honor and power are not yet fulfilled.

And because the town of this story is what it is, there came to dwell in it a Spirit—a strange, mysterious power—playful, vicious, deadly; a Something to be at once feared and courted; to be denied—yet confessed in the denial; a dreaded enemy, a welcome friend, an all-powerful Ally.

But, for Corinth, the humiliation of her material failure is forgotten in her pride of a finer success. The shame of commercial and civic obscurity is lost in the light of national recognition. And that self-respect and pride of place, without which neither man nor town can look the world in the face, is saved to her by the Statesman.

Born in Corinth, a graduate of the old Academy, town clerk, mayor, county clerk, state senator, congressman, his

zeal in advocating a much discussed issue of his day, won for him national notice, and for his town everlasting fame.

In this man unusual talents were combined with rare integrity of purpose and purity of life. Politics to him meant a way whereby he might serve his fellows. However much men differed as to the value of the measures for which he fought, no one ever doubted his belief in them or questioned his reasons for fighting. It was not at all strange that such a man should have won the respect and friendship of the truly great. But with all the honors that came to him, the Statesman's heart never turned from the little Ozark town, and it was here among those who knew him best that his influence for good was greatest and that he was most loved and honored. Thus all that the railroad failed to do for Corinth the Statesman did in a larger, finer way.

Then the Statesman died.

It was the Old Town Corinth of the brick Academy days that inspired the erection of a monument to his memory. But it was the Corinth of the newer railroad days that made this monument of cast-iron; and under the cast-iron, life-sized, portrait figure of the dead statesman, this newer Corinth placed in cast-iron letters a quotation from one of his famous speeches upon an issue of his day.

The Doctor argues in language most vigorous that the broken sidewalks, the permitted insolence of the railroad, the presence and power of that Spirit, the Ally, and many other things and conditions in Corinth, with the lack of as many other things and conditions, are all due to the influence of what he calls "that hideous, cast-iron

monstrosity." By this it will be seen that the Doctor is something of a philosopher.

The monument stands on the corner where Holmes Street ends in Strong Avenue. On the opposite corner the Doctor lives with Martha, his wife. It is a modest home for there are no children and the Doctor is not rich. The house is white with old-fashioned green shutters, and over the porch climbs a mass of vines. The steps are worn very thin and the ends of the floor-boards are rotted badly by the moisture of the growing vines. But the Doctor says he'll "be damned" if he'll pull down such a fine old vine to put in new boards, and that those will last anyway longer than either he or Martha. By this it will be seen that the Doctor is something of a poet.

On the rear of the lot is the wood-shed and stable; and on the east, along the fence in front, and down the Holmes Street side, are the Doctor's roses—the admiration and despair of every flower-growing housewife in town.

Full fifty years of the Doctor's professional life have been spent in active practice in Corinth and in the country round about. He declares himself worn out now and good for nothing, save to meddle in the affairs of his neighbors, to cultivate his roses, and—when the days are bright—to go fishing. For the rest, he sits in his chair on the porch and watches the world go by.

"Old Doctors and old dogs," he growls, "how equally useless we are, and yet how much—how much we could tell if only we dared speak!"

He is big, is the Doctor—big and fat and old. He knows every soul in Corinth, particularly the children; indeed he helped most of them to come to Corinth. He is acquainted

as well with every dog and cat, and horse and cow, knowing their every trick and habit, from the old brindle milker that unlatches his front gate to feed on the lawn, to the bull pup that pinches his legs when he calls on old Granny Brown. For miles around, every road, lane, by-path, shortcut and trail, is a familiar way to him. His practice, he declares, has well-nigh ruined him financially, and totally wrecked his temper. He can curse a man and cry over a baby; and he would go as far and work as hard for the illiterate and penniless backwoodsman in his cabin home as for the president of the Bank of Corinth or even Judge Strong himself.

No one ever thinks of the Doctor as loving anyone or anything, and that is because he is so big and rough on the outside: but every one in trouble goes to him, and that is because he is so big and kind on the inside. It is a common saying that in cases of trying illness or serious accident a patient would rather "hear the Doctor cuss, than listen to the parson pray." Other physicians there are in Corinth, but every one understands when his neighbor says: "The Doctor." Nor does anyone ever, ever call him "Doc"!

After all, who knows the people of a community so well as the physician who lives among them? To the world the Doctor's patients were laborers, bankers, dressmakers, scrub-women, farmers, servants, teachers, preachers; to the Doctor they were men and women. Others knew their occupations—he knew their lives. The preachers knew what they professed—he knew what they practiced. Society saw them dressed up—he saw them—in bed. Why, the Doctor has spent more hours in the homes of his neighbors than ever he passed under his own roof, and there is not a

skeleton closet in the whole town to which he has not the key.

On Strong Avenue, across from the monument, is a tiny four-roomed cottage. In the time of this story it wanted paint badly, and was not in the best of repair. But the place was neat and clean, with a big lilac bush just inside the gate, giving it an air of home-like privacy; and on the side directly opposite the Doctor's a fair-sized, well-kept garden, giving it an air of honest thrift. Here the widow Mulhall lived with her crippled son, Denny. Denny was to have been educated for the priesthood, but the accident that left him such a hopeless cripple shattered that dream; and after the death of his father, who was killed while discharging his duties as the town marshal, there was no money to buy even a book.

When there was anything for her to do, Deborah worked out by the day. Denny, in spite of his poor, misshapen body, tended the garden, raising such vegetables as no one else in all Corinth could—or would, raise. From early morning until late evening the lad dragged himself about among the growing things, and the only objects to mar the beauty of his garden, were Denny himself, and the great rock that crops out in the very center of the little field.

"It is altogether too bad that the rock should be there," the neighbors would say as they occasionally stopped to look over the fence or to order their vegetables for dinner. And Denny would answer with his knowing smile, "Oh, I don't know! It would be bad, I'll own, if it should ever take to rollin' 'round like. But it lays quiet enough. And do you see, I've planted them vines around it to make it a bit soft

lookin'. And there's a nice little niche on yon side, that does very well for a seat now and then, when I have to rest."

Sometimes, when the Doctor looks at the monument—the cast-iron image of his old friend, in its cast-iron attitude, forever delivering that speech on an issue as dead today as an edict of one of the Pharaohs—he laughs, and sometimes, even as he laughs, he curses.

But when, in the days of the story, the Doctor would look across the street to where Denny, with his poor, twisted body, useless, swinging arm, and dragging leg, worked away so cheerily in his garden, the old physician, philosopher, and poet, declared that he felt like singing hymns of praise.

And it all began with a fishing trip.

CHAPTER II.

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A REVELATION

"And because of these things, to the keen old physician and student of life, the boy was a revelation of that best part of himself—that best part of the race."

It happened on the Doctor's first trip to the Ozarks.

Martha says that everything with the Doctor begins and ends with fishing. Martha has a way of saying such things as that. In this case she is more than half right for the Doctor does so begin and end most things.

Whenever there were grave cases to think out, knotty problems to solve, or important decisions to make, it was his habit to steal away to a shady nook by the side of some quiet, familiar stream. And he confidently asserts that to this practice more than to anything else he owes his professional success, and his reputation for sound, thoughtful judgment on all matters of moment.

"And why not?" he will argue when in the mood. "It is your impulsive, erratic, thoughtless fellow who goes smashing, trashing and banging about the field and woods with dogs and gun. Your true thinker slips quietly away with rod and line, and while his hook is down in the deep, still

waters, or his fly is dancing over the foaming rapids and swiftly swirling eddies, his mind searches the true depths of the matter and every possible phase of the question passes before him."

For years the Doctor had heard much of the fishing to be had in the more unsettled parts of the Ozarks, but with his growing practice he could find leisure for no more than an occasional visit to nearby streams. But about the time that Martha began telling him that he was too old to stay out all day on the wet bank of a river, and Dr. Harry had come to relieve him of the heavier and more burdensome part of his practice, a railroad pushed its way across the mountain wilderness. The first season after the road was finished the Doctor went to cast his hook in new waters.

In all these after years those days so full of mystic beauty have lived in the old man's memory, the brightest days of all his life. For it was there he met the Boy—there in the Ozark hills, with their great ridges clothed from base to crest with trees all quivering and nodding in the summer breeze, with their quiet valleys, their cool hollows and lovely glades, and their deep and solemn woods. And the streams! Those Ozark streams! The Doctor wonders often if there can flow anywhere else such waters as run through that land of dreams.

The Doctor left the train at a little station where the railroad crosses White River, and two days later he was fishing near the mouth of Fall Creek. It was late in the afternoon. The Boy was passing on his way home from a point farther up the stream. Not more than twelve, but tall and strong for his age, he came along the rough path at the

foot of the bluff with the easy movement and grace of a young deer. He checked a moment when he saw the Doctor, as a creature of the forest would pause at first sight of a human being. Then he came on again, his manner and bearing showing frank interest, and the clear, sunny face of him flushing a bit at the presence of a stranger.

"Hello," said the Doctor, with gruff kindness, "any luck?"

The boy's quick smile showed a set of teeth—the most perfect the physician had ever seen, and his young voice was tuned to the music of the woods, as he answered, "I have caught no fish, sir."

By these words and the light in his brown eyes the philosopher knew him instantly for a true fisherman. He noted wonderingly that the lad's speech was not the rude dialect of the backwoods, while he marveled at the depth of wisdom in one so young. How incidental after all is the catching of fish, to the one who fishes with true understanding. The boy's answer was both an explanation and a question. It explained that he did not go fishing for fish alone; and it asked of the stranger a declaration of his standing—why did he go fishing? What did he mean by fisherman's luck?

The Doctor deliberated over his reply, while slowly drawing in his line to examine the bait. Meanwhile the boy stood quietly by regarding him with a wide, questioning look. The man realized that much depended upon his next word.

Then the lad's youth betrayed him into eagerness. "Have you been farther up the river just around the bend, where the giant cottonwoods are, and the bluffs with the pines

above, and the willows along the shore? Oh, but it's fine there! Much better than this."

He had given the stranger his chance. If the Doctor was to be admitted into this boy's world he must now prove his right to citizenship. Looking straight into the boy's brown eyes, the older fisherman asked, "A better place to catch fish?"

He laughed aloud—a clear, clean, boyish laugh of understanding, and throwing himself to the ground with the easy air of one entirely at home, returned, "No, sir, a better place to fish." So it was settled, each understanding the other.

An hour later when the shadow of the mountain came over the water, the boy sprang to his feet with an exclamation, "It's time that I was going, mother likes for me to be home for supper. I can just make it."

But the Doctor was loth to let him go. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Is it far?"

"Oh, no, only about six miles, but the trail is rough until you strike the top of Wolf Ridge."

"Humph! You can't walk six miles before dark."

"My horse is only a little way up the creek," he answered, "or at least he should be." Putting his fingers to his lips he blew a shrill whistle, which echoed and re-echoed from shore to shore along the river, and was answered by a loud neigh from somewhere in the ravine through which Fall Creek reaches the larger stream. Again the boy whistled, and a black pony came trotting out of the brush, the bridle hanging from the saddle horn. "Tramp and I can make it all

right, can't we old fellow?" said the boy, patting the glossy neck, as the little horse rubbed a soft muzzle against his young master's shoulder.

While his companion was making ready for his ride the Doctor selected four of the largest of his catch—black bass they were—beauties. "Here," he said, when the lad was mounted, "take these along."

He accepted graciously without hesitation, and by this the Doctor knew that their fellowship was firmly established. "Oh, thank you! Mother is so fond of bass, and so are father and all of us. This is plenty for a good meal." Then, with another smile, "Mother likes to fish, too; she taught me."

The Doctor looked at him wistfully as he gathered up the reins, then burst forth eagerly with, "Look here, why can't you come back tomorrow? We'll have a bully time. What do you say?"

He lowered his hand. "Oh, I would like to." Then for a moment he considered, gravely, saying at last, "I think I can meet you here day after tomorrow. I am quite sure father and mother will be glad for me to come when I tell them about you."

Was ever a fat old Doctor so flattered? It was not so much the boy's words as his gracious manner and the meaning he unconsciously put into his exquisitely toned voice.

He had turned his pony's head when the old man shouted after him once more. "Hold on, wait a moment, you have not told me your name. I am Dr. Oldham from Corinth. I am staying at the Thompson's down the river."

"My name is Daniel Howitt Matthews," he answered. "My home is the old Matthews place on the ridge above Mutton Hollow."

Then he rode away up the winding Fall Creek trail.

The Doctor spent the whole of the next day near the spot where he had met the boy, fearing lest the lad might come again and not find him. He even went a mile or so up the little creek half expecting to meet his young friend, wondering at himself the while, that he could not break the spell the lad had cast over him. Who was he? He had told the Doctor his name, but that did not satisfy. Nor, indeed, did the question itself ask what the old man really wished to know. The words persistently shaped themselves—*What* is he? To this the physician's brain made answer clearly enough—a boy, a backwoods boy, with unusual beauty and strength of body, and uncommon fineness of mind; yet with all this, a boy.

But that something that sits in judgment upon the findings of our brain, and, in lofty disregard of us, accepts or rejects our most profound conclusions, refused this answer. It was too superficial. It was not, in short, an answer. It did not in any way explain the strange power that this lad had exerted over the Doctor.

"Me," he said to himself, "a hard old man calloused by years of professional contact with mankind and consequent knowledge of their general cussedness! Huh! I have helped too many hundreds of children into this world, and have carried too many of them through the measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pox and the like to be so moved by a mere boy."

The Thompsons could have told him about the lad and his people, but the Doctor instinctively shrank from asking them. He felt that he did not care to be told about the boy—that in truth no one could tell him about the boy, because he already knew the lad as well as he knew himself. Indeed the feeling that he already knew the boy was what troubled the Doctor; more, that he had always lived with him; but that he had never before met him face to face. He felt as a blind man might feel if, after living all his life in closest intimacy with someone, he were suddenly to receive his sight and, for the first time, actually look upon his companion's face.

In the years that have passed since that day the Doctor has learned that the lad was to him, not so much a mystery as a revelation—the revelation of an unspoken ideal, of a truth that he had always known but never fully confessed even to himself, and that lies at last too deeply buried beneath the accumulated rubbish of his life to be of any use to him or to others. In the boy he met this hidden, secret, unacknowledged part of himself, that he knows to be the truest, most precious and most sacred part, and that he has always persistently ignored even while always conscious that he can no more escape it than he can escape his own life. In short, Dan Matthews is to the Doctor that which the old man feels he ought to have been; that which he might have been, but never now can be.

It was still early in the forenoon of the following day when the Doctor heard a cheery hail, and the boy came riding out of the brush of the little ravine to meet his friend who was waiting on the river bank. As the lad sprang lightly

to the ground, and, with quick fingers, took some things from the saddle, loosed the girths and removed the pony's bridle, the physician watched him with a slight feeling of—was it envy or regret? "You are early," he said.

The boy laughed. "I would have come earlier if I could," Then, dismissing the little horse, he turned eagerly, "Have you been there yet—to that place up the river?"

"Indeed I have not," said the Doctor, "I have been waiting for you to show me."

He was delighted at this, and very soon was leading the way along the foot of the bluff to his favorite fishing ground.

It is too much to attempt the telling of that day: how they lay on the ground beneath the giant-limbed cottonwoods, and listened to the waters going past; how they talked of the wild woodland life about them, of flower and tree, and moss and vine, and the creatures that nested and denned and lived therein; how they caught a goodly catch of bass and perch, and the Doctor, pulling off his boots, waded in the water like another boy, while the hills echoed with their laughter; and how, when they had their lunch on a great rock, an eagle watched hungrily from his perch on a dead pine, high up on the top of the bluff.

When the shadow of the mountain was come once more and in answer to the boy's whistle the black pony had trotted from the brush to be made ready for the evening ride, the Doctor again watched his young companion wistfully.

When he was ready, the boy said, "Father and mother asked me to tell you, sir, that they—that we would be glad to have you come to see us before you leave the hills."

Seeing the surprise and hesitation of the Doctor, he continued with fine tact, "You see I told them all about you, and they would like to know you too. Won't you come? I'm sure you would like my father and mother, and we would be so glad to have you. I'll drive over after you tomorrow if you'll come."

Would he *go*! Why the Doctor would have gone to China, or Africa, or where would he not have gone, if the boy had asked him.

That visit to the Matthews' place was the beginning of a friendship that has never been broken. Every year since, the Doctor has gone to them for several weeks and always with increasing delight. Among the many households that, in his professional career, he has been privileged to know intimately, this home stands like a beautiful temple in a world of shacks and hovels. But it was not until the philosopher had heard from Mrs. Matthews the story of Dad Howitt that he understood the reason. In the characters of Young Matt and Sammy, in their home life and in their children, the physician found the teaching of the old Shepherd of the Hills bearing its legitimate fruit. Most clearly did he find it in Dan—the first born of this true mating of a man and woman who had never been touched by those forces in our civilization which so dwarf and cripple the race, but who had been taught to find in their natural environment those things that alone have the power to truly refine and glorify life.

Understanding this, the Doctor understood Dan. The boy was well born; he was natural. He was what a man-child ought to be. He did not carry the handicap that most of us

stagger under so early in the race. And because of these things, to the keen old physician and student of life, the boy was a revelation of that best part of himself—that best part of the race. With the years this feeling of the Doctor's toward the boy has grown even as their fellowship. But Dan has never understood; how indeed could he?

It was always Dan who met the Doctor at the little wilderness station, and who said the last good-bye when the visit was over. Always they were together, roaming about the hills, on fishing trips to the river, exploring the country for new delights, or revisiting their familiar haunts. Dan seemed, in his quiet way, to claim his old friend by right of discovery and the others laughingly yielded, giving the Doctor—as Young Matt, the father, put it—"a third interest in the boy."

And so, with the companionship of the yearly visits, and frequent letters in the intervening months, the Doctor watched the development of his young friend, and dreamed of the part that Dan would play in life when he became a man. And often as he watched the boy there was, on the face of the old physician, that look of half envy, half regret.

In addition to his training at the little country school, Dan's mother was his constant teacher, passing on to her son as only a mother could, the truths she had received from her old master, the Shepherd. But when the time came for more advanced intellectual training the choice of a college was left to their friend. The Doctor hesitated. He shrank from sending the lad out into the world. He foolishly could not bear the thought of that splendid nature coming in

touch with the filth of life as he knew it. "You can see," he argued gruffly, "what it has done for me."

But Sammy answered, "Why, Doctor, what is the boy for?" And Young Matt, looking away over Garber where an express train thundered over the trestles and around the curves, said in his slow way, "The brush is about all cleared, Doctor. The wilderness is going fast. The boy must live in his own age and do his own work." When their friend urged that they develop or sell the mine in the cave on Dewey Bald, and go with the boy, they both shook their heads emphatically, saying, "No, Doctor, we belong to the hills."

When the boy finally left his mountain home for a school in the distant city, he had grown to be a man to fill the heart of every lover of his race with pride. With his father's powerful frame and close-knit muscles, and the healthy life of the woods and hills leaping in his veins, his splendid body and physical strength were refined and dominated by the mind and spirit of his mother. His shaggy, red-brown hair was like his father's but his eyes were his mother's eyes, with that same trick of expression, that wide questioning gaze, that seemed to demand every vital truth in whatever came under his consideration. He had, too, his mother's quick way of grasping your thoughts almost before you yourself were fully conscious of them, with that same saving sense of humor that made Sammy Lane the life and sunshine of the countryside.

"Big Dan," the people of the hills had come to call him and "Big Dan" they called him in the school. For, in the young life of the schools, as in the country, there is a spirit that names men with names that fit.

Secretly the Doctor had hoped that Dan would choose the profession so dear to him. What an ideal physician he would make, with that clean, powerful, well balanced nature; and above all with that love for his race, and his passion to serve mankind that was the dominant note in his character. The boy would be the kind of a physician that the old Doctor had hoped to be. So he planned and dreamed for Dan as he had planned and dreamed for himself, thinking to see the dreams that he had failed to live, realized in the boy.

It was a severe shock to the Doctor when that letter came telling him of Dan's choice of a profession. For the first time the boy had disappointed him, disappointed him bitterly.

Seizing his fishing tackle the old man fled to the nearest stream. And there gazing into the deep, still waters, where he had cast his hook, he came to understand. It was that same dominant note in the boy's life, that inborn passion to serve, that fixed principle in his character that his life must be of the greatest possible worth to the world, that had led him to make his choice. With that instinct born in him, coming from the influence of the old Shepherd upon his father and mother, the boy could no more escape it than he could change the color of his brown eyes.

"But," said the Doctor to his cork, that floated on the surface in a patch of shadow, "what does he know about it, what does he really know? He's been reading history—that's what's the matter with him. He sees things as they were, not as they are. He should have come to me, I could have—" Just then the cork went under. The Doctor had a bite. "I could have told him," repeated the fisherman softly, "I—"

The cork bobbed up again—it was only a nibble. "He'll find out the truth of course. He's that kind. But when he finds it!" The cork bobbed again—"He'll need me, he'll need me bad!" The cork went under for good this time. Zip—and the Doctor had a big one!

With fresh bait and his hook once more well down toward the bottom the Doctor saw the whole thing clearly, and so planned a way by which, as he put it, he might, when Dan needed him, "*stand by.*"

CHAPTER III.

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A GREAT DAY IN CORINTH

"Talk of the responsibilities of age; humph! They are nothing compared to the responsibilities of youth. There's Dan, now—"

Corinth was in the midst of a street fair. The neighboring city held a street fair that year, therefore Corinth. All that the city does Corinth imitates, thereby with a beautiful rural simplicity thinking herself metropolitan, just as those who take their styles from the metropolis feel themselves well dressed. The very Corinthian clerks and grocery boys, lounging behind their counters and in the doorways, the lawyer's understudy with his feet on the window sill, the mechanic's apprentice, the high school youths and the local sporting fraternity—all imitated their city kind and talked smartly about the country "rubes" who came to town; never once dreaming that they themselves, when they "go to town," are as much a mark for the like wit of their city brothers. So Corinth was in the midst of a street fair.

On every vacant lot in the down town section were pens, and stalls, and cages, wherein grunted, squealed, neighed, bellowed, bleated, cackled and crowed, exhibits from the

neighboring farms. In the town hall or opera house (it was both) there were long tables covered with almost everything that grows on a farm, or is canned, baked, preserved, pickled or stitched by farmers' wives. The "Art Exhibit," product mainly of Corinth, had its place on the stage. Upon either side of the main street were booths containing the exhibits of the local merchants; farm machinery, buggies, wagons, harness and the like being most conspicuous. The chief distinction between the town and country exhibits were that the farmer displayed his goods to be looked at, the merchant his to be sold. It was the merchants who promoted the fair.

In a vacant store room the Memorial Church was holding its annual bazaar. On different corners other churches were serving chicken dinners, or ice cream, or in sundry ways were actively engaged for the conversion of the erring farmer's cash to the coffers of the village sanctuaries. In this way the promoters of the fair were encouraged by the churches. From every window, door, arch, pole, post, corner, gable, peak, cupola—fluttered, streamed and waved, decorations—banners mostly, bearing advertisements of the enterprising merchants and of the equally enterprising churches.

Afternoons there would be a baseball game between town and country teams, foot races, horseback riding, a greased pig to catch, a greased pole to climb and other entertainments too exciting to think about, too attractive to be resisted.

From the far backwoods districts, from the hills, from the creek bottoms and the river, the people came to crowd

about the pens, and stalls and tables; to admire their own and their neighbors' products and possessions, that they had seen many times before in their neighbors' homes and fields. They visited on the street corners. They tramped up and down past the booths. They yelled themselves hoarse at the games and entertainments, and in the intoxication of their pleasures bought ice cream, chicken dinners and various other things of the churches, and much goods of the merchants who promoted the fair.

The Doctor was up that day at least a full hour before his regular time.

At breakfast Martha looked him over suspiciously, and when he folded his napkin after eating only half his customary meal she remarked dryly,

"It's three hours yet till train time, Doctor."

Without answer the Doctor went out on the porch.

Already the country people, dressed in their holiday garb, bright-faced, eager for the long looked for pleasures, were coming in for the fair. Many of them catching sight of the physician hailed him gaily, shouting good natured remarks in addition to their salutations, and laughing loudly at whatever he replied.

It may be that the good Lord had made days as fine as that day, but the Doctor could not remember them. His roses so filled the air with fragrance, the grass in the front yard was so fresh and clean, the flowers along the walk so bright and dainty, and the great maples, that make a green arch of the street, so cool and mysterious in their leafy

depths, that his old heart fairly ached with the beauty of it. The Doctor was all poet that day. Dan was coming!

It had worked out just as the Doctor had planned it on that fishing trip some three months before. At first Martha was suspicious when he broached the subject. Mostly Martha is suspicious when her husband offers suggestions touching certain matters, but the wise old philosopher knew what strings to pull, and so it all came out as he had planned. Sammy had written him expressing her gladness, that her boy in the beginning of his work was to be with the friend whose counsel and advice they valued so highly. The Doctor had growled over the letter, promising himself that he would "stand by" when the boy needed him, but that was all he or an angel from heaven could do now. And the Doctor had written Dan at length about Corinth, but never a word about his thoughts regarding the boy's choice, or his fears for the outcome.

"There are some things," he reflected, "that every man must find out for himself. To some kinds of people the finding out doesn't matter much. To other kinds, it is well for them if there are those who love them to stand by." Dan was the kind to whom the finding out would mean a great deal, so the Doctor would "stand by."

There on his vine covered porch that morning, the old man's thoughts went back to that day when the boy first came to him on the river bank, and to all the bright days of Dan's boyhood and youth that he had passed with the lad in the hills. "His life—" said he, talking to himself, as he has a way of doing—"His life is like this day, fresh and clean and —". He looked across the street to the monument that stood