



WHEN the fight begins within himself, a man's worth something.
—Browning.

Winning the Wilderness

(Continued from last week.)

(CHAPTER III.—Continued.)
THE pelting rain and deepening chill made the little home a very snug nest that night. There was only one stove to warm the house, but they kept up a fiction of parlor and dining room, kitchen and bed chamber. Even the library was there, although it encroached dreadfully on the parlor, bedroom and kitchen, all three, for it consisted of space enough for two chairs, one footstool, and a

tiny lampstand, beside which they spent their evenings.
"Who's likely to drop in to-night, and what's the programme for the evening: charades, music, readings, dancing, cribbage, or political speeches?" Asher inquired.

They had invented all sorts of pastimes, with make-believe audiences, such as little children create for their plays. For these two were children in a big child world. The wilderness is never grown up. It is Nature's little one waiting to be led on and disciplined to mature uses. Asher and Virginia had already peopled the valley with imaginary settlers, and each one of a certain type, and they adapted their pastime to the particular neighbors whom they chose to invite for the evening. How little the helpless folk in the city bored with their own dullness, and dependent on others for amusement—how little could such as these cope with the loneliness of the home on the plains, or comprehend the resourcefulness of the home-makers there!

"Oh, let's just spend the evening alone. It's too stormy for the Arnolds and Archibalds beyond the Deep Bend, and the Spooendykens have relatives from the East and the Gillivies are all down with colds."

Virginia had tucked herself down in the one rocking chair, with her feet on the footstool.

"It's such a nice night to be to ourselves. Watch the rain washing that wet window. It's getting worse. I always think of Jim on nights like this."

"So do I," Asher said, as he sat down in the armed chair he had made for himself of cottonwood limbs with a gunny sack seat. "He's all alone with his dog these dark nights, and loneliness cuts to the heart of a man like Jim. I'm glad I have you, Virginia. I couldn't do without you now. The rain is getting heavier every minute. Sounds like it was thumping on the door. Listen to that wind!"

Tell me about Jim, Asher. What made him come out here anyhow?" Virginia asked.

"I don't know all the story. Jim has never seemed to want to tell me,

and I've never cared to ask him," Asher replied. "When we were away together at school, he was in love with one of the prettiest girls that Ohio ever grew. She lived in the country up the valley from Cloverdale. Her name was Alice Leigh, and she was a whole cut above the neighborhood. Jim said she was an artist, could do wonderful things with a brush and she was just wild to go somewhere and take lessons."



A Strip of Good Road west of Norwich, in Oxford Co., Ont.

"Jim was planning always how to give her the opportunity to do it, but her mother, who owned a lot of land for that country and could afford to send Alice away to study, couldn't see any dollar sign in it, so she kept her daughter on the farm."

Asher paused and looked at Virginia. His own happiness made his voice tremble as he went on.

"He has a brother Tank. I suppose his real name is Thaddeus, or Tantalus, or something like it; I never knew, and I never liked him well enough to ask. Tank was a black-eyed little runt whom none of the boys liked, a grasping cur, younger than Jim, and as selfish as Jim is kind."

Just before I came West to scout the Indians off the map, Jim came back to school one time so unlike himself that I made him tell me what was the matter. It was Tank, he said, who was making trouble for him up in the Leigh neighborhood, and he was so grieved and unhappy, I wouldn't ask any more about it. I left for the

West soon after that. When I went back to Cloverdale, Tank Shirley had married Alice Leigh and her mother's farm, and Jim had left the country. I ran on to him by accident up at Carey's Crossing when I came West again, but I've never heard him say a word about the matter, and, of course, I don't mention it, although I believe it would do Jim good if he could bring himself to tell me about it. He's never been quite the same since. He has a little tendency to lung trouble, which the plains air is taking out of him, but he's had a bad attack of pneumonia and it's an old enemy of his, so it always is to a man of his physique. He's a good worker, but lacks judgment to make his work count. Doesn't really seem to have much to work for. But he's a friend to the last ditch. Just hear the rain!"

"It seems to be knocking against the door again," Virginia said, "and how the wind does howl! Poor Jim!"

"Listen to that! Sounds like something loose against the window. There's something out there." Asher started up with the words.

Something white had seemed to splash up against the window, and drop back again. It splashed up a second time, and fell again. Asher hurried to the door, and as he opened it, Pilot, the big white-throated dog from the Shirley claim, came bounding in, so wet and shaggy he seemed to bring all the storm in with him.

"Why, Pilot, what's the news?"

repeated, and Pilot, with a sorrowful yelp, stretched himself at full length beside the stove.

"Jim's sick, then?"

Pilot wagged his tail understandingly.

"Virginia, Jim needs me. I must go to him," Asher looked at his wife. "If Jim needs you, you'll need me," she replied.

"And ye'll both need Pilot. So we'll keep all the human beings together," Asher said, as he helped his wife to fasten her heavy coat, and caught a long old-fashioned nuba about her head.

Then they went out into the darkness and the chilling rain, as neighbor to neighbor, answering this cry for help.

Pilot ran far ahead of them and was waiting with a dog's welcome when they reached Shirley's cabin. But the master, lying where he caught the chill draught from the open door, was rigid with cold. A sudden attack of pneumonia had left him helpless. And to-night, Pilot, doing a dog's best, did not understand the danger of leaving doors open, and of joyously shaking his wet fur down on the sick man to whom help was coming none too soon.

"Hello, Jim. We're all here, doctor, nurse, cook, and hired man, and the little dog under the wagon," Asher said cheerily, bending over Jim's bunk. "That pup pretty nearly killed you with kindness, didn't he?"

Jim smiled wanly, then looked blankly away and lay very still.

The plains frontier had no use for the great talent folk. People must know how to take care of life there. Asher's first memory of Virginia was when she bent over him, fighting the fever in a prison hospital. He knew her talent for helping, and he had fairly estimated her quick ingenuity for his sad home emergency. But a new vision of the plains life came to her as she watched him, gentle-handed, swift, but unburied, never giving an inch to the enemy in fighting with death for the life of Jim Shirley.

"He's safe from that congestion," Asher said when the morning broke. "But his fever will come on now."

"Where did you learn to do all these things for sick people?" Virginia asked.

"Partly from the hospital nurse I had in the war. Also, it's a part of the game here. I learned a few things fighting the cholera in sixty-seven. We must look everything on the frontier squarely in the face, danger and death along with the rest, just as we have to do everywhere else, only we have to depend on each other more here. He'd on there, Jim!"

Asher sprang toward Shirley, who was sitting upright, staring wildly at the two. Then a struggle began, for the sick man, crazed with delirium, was bent on driving his helpers from the cabin. When he lay back exhausted at length, Asher turned to his wife.

"One of us must go to Carey's Crossing for a doctor. You can't hold Jim. It's all I can do to hold him. But it's a long way to Carey's. Can you go?"

"I'll try," Virginia replied. And Asher remembered what Jim had said on the windy September day: "She's as good a woman as we are men."

"You must take Pilot with you, and leave him at home. You can't get lost, for you know the way up to the main trail, and that runs straight to the Crossing. Dr. Carey knows Jim, and he will come if he can. I am such a pulled Jim back once a year or two ago when the pneumonia had him. Heaven keep you safe, you brave little."

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"Come out here, then! Come on, I tell you!" Asher started as if to open the door, but the dog did not move.

"He's not out of doors, and he isn't sitting up in a chair. Tell me, now, Pilot, exactly where Jim is! Jim, mind you!"

The dog looked at him with watchful eyes.

"Where's Jim? Poor Jim!" Asher