

* * The Story Page. * *

THE BRIGHT PLACE IN THE SKY.

BY EDWARD A. RAND.

"Oh, there it is!" he cried, eagerly. I can make out a black spot against that brighter place in the sky. Yes, it is there sure; just a black spot!" As he spoke, the boy crouched upon the hummock and eyed steadily that touch of black against a strip of bright sky upon the edge of the western sea. "It won't stay long," he murmured. No, it was a wonder that the brightness was there at all, for the sun had been below the horizon some time. It seemed as if the light of the sun came back in pity to show Ned Peterson where the boat of his brother Harry might be. "Going!" murmured the crouching form on the sand hummock. Yes, the light was going, and once more the heavy folds of mist were sweeping the sea. Harry Peterson's boat disappeared as if it had melted into the water. "I'll just tell Grandmother," murmured Ned.

Then he darted away, up and down the sand hummocks, and in the direction of a low, story-and-a-half house packed away amid a clump of trees behind the hummocks. He and Harry were orphans living with their grandmother, and the most of their support came from the results of Harry's fishing. Ned was younger, and he "tended store" in the little fishing village stretching back from the sand hummocks.

Harry had gone in the morning out to "Sunk Rock", and ought to have been home several hours ago; but he had complained of the unwillingness of fish to take his hook in their mouths, and had announced his intention to stay on the water until he could bring home "a decent fare." The afternoon had closed with serious threats of bad weather, and the most of the time since noon a dismal fog had shrouded the sea, while a horn-buoy off the harbor's mouth had been bellowing all kinds of disaster ahead.

"He—he is coming, Grandmother!" called out Ned, as he stepped inside the door of the snug little room.

"Where did you see him?" asked an old lady with a placid face, knitting away at one side of the hearth piled with flaming driftwood.

"I—I didn't see him at all. I saw his boat, though; and it was off Lower Ledge where he spoke of going. You see the sky cleared, and there was a bright place just above the water and against that bright place—don't you think, Grandmother—I saw Harry's boat! Then the fog shut down."

"God has bright places in the sky for us," murmured the old lady.

"It told me Harry was coming. Got some comfort out of it."

"I don't like that fog, Ned."

"Nor I, Grandmother."

"You see Ransom Towle, who knows our coast well if anybody does, says it is going to be a 'bad spell.' Now, Ransom don't like fog. He was off in one last year; and though he knows the coast well as his bean patch, he got all mixed up, and he rowed round half the night. It ain't just the fog, but it's the fog and suthin' else."

The "suthin' else" was the harbor's mouth in a storm. "I think Harry ought to be at home in half an hour, Grandmother."

"And we'll say he will be, and I'll just have the supper table spread. What can I get him that is good?"

"He likes your 'fried hard tack,' what father had when in the army, time of the war."

This was the army biscuit, the pilot, fried in pork.

"Oh yes! just the thing!" declared Grandmother, stepping forward energetically. "I'll look in the closet, for I know I have some biscuit."

When the half hour was up, there was an appetizing odor of supper in the low studded kitchen; but from the great misty sea beyond the hummocks nobody had come to eat the special dish. Grandmother and Ned looked at one another dismally. Then Grandmother went to a window looking along the village street.

"Can't see the lights at the store!" she exclaimed. "That's a bad sign. When we can't see those we know it's a thick fog along shore. Too thick for Harry."

"I don't suppose he knows where he is," said Ned gloomily. Then he thought in silence. Suddenly he turned toward the door, sprang out into the little vine-covered porch and said: "I'll tell you what I can do, I can build a fire on High Hummock—a good stout one. Then if the fog should thin out any it will help Harry."

"Oh, do, do! And I will pray. I'd like to help you; but I should be sick tomorrow if I went out. I'll pray."

"Guess my bonfire will do more good than your praying," thought Ned; but he was kind enough not to do any thinking aloud. High Hummock was a short distance from the house. It was perhaps thirty feet high and the king of the hummocks. At its foot was a pile of driftwood accumulated there mostly by Harry. Fisher-

men would pick up fragments of spars of a vessel's ribs, logs drifted out of forests far inland and swept by some river out to sea, pieces of boards or joists that had strayed from lumber yards. These were represented here in Harry's heap, though a small one.

"Harry did not know what he was picking up this wood for," murmured Ned. "I can make a big fire with this, and keep it up for some time, can I? Not long; but I will have a good big beginning."

The flame flashed up into the dark, dismal fog, and brilliantly lighted the top of High Hummock.

"Hope Harry will see that!" thought Ned. Then he went down to the house, wondering if he would find Harry there. Looking through a window, he saw the kneeling form of his grandmother, but no Harry. He stepped softly into the room.

"He hasn't come," Ned said to his grandmother, as she rose from her knees.

"Who, Ned?"

"Why, Harry?"

"Oh! Harry is not here; but when you spoke and said, 'He hasn't come', I was thinking of somebody else. I was thinking of God. He has been here. He has comforted me. I always feel stronger when He comes. I get help in prayer."

"That's all, Grandmother? Didn't you think your prayers would bring Harry right through the fog?"

I think God will take care of Harry. Whether he will bring Harry right through the fog, as you put it, I can't say. I don't know how he is going to manage this case. I know that God will do the very best thing for us all, Harry included."

"Well, well!"—a tone of surprise sounding in Ned's voice—"don't you think your prayers will be heard? What's the good of praying?"

"Prayer is going to help; that I believe. Whether my prayers will be heard the way I put them I don't know. I had rather have them answered God's way."

Ned ran his hands through his bushy locks, and he murmured.

"Well! I—I don't see the good of praying, if—if you don't get the very thing you ask for?"

"I believe God will give us that, or something better. I put an 'or' in. That gives God a chance to do as He thinks best."

Ned was silent for a moment. Then he broke out: "However, I know one thing will do good, and that is to keep up that fire on High Hummock."

"And prayer helps us keep on. It gives us strength. Maybe God is going to answer the prayer through what we do. I wish I could help you."

"Oh! oh! you must not try it! I'll keep up the fire in good style."

Ned piled about the ruddy coals glowing on High Hummock, all the driftwood at the hummock's base. Then he went back to the house.

"She's praying still!"—he said, looking in the window. She arose as he entered the room.

"Any news, Grandmother?"

"I have seen nothing of Harry."

"Humph! my wood is gone. You said prayer would help us keep on; but I have nothing to keep on with."

"I thought as I was praying, if your wood gave out, there were the dead vines in the bean patch. Sometimes I think when we are praying God may help us out by telling us things. You see we may have to answer our own prayers, and it is better that we should do it than have it done for us."

Ned looked silently at his grandmother and then went out again.

"She has got her own ideas, hasn't she? I thought prayer made things sort of easy for us; but it may make them hard!" was Ned's soliloquy on his way to the bean patch. "Now, sometimes when I hear Abram White and his set praying in the schoolhouse for this and that, but seeming to do nothing about it, I say their praying seems to be a way of getting things easy. Grandma's idea is to work for your living. Well, if we get Harry ashore I won't quarrel about it. Now for the bean vines."

These combustibles made a big crimson whirr-r against the black night, and speedily there was darkness. "Did Harry see that?" wondered Ned. "Big while it lasted!"

Was the fog thinning out? Turning toward the fire he saw a red light flashed from a window up under the ridgepole.

"That's brighter than it would have been ten minutes ago. Oh, if this fog will thin it out! Say! That's a light Grandmother put there. She has carried the red lantern upstairs, I know. I'll find out, and find out if, while praying, she thought of anything more to be done."

He ran down to the house, and saw Grandmother coming into the room by a door that communicated with the garret stairs."

Ho, Grandmother, did you take the red lantern upstairs?"

She smiled. "Yes; I thought if I could not go outdoors and help I might go up the garret stairs and put our red lantern in the window nearest the sea."

"You are trying everything, Grandmother."

"Yes", she replied turning away into a little room near by.

"She's going to do some more praying", thought Ned: "and I will help her."

"Oh, Ned!"

"Here I am!"

"I was wondering if you hadn't better be on the beach in case Harry comes. He may need help."

"Then you are looking for him?"

"I am doing all I can to make a good reason for looking, and God is helping us."

Ned went out again.

She—she—she has some notions, hasn't she? Well, I will stick long as she dies," thought Ned. "I will go down on the sands and give a shout or two, in case Harry should be there."

Soon there was a boy on the edge of the surf, facing the blackness that hung upon the waters and, making a trumpet of his hands, he shouted through them: "Harry!"

"Oh, its noisy! He can't hear. Hold on! What's that black thing on the water? Oh! oh! oh! it is a boat?"

Ned answered his inquiry with a "Yes," and eagerly pressed into the surf.

"Some boat, and maybe it wants me, and if this shouldn't be Harry, it will do good!" reflected Ned.

In a few minutes a boat had painfully worked its way ashore, helped by Ned's strong arms.

"Hullo, Harry, this you?" he shouted to somebody stiffly wriggling his way over the boat's rail.

"Yes, it's Harry; and I wonder how I got home. Got awfully mixed up in that fog. Had no compass you know; and I got into a current off the harbor's mouth that twisted me round and mixed me up still more. One time, I about gave up; but I said 'Grandmother will be praying, and it won't do to disappoint her,' and I stuck to it. Then you have been—been building a bonfire and burning a red light? You see a little while ago I saw a sudden flash—oh, it was sudden—did not last, but it did me good; for I knew I was somewhere near folks and the fog must be thinning; and then I caught a red light, a small one. I said: 'I wonder if that's our red lantern?' and I thought of Grandmother and her praying, and it put some life into me, and I pulled for it. Seems as if I had been pulling for a century; but I thought of Grandmother and I believe she pulled too, and you came down to help me through the surf? Well, I don't know but I would have lain off here through the night if you hadn't come, this last pull did look so awful hard. I'm glad to get here now, you may well believe."—*E. E.*

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ADAM CONWAY'S PLACE.

BY MRS. S. ROSALIE BILL.

There had been a revival in Covington, and among those who had professed a hope in Christ were Julian Pierson and Adam Conway.

Both of these men were young; neither having quite attained his majority. Pierson belonged to one of the most wealthy and influential families in town. Adam Conway was the only son of a man who had died a drunkard. His mother was a devoted christian, and he had three sisters younger than himself, who as yet were too young to support themselves. People speaking of those two young men said, "what a splendid future awaits Julian Pierson! He will undoubtedly be an honor to our town. But there is Adam, poor fellow! What can he ever amount to, burdened as he is with the stigma of his drunken father and with three sisters to care for?"

Mr. Lawson, the leading merchant in Covington, kindly offered Adam a situation in his store, giving him sufficient wages to keep the wolf from the door, with the prospect of advancement if he should prove worthy. Adam found that for a very small sum he could have the use of a small house and garden, just out of town on a steep hill-side, so he took it, saying:

"The air will be fresh, and good for the girls. If I arise very early in the morning I can work in the garden and thus add not a little to our table supplies. It will be farther for me to walk; but then I am young and strong."

There were many youths lounging about the stores and saloons evenings, and Adam greatly desired to do something for them. Speaking to Mr. Lawson, who was a christian, he readily fell in with the idea, offering Adam the use of a room, and promising to have it warmed and lighted at his own expense.

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