

of Mount Pisgah and the surrounding country did not spend more time upon old Wardelow than was required by the necessities of business.

There were a few exceptions to this rule. Old Mrs. Perry, who had passed for a saint, and whose life did not belie her reputation, used to drive her old pony up to New Boston about once a month, carrying some home-made delicacy with her, and chatting sympathetically for an hour or two.

Among the Mount Pisgah merchants there was one—who had never had a child of his own—who always pressed the old man's hand warmly, and admitted the possibility of whatever new hope Wardelow might express.

The pastors of the several churches at Mount Pisgah, however much they disagreed on doctrinal points, were in perfect accord as to the beauty of a character which was so completely under the control of a noble principle that had no promise of money in it; most of them, therefore, paid the old man professional visits, from which they generally returned with more benefit than they had conferred.

Time had rolled on as usual, in spite of Wardelow's great sorrow. The Mexican war was just breaking out when New Boston was settled, and Wardelow's hair was black, and Mount Pisgah was a little cluster of log huts; but when Lincoln was elected, Wardelow had been gray, and called old for nearly ten years, and Mount Pisgah had quite a number of two-story residences and brick stores, and was a country town, with court house and jail all complete.

None of the railway lines projected toward and through Mount Pisgah had been completed, however, nor had the town telegraphic communication with anywhere; so, compared with localities enjoying the higher benefits of civilization, Mount Pisgah and its surroundings constituted quite a paradise for horse thieves.

There were still sparsely settled places, too, which needed the ministrations of the Methodist circuit-rider.

The young man who had been sent by the Southern Illinois Conference to preach the Word on the Mount Pisgah circuit was great-hearted and impetuous, and tremendously in earnest in all that he did or said; but, like all such men, he paid the penalty of being in advance of his day and generation by suffering some terrible fits of depression over the small results of his labor.

And so, following the example of most of his predecessors on the Mount Pisgah circuit, he paid many a visit to old Wardelow, to learn strength from his example of patient faith.

As the circuit-rider left the old man one evening, and sought his faithful horse in the deserted barn in which he had tied him, he was somewhat astonished to find the horse unloosed, and another man quietly leading him away.

Courage and decision being among the qualities which are natural to the successful circuit-rider, he sprang at the thief and knocked him down. The operator in horse-flesh speedily regained his feet, however, and as he closed with the preacher, the latter saw, under the starlight, the gleam of a knife.

Commending himself to the Lord, he made such vigorous efforts for the safety of his body that, within two or three moments, he had the thief

face downward on the ground, his one knee on the thief's back, one hand upon the thief's neck and in his other hand the thief's knife. Then the circuit-rider delivered a short address.

"My sinful friend," said he, "when two men get into such a scrape as this, and one of them is in your line of business, one or the other will have to die, and I don't purpose to be the one. I haven't finished the work the Master has given me to do. If you've any dying messages to send to anybody, I give you my word as a preacher that they shall be delivered, but you must speak quick. What's your name?"

"I'll give you five hundred dollars to let me off—you may holler for help and tie my hand, and—"

"No use—speak quick," hissed the preacher—"what's your name?"

"Stephen Wardelow," gasped the thief.

"What!" roared the preacher, loosening his grasp, but instantly tightening it again.

"Stephen Wardelow," replied the thief. "But I haven't got any messages to send to anybody. I haven't a relative in the world, and nobody would care if I was dead. I might as well go now as any time. Hit square when you do let me have it—that's all!"

"Where's your parents?" asked the preacher.

"Dead, I reckon," the thief answered. "Leastways, I know mother is, and dad lived in a fever an' aguerish place, an' I s'pose he's gone, too, before this."

"Where did he live?"

"I don't know—some new settlement in Illinois. I got lost in the river when I was a little boy, an' was pick'd up by a tradin'-boat an' sold for a nearly-white nigger—I s'pose I was pretty dark."

There was a silence; the captive lay perfectly quiet, as if expecting the fatal blow. Suddenly a voice was heard:

"Not wishin' to interfere in a fair fight—it's me, parson, Sheriff Peters—not wishin' to interfere in a fair fight, I've been lookin' on here, where I'd tracked the thief myself, and would have grabbed him if you hadn't been about half a minute ahead of me. And if you want to know my honest opinion—my professional opinion—it's just this: There was stuff for a splendid sheriff was spilled when you went a-preachin. How you'd get along when it come to collectin' taxes, I don't know, never havin' been at any meetin' where you took up a collection; but when it come to an arrest, you'd be just chain-lightning ground down to a pint. The prisoner's yours, and so's all the rewards that's offered for him, though they're not offered for a man of the name he gives. But, honest, now, don't you think there's a chance of mitigatin' circumstances in his case? Let's talk it over—I'll help you tie him so he can't slip you."

The sheriff lighted a pocket-lantern and placed it in a window-frame behind him, then he tied the prisoner's feet and legs in several places tied his hands behind his back, sat him upon the ground with his face toward the door, cocked a pistol, and then beckoned the preacher toward the corner. The sheriff opened his pocket-book and took out a paper, whispering as he did so:

"I've carried this as a sort of curiosity, but it may come in handy now. Let's see—confound it!—the poor old

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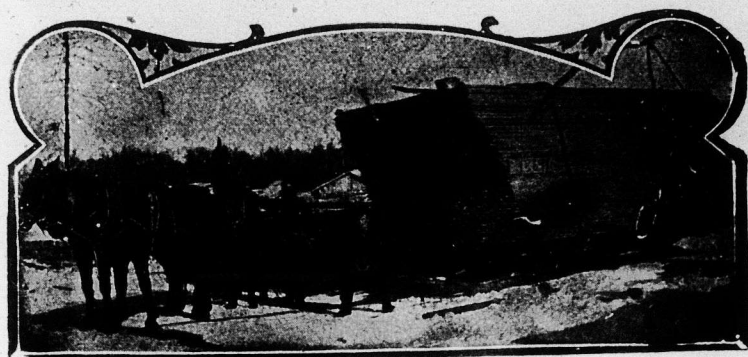
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