

"On business for—who?" asked Tommy in surprise.

"For the King. He sent me," said Nat again. "That's his orders there, I take it," pointing to the placard. "What is it, Tommy?"

"That? Why that's only an advertisement," answered Tommy, his eyes opening wider in his astonishment. "It says, 'Go to Tracey's Half-way House for a square meal.'"

"Yes, I know'd it! I know'd it!" exclaimed Nat exultingly. "The King said take no money nor nothin' to eat, an' He'd take keer of me. He says 'Go, an' I'll obey orders,' and instantly his tall figure was moving swiftly down the road.

Tommy gazed after him a minute in bewildered silence, and then exclaimed emphatically as he turned away:

"My! but ain't he cracked!"

With rapid steps Nat hurried forward, swinging his huge stick and talking to himself. He had taken the placard as a veritable command to go to Tracey's and thitherward he directed his steps. It was not the first time he had been there. On previous occasions when he had passed that way he had been kindly treated by Mrs. Tracey, and perhaps that had something to do with the alacrity of his movements, and he hastened down the road till it brought him to a small stream, on the bank of which stood a saw-mill. Mr. Tracey, the owner of the Half-Way-House, was engaged at work here, and he turned aside to speak to him.

"I'm on business for the King, and I'm goin' to your house," he announced with the dignified gravity that belonged to his royal commission.

"On business for the King, and goin' to my house, eh?" answered the person addressed, a good-natured smile crossing his kindly face. "Well, I reckon that's a high honor to me. You've got a tramp afore you, though, Nat—a good seven miles."

"I must obey orders," replied Nat simply.

"That's right—obey orders. Well, if you do go tell Mrs. Tracey I'll be home to-morrow night. Tell her, too, not to be uneasy about that money bein' in the house, 'cause I'll see to it when I come."

"What money's that?" asked a fellow-workman as Nat turned away.

"My pension. My claim was allowed last week, and I got my money—five hundred dollars—yesterday. I was foolish not to put it in the bank right off, but I didn't and as I didn't have time to go in town yesterday I had to leave it at home. I reckon it's safe enough, though, till to-morrow night, and then—"

"Hist!" interrupted his companion suddenly. "What's that?"

Tracey paused to listen.

"I didn't hear anything," he said. "I thought I heard some one over there," pursued the other, pointing to a large, high pile of boards a few feet distant—the boards being piled in form of a square, with a large cavity in the centre. "Most likely it was rats, though."

"More likely to be rats than anything else, there's so many about here," answered Tracey. Then he added jocularly: "Maybe, though, it's them burglars that's been playin' mischief 'round these parts for the last week or so—maybe they're stowed away in that pile of lumber. My! if I really believed that I'd be uneasy myself, for the chaps would have heard all I said about my pension."

"What burglars is that?" inquired the other.

"What burglars? Why, man, don't you read the papers? Why, only yesterday the Sheriff and his deputies rode by my house on the hunt for 'em. Last Saturday night they broke into Lawyer Burke's house in the village, and carried off about a hundred dollars, and then on Sunday night they got into the railway station, broke open the safe, and made off with about three hundred more. That's the biggest of their hauls, though they've entered several other places."

The conversation was continued on this topic for a few minutes, and then dropped. Neither of the men thought it worth while to investigate the cause of the noise, and they pursued their work for a short time and were then called over to the other side of the mill. Just as they disappeared a face peered over the top of the board-pile from the inside, another followed a moment later, and presently two rough, villanous-looking men came into view, and seeing

they were unobserved, sprang quickly to the ground and hastened into the forest.

"Close shave that, as bein' as we hid there all last night and all day till now," said one as he pushed through the underbrush.

"Yes; I thought as once them mill chaps was a comin' to look," responded the other. "Good for 'em as they didn't, an' took us for rats; 'cause the p'lice be on the look out now and we don't want to use no shootin' irons an' make things too hot. We must move out lively from 'ere, Bill."

"Not till we get that 'ere pension," answered Bill significantly. "That lay-out were as good as pitched at us, an' it'd be a pity not to take it. 'Sides, the gov'ment owes me a pension for all the time I've lost in gaols and prisons an' this ere's a good chance to get it. I knows where the crib is, 'cause we stopped there last week for somethin' to eat, don't you mind? This feller that owns it was there at the time. There is nobody but a woman an' two little uns, an' they're easy fixed, and there ain't no other house nigh."

"But there's that other 'ere chap as said he was a goin' there?"

"Him? He's crazy, an' if he goes there at all he'll only stop a bit an' move on. A tap on the head 'll settle him, anyway, if he's there—but then he won't be there."

During this time Nat was not idle. His tall form, with long and steady stride, was hastening forward "on business for the King."

It did not occur to him what he should do when he reached Tracey's and had been supplied with food. At present he was "obeying orders"—and beyond that his thought did not go. It was indeed a long walk he had undertaken, and it was just at dusk that he reached his destination. The Half-Way House was a lonely hostelry, situated at the intersection of two roads, with no other house in sight, and was a common stopping-place for persons passing to and from the city. Nat stepped boldly upon the broad piazza in front, and with full consciousness of his right walked unhesitatingly into the pleasant sitting-room. Mrs. Tracey came forward to meet him.

"Why, Nat, is that you?"

"Yes'm," he answered gravely. "I was told to come an' get a square meal. The King sent me."

"The King sent you? Well, I guess I'll have to give you a supper, then, said she. "And by the way, Nat, did you see my husband on your way here?"

"Yes'm; and he said for me to tell you he'd be home to-morrow night, an' for you not to be uneasy 'bout that money."

"O dear! I did so hope he'd come this evening," she sighed.

She was indeed uneasy on account of the money in the house. She had slept but little the preceding night for thinking of it, and had worried about it all through the day, and now another lonely night was before her. As she was preparing supper for her guest another thought came to her. Could she not induce Nat to stop there for the night? His notion of wandering made it an uncertain request, and even if he remained, with his beclouded intellect, he could not be depended on in case of trouble. Still he would be company, and perhaps he might aid her—she prayed for that—if she needed help.

"Nat," she said, as she poured out a glass of milk for him, "won't you stay here to-night?"

"I don't know whether it be orders," he answered uncertainly. "Parson said the King sent out his messengers, an' they wasn't to take no money nor nothin' to eat, an' I don't know if it be right to stop."

"O, yes it is," replied Mrs. Tracey, catching at once an idea of his thoughts. "I heard what the parson said too. When the King's messenger entered a house he was to abide there—that is to stop. Don't you remember?"

Nat considered the proposition.

"Yes'm, that's his orders. I'll stop," he said.

"And Nat," pursued the lady, rendered eager by her success, "there's another thing the King said—you heard it at Sundayschool. He said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me'—that is, such little children as mine there, pointing to them as they stood at her side. "And the King said, too, 'Whoever shall offend one of these little ones it is better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. The King doesn't wish

any harm to come to his little ones, in any way—you remember that?"

"Yes'm," replied Nat absently.

"Well, then," continued Mrs. Tracey, driving the concluding nail into her argument, "if any bad wicked men should come here to-night, and try to hurt me or these little ones, that belong to the King, you would help us, wouldn't you?"

She waited anxiously for the reply. Nat looked at her vaguely for a moment, and then his eyes wandered aimlessly around the room, and then back to her. Finally he said quietly:

"The King sent me. I'll obey orders."

How far he understood she did not know, and all her efforts could draw out no more definite reply, and with that she was obliged to be content. As the evening grew late she provided her guest with a sleeping-place in an adjoining room, by throwing a few quilts on the floor—for Nat would sleep nowhere else—and then she lay down, without undressing on a bed beside her children. But it was a long time before slumber visited her troubled spirit.

As for Nat, no thought of worry or anxiety for the future was on his mind, and he "slept the sleep of the just" And his dreams were peaceful. But after a time those dreams became disturbed and discordant—a voice seemed to be calling to him from his King, and presently he awakened with a start.

"Nat! help! Nat, the King wants you!" came in smothered tones from the other room.

In an instant he sprang lightly to his feet, and grasping his stick he strode forward and opened the door. A fearful struggle met his view as he entered. Two rough, evil-looking men were there—one holding Mrs. Tracey, the other the children—and the villains were evidently trying to bind and gag their victims. As Nat witnessed the scene his tall form seemed to tower yet higher, and a strange, fierce light gleamed from his eyes.

"I belong to the King!" he thundered. "How dare you offend his little ones?"

At this unexpected intrusion one of the burglars released his hold of Mrs. Tracey, and sprang forward with an oath to meet him. But it was in vain. The great stick was whirled in the air, and then came down with fearful force on the head of the villain, and he sank senseless to the floor. The remaining burglar hastened to his comrade's assistance, but he was like a child in the hands of a giant, and in a moment he, too, was helpless and motionless. Nat stooped and drew the two insensible forms toward him.

"Now bring them ropes, and I'll hang a"—he paused, and left the sentence unfinished. "But their aint no millstones 'bout here to hang 'round their necks?" he added, looking up bewildered. "Do you b'lieve a big rock would do? I must obey orders."

"No, I don't believe a rock would do," replied Mrs. Tracey, smiling in spite of her alarm. "But they will be coming to presently; I would just tie their hands and feet and leave them until morning."

"Yes'm, so I will. The King said tie 'em hand and foot—that's his orders. They won't offend his little ones any more," and in a few minutes Nat had them safely secured.

I need not tell of the night that followed, of how Nat kept sleepless guard over his captives, and of how, when morning came and help came with it, the burglars were safely lodged in the county gaol. All that is easily surmised. But at last Nat was a hero—not only in his own eyes but in the eyes of all others. He bore his honors meekly and with dignity, as a right belonging to a servant of the King. He accepted the numerous congratulations and hand-shakings, wondering, perhaps, what it all meant, and replying to the questions heaped upon him with the simple statement: "I just obeyed orders." Nothing, however, could induce him to accept any reward for his services. The royal command was to take no bread, no money in his purse, and he would not.

But Nat did not lack for friends after that. He still continued his wandering, and as the story spread, home and hearts were open to him everywhere. But it was at Tracey's that he was more especially welcomed, and as the years came and went it was noticed that his visits became more frequent and his stays more prolonged. Indeed, as Tracey expresses it:

"He'll get his orders to come here an' die yet, I reckon; an' he's welcome to all the

care we can give him. An' I just believe that 'way up in that other world we read about, he'll be as clear-headed as anybody, and in genuine earnest will forever be 'on business for the King.'"

ERSKINE M. HAMILTON.

DID YOU EVER see a counterfeit ten-dollar bill? Yes. Why was it counterfeited? Because it was worth counterfeiting. Did you ever see a scrap of brown paper counterfeited? No. Why? Because it was not worth counterfeiting. Did you ever see a counterfeit Christian? Yes, lots of them. Why was he counterfeited? Because he was worth counterfeiting. Did you ever see a counterfeit infidel? No. Why? You answer; I am through.

"OUR FORMER PASTOR used to protect us from such calls," was the chilling remark of a penurious church officer, as he met his minister after the close of a sermon in which he had made an earnest plea for Foreign Missions. Such "protection" is fatal, and only proves how narrow and selfish may be the views and feelings of a heart that has never opened to a full understanding of giving for Christ's sake.

Question Corner.—No. 19.

BIBLE QUESTIONS.
SCRIPTURE ENIGMA.

- Into a darkened world,
Behold, as this I came;
But blinded men their darkness loved,
And called not on my name.
- Thy name is poured forth
As this; its fragrance shed
Shall draw us, that we ever may
By Thee henceforth be led.
- Lo, smitten for our sins,
From this sweet waters flow,
And ever, through our desert life
Beside us still they go.
- Into that Heavenly Fold
The only way am I,
Enter by this—and, sheltered, safe
In pastures green, you'll lie.
- Before the Lamb in robe
In every hand a
With mighty voice
This key.
- As th'

- Keep my ... manaments, so shall ye
Continue in my love.
- Suffering for us—the Holy One—
Christ left us this, that we
May follow in His steps, who bare
Our sins upon the tree.
 - That Israel of old might live
This in their need was given,
Type of life-giving, living Bread
For men sent down from Heaven.
 - As this—shall He who's Jesse's root,
For all the people stand,
To it shall all the Gentiles seek
From many a far-off-land.
- A helpless man is sinking
Beneath tempestuous waves;
In my initials you will find
His cry to Him who saves.
- Each son of Adam's race
Must turn with that same cry.
To him who came to save the lost
And give them life on high.
- He waits with longing heart—
Freely his life he gives—
Oh! take it from his pierced hand,
Who takes it ever lives.

ANSWERS TO BIBLE CORNER NO 17.

BIBLE QUESTIONS.—(1.) 2 Sam. 20: 19; (2.) Ishbi benob, 2 Sam. 21: 16; (3.) Döög, 1 Sam. 22: 18; (4.) Elenzer, the son of Dodo, 2 Sam. 23: 10; (5.) Benaiab, 2 Sam. : 20, 21; (6.) After numbering the people, 2 Sam. 24.

BIBLE STUDY.

Balsam, or Balm of Gilead; Josephus; the Queen of Sheba; Jericho; Bruce; Balsam; the Sultan Selim, who conquered Egypt and Arabia in 1516 Constantinople; Jeremiah viii, 23.