"AS WE FORGIVE THOSE"

by T. Morris Longstreth

THE brothers Ripley were as different in nearly every way as the rapids and still pools of a mountain stream. Perhaps that is why they loved each other in a degree not usually meant by "brotherly love."

Will Ripley was the still pool. He was thoughtful to drowsiness, honest as daylight, mild-tempered, and twenty. He was up north in Pennsylvania somewhere, either alive or dead, for the date of this story is July 7th, 1863, which means, as you can read in the despatches of the time, that the terrible slaughter of Gettysburg was just over. The Ripleys, on their farm near The Soldiers' Home, outside of Washington, had not heard from him.

Although Will was no soldier at heart,—it hurt him even to stick pigs,—he had responded to Lincoln's call for more men two years before, leaving his kid brother Dan at home to help his father and mother. Dan was now fourteen, a high-strung, impetuous, outspoken lad of quick actions and hasty decisions. He was the laughing rapid. But for all his hastiness, he had a head and a heart that could be appealed to, usually. The only thing to which he could not reconcile himself was the separation from Will. Even Will's weekly letters,—which never missed their date except when the army was in retreat, and which always sent messages of love to Dan, coupled with encouragement to stay on the farm as the best way he could aid the cause,—scarcely kept Dan from running off and hunting up his brother. Dan knew that he and his collie, Tam, were needed to look after the sheep; he knew that the President had asked the loyal to raise all the wool possible; he knew that his father was little more than an invalid since he had been hurt some time before by an accident on the farm. But to see the soldiers marching down Pennsylvania Avenue set him wild to be away with them. In fact, Tam seemed to be the anchor that held him; Dan sometimes even thought that he loved Tam next to Will.

The summer of '63 had been unbearably hot. Then there had been an increasingly ominous list of military disasters. Even the loyal were beginning to murmur against Lincoln's management of the war. Then Will's letters had ceased, and Mr. Ripley could get no satisfaction from headquarters. Even Will's uncle, a Colonel Scott, of Illinois, and a friend of Lincoln's, after repeated efforts to influence some officials at the War Department to aid him in securing news, had not been able to see the President, who was the last resort of everybody in those days of tribulation.

Dan was irritable with fatigue and his secret worry; his family, nearly sick with the heat and tension.

The climax to this state came from an unforeseen event. Tam, either crazed by the heat or some secret taste for blood, ran

amuck one night, stampeded the sheep, and did grievous damage. Farmer Ripley doubtless acted on what he considered the most merciful course by having Tam done away with and buried before Dan got back from an errand to the city. But to Dan it seemed, in the first agony of his broken heart, an unforgivable thing. Weariness, worry, and now this knife-sharp woe changed the boy into a heart-sick being who flung himself on the fresh mound behind the barn and stayed there the whole day, despite the entreaties of his mother and the commands of his father.

He shed no tears; tears would have been dried up by the waves of hot anger against his father. And while he lay there, he thought and planned.

That evening his mother carried some food out to him. He did not touch it; he would not talk to her.

Sometime later, as the night wore on, he stole into the house, did up some clothes into a bundle, took the food at hand, and crept from his home. Once more he went to the grave of his slain pal. What he said there, aloud but quietly, need not be told. Sufficient it is to know that a burning resentment toward his father filled him, coupled with a sickening longing to be with his brother Will. Ill with his hasty anger, he thought that Will was the only one in the world who loved or understood him. In the wee hours of morning he left the farm, forever, as he thought, and turned down the wood-road which led to the Soldiers' Home, where he hoped to find some one who could tell him how to get to Will's regiment. The sultry, starless heat of a Washington midsummer enclosed him; the wood was very dark and breathless; his head throbbed. But he pushed on, high-tempered, unforgiving; he would show them all! Suddenly he recollected that he had not said the Lord's Prayer that night. Dan had been strictly raised. He tried saying it, walking. But that seemed sacrilegious. He kneeled in the dark and tried. But when he got to "as we forgive those who trespass against us," he balked, for he was an honest soul. And this new gulf of mental distress was too much for him; it brought the tears.

There in the dark by the roadside, Dan lay and cried himself bitterly into an exhausted sleep.

At the same hour another worn soul, a tall, lean-faced man with eyes full of unspeakable sorrow, was pacing the chamber of the White House. The Rebellion had reached its flood tide at Gettysburg three days before; the President had stayed the flood, bearing in tireless sympathy the weight of countless responsibilities. Now, all day long, the débris of affairs had been borne down upon him—decisions that concerned not only armies, but races; not only races, but principles of human welfare. He was grief-stricken still from Willie's death, and his secretary in the room downstairs, listening unconsciously to the steady march of steps overhead, read into them the pulse-beats of human progress. Lincoln had given instructions that no one was to interrupt him. He was having one of his great spiritual battles.

Finally, shortly before dawn, the footsteps stopped, the secretary's door opened, and the gaunt, gray face looked in. "Stoddard, do you want anything more from me to-night?"

The secretary rose. "I want you in bed, sir. Mrs. Lincoln should not have gone away; you are not fair with her or us."

"Don't reproach me, Stoddard," said Lincoln, kindly; "it had to be settled, and, with God's help, it has been. Now I can sleep. But I must have a breath of air first. There 's nothing?"

"Only the matter of those deserters, sir, and that can wait."

The President passed his hands over his deep-lined face. "Only!" he murmured. "Only! How wicked this war is. It leads us to consider lives by the dozen, by the bale, wholesale. How many in this batch, Stoddard?"

The secretary turned some papers. "Twenty-four, sir. You remember the interview with General Scanlon yesterday."

Lincoln hesitated, saying: "Twenty-four! Yes, I remember. Scanlon said that lenience to the few was injustice to the many. He is right, too." Lincoln held out his hand for the papers; then drew it back and looked up at Stoddard. "I can't decide," he said in a low voice, "not now. Stoddard, you see a weak man. But I want to thresh this out a little longer. I must walk. These cases are killing me; I must get out."

"Let me call an attendant, Mr. Lincoln."

"They 're all asleep. No, I 'll take my chances with God. If anybody wants to kill me, he will do it. You must go to bed, Stoddard."

The two men, each concerned for the other, shook hands in good night, and Lincoln slipped out into the dark, his long legs bearing him rapidly westward. During the heat he usually slept at the Soldiers' Home, being escorted thither by cavalry with sabers drawn. But he hated the noise of it, and, during Mrs. Lincoln's visit in New York, was playing truant to her rules. When he neared the Home he felt slightly refreshed and turned into the woods, drawn by the need of companionship with elements as calm and benignant as forest trees. The sky at his back began to lighten.

By the time dawn showed the ruts in the road, Lincoln realized that he was tired. "Abe, Abe," he said half aloud, "they tell me you used to be a whale at splitting rails, and now a five-mile stroll before breakfast—By jings!" It was his usual "swear," that "by jings!" and this time it was occasioned by his nearly stepping on a lone youngster lying in the road. The boy raised his head from a bundle of clothes; the tall man stooped with tenderness, saying: "Hello, sonny, so you get old Mother Earth to make your bed for you! How 's the mattress?"

Dan sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What are you doin'?" he asked.

"I appear to be waking you, and making a bad job of it," said Lincoln.

"You did n't come to take me, then," said Dan, relieved. "I would n't 'a' gone," he added defiantly.

Lincoln looked at him sharply, his interest aroused by the trace of tears in the boy's eyes and the bravado in his voice. "There 's a misunderstanding here," continued Lincoln, "almost as bad a misunderstanding as Mamie and her mother had over Mr. Riggs, who was the undertaker back home." Here the gaunt man gave a preliminary chuckle. "Ever hear that story, sonny?"

Dan shook his head, wondering how such a homely man could sound so likable. Lincoln seated himself on a fallen tree trunk. "Well, it was this way. Back home there was an old chap used to drive an old rig around collecting rags. And one day when Mamie's ma was inside dusting the parlor, Mr. Riggs, whose job was undertaking, as I said, drops by for a friendly call, and Mamie sings out, country style, "Ma, here 's Mr. Riggs"; and her ma, thinking she 'd said the man for the rags, called back, "Tell him we have n't anything for him to-day."

The joke broke on Dan, after one look at his friend's face, and his quick, impetuous laugh might have disturbed the

early-rising birds. Lincoln joined in, and for an instant Dan clean forgot Tam dead and home deserted; and for the same fleet instant Lincoln forgot his troubles in Dan's laugh. "Tell him we have n't anything for him to-day!" repeated the boy, "I 'll sure have to tell that to Fa—" He did n't finish the word, remembering with a pang that he was not going to see his father again.

Lincoln had caught the swift change on his face and it was his turn to wonder. He knew better than to ask questions. You can't fish for a boy's heart with question-marks, neat little fishhooks though they be. So he said, "Our sitting here when we ought to be getting back home reminds me of another story."

"Tell me," said Dan, well won already to this man, despite the gray, lined cheeks and the sadness that colored his voice. Dan did n't know yet who he was. He 'd not seen the cartoons that flooded the country during election, he was too young to go in to the inauguration, and the idea of the President of the United States sitting with him in the woods was too preposterous to cross his mind.

"You and I are pretty lazy, Son," said the kindly man; "but we are n't as lazy as the two darkies in the battle of Chancellorsville. The order came to retire, but those darkies were too lazy to move. Presently, *'Ping!'* a bullet had hit one of the darkey's canteen. " 'Brother,' said the second darkey to him, 'I reckon we ought to be a-movin'.' 'I reckon we ought,' said the first; but they did n't move. And it was n't long before the hat of the second darkey was shot clean off. 'Mercy sakes! I reckon we just *ought* to be a-movin',' exclaimed the other darkey, and he half rose to go; but it was too much exertion, and he sank down again, saying, 'Mebbe, if we hangs aroun' a while longer, we kin git *carried* away.' "

When Dan had got over that story, Lincoln said, "Well, since there 's no one to carry us away, sonny, I reckon we just ought to be a-moving, don't you?" He helped the boy with his bundle.

"Are you going to the war, too?" asked Dan. "I am."

"You!" exclaimed Lincoln, "why you 're no bigger than my own Tadpole, and he 's only a wriggler yet. Does your father know?"

"I reckon he does by now," said the boy, darkly. "Father 's an early riser. You see, he killed my dog without my knowin', and so I lit out without *his* knowin'."

The hardness of the boy's voice hurt Lincoln, who said, "What 's your father's name, sonny?"

"William Ripley, that 's senior. Will, that 's junior, is my brother, off at the war. I 'm Dan. I 'm going to find my brother. I don't care if I never come back. I loved Tam better than—than—" His voice choked.

Lincoln put his hand on his shoulder. He was getting the situation. "Tam was your dog?" asked the big man, as gently as a mother.

"Yeh. And Father should n't 'a' killed him unbeknownst to me. I 'll never forgive him that, never!"

"Quite right," said the wise man, walking with him. "Don't you ever forgive him, Dan. Or don't ever forget it—under one certain condition."

"What 's that?" asked the boy, a trifle puzzled at the unexpected compliance of his elder with his own unforgiving mood.

"Why, that you also never forget all the kind and just things that your father has done for you. Why did he kill the dog, Dan?"

"Well—he—killed—some sheep," said the boy. He would be honest with this tall, gentle, and grave person who understood so readily.

"How old are you Dan?"

"Fourteen, going on fifteen."

"That 's quite a heap," said Lincoln, musingly, "quite a heap! In fourteen years a father can pile up a lot of good deeds. But I suppose he 's done a lot of mean ones to cancel 'em off, has he?"

"No," admitted Dan.

His frankness pleased the President. "I congratulate you, Dan. You 're honest. I want to be honest with you and tell you a story that is n't funny, for we 're both in the same boat, as I size up this proposition —yes, both in the same boat. I am in the army, in a way; at least, I 'm called Commander-in-Chief, and occasionally they let me meddle a little with things."

"Honest?" said Dan, opening his eyes very wide. He had been so absorbed in his own disasters that he had accepted this curious, friendly acquaintance, as a fellow will, without questions. But now, although the forefront of his consciousness was very active with the conversation, the misty background was trying to make him compare this man with a certain picture in the family album, with another one pasted on the dining-room-cupboard door, the same loose-hung person, only this one had a living rawness—maybe it was bigness—about him that the pictures did n't give, like a tree, perhaps. But it could n't *be* the President talking to him, Dan. If it was, what would the folks at home— And again his thought stopped. There were to be no more "folks at home" for him.

"Honest Injin, Dan. But sometimes they yell when I do meddle. There 's a case on now. Last night I pretty nearly had twenty-four men shot."

"Whew!"

"But I had n't quite decided, and that 's the reason I came out here in God's own woods. And I 'm glad I came, for you 've helped me decide."

"I have!" said Dan, astonished, "to shoot them?"

"No! Not to. You showed me the case in a new light. Here you are, deserting home, deserting your father, bringing sorrow to him and to your mother, who have sorrows enough with Will in danger and all; you 're punishing your father because he did one deed that he could n't very well help, just as if he 'd been a mean man all his life. And it 's like that with my twenty-four deserters, Dan, very like that. They 've served years, faithfully. Then, can any one thing they do be so gross, so enormously bad, as to blot out all the rest, including probably a lifetime of decent living? I think not. Is a man to blame for having a pair of legs that play coward once? I think not, Dan. I tell you what I 'll do, sonny," and the tall man stopped in the road, a new light shining in his cavernous, sad eyes, "I 'll make a bargain with you. If you 'll go home and forgive your father, I 'll go home and forgive my twenty-four deserters. Is that a bargain?"

The boy had been shaken, but it was difficult to change all at once. "It is hard to forgive," he murmured.

"Some day you 'll find it hard not to," said the great man, putting out his huge palm for the boy to shake. "Is n't that a pretty good bargain, Dan? By going home, by ceasing to be a deserter yourself, you will save the lives of twenty-four men. Won't you be merciful? Perhaps God will remember sometime and forgive you some trespass even as you forgive now."

Something of last night's horror, when he could not say the prayer, and something of the melting gentleness of the new friend before him touched the boy. He took Lincoln's hand, saying, "All right. That 's a go."

"Yes, a go home," smiled Lincoln. "I suppose I 'll have to turn, now."

" 'I 'll make a bargain with you' "

"Where 's your home?" asked the boy, knowing, yet wishing to hear the truth, to be very sure; for now he *could* tell the folks at home.

"The White House," replied Lincoln, "but I wish I were going back to the farm with you."

The boy heard him vaguely, his jaw was sagging. "Then you—are the President?"

Lincoln nodded, enjoying the boy's wonder. "And your servant, don't forget," added Lincoln. "You have been a help to me in a hard hour, Dan. Generals or no generals, I 'll spare those men. Any time that I can do anything for you, drop in, now that you know where to find me."

The boy was still speechless with his assured elation.

"But you 'd better— Wait," and Lincoln began hunting through his pockets; "you 'd better let me give you a latch-key. The man at the door 's a sort of stubborn fellow, for the folks will pester the life out of him. Here—"

And finding a card and a stub of a pencil, he wrote:

Please admit Dan'l Ripley on demand.
A. Lincoln.

"How 's that?"

"Thank you," said Dan, as proud as a cockerel. "I reckon I should 'a' guessed it was you, but those stories you told kind o' put me off."

"That 's sometimes why I tell them," and Lincoln smiled again. "It 's not a bad morning's work—twenty-four lives saved before breakfast, Dan. You and I ought to be able to stow a mighty comfortable meal. Good-bye, sonny."

And so they parted. The man strode back the way he had come; the boy stood looking, looking, and then swiftly wheeled and sped. He had been talking to the President, to Abraham Lincoln, and hearing such talk as he never had heard before; but especially the words "You have been a help to me in a hard hour, Dan"—those words trod a regular path in his brain. He ran, eager to get to the very home he had been so eager to leave. Forgiveness was in his heart, but chiefly there was a warm and heady pride. He had been praised by Abraham Lincoln! Of this day he would talk to the end of time. Dan did not know that the major part of the day, the greatest in his life, was still to come. Certainly the dawning of it had been very beautiful.

Breathless and eye-bright with anticipation of telling his tale, he leaped the fences, ran up to the back door, and plunged into his house. The kitchen was quiet. A misgiving ran over him; were they all out in search of him? Would he have to postpone his triumph?

In the dining-room, a half-eaten meal was cooling. He explored on, and, coming out on the spacious front of the house, found them—found them in an inexplicable group around a uniformed officer. Tears were streaming down his mother's cheeks. His father, still pale from his accident, looked ashen and shriveled. They turned at Dan's approach. He expected that this scene of anguish would turn to smiles upon his discovery. He was amazed to find that his return gave them the merest flurry of relief, and alleviated their sorrow not at all.

"Danny dear, where have you been?" asked his mother.

"The Lord must have turned you about and sent you home in answer to our prayers," said his father.

And then they turned back to the officer, pleading, both talking at once, weeping. Dan felt hurt. Did his return, his forgiveness mean so little to them? He might as well have gone on. The he caught the officer's words. "Colonel Scott can do no more, Madam. The President cannot see

him, and more pardons are not to be hoped for."

Mrs. Ripley turned and threw her arm across Dan's shoulders. "Danny—Danny—you are our only son now. Will was—" and she broke down completely.

"Will was found asleep while on duty, Dan, and—"

"Is to be shot?" asked the boy. "I wonder if he was one of the twenty-four." They looked at him, not understanding.

"The Lord has restored you to us. If we could only pray in sufficient faith, he could restore Will," said Farmer Ripley, devoutly. "Dear, let us go in and pray. We should release this gentleman to his duty. We can pray, dearest."

Dan realized with a sudden clearness that his brother, his beloved, was to be taken from him as Tam had been taken. It shook his brain dizzy for a moment; but he knew that he must hold on to his wits—must think. There was Abraham Lincoln, *his friend!*

"You pray," he cried to his father, shrilly, "and I 'll run."

"Run where, dear? Will is in Pennsylvania."

"To the White House, Mother. He said, 'Any time I can do anything for you, drop in.' *Any thing,* Mother. Surely he 'll—"

"Who?" cried both his parents.

"Why, the President, Mr. Lincoln!"

"But the President is busy, dear. This gentleman says that Cousin Andrew has not been able to see him, and he is a colonel, you know."

"He 'll see me—I know he will!" said Dan. "Look! We have a secret together, the President and I have." And the boy showed has card and poured out his story.

The mother saw a break in her gray heaven, saw the bright blue of hope.

"We must go at once," she said. "Father, you are not able to come with us, but pray here for us."

"Please take my horse and wagon," said the officer.

"Yes," said Dan, "let 's hurry. Oh, I 'm glad, I 'm so glad!" And the joy at his lucky turning-back shone in his face as he helped his mother into the vehicle.

"May God help you!" said the officer.

"He often does," said the boy, thinking.

It was high noon when the doorkeeper of the White House, hardened into a very stony soul by the daily onslaught of Lincoln-seekers, saw an impetuous youth leap from a light carriage and drag a woman up the portico steps toward him.

"In which room is the President?" asked Dan.

"He 's very busy," said the doorkeeper, probably for the five-hundredth time that morning. "Have you an appointment?"

"No, but he said drop in when I wanted; and what 's more, here 's my 'latch-key,' " and Dan, trembling a little with haste and pride, showed him the card "A. Lincoln" had written.

The man looked quizzically at it and at him. "In that case," he said drily, "you 'd better step into the waiting-room there."

There must have been forty or fifty people crowded into the anteroom, each on some errand urgent. Some were in uniform; all looked tired, impatient, important. Dan saw the situation and knew that Lincoln could never see them all. He whispered to his mother and put her in a chair, then went up to the door-boy and asked if the President was in the next room. The boy admitted the fact, but would not admit anything further, including Dan. The looks on the faces of the waiting-room people deepened in annoyance. "Does this urchin" (said their looks) "expect to see the President to-day, when so many more important persons (such as we) are kept waiting?"

Death has small regard for persons, and,

in this respect, boys come next to death. Dan, not caring for etiquette when his brother might be shot at any moment, slipped under the arm of the door-boy and bolted into the room.

Lincoln was standing by the window. He looked around in surprise at the noise of Dan Ripley's entry, recognized his walking partner, made a motion for the door-boy, who had one irate hand on Dan, to withdraw, and said: "Why, Dan I 'm glad to see you so soon again. You 're just in time to back me up. Let me introduce you to General Scanlon."

Dan looked into the amazed and angry eyes of a Union general who, practically ignoring the boy, went on to say: "Mr. President, I repeat, that unless these men are made an example of, the army itself may be in danger. Mercy to these twenty-four means cruelty to near a million."

The President, worn not only from his sleepless night, but from the incessant strain of things, looked grave, for the general spoke truth. He turned to Dan, "Did you go home, sonny?"

Dan nodded.

"Then I shall keep my half of the bargain. General, this boy and I each walked the woods half the night carrying similar troubles, trying to decide whether it was best to forgive. We decided that it was best, as the Bible says, even to seventy times seven. Dan, how did your folks take it?"

Dan spoke quickly. "It would 'a' killed them if I 'd run off for good, for they just got word that my brother Will—you know I told you about him—is to be shot for sleeping on watch. I just know he was tired out—he did n't go to sleep on purpose. I told my mother that you would n't let him be shot, if you knew."

Lincoln groaned audibly and turned away to the window for a moment. The general snorted.

"I brought my mother in to see you, too," said Dan, "seeing as she would n't quite believe what I said about our agreement."

Lincoln looked at the boy, and his sunken eyes glistened. "I agreed for twenty-four lives," he said; "but I don't mind throwing in an extra one for you, Dan."

And this time the general groaned.

"Stoddard," added the President, "will you see if there is a Will Ripley on file?" The secretary left the room. Lincoln turned abruptly to the general. "You have heard me," he said. "I, with the help of God and this boy, threshed out the matter to a conclusion, and we only waste time to discuss it further. If I pardon these deserters, it surely becomes a better investment for the United States than if I had them shot—twenty-four live fighters in the ranks, instead of that many corpses under ground. There are too many weeping widows now. Don't ask me to add to the number, *for I won't do it!*"

It was rarely that Lincoln was so stirred. There was a strange silence. Then the secretary entered with, "Yes, sir, a Will Ripley is to be executed to-morrow, for sleeping on duty. The case was buried in the files; it should have been brought to you earlier."

"Better for the case to be buried than the boy," said the President. "Give me the paper, Stoddard."

"Then you will!" said Dan, trembling with joy.

"I don't believe that shooting the boy will do him any good," said Lincoln, as the pen traced the letters of his name, beneath this message, "Will Ripley is not to be shot until further orders from me."

Dan looked at it. "That 's great! Oh, thank you!" he said, "Can I bring Mother in to see it—and to see you?" he asked.

The President looked down into the shining face and could not refuse. In a

jiffy, Dan had dragged his mother into the presence. She was all confusion; the general was red with irritation.

She read the message; it did n't seem quite clear to her. "Is that a pardon? Does that mean that he won't be shot at all?"

"My dear Madam," replied Lincoln, kindly, "evidently you are not acquainted with me. If your son never looks on death till orders come from me to shoot him, he will live to be a great deal older than Methusaleh!"

She stretched out both her hands, crying, "I want to thank you, sir. Oh, thank you, thank you!"

"Thank Dan here," said Lincoln. "If he had not let the warmth of forgiveness soften his heart, Will Ripley would have died. And perhaps, if I had not met him in the woods at dawn, I might have gone into eternity with the blood of these twenty-four men on my hands. Dan helped me."

The boy looked as one transfigured. Lincoln went on: "And all this only confirms my notion that it is selfish, stupid, and destructive not to forgive if you 've got a loophole for forgiveness left. It reminds me of a little story. Will you excuse me another moment, General?" The pink officer bowed stiffly and Lincoln said: "One of my neighbors back home was a Quaker named Silas Greene, and he was known as a very mild and forgiving man. He was so mild-tempered that his wife could not even induce him to shoot the chickens which persisted in scratching up her garden. 'Consider, dear,' Silas used to say, 'consider the hen. Any creature that is so useful before it is born and after it is dead deserves a little consideration during its short lifetime, does n't thee think?' "

Everybody in the room laughed but the general. The president concluded: "And that 's the way I feel about these erring soldiers, Mrs. Ripley. We must consider what they have done and what they will do, as intently as we consider the wrong of the moment. Good-by, Dan, we shall both remember to-day with easy consciences."

THE waiting crowd in the anteroom could not understand, of course, why that intruder of a boy who had dragged the woman in to see the President so unceremoniously should bring her out on his arm with such conscious pride. They could not understand why the tears were rolling down her cheeks at the same time that a smile glorified her face. They did not see that the boy was walking on air, on light. But the dullest of them could see that he was radiant with a great happiness.

And if they could have looked past him and pierced the door of the inner room with their wondering glances, they could have seen a reflection of Dan's joy still shining on the somber, deep-lined face of the man who had again indulged himself in—mercy.