CHAPTER XXX

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

Susan was very sorrowful when she saw the beautiful old lawn of Ingleside ploughed up that spring and planted with potatoes. Yet she made no protest, even when her beloved peony bed was sacrificed. But when the Government passed the Daylight Saving law Susan balked. There was a Higher Power than the Union Government, to which Susan owed allegiance.

"Do you think it right to meddle with the arrangements of the Almighty?" she demanded indignantly of the doctor. The doctor, quite unmoved, responded that the law must be observed, and the Ingleside clocks were moved on accordingly. But the doctor had no power over Susan's little alarm.

"I bought that with my own money, Mrs. Dr. dear," she said firmly, "and it shall go on God's time and not Borden's time."

Susan got up and went to bed by "God's time," and regulated her own goings and comings by it. She served the meals, under protest, by Borden's time, and she had to go to church by it, which was the crowning injury. But she said her prayers by her own clock, and fed the hens by it; so that there was always a furtive triumph in her eye when she looked at the doctor. She had got the better of him by so much at

least.

"Whiskers-on-the-moon is very much delighted with this daylight saving business," she told him one evening. "Of course he naturally would be, since I understand that the Germans invented it. I hear he came near losing his entire wheat-crop lately. Warren Mead's cows broke into the field one day last week--it was the very day the Germans captured the Chemang-de-dam, which may have been a coincidence or may not--and were making fine havoc of it when Mrs. Dick Clow happened to see them from her attic window. At first she had no intention of letting Mr. Pryor know. She told me she had just gloated over the sight of those cows pasturing on his wheat. She felt it served him exactly right. But presently she reflected that the wheat-crop was a matter of great importance and that 'save and serve' meant that those cows must be routed out as much as it meant anything. So she went down and phoned over to Whiskers about the matter. All the thanks she got was that he said something queer right out to her. She is not prepared to state that it was actually swearing for you cannot be sure just what you hear over the phone; but she has her own opinion, and so have I, but I will not express it for here comes Mr. Meredith, and Whiskers is one of his elders, so we must be discreet."

"Are you looking for the new star?" asked Mr. Meredith, joining Miss Oliver and Rilla, who were standing among the blossoming potatoes gazing skyward.

"Yes--we have found it--see, it is just above the tip of the tallest
old pine."

"It's wonderful to be looking at something that happened three thousand
years ago, isn't it?" said Rilla. "That is when astronomers think the
collision took place which produced this new star. It makes me feel
horribly insignificant," she added under her breath.

"Even this event cannot dwarf into what may be the proper perspective
in star systems the fact that the Germans are again only one leap from
Paris," said Gertrude restlessly.

"I think I would like to have been an astronomer," said Mr. Meredith
dreamily, gazing at the star.

"There must be a strange pleasure in it," agreed Miss Oliver, "an
unearthly pleasure, in more senses than one. I would like to have a few
astronomers for my friends."

"Fancy talking the gossip of the hosts of heaven," laughed Rilla.

"I wonder if astronomers feel a very deep interest in earthly affairs?"
said the doctor. "Perhaps students of the canals of Mars would not be
so keenly sensitive to the significance of a few yards of trenches lost
or won on the western front."

"I have read somewhere," said Mr. Meredith, "that Ernest Renan wrote one of his books during the siege of Paris in 1870 and 'enjoyed the writing of it very much.' I suppose one would call him a philosopher."

"I have read also," said Miss Oliver, "that shortly before his death he said that his only regret in dying was that he must die before he had seen what that 'extremely interesting young man, the German Emperor,' would do in his life. If Ernest Renan 'walked' today and saw what that interesting young man had done to his beloved France, not to speak of the world, I wonder if his mental detachment would be as complete as it was in 1870."

"I wonder where Jem is tonight," thought Rilla, in a sudden bitter inrush of remembrance.

It was over a month since the news had come about Jem. Nothing had been discovered concerning him, in spite of all efforts. Two or three letters had come from him, written before the trench raid, and since then there had been only unbroken silence. Now the Germans were again at the Marne, pressing nearer and nearer Paris; now rumours were coming of another Austrian offensive against the Piave line. Rilla turned away from the new star, sick at heart. It was one of the moments when hope and courage failed her utterly--when it seemed impossible to go on even one more day. If only they knew what had happened to Jem--you can face anything you know. But a beleaguerment of fear and doubt and suspense

is a hard thing for the morale. Surely, if Jem were alive, some word would have come through. He must be dead. Only--they would never know--they could never be quite sure; and Dog Monday would wait for the train until he died of old age. Monday was only a poor, faithful, rheumatic little dog, who knew nothing more of his master's fate than they did.

Rilla had a "white night" and did not fall asleep until late. When she wakened Gertrude Oliver was sitting at her window leaning out to meet the silver mystery of the dawn. Her clever, striking profile, with the masses of black hair behind it, came out clearly against the pallid gold of the eastern sky. Rilla remembered Jem's admiration of the curve of Miss Oliver's brow and chin, and she shuddered. Everything that reminded her of Jem was beginning to give intolerable pain. Walter's death had inflicted on her heart a terrible wound. But it had been a clean wound and had healed slowly, as such wounds do, though the scar must remain for ever. But the torture of Jem's disappearance was another thing: there was a poison in it that kept it from healing. The alternations of hope and despair, the endless watching each day for the letter that never came--that might never come--the newspaper tales of ill-usage of prisoners--the bitter wonder as to Jem's wound--all were increasingly hard to bear.

Gertrude Oliver turned her head. There was an odd brilliancy in her eyes.

"Rilla, I've had another dream."

"Oh, no--no," cried Rilla, shrinking. Miss Oliver's dreams had always foretold coming disaster.

"Rilla, it was a good dream. Listen--I dreamed just as I did four years ago, that I stood on the veranda steps and looked down the Glen. And it was still covered by waves that lapped about my feet. But as I looked the waves began to ebb--and they ebbed as swiftly as, four years ago, they rolled in--ebbed out and out, to the gulf; and the Glen lay before me, beautiful and green, with a rainbow spanning Rainbow Valley--a rainbow of such splendid colour that it dazzled me--and I woke. Rilla--Rilla Blythe--the tide has turned."

"I wish I could believe it," sighed Rilla.

"Sooth was my prophecy of fear
Believe it when it augurs cheer,"

quoted Gertrude, almost gaily. "I tell you I have no doubt."

Yet, in spite of the great Italian victory at the Piave that came a few days later, she had doubt many a time in the hard month that followed; and when in mid-July the Germans crossed the Marne again despair came sickeningly. It was idle, they all felt, to hope that the miracle of the Marne would be repeated. But it was: again, as in 1914, the tide

turned at the Marne. The French and the American troops struck their sudden smashing blow on the exposed flank of the enemy and, with the almost inconceivable rapidity of a dream, the whole aspect of the war changed.

"The Allies have won two tremendous victories," said the doctor on 20th July.

"It is the beginning of the end--I feel it--I feel it," said Mrs.
Blythe.

"Thank God," said Susan, folding her trembling old hands, Then she added, under her breath, "but it won't bring our boys back."

Nevertheless she went out and ran up the flag, for the first time since the fall of Jerusalem. As it caught the breeze and swelled gallantly out above her, Susan lifted her hand and saluted it, as she had seen Shirley do. "We've all given something to keep you flying," she said. "Four hundred thousand of our boys gone overseas--fifty thousand of them killed. But--you are worth it!" The wind whipped her grey hair about her face and the gingham apron that shrouded her from head to foot was cut on lines of economy, not of grace; yet, somehow, just then Susan made an imposing figure. She was one of the women--courageous, unquailing, patient, heroic--who had made victory possible. In her, they all saluted the symbol for which their dearest had fought. Something of this was in the doctor's mind as he watched her from the

door.

"Susan," he said, when she turned to come in, "from first to last of this business you have been a brick!"