ENDINGS ARE BEGINNINGS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The maple beneath which he was sitting stirred like a restless child and the leaves rustled and shook in the breeze that rushed through them. He had work to do but his mind was in such a muddled state of questions and disappointment and shock that he could scarcely do it. What was to become of their family? he wondered ever so sadly. His father, especially.
He looked toward the sheep pen where the sheep were resting in utter contentment and peace, their stomachs satisfied with both water and food, and suddenly his heart felt like someone was putting it through a wringer, twisting and wringing and smothering it.

A sob choked somewhere inside his chest and he gasped for breath. He had never -- never! -- had anything in all of his seventeen, almost eighteen, years of natural life hurt him like this latest bit of news had hurt him. It came as a total shock to him; a shock as devastating and shaking to his total being as an earthquake measuring 9 point 5 on the Richter scale, he was sure.

His broad shoulders shook and his lanky frame trembled with remembering. He had known that with the wheat and corn prices dropping like they had, his father was having a difficult time making ends meet; but he had no idea that the farm was at stake unless a certain amount of money was at the bank by that certain and particular day. And of course it wasn't. The old saying about not being able to get blood out of a turnip applied to his dear father, who didn't have the money. The bank, true to their word, was foreclosing on his parents. It all seemed so unreal; so unfair.

Rob loved the farm. Oh, how he loved it! His roots went deep into the very heart of it. Truth of the matter was, he had never felt like he was where he belonged until his father moved them to this farm six years ago. He was "home" the moment he walked through the kitchen door. And when he saw the barn and its adjoining buildings he knew that his dream of raising sheep would become reality. And it did.

They were hardly settled in until his father bought him two ewes. He felt like he was dreaming, so happy, excited and overjoyed was he. The ewes, Molly and Polly, became his prized earthly possessions. He loved them and they, in turn, loved him and his presence. Molly was the first to give him two frisky, beautiful lambs, followed closely by Polly's delightful twins. Six sheep! He had thanked God, who had blest him with such riches . . . his sheep.

He cared for them and tended them like a grown man, at eleven years of age. And each year thereafter the flock had increased amazingly and wondrously until, from the humble beginning of two sheep, he soon had a flock of many beautiful, healthy sheep. And now, like a lightning bolt out of
the sky, he heard the shocking news that the farm was no longer to be in his father's name. The sheep must be sold. . . .

Rob got to his feet and rushed down to the sheep pens, his heart breaking, and throbbing like a giant piston inside his chest. How could he leave this! How?! Must he be confined to merely four walls and walk an asphalt jungle now? Must he? Oh, but he couldn't. He just couldn't do that! He was made for wide open spaces; made to be a keeper of sheep and a tiller of the land. There was honor in this, was there not? Indeed there was. And this was where he belonged, now and until death took him away. God wanted him on the land. He was as sure of that as he was that his name was Rob Pershing.

The sheep saw him coming and with bleating voices of welcome they hurried to the edge of the pen. Rob walked in among them, stroking their furry heads and talking softly to them, his tears falling uncontrollably to the ground. He wanted to ask God why, but the knowledge that He only did what was wisest and best for His children kept Rob from uttering the question.

Whiteface, a young sheep which had taken an unusually strong attachment to him, came quickly to his side and rubbed her nose along his pant leg, vying for his attention. He stooped down and put an arm around her neck and sobbed like a hurt child. Sheep without a shepherd! This was all he could think of. How Jesus loved His "sheep"! He said He was the good Shepherd; He gave His life for the sheep. Rob was sure he felt a kinship with Christ in His analogy.

What would happen to his sheep? Rob wondered, as a stabbing pain pierced his heart for the flock. Men could be so brutal and cruel and heartless to animals, he knew. Oh, his flock! He didn't want that for his sheep. No. No!

"Please, God. . ." his two-word prayer ending in a moan and a rent sob which God the Holy Ghost heard and understood and interpreted.

"Rob. Rob."

He looked up and saw his father beside the pen. He hadn't known he was home.
"I . . . I guess I'm behaving quite immaturely, Dad," he said, as he took a work-worn hand and brushed tears from his cheeks. "I love the sheep. And I . . . I love this farm. And now . . . now it must all end."

"End, Rob?"

"I'm afraid so. Will the bank take the sheep, too? After all, they're worth quite a nice sum."

"Not the sheep, Rob. They are yours. The farm, yes. But this isn't the end, dear boy," Mr. Pershing said with a quiet confidence. "Endings are beginnings. And to those who love the Lord, an ending of one thing is many times the beginning of something greater and more wonderful."

"But I am to be a keeper of sheep and of the land, Dad. This is where God wants me. And I'm doing what He has called me to do and, suddenly, it must come to an abrupt halt. To an end. This is hard for me to reconcile; it's hard for me to understand, I've paid my tithes and offerings consistently, and I've tried always to keep in step with God and to obey His voice and His commands. Truthfully, I have been tempted to ask why. But I know He is both sovereign and all-wise."

"And His ways are past finding out, Rob. Always, He knows what is best for us."

"Aren't you worried, Dad? I mean, well, you had your life pretty much wrapped up in the farm, too. What will you do? I'll try to find work so I can help you and Mother get on your feet again, God willing. Maybe I'll be able to hire out to a farmer, or some such thing."

"Am I worried? you ask. No, Rob, I'm not. For a while I was. Then I turned everything over to God. When I did so, I received an inexpressible peace. Now I have the unwavering assurance that God is working all these circumstances out for our good. Let me tell you a few things."

"Your mother received a phone call from a minister in the town of Brentenwood, wanting to know if she'd be willing to take on a secretarial job in the church. And today, after spending a long time with our Heavenly Father and seeking His direction for my family, He led me to a nice place in the country. I paid the deposit down on it, to rent. So we'll be moving into the
house soon, the Lord willing. You'll be able to take some of the sheep. And, too, there's a good little college nearby, within driving distance of where we'll be living. I thought you'd like this. I made inquiry, and learned they have a super Ag program and courses in what you are interested."

    Rob gasped in amazement. "Really, Dad? But I'll have to work a while before I'll be able to go to college, God willing. And since you don't have employment, I'll try to be the bread winner, as the Lord helps me."

    "I found work, Rob. Rather, God found it for me, via prayer. An answer to prayer, I mean. There's a cabinet shop in the town. The cabinet maker was looking for an older, more settled man. I'll be going to work as soon as we are moved, the Lord willing. Oh, how good our Heavenly Father is!"

    Rob was silent for a long while. Then, finally, he spoke. "How utterly wrong it is to worry, Dad!" he exclaimed. "And I am guilty of having been a real worrier. I imagined only the very worst things could happen to us, with losing the farm. I was especially worried about you. . . ."

    "Me? Why, Rob, I belong to God, and nothing can happen to me but what will be for my good and His glory. This loss is a blessing in disguise. I'm not exactly young anymore, and the doctor told me to slow down. Now. But, like you, I loved the farm. Loved its arduous work, too. I'm ready for a change though. I feel God's hand has been guiding me wondrously. Your mother and I are now growing eager to get moved."

    "You are? Well, then I guess it's about time I do like you did, and turn all my concerns and cares and worries over to God. How very futile worry is anyhow. And it fosters doubt."

    "Doubt, and discouragement and depression, Rob. And, like I said, endings are beginnings, concealed though they may be for a time. I feel challenged; God knows what is best for us. Always."

    Long after his father had left, Rob walked among the sheep, talking to them and stroking their wooly heads. He felt so much lighter now. His father's faith was helping him to see that God was turning what he thought was a loss into a blessing. The light of a new beginning was slowly dawning upon him. Humbled, he knelt "among the flock and prayed; it was a prayer of total resignation to the will of God and a prayer of thankfulness, too.