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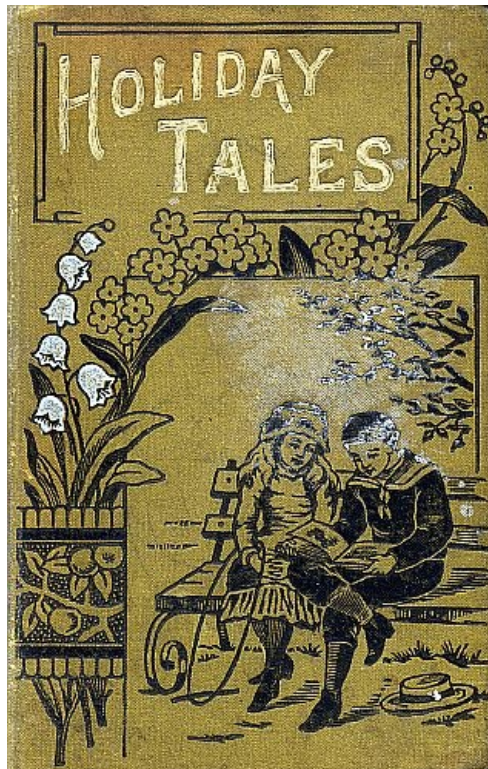
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PLANNING OUT THE GROUND.

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HOLIDAY TALES.

By FLORENCE WILFORD,

AUTHOR OF 'NIGEL BARTRAM'S IDEAL,' 'AN AUTHOR'S CHILDREN,' ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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SEVEN CAMPBELLS.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND SONS.

MAMMA, there's such a fine poem here about "seven lovely Campbells" whose father's name was Archibald; it must mean us,—don't you think so?' And a very pretty boy about ten years of age, who had been poring for some time over Wordsworth's Poems, lifted his roguish face to his mother's with a look of pretended conviction.

'Not exactly, Willie, seeing that the poem begins, "Seven *daughters* had Lord Archibald!'" [6]

'Ah, mamma, you are not to be caught. I do believe you have read everything that ever was written! But now, mamma, which would you rather have—seven daughters or seven sons?'

'I would rather have just what I've got, Willie.'

'Seven sons, then. Oh! mamma, I'm glad you said that; and you know we shall be of much more use to you than a lot of girls. Why, if the French were to come, you needn't be a bit afraid, with all of us to defend you.'

'Baby at the head, armed *cap-à-pie*, I suppose,' smiled the mother, dancing in her arms her youngest son, a little fellow of about two years old; but she soon set him down in her lap again, for she had been ill, and was still so weak that the least effort tired her.

'Mamma, I think you'd better let me ring for nurse to take Georgie, and then you can lie upon your sofa again and have a nap; and I'll go and ask my brothers to play in the rough ground, where you won't hear their noise,' said thoughtful Willie. [7]

The mother assented to all these proposals; but when, after ringing the bell, the boy turned to go, she beckoned him back to her side. 'Tell my darling Johnnie that I hope he'll come and sit with me this afternoon; only he must be wise and quiet, and not get into one of his harum-scarum moods, or papa won't let me have him.'

Willie nodded sagaciously. 'I'll keep guard over him, mamma, so that he shall behave like a mouse all dinner-time, and then papa won't be afraid to trust him. Now let me give Georgie one kiss.' His mother watched him fondly as he caressed the little brother, whose baby mind took small cognizance of such affectionate demonstrations, and then, drawing his curly head down to her, she gave him a true mother's kiss, and whispered, 'Mamma's own good boy.' Willie tripped lightly down the stairs and into the garden, where three little boys, of the respective ages of eight, six, and five, were playing at the well-known game which Charles Dickens terms 'an invasion of the imaginary domains of Mr. Thomas Tytler.'

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'Here, Duncan, Seymour, Archie, I want you to come into the "desert" with me and have a game there. Mamma's going to take a nap before dinner, and she won't be able to sleep while you make this row under her window. Come along, there's good fellows.' The two little ones left off picking up gold and silver directly, and Duncan descended from the rank of a landed proprietor with great good-humour;—not that Mr. Thomas Tytler's domains were the only ground belonging to him: he had a neat little flower-plot in one corner of the garden, as had all the elder brothers except Johnnie, who had been deprived of his by his father for having neglected to cultivate it, and who from that day forward had been known in the family by the soubriquet of 'Jean-sans-terre,' otherwise 'Lackland.' Willie led the way out of the garden into a rough piece of ground covered with weeds and stones, and called by the children the 'desert,' because nothing grew there but a few stunted shrubs. He left the younger ones to play about there, while he passed on and walked along the high road to meet his two elder brothers, Honorius and John, who attended a day school in the neighbourhood, and always came home at twelve and returned in the afternoon. Willie was of an age to go to school too; but his father, who was not a rich man, could not afford to send him just then, and therefore instructed him himself, together with Duncan and Seymour, though rather in a desultory fashion, as he was a doctor, and could not command much uninterrupted time.

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The Doctor's seven sons were well known in the neighbourhood, and acknowledged by every one to be 'nice, gentlemanly boys;' so Willie had to receive and return some greetings both from high and low as he passed along. But before he had gone far he descried an elder boy with some lesson-books in his hand coming towards him, whereupon he shouted 'Is that you, old fellow? What have you done with Johnnie?' and bounded to his side.

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Honorius was, like his name, grave and dignified,—at least as much so as a boy of fourteen can be without affectation. He answered quietly that Johnnie had taken the path through the fields in order to hunt for sticklebats in Farmer Merryman's pond, and that he did not know when they might expect to see him again. But at that very moment a bright, mischievous face peered over the hedge at one side of the road, and then, with a warning to them to stand clear, and 'a one, two, three, and away,' Johnnie—for he it was—took a running leap, cleared the hedge, and stood beside them. Willie explained his reason for coming to meet them, and the three boys took their way to the desert, lamenting that the ground was not smooth enough there to admit of their playing cricket, as they did on the lawn.

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'Do you know I've been thinking,' said Willie suddenly, 'that it would be very jolly if we could dig up the desert, and make it a nice place for mamma to walk in when she gets better? We might have paths this way and that, and then flower-beds or turf between; though, to be sure, papa *did* say that when he could afford to have it cultivated, he would plant some of it with potatoes.'

'Oh, plebeian notion!' said Johnnie, tossing his handsome head, 'he will propose keeping pigs next! What do you say to it, my Emperor? is not your royal mind duly horrified?' The Emperor, as his brother called him, in allusion to his imperial namesake, by no means showed the disgust expected of him: he turned up a bit of the soil with his pocket-knife, and said reflectively,

'I should think it would grow potatoes very well, but it'll want a deal in the way of preparation. I don't believe we could dig it up properly, for there are none of us strong enough for the work but myself and you, Johnnie; and you're such an idle fellow, you wouldn't work for more than ten minutes together.'

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'Oh yes, he will, if it's for mamma,' cried Willie; 'and papa would be so pleased. Do let's begin, Honorius; I can dig quite well, and the little ones might pull up some of the weeds.'

'We must mark the paths first if we're to do it at all,' said Honorius in his deliberate way. 'Who's got a ball of string?'

'I have,' began Johnnie, putting his hand in his pocket; but he drew it forth again empty, and jestingly continued, 'No, "it's gone from my gaze like a beautiful dream." I have lost it, I suppose. We must advertise for it; or, considering all things, perhaps it would be cheaper to buy another.'

'You'll lose your head some day,' observed Honorius calmly. 'Run into the house, Willie, and ask cook for some string; and you might fetch the spades, Lackland,—they're in the arbour.'

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The two boys darted off on their separate errands, and the Emperor walked up and down, devising how the desert might be best improved.

'Rather stupid of us not to have thought of doing something to it before,—it's more than four months since papa bought it; but, to be sure, the weather has not been fit for out-of-door work, and papa always talked as if it would take two or three men to put it in order. I don't think he'll mind our having a try at it, for at any rate we can't do much harm. I'm very glad he bought it: it would have been horrid to have had it let on a building lease, and some great house run up that

would shut out the view from our windows, that mamma likes so much. It's nice that her own room does not overlook this, or she'd see what we are about, and I should like it to be a surprise to her. It's quite Willie's idea; he's a capital chap for thinking of things to please her. I wish that funny fellow Lackland had half as much sense.'

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Willie came back very soon with the string, and assisted his brother in fastening a stake in the ground where the path was to begin, and then, tying the string to it, drew it along in a straight line to the place where the path was to end, at which they stuck in another stake, and again fastened the string.

Johnnie did not reappear for some time, and then wore an air of rather droll vexation. 'Pity me,' he exclaimed as he gave the spades to Honorius, 'I have fallen foul of my paternal relative. I found a lot of birds in the arbour, and served them with a notice to quit by clapping my hands and hooting to them, when who should appear but papa, asking what the noise was about, and how I could be so inconsiderate as to disturb mamma?'

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'No wonder,' said Honorius.

'Oh, and I promised to keep you quiet!' exclaimed Willie in great distress.

Jean-sans-terre laughed his merriest of laughs.

'Keep me quiet! you silly fellow. Did you really think it possible?'

'Yes, for mamma's sake,' said Willie stoutly. 'You can be quiet if you choose; and I told you what she said about her wanting you to sit with her this afternoon.'

'And you think paterfamilias will forbid it on account of my ill-timed sparrow-hooting?'

'I think,' said Honorius, 'you had better speak of my father by his right name, and endeavour to behave rather less like an idiot. Here, take a spade, man, and come to work.'

Johnnie shrugged his shoulders, made an indescribable grimace, and began digging vigorously, humming the Jacobite ditty,

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'Wha is it noo we ha'e gotten for a king,
But a wee wee German lairdie?
And when we went to fetch him hame,
He was dibbling in his kail-yairdie.'

Honorius sketched in his pocket-book a sort of plan of what the desert was to be like when its cultivation was completed. There was to be a path crossing it each way exactly through the centre, and along each side of these paths there was to be a broad flower-border, which would partially conceal from view the potatoes and other useful vegetables which were to occupy the chief part of the ground.

'It's not too late in the spring to plant potatoes, I suppose, Honorius, is it?' said thoughtful Willie; 'and papa will give us those, I'm sure. But where shall we get the flowers? I don't think papa will buy them for us.'

'We can get some seeds of different annuals, such as nemophila and candytuft, ourselves. That won't cost very much, and I've got three shillings that I can spend on it; but then we shall want roots of other things and rose-bushes, and they cost more. Have you got any money, Johnnie?'

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'No, not I. I am "sans argent" as well as "sans terre." I know one way of getting some, though. Papa said if I would translate that favourite piece of his in Cæsar all through, *well*, he would give me half-a-crown. But then, consider the labour! I have a strong suspicion that it might prove fatal to my constitution.'

'Oh, humbug! you could do it easily if you chose,' said the elder brother. 'Besides, I'll help you, if papa doesn't mind.'

'You'll do it, I know,' pleaded Willie softly; 'and I've got a shilling that'll go towards buying some roots.'

'And Seymour and I have got sixpence between us,' cried Duncan. 'I say, Honorius, haven't we pulled up a jolly lot of weeds already?'

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'Oh, famous,' cried the Emperor approvingly. 'Work away; we shall have to go in to dinner soon.'

He himself toiled with all his might, for the soil in some places was very stiff, and resisted the incision of the spade. Whenever he came to a part where it was looser, he turned that over to the younger ones; for Honorius, though occasionally sharp in speech, was almost invariably kind and considerate in his actions. 'Deeds, not words,' was his favourite motto; but it would sometimes have been well if he had remembered that we must give account for words as well as deeds, and that the law of love should govern both.

The boys worked on for some time almost in silence. Johnnie was expending his energies in hard digging, and dropped for the while his usual character of 'merry-andrew.' He was considering with himself, too, whether he should undertake the task his father had proposed to him.

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'To be sure, I have a strong motive now for earning the half-crown, which I hadn't before,' thought he; 'but papa's so awfully particular, and I'm—yes, I must allow—I'm such an awful blockhead, that it's as likely as not I shall not win the money after all. However, I can but try; yes, and I will try too.'

Lackland's face was very bright when he took his place at dinner that day, but his behaviour was more quiet and guarded than usual: he conducted himself more like Willie's ideal mouse, than like the noisy, rattling fellow he usually appeared. The brothers sat, three on each side of the table; no one claimed the place at the top, where the mother was accustomed to sit when well. Dr. Campbell looked tired, and was very silent, but took care that his sons' vigorous appetites should be duly satisfied, and was always ready with a kindly 'Willie, my boy, don't you want some more?' 'Seymour, pass your plate to me,' whenever the silence of one knife and fork told that its owner had finished the portion allotted to him. Johnnie glanced at him sometimes, but did not address him till after grace had been said and they had risen from table, when, approaching him, he asked gently if he might be allowed to sit a little while with his mother that afternoon.

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'Can I trust you to be quiet, Johnnie?' said the Doctor doubtfully.

Lackland blushed, and fidgeted with his feet. 'I will try to be quiet indeed, papa. I am sorry I made such a row in the arbour this morning.'

'Very well, you may go to mamma, then, as soon as I come down; but I shall beg her to send you away if you get riotous.'

'Yes, papa; and, one thing more, may I do that bit of Cæsar that you offered the half-crown for? I didn't care about doing it the other day, but I should like to, now.'

'You may do it, certainly. I am glad you wish to—without help, mind—and I will look over it as soon as I have time. Well, Honorius,' as his elder son drew near, 'have you something to ask too?'

[21]

Honorius's errand was to obtain his father's sanction for the changes they were making in the desert. Dr. Campbell smiled as he heard their plans. 'It would take two men's hard labour to put that place in order,' he said; 'I don't think you'll be able to do it.'

'Papa, you don't know what seven Campbells can do!' said Willie in a tone of triumphant heroism.

'Seven! What! have you pressed Georgie into the service? Well, good luck to you all, it'll be a nice amusement for you; you can't do much harm, at any rate.'

He left them and hastened up to his wife's room, but Willie ran after him to beg that the plan might be kept a secret from her. Dr. Campbell readily promised secrecy, but the boys were disappointed that he had not seemed more delighted with their scheme.

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'If papa thinks it's nonsense, there's no use going on with it,' said Honorius moodily.

'Yes, there is,' said Willie; 'it'll show him what we can do. He thinks it nonsense, because he doesn't know how hard we mean to work, and how steadily we'll keep on at it. It'll be such fun when he sees we can do a great deal more than he thinks!'

Honorius allowed himself to be convinced by this reasoning, and went with Willie and Seymour to the desert to work away till it got near three o'clock, at which time he had to return to school. Johnnie worked steadily at Cæsar till he heard his father go out, and then went up-stairs softly and tapped at his mother's door. Her 'come in' was glad and eager, and a soft pink colour flushed into her cheeks when she saw it was really Johnnie. This good mother, so just and tender to all her sons, kept a special corner of her heart for the merry scapegrace who excelled the family cat in a talent for unintentional mischief, and almost equalled that luckless animal in a facility for getting into universal disgrace. In another minute Johnnie was squatted on a footstool by the side of her sofa, holding her thin white hands in his own, and sometimes kissing them with a pretty devotion, which, mother-like, she thought very charming, though she pretended to call it 'silly.'

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'And how is my Johnnie getting on at school?' she asked presently. 'Whereabouts in the class are you now? At the top, I hope!'

Johnnie screwed his mouth up, shook his head, groaned, and made all manner of funny faces. 'I'm at the bottom, mother,' he said at last, in a voice that might have been intended to be penitent, but did not sound so.

'Oh, Johnnie! and I was hoping you would never do so badly again. What *will* papa say if this half-year's report is as bad as the last?'

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'I don't know,' said Johnnie in a way that might almost have been taken to mean, 'I don't care;' then, more softly, 'I am sorry you are vexed, mother.'

'Yes, I am indeed, Johnnie. It is not as if you were really dull and slow: then your low place in the school would not be your fault, and we shouldn't mind so much; but you can learn very well if you like.'

'But I was born with a disposition *not* to like it. I can't help being idle, really, mother; "it's the natur of the baste!"'

'Then you must conquer your nature,' she said in the spirited tone of one who had never sat down helplessly under her faults and talked about 'natural infirmity.' 'What should any of us be worth, Johnnie, if we yielded to all our foolish inclinations?'

He had not an answer ready, so played with her rings, and glanced at her deprecatingly and coaxingly from under his long, dark eyelashes. [25]

'I didn't mean to scold,' she said reluctantly, 'especially this day of all days, when I may have you for one of the little talks we haven't had for so long. But, Johnnie, you don't know how hard it makes it for me to submit to be ill and helpless, when I think that because I am not able to watch over you, you are running wild, neglecting your lessons, and vexing poor papa, who has so much to trouble him.'

Jean-sans-terre's brown eyes looked odd in their expression of mingled fun and sadness; he was trying to feel sorry and ashamed, as he knew he ought, but penitence was so very difficult to him. 'Dear little mother, don't fret; I'll do better for the future,' he said caressingly.

No experience of the fragile nature of his promises had availed to make his mother distrust him. 'My darling, I'm sure you will,' she answered with ready confidence.

He was so anxious to assure her of his good intentions, that he had nearly revealed the secret of his intended labour at Cæsar, and his desire to obtain the half-crown to aid his plans for the desert, but he remembered in time that it was his brothers' secret as well as his own; and Lackland, if he lacked wisdom and steadiness and industry, was at least not deficient in a sense of honour, so he was silent. But he could almost have thought that she guessed at his scheme when she went on, 'If you would only pursue one thing steadily, and *make* yourself do it in spite of disinclination, you don't know what good it would do you, and how it would help you in everything else. Be a hero, Johnnie, and conquer your idleness!' [26]

'I mean to be a real hero some day, mamma,' he answered, smiling. 'You know Uncle Gustavus has promised to use his interest to get me a commission, and then you shall see how well I'll serve the Queen. Don't you remember telling me how Bertrand du Guesclin was a great bother to everybody when he was a boy, but yet he grew up so jolly brave that people were glad to run to him for help when he was a man?' [27]

'And his mother hadn't patience with him, and yet afterwards lived to be proud of him: is that the inference you mean me to draw, Johnnie?'

'No, no, no! she was a cross old thing. Don't you remember how she was going to have Bertrand beaten, when that kind old nun stopped her? You're not a bit like her, dear little mamma,—not a scrap, not an atom! But oh, mamma, when will you be able to read us all those famous stories about heroes? They're the only things I ever remember, and I'm pining for one of them.'

'You shall have one as soon as papa thinks I'm strong enough to read aloud. But, my hero, I want you to consider that before you can get a commission you must pass an examination, and knowing about Du Guesclin won't make up for deficiency in arithmetic and French grammar.' [28]


'Oh, I'll see about all that; I'll work night and day sooner than not pass, for I *must* be an officer. You know, mamma, we've settled it all. Honorius is to be a doctor, like papa, and I'm to be a soldier, and Willie is to be a clergyman, and Duncan a sailor, and Seymour a merchant, and Archie a lawyer, and Georgie—somehow we never can settle what Georgie is to be—but something, of course, you know; and then you will have us all, mamma, your seven sons, "seven Campbells," as Willie has taken a fit for saying, and we shall make you so proud of us!'

'I hope so; but, my Johnnie, we must not forget that if my seven are spared to me, and I to them, it will be by God's great mercy.'



CHAPTER II.

JOHNNIE'S PROTEGE.

 OHNNIE completed his task in two or three days, labouring at it at first very earnestly, then growing tired, getting careless, and finally finishing it up in a hurry, with so little effort at accuracy of rendering or clearness of style, that any one less sanguine than he would have considered the attainment of the half-crown hopeless. Honorius glanced over the translation, and shook his head ominously, wishing that he might be allowed to make some improvements in it; but his father's injunction to Johnnie to accept no help put this [29]

out of the question, so it was delivered into Dr. Campbell's hands just as it was. The first part was very satisfactory. 'Very good, very good indeed, Johnnie!' he exclaimed as his eye ran rapidly down the neatly written lines; but his face lengthened as he went on. 'Why, how you have begun to scribble here, Johnnie!' he said as he reached the middle. 'And what *do* you mean by this? You have not even given the sense of this passage correctly. Here, take the book and translate it to me word by word.'

Johnnie stumbled wofully in his rendering, not from confusion, but from sheer ignorance; and both the written and verbal translation went on getting worse and worse, till at last the Doctor, who was rather a hasty man, lost all patience, and tossed the whole production into the fire, exclaiming, 'Pshaw! far from deserving any reward, that translation is the most wretched exhibition of carelessness and idleness that I ever saw. I don't know what's to become of you, Johnnie, if you can't, or rather *won't*, do better than that!'

The little boys glanced at poor Lackland in terror and dismay, and Willie's eyes filled with tears; but Johnnie only coloured, and, shutting up the volume of Cæsar, put it in its place again, and resumed the occupation of making a willow-wand into a bow, on which he had been engaged when his father summoned him. If Honorius had met with such a rebuff, he would have remained bitterly hurt and ashamed for the rest of the day, and Willie in the same case would have been utterly humbled and discouraged. Not so 'Jean-sans-terre.' What his cogitations were, his brothers could not decide; but the result was, that when he had bidden his father good-night, he paused a minute, and then added, 'May I have another try at Cæsar, papa?' The tone was bright and cheery, and Dr. Campbell looked up in pleased surprise—

'Do you really mean it, Johnnie?' he said hopefully.

'Yes, I do indeed, papa; but perhaps you wouldn't like the trouble of looking over another translation. I know that one was awful.'

'If you can take the trouble of writing it, I shall not begrudge the trouble of looking over it; but mind, it must be well done. I'd rather you took a month about it than brought me such a one as that of to-night.'

'Oh, thank you, papa, but that wouldn't suit me at all; I want the half-crown as quick as I can get it. I'll work night and day rather than not have the translation done soon.'

'Then I am to understand it is merely for the sake of the half-crown you are willing to do this bit of Cæsar over again?' said Dr. Campbell disappointedly: 'I had hoped that it was from a better motive—a real desire to improve and conquer your carelessness, or a wish to please and satisfy your mother and me.' He looked full at his son as he spoke, and seemed to expect an answer. It came, bold and true: 'I was only thinking of the half-crown, papa.' Yet if Dr. Campbell could have known to what purpose the half-crown was to be devoted, he would have seen that love to the mother was the primary motive, after all, and would not have turned away so coldly as he did from this apparently mercenary speech. Honorius thought so, and would have explained; but Johnnie pulled his sleeve and whispered something, and meanwhile the Doctor left the room.

'Oh, how could you answer like that, Johnnie?' remonstrated Willie when the two boys were alone in the attic which they shared together. 'If you had told papa what you wanted the half-crown for, he would have been pleased, whereas now I don't know what he thinks of you.'

'I only gave a plain answer to a plain question,' said Johnnie. 'If he had asked me what I wanted the money for, I might have told him.'

'But it appeared——'

'I don't care what it appeared,' interrupted Lackland, laughing; 'I only wish papa hadn't burnt the whole of my translation: the beginning of it was all right, and I might have copied it straight off, instead of having to make it all out again.'

'Oh yes! that was dreadful,' replied Willie. 'And then what he said too! I was so sorry, Johnnie; I knew you must be so ashamed.'

Jean-sans-terre's eyes seemed to be searching after penitence again, as they had when his mother spoke to him.

'*Ought* I to have been ashamed?' he asked with simplicity.

The question appeared to Willie so extraordinary, that he really didn't know what to say in answer. He pondered over it seriously while he was undressing, and added to his evening prayers this clause: 'Make Johnnie more sorry when he has vexed papa.'

Dr. Campbell was certainly vexed and disappointed with his son, and showed it a little in his manner, which was, however, quite useless as far as Johnnie was concerned, for he never even remarked it. There are children so sensitive, that the faintest shade of sadness or disapproval in the manner of their elders towards them will suffice to make them unhappy for days; there are others who, unless they are actually scolded or punished, never perceive that anything is amiss: and Johnnie was one of these last. He was just as pleasant and affectionate to his father as usual, just as fearless in his remarks and questions, and showed up his translation, when he had finished it, quite as unconcernedly as if no previous one had ever existed. He got the half-crown this time, and a fair meed of praise, which he received with undisguised satisfaction, and the

mental reflection that 'papa was very kind.'

Dr. Campbell did not inquire how he meant to spend the money, not wishing to show a want of confidence in his son; and Johnnie tarried for no explanation, but raced off to the nurseryman's, only pausing to tell Honorius that he was no longer 'sans argent,' and to ask what plants he should buy.

The boys, by constant labour, had managed already to dig up the proposed flower-border and to level the part intended for the paths; but Honorius was sadly at a loss as to where they should get gravel for the latter. He could not help looking rather wistfully at a great heap of it—beautiful golden gravel too—which lay in one corner of the garden of an old lady to whom his father one day sent him with a message; and Mrs. Western—as this old lady was called—noticed her young friend's expression, and asked what he was thinking of. He told her of his plans for the desert, and inquired where such gravel was to be bought, and if it were very dear. She replied that it was rather so, but this had been given her by her son-in-law, who had a gravel-pit on his estate, and added very kindly, 'You are quite welcome to have what you see there, for I have used as much as I shall want for the present; only you must send some one for it, for I can't ask my maid to carry gravel.' Honorius thanked her warmly, and joyfully accepted her offer, promising to send some one for the gravel as soon as he possibly could. [37]

The difficulty was to know whom to send, for the Campbells' in-door servants were all maids; and when the boys begged the old man who took care of their father's horse and drove his gig to go to Mrs. Western's for them, he replied surlily that he had hard work enough as it was ('night and day both, sometimes, when master is sent for from a distance'), and declined to assist them. [38]

'I know,' said Johnnie. 'The next half-holiday Bob Middleton would do it for sixpence or a shilling; he could take the wheelbarrow and get a load at a time. I declare I wouldn't mind fetching it myself, if I thought papa wouldn't object.'

'Oh, nonsense,' said Honorius. 'Work as hard as you like here, but don't take to wheeling gravel through the village, pray. Bob Middleton might do, only he's such an impudent fellow. I hate having anything to say to him.'

'Oh, I'll transmit your royal commands to him, if that's all,' said Johnnie; 'only say yes, and I'll look him up this afternoon: perhaps he might go to Mrs. Western's for us at once.'

Honorius gave a reluctant consent, and accordingly Johnnie appeared in the desert soon after three o'clock, accompanied by a youth of fifteen, very raggedly attired, and with a face which was an extraordinary compound of ugliness and roguery. Bob undertook for a shilling to fetch all the gravel from Mrs. Western's, and set off at once for the first load, with which he returned ere long. He came and went several times; but at last such a long interval elapsed between his going and returning, that the boys began to be alarmed. [39]

'He's gone off with the wheelbarrow, I do believe,' said Honorius.

"'Body o' me!" as old King Jamie used to say, you don't suppose such a thing,' cried Johnnie. 'Spite of his objections to soap and water and the English grammar, I have a higher opinion of Bob than that.'

But as still time passed on and Bob did not return, Duncan and Seymour were sent in search of him. They looked for him by the way, but saw nothing of him, and at length arrived at Mrs. Western's house and rang the bell.

'Has a boy been here for some gravel Mrs. Western promised us, or is he here now?' inquired Duncan of the maid who came to the gate. [40]

'He has been here, Master Campbell,' she replied, 'but he's gone off as fast as his legs can carry him, and he's taken mistress's new thermometer with him that hung on the south wall, and he's trampled over all the beds, and Mrs. Western she saw him from the window; and your pa' was passing, so she called him in; but the boy made off, and it'll be a wonder if the police are not sent for. They're a bad set, those Middletons.'

Duncan's eyes grew round with excitement, and Seymour, who was rather timid, began to cry. He wanted to run home again, but Duncan considered such a proceeding cowardly; and while they were debating the point, Dr. Campbell saw them, and called to them to come in.

'Who sent Bob here for the gravel?' he inquired. [41]

'Johnnie sent him; Honorius said he might,' replied Duncan.

'Of course they never thought how the boy would behave,' said kind old Mrs. Western. 'I daresay they didn't know he wasn't a fit person to be trusted.'

'They might have known,' said Dr. Campbell; 'Johnnie at least has heard me say that Bob was ripe for any mischief, and he knows I refused to let him take him out fishing with him. If Honorius had told me of your kind present, I would have sent some proper person for the gravel.'

'Honorius did say Mrs. Western had promised us some gravel after dinner, papa, but you were just going out, and I suppose you didn't hear him,' said Duncan. 'He didn't like sending Bob much, but we didn't know who else to get.'

'You should have asked,' began his father; but seeing that Seymour was frightened, he checked

himself, saying, 'It's no blame to you little ones; I don't suppose you had anything to do with it. Run away home if you like.'

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'Oh, but let Sarah cut you a piece of cake first,' said Mrs. Western. 'My dear (to Seymour), don't fret; you shall have the gravel all the same.'

Mrs. Western's maid brought them out two large slices of pound-cake, which, after they had thanked their kind old friend, they took away with them, Seymour beginning directly to munch at his slice, while Duncan put his into his pocket.

'Papa didn't say we *must* go home,' he observed,—'he only said we *might* if we liked; so you can go, and I'll try and find Bob, and tell him I'll give him this piece of cake if he'll give back the thermometer. I'm so afraid, if he doesn't, Johnnie'll get into trouble; and besides, it's so wicked to steal.'

'Yes,' said Seymour with his mouth full of cake; 'and I'll tell you what, Duncan,' reluctantly but firmly, 'you may take the rest of my piece too.'

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Duncan, however, declined this, and trudged away, resolutely resisting, as he went along, the temptation to eat even a *crumb* of his own delicious-looking slice. He soon arrived at Mrs. Middleton's cottage, but of course Bob was not there; and his mother, who was a widow, and supported herself by washing, came to the door with her arms covered with soap-suds, and after hastily answering that 'Bob was nowhere's about, plunged them in the wash-tub again, and took no more heed of Duncan. He hesitated whether to tell her about the thermometer or not, but had been so impressed with the naughtiness of 'telling tales,' that he could not make up his mind it could be right, even in this case, and so turned away and ran back to the desert, where he found his father speaking to Honorius and Johnnie.

'Didn't you remember, boys, what I said about Bob when you wanted to take him out fishing with you?' he was asking.

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'It was to me you said it; Honorius was not in the room,' Johnnie said quickly.

'Very well, then, you at any rate knew my opinion of Bob Middleton, and must have known that you were doing wrong in employing him without my leave.'

'I didn't think,' said Lackland carelessly.

'Then I must teach you to think. Put down your spade and go into the house, and up to your room.'

There was no mistaking Dr. Campbell's manner now; even Johnnie was obliged to perceive the displeasure he had provoked: he stuck his spade into the ground, and turned towards the house.

Duncan dashed after him. 'Here, Johnnie, take this piece of cake. Mrs. Western gave it to me; it's so good—do have it, see!'

Lackland was by no means too miserable to appreciate this attempt at consolation. 'It looks jolly,' he said, 'but I won't take it all; you must have half yourself, Duncan,' and he broke it in two.

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Duncan would rather his brother should have had the whole, but he was glad to see him munching the half even so contentedly. 'Do you think I may go up into your room with you?' he inquired.

'No, no; papa didn't mean that, I'm sure. Don't stop me, old fellow; good-bye,' and Johnnie ran off and up to his room as fast as he could go. He had not been there more than five minutes, when there was a sound of little toddling steps along the passage, and two fat hands came drumming on the door. 'What do you want, baby?' said Johnnie, rising and opening it.

'I want to tiss 'oo,' answered the child, lifting up his chubby face.

Johnnie bent down and kissed him, asking, 'How did you know I was here, Georgie?'

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'Ma heard 'oo tome up 'tairs; ma say what matter wis 'oo?'

'Tell her papa sent me up,' faltered Johnnie; 'or stay, say——'

'I say 'oo naughty,' said Georgie, whose infantine mind had already jumped to the right conclusion. He scampered off with this message, but speedily returned: 'Ma say she vezy sorry; ma say I may tiss 'oo again.'

'I wish I might go to her,' thought Johnnie, and in his softened mood the little brother's kisses were so sweet to him, that he could scarcely make up his mind to let Georgie go. But he did, and stepped back resolutely into his room, while the little one, announcing, 'I going to tea now,' trotted off again down the passage. Meantime Honorius was showing his father the scarlet geraniums that Johnnie had bought with his half-crown, and expatiating on the quantity of digging he had got through, although, being occupied with Cæsar, he had not had so much time to spend in the desert as the others.

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'Poor fellow! Well, he has behaved much better than I thought,' said Dr. Campbell relentingly. 'I'm afraid I was rather hard on him just now; that's the worst of being too hasty.'

Of all things, Honorius could not bear that his father should reproach himself. 'I'm sure Johnnie

admits that he was in fault about Bob, papa,' he said.

'And do you know I've got a bright idea about Bob and the thermometer, papa,' said Willie. 'May I go as far as Farmer Merryman's field and back? I won't be long.'

'Certainly you may, if it's necessary for the development of your bright idea, Willie; but make haste home to tea. And you, boys, come in with me; if you're not hungry, I am.'

In the strength of his bright idea Willie ran along like a greyhound; moreover, it was pleasant to feel how completely his father trusted him. He went across the fields till he came to Farmer Merryman's pond, which was overhung by a willow-tree, whose branches were thick enough to afford a tempting seat: it was a lonely place, and a favourite resort of Bob's, as Willie well knew; and here he hoped to find him. Was he there? Yes—no—yes! and Willie almost shouted with delight, but restrained himself, and advanced cautiously to the foot of the tree. 'Bob,' he said softly, 'Bob, I want to speak to you, please.'

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Bob gave a violent start, and looked down rather savagely at the adventurous child who had discovered his hiding-place. 'What d'ye come prying here for?' he asked rudely.

'I came to ask you to give back Mrs. Western's thermometer,' said Willie; 'and my brother Johnnie says he's *quite* sure you didn't mean to steal it.'

'No more I did; what's the worth of it to me? I'd only taken it down just to look at it, like, when out came those maids a-storming and a-scolding, and vowed they'd fetch the justice; so I made off, and took the 'mometer with me, for I hadn't had half a look at it.'

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'Oh, but you've done with it now, so do take it back,' pleaded Willie urgently.

'Don't you wish you may get it? You'd like to see me make such a fool of myself, wouldn't you?'

'Well, then, let me take it, and I'll tell Mrs. Western how it was, and ask her not to be angry with you. If you give it me, I'll give you the shilling that you were to have had when you fetched all the gravel: of course you can't fetch any more of it for us now, but we would rather you had the shilling. I'm so glad you didn't mean to steal.'

Bob calmly surveyed the flushed, eager face that was turned up to his. 'It's you that's to be the parson, ain't it?' he said mockingly.

Willie made no reply, but folded his arms and leant back against the tree, looking such a perfect little gentleman, that some dim perception of his own impertinence flashed upon Bob's eccentric mind.

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'It worn't all on my account you comed along here, was it?' he inquired.

'No; partly on Mrs. Western's, and partly on my brother Johnnie's. Papa is displeased with him for having sent you for the gravel; and, Bob, you know Johnnie *trusted* you.'

Bob grinned, and Willie felt that the appeal to his sense of honour had failed; but, though very impertinent and mischievous, he was not a thoroughly bad boy, and now swung himself down from the tree, bringing the thermometer with him.

'If I give it to you, you must promise not to tell where you found me,' he said; 'I won't have other folks prying after me here.'

'I won't tell Mrs. Western, if that's what you mean,' said Willie; 'and I'll ask her to forgive you.'

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'My! you may do as you like about that. I ain't in such a hurry to be forgiven. But what I mean is, you ain't to tell your father nor nobody where you found me.'

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'I must tell papa if he *asks* me,' said Willie.

'Then you shan't have the 'mometer; I'll pitch it into the pond.'

'That would be wicked,' said undaunted Willie, 'for it does not belong to you.'

'Can't help that; here goes,' and he held it over the edge of the pond. 'It'll be in in another minute if you don't say you'll not tell your father.'

'I shan't tell him if he doesn't say I am to; but if he does, I must.'

'Why must you?'

'Because I must obey him, even when I'd rather not; it's right.'

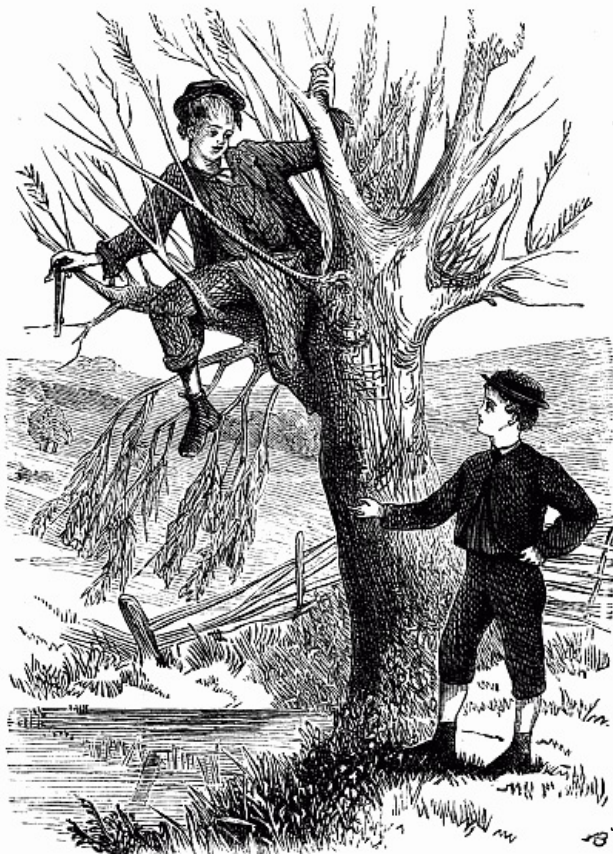
'That beats all,' said Bob in unbounded surprise; but he didn't throw the thermometer into the pond. It was some time, however, before Willie could persuade him to give it up, though at length he did, and received the shilling, observing,

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'I could ha' took this from you if I'd liked, and kep' the 'mometer too; but I ain't a thief, let folks say what they please.'

'No, I know you're not,' said Willie. 'Oh, Bob, if you would only——'

'What?' said Bob; 'you hadn't no call to stop just then. I thought you was a-going to make a fine speech.'



'CAN'T HELP THAT,—HERE GOES.'

See page 52.

'No, I mustn't.'

'Mustn't what?'

'Mustn't lecture; mamma won't ever let me. There are other people to teach you.'

'They did teach me a lot,—parson did, and schoolmaster did; but I got tired of it, and now I'm too big to go to school. But I'm thinking of looking out for a bit of work.'

'Oh do, do, *please*; we should be so glad.'

'If you ain't the funniest little gentleman!' said Bob with increasing astonishment. 'But I kind o' like you too, I ha' been thinkin' o' taking a turn for the better, as they say, lately; but bless you, not even my mother would believe I was in earnest, so who is there to care if I do?'

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'Seven Campbells,' said Willie; and then, fearing this was not quite the truth, he added, 'No, Georgie is too young to care, but all the rest of us would be glad, Bob;' and when he had said this he ran home. His arrival with the thermometer caused great delight to all his brothers, and Dr. Campbell called Lackland down to hear the good news, saying kindly, 'You have had opportunity for a little thought, Johnnie, my man, and I hope will be more careful not to act contrary to my known wishes another time; so now come and help us to rejoice over the recovery of poor Mrs. Western's thermometer.' Johnnie came, nothing loth,

pausing, however, to ask, 'May I speak to mamma first? She heard me come up-stairs.'

Permission was given, and after a preliminary tap the bonnie face peeped into the sickroom. 'All right, dear little mother: I *was* rather in a scrape just now, but papa has forgiven me, and I'm going down-stairs again. Good-night, dear mamma.' The white curtains of the bed were drawn aside for one minute, and the sweet motherly eyes looked out at him.

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'Good-night, and thank you for coming to me, my darling boy; only remember'—very gently—'a *pardoned* fault needn't be a *forgotten* one, Johnnie.'

'No, mamma.' There was a momentary quiver in the gay, ringing voice, and it was quite enough for the mother. 'That will do; I can trust you not to forget *this* time, Johnnie,' she said, and with a happy smile she lay down to sleep.



CHAPTER III.

WHAT SEVEN CAMPBELLS CAN DO.



SPITE of obstacles, the labours of the 'Seven Campbells,' as Willie grandly called them, did effect a great improvement in the desert, and the seventh certainly took his share, so far as such a very small man could; for he pulled up a great many weeds with his little fat hands, and brushed down the gravel on the walks with a tooth-brush! The

Doctor, seeing his boys were in earnest, lent them his help whenever he could spare time, sent for the remainder of the gravel for them, showed them how to lay it, trimmed the borders, sowed some potatoes, and presented them with four apple-trees, which he planted at four corners of the ground, and called 'Gozmaringa, Geroldinga, Crevedella, and Spirauca,' after the names of some apple-trees that belonged to King Charlemagne. But, spite of his assistance, there was a great deal requiring the boys' exertions; and they worked like Trojans, devoting nearly all their play-hours and pocket-money to this object, and finding in it both interest and amusement. Johnnie had learnt one or two lessons from this undertaking: first, that in working for a good object, it is not only necessary to have a right intention at starting, but that constant pains and perseverance are requisite,—as in the matter of Cæsar; secondly, that a privilege earned is sweeter than one bestowed as a favour,—as in the spending of the half-crown, which

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his own toil had procured; thirdly, that even for a good object we must not use bad or doubtful means,—as in the matter of the gravel; and fourthly, that hard work—digging, or what not—from a right motive, becomes a much greater pleasure than any that can be procured by idleness. And he had found true, too, what his mother had said, that if he would pursue *one* thing steadily, and make himself do it in spite of disinclination, the determination and energy thus acquired would help him in everything else.

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Midsummer came, and by that time the desert was a desert no longer: it was a neat, trim-looking piece of ground with smooth walks, some small but promising crops, and a flower-border gay with geraniums, nasturtiums, sweet-peas, nemophila, and convolvulus. The mother was rapidly regaining strength, and had been down-stairs several times, but only into the drawing-room, which did not look towards the desert: from the school-room and dining-room, which had a full view of it, she had been jealously excluded. It is to be feared that this precaution had caused her a little anxiety, and that she had a secret vision of broken slates, torn pinafores, and blotted lesson-books, which she imagined were being concealed from her in these forbidden chambers till she was supposed to be strong enough to bear the sight of such calamities. But the day was now come when her fears were to be dispersed, and a far different and much pleasanter surprise was to dawn upon her.

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She was to take her first walk, leaning on her husband's arm; and he had been privately instructed by his sons to bring her in the direction of the quondam desert. They had erected a triumphal arch over the little entrance-gate, formed of bent osiers twined with flowers, and surmounted with paper flags, on which were inscribed, in large coloured letters, such mottoes as the Scotch 'Ye're gey welcome,' and the Irish 'Cead mile failte.' Archie and Georgie, gaily bedizened, and with wands in their hands, were stationed at each side of the gate to welcome her, and were to marshal her up the centre walk, at the top of which her other sons were to receive her, and conduct her to a seat which had been prepared for her to rest upon. Such was the programme; but how could English boys adhere to anything so formal? Directly Archie announced that 'mamma was coming' Georgie pushed the gate open, and toddled to meet her, followed by all the rest of the boys, leaping, shouting, and laughing, forgetting all preconcerted speeches, and much too happy to be even coherent.

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'Papa' was afraid such noisy glee would be too much for the invalid, but 'mamma' would have her way for once, and indulge the boys to the top of their bent; so they led the way into the desert, all laughing and talking at the same time, till Willie bethought himself that the noise and excitement would really be too much for his mother, and first loudly exhorted his brothers to be quiet, and then—which was much better—became quiet himself, and thus set an example of considerateness.

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Mrs. Campbell's surprise and delight were great enough to satisfy her sons, which is saying a good deal. She would not sit down till she had made the tour of the garden (it would be an insult to say 'desert' any longer); and she accepted a sprig of Johnnie's geranium, and a handful of Duncan's sweet-peas; *tasted* one of Archie's nasturtium flowers when assured by him that it was 'so nice;' was duly edified by the sight of the remains of the tooth-brush, worn to a stump by Georgie's sedulous and novel use of it; allowed Honorius to pull up a potato root, that she might see how healthy and free from disease it was; submitted patiently to have her hair ornamented with some of Seymour's convolvuluses; and only declined to taste the one hard green apple born by Geroldinga (Gozmaringa, Crevedella, and Spirauca were as yet fruitless), from a fear that the tender, careful guardian at her side would be irrecoverably shocked at such imprudence. She sat down at last on the chair of state that had been prepared for her, and owned herself a little tired; but her interest and amusement never flagged, and she listened with eager pleasure to the history of her sons' exertions.

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'They've all worked like horses,—even Georgie, I do believe,' said Dr. Campbell, smiling.

'And Johnnie too!' said the mother delightedly.

'Yes, Johnnie has done his work manfully, and has found out that industry is pleasure, after all. Haven't you, my boy?' and the father laid his hand on his son's shoulder with a proud, pleased look, such as Lackland had but seldom called up before.

The bright eyes, which never looked down in fear, looked down now. Jean-sans-terre was not so unsensitive to *praise* as he was to *blame*.

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'Ah, papa,' said Willie, 'you laughed at us when we began to dig up the desert, but now you see seven Campbells can do more than you thought they could.'

'And now, when we want anything done, we may look to our seven Campbells for it, said Mrs. Campbell gaily. 'Honorius, you were the directing genius, were you not?'

'Yes, I believe I planned how it was to be, but it was Willie who first thought of it, and proposed that we should do it to please you. I am so glad you are satisfied with our work, mother.'

'Satisfied! I am delighted, my Emperor. But now that the desert is *put* in order, who is going to *keep* it so? Are we to look to our seven sons for that?'

'Yes, oh yes!' was chorused by six of the seven voices. Johnnie alone was silent; but his dimples were all in play, and he had never looked more roguish.

'Sans-terre means to steal a march on us, and do more than any of us, I do believe, though he

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won't make promises,' said Honorius.

'Sans-terre shall be sans-terre no longer,' said Dr. Campbell; 'he has earned back a right to his own plot of flower-garden, and may enter into possession again to-night, if he pleases.'

But Lackland shrugged his shoulders, and declined the burden of proprietorship.

'I don't care to have any garden of my own, thank you, papa,' he answered; 'I'm happier without it than with it, and there's plenty of work for me here. I never want to have anything belonging to me except a sword.'

'And some clothes, Johnnie,' said Seymour, who was very matter-of-fact.

The boys laughed, and Johnnie replied, 'Oh, certainly, Seymour. I'm not prepared to adopt the full dress of a Mexican general even—a cocked hat and a pair of spurs; I must have a full suit of uniform, at any rate. But I mean to say I'll never be bothered with a house or a wife, or anything like that.'

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'Ah, Johnnie,' said his father, 'I may say to you in the words of the old song,

"Bide ye yet, and bide ye yet,
Ye dinna ken what'll betide ye yet."

For aught you know,

"A canty wee house and a cosie wee fire,
And a bonnie wee bodie to praise and admire,"

may be your destiny; and perhaps some day you will appreciate those treasures as much as I do now.'

Johnnie looked incredulous. But the attention of all was diverted by the sudden appearance of a sun-burnt, grinning face over the paling which separated the kitchen garden (no longer desert) from the road.

'That's Bob Middleton, I declare!' said Honorius. 'Do you know, papa, Farmer Jennings has taken him to work in his hay-field, and says if he does well he may perhaps keep him as a farm-labourer?'

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'And Mrs. Middleton told Mrs. Western that Bob was beginning to hold up his head a bit, and that if he had only a decent jacket she really thought he would go to church with her on Sundays,' said Willie.

'Honorius has an old jacket that is only fit for giving away,' said Mrs. Campbell; 'don't you think we might make poor Bob a present of it, dear Archibald?'

'Oh do, papa,' cried the boys unanimously.

Dr. Campbell had no objection; so Honorius ran into the house to fetch the jacket, observing, 'I shall tell him to take himself off when I've given it him; it's not manners to stare over at us in this way.' When he returned, however, from his colloquy with the grinning Bob, he explained, 'He doesn't mean to be rude, he says, but he's so pleased that we've made the desert so trim, and that "madam," as he calls mamma, is able to come out and see it. He's immensely pleased with the jacket, but he doesn't want to go away till he's spoken to Johnnie and Willie.'

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Willie ran off at once. Johnnie turned to go with equal haste, then paused and glanced at his father: the forgiven fault had *not* been forgotten.

'Yes, go, my man,' said Dr. Campbell; 'and you may bring Bob in if you like, just to take a turn round the garden; but don't encourage him to stay.'

'Oh, and mayn't we give him Geroldinga's apple?' said Duncan; but the Doctor answered, laughing, 'that that would be anything but a benevolent present, and that Geroldinga's solitary fruit had better be allowed to ripen.'

'I shan't take it,' said Archie, thus innocently revealing, what was indeed the case, that he felt some temptation to do so.

'Nor baby won't,' said Georgie manfully.

'No, my little boys will not touch what is not their own,' said the mother, glancing down tenderly at the two small faces; 'and some summer, perhaps, we may find Gozmaringa and the rest covered with apples, and then what apple dumplings we shall have!'

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Archie's broad smile told that he relished the idea. Georgie, to whom apple dumplings were as yet an unknown delicacy, looked grave and asked, 'Is appy dumpions nice?'

'Very,' said the laughing mamma. 'But see, here is Bob coming this way. Well, Bob, what do you think of my sons' work?'

'It's fust-rate,' said Bob, pulling his rough forelock. 'I hopes you finds yourself better, mum.'

'Much better, thank you, and very glad to be out again. I have been watching the hay-making in Farmer Jennings' field from my window; I was very glad to see *you* at work there, Bob.'

Bob made an indescribable contortion of his figure, charitably supposed to be intended for a bow, and passed on.

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'Madam looks palish,' he observed to Johnnie, who was escorting him about; 'I doubt she's not very hearty yet.'

'No, it'll be some time before she's quite strong. Has she ever spoken to you before, Bob?'

'Oh my! yes. Why, she brought me some doctor's stuff and some sweet cold drink when I was so bad with fever two winters ago, and she took and spoke up to me last autumn when I was throwin' stones at parson's chickens. Besides, I've seen her in the school when I was a little chap.' He was evidently proud of his acquaintance with so sweet-spoken and kind a lady, and when he left the garden with the jacket under his arm, remarked, 'I'll make a bigger haycock than e'er a one else in the field right under madam's window, that'll pleasure her, maybe, for it smells fust-rate, it does.'

He fulfilled his intention, and pleased Farmer Jennings so much by his cheerful industry in the hay-field, that he took him on trial for a month as farm-lad, and finding him tolerably satisfactory in that capacity, gave him permanent employment. His impudence was not at once conquered, and brought him into some trouble; but when he found that the farmer and his men would not put up with it as his mother had, he learned to put a check on it, and others besides the seven Campbells encouraged him in taking a turn for the better.

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Johnnie still remained 'sans terre,' by his own desire, but worked away in his father's garden as he never had done in the part that was called his own. He began to get on better at school too; and Willie joined him there after the summer vacation, and helped to keep him steady by his example and admonitions. For Willie had certainly a little taste for lecturing; and Lackland, the harum-scarum and good-humoured, was just the boy both to provoke it and to bear it: if he was a Du Guesclin in bravery, he was not in quarrelsomeness, and nothing that Willie could say ever made him angry. The mother, too, became well and strong again, able once more to exercise her sweet influence through all the household; and between the father's firmness and the mother's gentleness, those seven boys were well and wisely trained.

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Many years have passed since then, and the seven Campbells are no longer boys. Honorius has been taken into partnership with his father, and is known by the whole country-side as 'the young doctor;' Johnnie is serving the Queen in a line regiment in India; and Willie has lately been ordained, and is working hard as a curate in a large manufacturing town. So three of the seven have had their wish. But Seymour has been taken by one of his uncles, a rich banker, into his counting-house; Duncan is not gone to sea,—he has just passed a competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service; as for Archie, he is still only a schoolboy, and he and Honorius live at home, while the others are scattered far and wide.

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But nowhere on earth could you find all those seven Campbells now, and there has never been any need to decide on a profession for Georgie: the youngest, the darling, the flower of the flock, has been called to rest the first. Wide tracts of sea and land lie between the mother and her darling Johnnie, and a wider distance still severs her from her little George, yet to her the seven are but as one band, united for ever by a common faith and mutual love. And so much is this the feeling of them all, that if you should chance to meet one of those Campbells, and to ask of their number, I think, like the child in the ballad, he would answer, 'We are Seven.'



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CECIL'S MEMORABLE WEEK.

CHAPTER I.

THE SENTENCE.



It would be hard to find a pleasanter family group than that which had gathered round the tea-table at Wilbourne Rectory one hot bright evening in the end of July: a kindly-looking mother, with a dark, sweet, brunette face, that *would* not be careworn spite of forty years of life, seven children, and a slender purse; a tall, slight, brown-bearded father, a little bald, and with deep lines of thought on the broad forehead and around

the rather sunken blue eyes; a fair, round-faced girl of fifteen, sitting next him; two smaller lasses, with long black hair almost straight, clear brown complexions, and a bit of bright scarlet bloom on each cheek, that was just like the mother's, only fresher and less fixed; a little curly-haired lad of eight, that was like nobody in particular; and last, but not least, a Sandhurst cadet, a well-grown youth of seventeen, with dark hair, cut very short in military style, and a little dark down on cheek and lip, which *he* called whiskers and moustaches. He sat on one side of his mother, and on the other sat a person who was *not* a member of the family—Mr. Cunningham's curate, a great big broad-shouldered young man, six feet three at least in height, with a pleasant, open face, rather sun-burnt, and the most good-tempered smile that you can possibly conceive. [74]

Two of the children of the house were absent—the second son, a midshipman in the Queen's service, who was now on his way to Japan; and the third, who was expected home this very evening from school. [75]

A little talk sprang up about him among his brothers and sisters, begun by a 'wonder' from one of the little girls as to when he would arrive; and strange to say, at the mention of his name, the lines on the father's brow deepened a little, and Mrs. Cunningham's face took for a moment quite a sorrowful expression.

'I almost hope he will not come till tea is over,' she said.

It did not sound like a motherly sentiment, but it was spoken out of the depths of a true motherly feeling.

Cecil Cunningham was coming home in a kind of disgrace. He had been placed at a good grammar school in the county town, some fourteen miles from Wilbourne, had won for himself an 'exhibition,' as it was called, by which the greater part of his school expenses were defrayed, and would have been allowed to keep it till he went to college had his progress during the first year been sufficiently good. But, alas! it had just been discovered that the marks he had gained for his various studies throughout this time did not, when counted up, amount to the rather high total which the founder's will required; and so it had been announced to him and his parents that he had forfeited the 'exhibition,' and could not be received at the school again unless his father were prepared to pay the full terms, which, though not very high, happened to be more than Mr. Cunningham could justly afford. The middy had lately been fitted out for sea. The son at Sandhurst was a considerable expense; and though it was hoped that after another six months he would succeed in getting a commission without purchase, there would be his outfit and yearly allowance to provide; and altogether, Mr. Cunningham did not see his way to giving Cecil such advantages as he could wish, without the help of that 'exhibition' which the boy had just lost by his own fault. [76]

Cecil was very clever, and, though rather idle by nature, had promised to work hard at school, and had been supposed to be conscientious enough to be sure to keep his word. He greatly wished to be a clergyman; and this desire of his had been an intense joy to his father, who, though a good deal disappointed at his two elder sons choosing army and navy, had consoled himself with the thought that *one* at least of his children had a real desire for the priesthood, and this the very one whose talents best fitted him for a university education. From school he was to have gone to Oxford; and his whole prospects had seemed fair enough till now, so that it was not wonderful that the unexpected news of his failure had occasioned great disappointment at the Rectory. His father was much displeased with him, and meant that he should feel how great a fault his idleness had been; and his mother, who knew this, and believed that her boy was *already* feeling it, was anxious that the first meeting should be got over without the presence of spectators. [77]

But just as she spoke, Cecil, followed by the gardener wheeling his luggage in a barrow, was seen coming up the gravel walk towards the house.

The little curly-haired boy rushed off at once to meet him,—not to open the hall door, for that stood wide open already,—but a restraining look from the mother stopped the girls, who were rising also; and when Cecil came in, the greetings were very quiet, though not in the least cold, except perhaps on Mr. Cunningham's part. Cecil had his mother's face, at once dark and bright, with brown clear eyes that looked full of intelligence, and, alas! seemed to say that their owner might have kept his place in the school with ease had he but so chosen. He did not seem very conscious or very miserable: he had the true boyish instinct of hiding feelings, and looked much as usual, though there was nothing like bravado or nonchalance in his manner. When his father shook hands with him gravely, and merely said, 'Well, Cecil,' in a short dry way, a sudden flush mounted up in his brown cheek; and there was a little anxiety in his face when he turned to kiss his mother, as if a sudden fear had come over him that she might refuse the caress. But she did not; and he sat down calmly enough to his bread and butter, showing a very tolerable schoolboy appetite, and munching away rather quickly when he found that the others were near the end of their meal. His sisters and his little brother volunteered some information about his rabbits, and so on; but when they began to ask questions concerning his schoolfellows, their father said quietly, 'Let Cecil have his tea,' and began a conversation about politics with the curate, in which none of the juniors ventured to join except the cadet. [78]

When they rose from the table, the two gentlemen went off to the study; and with a sigh of relief one of the little girls exclaimed, 'Oh, now you *can* come and see the rabbits, Cecil; father won't want you!' [80]

Cecil glanced at his mother; but though she was longing for a good hug and a little private talk, she thought it better to refrain just then, and said gently, 'Yes, you can go with Jessie, but don't go out of earshot;' after which she turned away and went up-stairs.

Jessie, who was just a year younger than Cecil, was his special friend and ally, and the other long-haired lassie considerably left them together, and went off to do some gardening; while little Lewis followed at a respectful distance, not able to tear himself quite away from Cecil, and yet not presuming to interrupt the confidential talk between him and his sister.

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The rabbit hutch was in a little yard not far from the house, and within view, as it happened, of the study window. Cecil stroked the soft creatures' ears, and fondled them a little, and fed them with some cabbage leaves with which Jessie supplied him; but his manner was rather absent, and presently he said abruptly, 'I say, Jessie, isn't it an awful shame?'

Jessie was not prepared for this view of the question.

'I am so sorry,' she said doubtfully. 'I never once thought of its happening till Dr. Lomax's letter came; for you know, Cecil, you told me you meant to work. Oh! don't you remember saying it here, in this very place, when you were making the new bars to Lop-ear's hutch?'

'Well, and I did,' said Cecil gruffly.

'Yes, I know you did; and that made me think you would do it.'

'Well, so I did do it—that's what I mean' said he more gruffly still.

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'Did work!' exclaimed she gladly, and quite ready of belief, with the tender trustfulness of a true sister. 'But oh, then, Cecil how was it that they didn't give you marks enough? I thought you would have lots to spare—I did indeed!'

'Humbug!' said Cecil, but not gruffly now; 'it's not so easy to get marks as all that. I was quite sure of having enough, though—so sure that I hadn't a second thought about it; and I can't tell to this moment how it was I didn't, except that Lomax is such a brute!'

'The Doctor!'

'No—his son, the junior master; it was he who counted up the marks.'

'Do you mean the marks you got at the examination?'

'No, the weekly marks I had got in all my studies during the half-year; that's the way they calculate to see whether one may keep the "exhibition."'

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'Do you think he can have made any mistake?'

'He might, perhaps, to spite me; it's not likely otherwise, for he's a dab at arithmetic. I asked the Doctor to let me see the book, but he wouldn't; and of course I couldn't tell him what I thought, and it would have been no use if I had.'

'And you did really work all the time?' said Jessie, looking at him tenderly and seriously out of her big black eyes.

'Well, almost all—not quite the last week or two, perhaps: it was awfully hot weather, and being so sure, I thought I might take it easy; but that couldn't have made the difference.'

'I wish you had been able to say you worked quite all the time,' said Jessie gravely, with a little sigh, 'for then father couldn't have been angry.'

'I'm afraid he's awfully vexed, isn't he?' said Cecil, with rather an anxious glance towards the study.

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'I think so; and Percy says' (Percy was the cadet) 'that he doesn't know how to manage about your education. Francie and I have been so anxious about it: it would be too dreadful if you were not to be a clergyman, wouldn't it, Cecil?'

Cecil said nothing, but absently doled out the last cabbage leaf to the rabbits in such small morsels, that they nibbled at his fingers as if they thought those part of the provender. Jessie was lost in a calculation of whether if Frances and she were to have no new frocks for a twelvemonth, and to save up all their pocket-money, that would make it possible for Cecil to go back to the grammar school, when Mr. Cunningham leaned out of the study window and called him.

Though he had been expecting the summons, he started and coloured violently, but ran off at once, going in by the back door, which was the nearest way.

Jessie went into a little tool-shed, which was close to the rabbits' dwelling-place. She did not like to watch the window, but was too anxious to be able to go and help Francie with her gardening, or to play with Lewis, who was wandering aimlessly about. 'Father,' who was so tender to his little girls, who was the very very best man, as Jessie believed, in the whole world, could nevertheless be very severe when he saw occasion—could reprove in a way which an offender was not likely to forget. He had wonderful patience for the blunders of little Lewis, who was rather dull, and found lessons a daily difficulty; but he had always expected much more of Cecil, who was really full of ability, and had sometimes dealt seriously with his fits of idleness in the days of his home teaching. And *now*—now when the boy had failed just when every principle

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of duty should have made him exert himself to the utmost—what could be looked for? Oh, what a bitter half-hour this must be to Cecil!

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Yes, for half an hour passed, and still Cecil did not come back. Jessie's fright and agitation were growing very hard to bear. 'Oh I know it is right!' she said, clasping her hands together; 'I know we *must* be scolded and punished for our faults; only I wish it was me, and not Cecil. And, after all, I think there must have been some mistake, for he says he *did* work; and if father could only believe it, I am sure he wouldn't be angry, even though Cecil *has* lost his place in school! Oh, I wish it could be made clear somehow! I know! I will ask God to make it clear.' And then the little girl prayed to the heavenly Father, whom the earthly father had taught her to seek in all her troubles.

Eight o'clock struck, and she started to her feet.

'Oh! I must go in and do my work—I shall only just be able to finish it before bed-time. Father must have gone to the choir practice. I wonder if he has taken Cecil with him, and if *that* is the reason why he hasn't come back?'

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With a deep-drawn breath of relief at this possibility, she ran into the house, and meeting her eldest brother in the hall, hastily inquired if he knew what had become of Cecil.

'He's in his room, I think,' was the answer. 'Poor little beggar! I fancied I heard him sobbing, and wanted to go in, but he wouldn't let me. I've just been telling Mary, that if I don't succeed in getting my commission without purchase I shall enlist as a private, and never come home at all. I couldn't stand seeing you all look as glum about me as you do about Cecil.'

'Oh, but, Percy, would that be—' began little Jessie in consternation; and then he laughed, and she saw that he was joking.

'Mother's been looking for you,' he said as she turned towards the staircase; 'she wants you to do some work.'

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'Where's father?'

'Gone to the choir practice a quarter of an hour ago. Good-bye; I'm going out for a stroll. Try and cheer up that poor little chap; perhaps he'll let you in, as you're his chum.'

Jessie longed to try that moment, but she knew she was due at her needle-work, and very unwillingly went into the drawing-room, where her mother and sisters were sitting round a lamp-lit table, stitching away very busily at a new set of shirts for Percy.

'I was looking for you, Jessie,' said the mother in her pleasant voice; 'come and work at double speed, to make up for lost time.'

Jessie had never felt less disposed to work; but when Mrs. Cunningham made room for her, and gave her the seam she was to do, with a kindly sympathy in tone and glance that seemed to say she knew just what the little girl was feeling, though she wasn't going to talk about it, all her unwillingness melted away. 'Mother is sad too,' she thought. 'I won't do anything to vex her;' and so she worked away as neatly and diligently as she could till nine o'clock, which was her bed-time.

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'I may go to Cecil before I go to bed, mother, mayn't I?' she whispered as she was bidding good-night.

Mrs. Cunningham gave permission, and Jessie rushed up-stairs two steps at a time, but controlled herself to give a very gentle tap at Cecil's door. It must have been too gentle, for he took no notice of it; but in answer to another, rather louder, came the question, 'Is it you, Jessie?' And when he found it was, he opened the door, which was locked, and let her in.

He seemed to have been unpacking, for his little portmanteau was open on the floor, and some of his clothes and other possessions were strewn upon the bed and the one chair, which was the only seat that the little attic could boast; but he was flushed, and his eyes were red, as if he had been crying, and he turned away abruptly from his sister when he had let her in, and began to dive into the portmanteau again.

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'Can't I help you?' said she, not knowing well how to begin her task of comfort. 'I'll fold up the clothes and put them in the drawers, while you take out the books. Oh! perhaps you meant to leave them in, though. You won't want them for the holidays?'

'Pretty holidays!' said Cecil passionately, more to himself than to her. 'A single week!'

'I don't understand,' she rejoined in consternation. 'You're not going back to school in a week, surely?'

'I'm not going back to Eastwood at all, but I'm going to a horrid, odious, beastly little day school in Fairview;' and Cecil flung out some books upon the floor, in a manner which did not bespeak very exemplary submission to his father's decrees.

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The information itself, and Cecil's terrible adjectives, both dismayed Jessie, and for a minute or two she did not speak. Then she said, 'But surely there must be holidays at the day school too?'

'They're just over—they began in June. Of

course those sort of places don't break up at the same time as the public schools, like *we* do,' said Cecil with wrathful contempt.

'And must you begin when the school does?'

'I've got to—that's all; it's to be my punishment, father says,—just as if losing the exhibition were not punishment enough!' And he buried his face in the portmanteau to hide his tears.

Jessie came over to him and hugged him, and he didn't seem to mind, though she could only kiss the side of his cheek and his shirt collar, for the greater part of his face was hidden among the books.

'Did you tell him you worked nearly all the time?' she faltered in an unsteady voice.

'I began to say something, and he asked me if I could honestly say I had done my very best, and I couldn't quite say that, you know, and then he wouldn't hear any more. And oh, I'm sure he thinks I did nothing but idle my time away!'

'Did you tell him you thought there must be some mistake?'

'I said something about Lomax spiting me, but he wouldn't listen to that.'

'Oh no,' said Jessie, who readily understood that her father would never admit *that* explanation of the affair. 'Oh, Cecil, I am so sorry, so *very* sorry!'

'If I had really been idle,' said Cecil, raising up his tear-wet face, more crimson than ever from its sojourn in the box, 'then I shouldn't care—I mean, it would only be fair that I should be served out for it; but when I haven't—when I have tried all this year—oh!—' and he was nearly choked by the sobs which, in his desire to be manly, he was struggling to repress.

Jessie believed him entirely, and was grieved to the very heart. 'I am so sorry,' she repeated. 'But, dear Cecil, *God* knows; He sees you have been trying; *He* isn't angry with you.'

'Then why does He let this happen?' said Cecil fiercely.

Jessie was startled and shocked, and had no answer ready. 'I don't know,' she said at last, through her tears; 'I can't tell why, but He is so good—oh, He is *so* good!—perhaps it will all come right still. I will ask Him; and you will, won't you, Cecil? Isn't there something in the Bible about its being acceptable with God, if we do well and suffer for it?'

'Yes; but I'm not suffering because I've done well, but because I'm supposed to have done ill,' said Cecil gloomily. 'There's no good talking, Jessie; you'd better go to bed.'

'Perhaps I had,' said Jessie, a sudden thought striking her as she heard her father's voice in the passage below; 'but I can't bear to leave you, Cecil. I am so sorry, and I do love you so!'

He half returned her tender, sorrowful hug; and then she ran away, but not straight to her own room. She darted down one flight of stairs, and caught hold of her father, who had come in from the practice, and had been washing his hands before going to supper.

'Father,' she said breathlessly, 'please let me say it: Cecil *has* been working—he has indeed. Oh, I am sure you would believe it if you had heard what he said to me just now!'

Mr. Cunningham did not draw himself away from the detaining clasp, but he said gravely, 'I quite believe that Cecil does not think he has been so very idle, but he admits that he has not done his best, and I hope in a little while he will see all his fault, and be sorry for it. Don't let him talk to you any more to-night.'

'But don't you think there may have been some mistake?'

'No, indeed,' he answered in a surprised tone, which showed that no such supposition had ever entered his head.

Then, as she still lingered, he stooped to kiss her, and said kindly, 'Don't try to comfort Cecil with such an idea as that, my child, but see if you can encourage him to do his best for the future.'

'And—father,' she said timidly, 'is he really only to have a week's holiday?'



'JESSIE CAME OVER TO HIM AND HUGGED HIM.'

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'Yes,' said Mr. Cunningham in his most decided tone; then more gently he added, 'I am afraid that is punishing you as well as him, but it can't be helped; and as he is only going to a day school, you will not lose him entirely.'

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Remembering the adjectives Cecil had heaped upon the day school, Jessie could not feel this to be quite consolatory; but she only said 'Good-night, father,' and held up her face for another kiss, which was given very tenderly.

Poor little girl! there was a great deal of grief and perplexity in her heart that night; but the comfort was, that though she so pitied Cecil, she did not distrust the goodness of either the heavenly or the earthly father. She could not see the why and wherefore of it all; but when she had said her prayers, she laid herself down to sleep trustfully and patiently, while Cecil was tossing and tumbling about, feeling as if everybody except Jessie were against him.



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CHAPTER II.

A BACHELOR'S LUNCH.



HE bells were ringing for Sunday Morning Prayer at Wilbourne Church, and the congregation was pouring in at the large west door, and the choir boys taking the little path towards the vestry, when Mr. Yorke, the tall curate, opened the small side gate, which was his nearest entrance to the churchyard.

He was passing quickly along, when he caught sight of a boy leaning over the paling a little beyond the gate, in rather a disconsolate attitude; and first he paused for a minute, and then struck across the grass and laid his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder.

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'Come in with me, Cecil,' he said in his most cheery tone—knowing that the lad usually formed one of the choir when at home, and thinking that his ill success at school had made him shy of facing the other choristers, who probably knew all about it by this time.

'No, I mustn't,' said Cecil, turning round abruptly and colouring very much.

Mr. Yorke was surprised, and showed it. Knowing that Cecil's general conduct at school had been very good, he had not thought that exclusion from the choir would have formed part of his punishment.

'It's not because of *that*,' said the boy, reading his thoughts in his open, kindly face, 'at least not of that alone; it's because I don't say I'm sorry, and behave as I'm expected to behave. But oh, if father knew—'

He broke off and turned his face away; but Mr. Yorke, who liked the boy well, and had one of those sympathetic natures that can feel for everybody's troubles, was touched by the bitter, hopeless tone.

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'Suppose you come home with me after service, and spend the rest of the day with me,' said he, feeling it might really do the boy good to have his Sunday free from the sort of atmosphere of disgrace which he felt or fancied surrounded him at home.

He could see that Cecil caught at the notion, by the eager way in which he looked up; though the answer was,

'Thank you; but perhaps father wouldn't like it.'

'I don't think he will mind; I'll ask him myself. Don't suppose I'm inviting you to any great treat: cold mutton and bread and marmalade are about all that I have to offer. I don't like to keep my landlady from church.'

'Oh, thanks,' said Cecil, laughing, not at all as if the prospect alarmed him; and Mr. Yorke laughed too, and saying, 'Well, then, look out for me after service,' strode away across the grass, looking back, however, at the vestry door, to see if Cecil were turning his steps towards the church.

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Cecil had not at all liked the idea of taking his place among the congregation: he thought that those who noticed him would wonder why he was not in the choir, and in his present mood the least humiliation was intolerable to him. The two days which had intervened since his coming home had not been well or happily spent: he had gone about in a sulky injured way, keeping aloof from his father and mother, answering shortly when spoken to, and being anything but sociable even with his brothers and sisters. Some of them had almost ceased to be sorry for him, because he made himself, as they said, 'so disagreeable;' but his faithful friend Jessie had borne with him

uncomplainingly, and continued to feel for him with all her heart. He was a little cheered now by the thought that Mr. Yorke felt for him too, and did not seem to condemn him altogether; and so—rather slowly—he walked towards the church and went in, and took a place near the door, where he thought scarcely anybody would see him. [102]

His thoughts wandered far and wide during the prayers, though now and then he recalled them by an effort, and tried to attend for at least a few minutes; but he could not help listening to the sermon, which was preached by his father—his father, whom at the bottom of his heart he did warmly love and respect, spite of all the rebellious feelings of the last day or two. The text was, 'While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being;' and there followed a beautiful, fervent exhortation to the spirit of constant praise, and then a consideration of the hindrances which check this flow of thankfulness in Christian souls. Cecil listened most attentively, and with a kind of awe, when among these was named the pride of heart which would not acknowledge as deserved such punishment as God might send, either directly from Himself or through others—the temper which called it 'very hard' that this or that suffering should be laid upon us. He did not suppose that his father was thinking of him—nor was he; but in the vivid description of feelings which followed he recognised his own, and a strange thrill of heart seized him when Mr. Cunningham went on: 'There is no peace like the peace of those who have conquered all such rebellious impulses, such self-justifying thoughts, who have given themselves up lovingly to God to be chastened as much and as long as He wills. There is no praise like the praise of a soul that can say with holy Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" or with Habakkuk, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."' [103]

'If I had sung in the choir to-day, it wouldn't have been real praise; I shouldn't have thought of it or meant it,' Cecil owned to himself; and it did not seem to him so hard as before that he had been excluded, though he was far from entering fully into the spirit of submission which Mr. Cunningham had set before his people as the thing to be longed and striven for. Entering fully! Ah, with most of us it takes a lifetime to do that; but none of us are too young to *begin* to learn it. [104]

Cecil went back to his old position by the churchyard palings after service to wait for Mr. Yorke, but could not quite escape some greetings from his village friends, who were 'glad to see him back, and hoped he had his health.' He looked up anxiously when he saw his father and the curate come forth from the vestry together; but they soon parted, and Mr. Yorke came across the grass to him, saying, 'All right, Cecil; you can come home with me.' [105]

'Home' was some bachelor lodgings in a very rustic cottage with a porch all overgrown with Tangier peas, and a queerly-shaped dining-room, the ceiling of which was so low that Mr. Yorke's head seemed but a little way off it as he walked about. On the other side of the passage was a drawing-room, wonderfully smart and uncomfortable, with groups of wax fruit under glass shades on rickety tables, crochet couvrettes over the back of almost every chair as well as on the sofa, and a wonderful festoon of green and yellow tissue paper round the glass above the mantelpiece. Mr. Yorke took Cecil in there while the cloth was being laid, but told him he never sat there, as there was not a single chair which would bear his weight, nor a table which did not creak when it was leant upon. [106]

'I should turn all this trumpery out, and make Mrs. Keeling give me something sensible,' said Cecil, with a boy's rough-and-ready way of disposing of difficulties.

'No, you wouldn't, if you saw what a delight she takes in it all, and what a solace it is to her to come and dust and admire. Between the dining-room and a little den I have up-stairs, I do very well. I only hope you'll have as snug a little hole and as worthy a little landlady when *you* are a curate in lodgings.'

'I don't know whether I shall ever be a clergyman now,' said Cecil gloomily.

Mr. Yorke, who was standing at the window looking out, while his guest had ventured on one of the dangerous chairs, turned round in surprise. 'You don't mean to say you are giving up that? I thought you had wished it ever since you were four years old.'

'So I have; and if I had stayed at Eastwood, I might some day have got one of the Hulston scholarships, and that would have helped me at college; but now there's no chance for me. I'm going to old Bardsley's day school in Fairview, and there's nothing to be got *there*.' [107]

'Still I wouldn't give up if I were you, my boy; I would keep the hope before me. There's nothing like a high aim to help one through the drudgery of school-work, and keep one out of stupid, little, mean temptations.'

'I know, and it was for that I worked,' said Cecil, 'at least for that chiefly; but it was all no use, and it doesn't seem worth while to try any more.'

Mr. Yorke, who had supposed that Cecil *hadn't* worked, did not quite know what answer to make to this.

'I think it seems more worth while than ever,' he said after a minute. 'If one has lost ground, one must make it up again somehow. You know you might be ordained even without going to Oxford, though I don't mean to say that a college education is not a good thing, if one can have [108]

it.'

'Father went to Oxford, and so did you, didn't you?' said Cecil.

'Yes, there was no difficulty about that, as it happened; but my way was not all smooth, any more than yours. I had not been meant for a clergyman, and there were objections to be got over, and a good deal that was discouraging; but it all came right at last.'

He broke off his sentence rather abruptly, but in his heart it was ended thus: 'Thanks be to God for it.'

If Cecil had ever seen the luxurious home from which the curate came, or had known what good worldly prospects he had given up to enter holy orders, he would have made quite a hero of him in his own mind; but, even as it was, he looked up admiringly at the tall manly figure and bright resolute face. He liked to feel that Mr. Yorke was his friend, and for the moment longed to tell him all his trouble, and see if he could give him more help in bearing it than little Jessie could. But he was shy of beginning; and before he had opened his lips, a plump little old woman in a black silk dress and spotless apron appeared at the door, and announced, 'Your lunch is ready, sir.'

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Lunch!—so they were to dine late; and though the cold mutton was not likely to prove a much greater dainty at six than at one, Cecil felt a little pride and pleasure in keeping such grown-up hours.

In honour of the young guest, Mrs. Keeling had set out every small luxury that either her lodger or she possessed; and there were poached eggs, and gooseberries, and sardines, and honey, and pickles, and gingerbread, and potted meat, arranged with great display upon the table, while the bread and butter and cheese, as being altogether ordinary, were exiled to a little sideboard behind Mr. Yorke's chair.

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'Is there anything more you require, sir?' said the old dame before withdrawing, in a complacent tone that seemed to say, What *could* they require when such a variety was before them?

'Thank you, let me see: would you like some mutton, Cecil?'

Mrs. Keeling almost frowned at this proposal. How could the good young gentleman be so inconsiderate, she thought, as to propose to his visitor for *lunch* what was by and by to come up for *dinner*? She was quite relieved, however, by Cecil's eager negative, and went off to her kitchen well satisfied; while Mr. Yorke, after saying grace, proceeded to do the honours of the repast.

'May I give you some pickles, Cecil?' he said mischievously. 'I don't see anything to eat with them, so I suppose they are meant to form a course by themselves.'

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'They wouldn't be bad with bread and cheese,' rejoined Cecil, laughing; 'some of our seniors eat them with all sorts of things.'

'Well, you can try the combination if you like, but I don't see any cheese; and oh, hulloa! there's no bread either. Will you ring the bell while I help the eggs?'

'I see them—they're behind you—I'll get them,' and Cecil jumped up and set down the bread, but, among the array of dishes which covered the small table, could find no room for the butter or cheese.

'We can turn out the pickles, and the gooseberries too, for the present,' said Mr. Yorke with a look of amusement. 'Thank you, Cecil; I seem to have brought you here to wait upon me.'

'Oh, it's such fun!' said Cecil delightedly. A thoroughly well-arranged meal would not have given him half the pleasure that this queer little bachelor lunch did.

Before it was over, his spirits were such as entirely to satisfy his host; and Mrs. Keeling, when she came to clear away, was gratified to find that her home-made gingerbread had by no means been despised, though she had been a little offended in the interval by water being rung for. What could Mr. Yorke be thinking of, to let the little gentleman drink water, when there was cowslip wine and raspberry vinegar of her own making in the house, supposing that ordinary wine or beer were thought too strong for him?

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But Cecil had affirmed that he always drank water at home, and wished for nothing else, and Mr. Yorke knew better than to try to lead him to other tastes. He liked Cecil's bringing-up altogether—the hardiness and the good sense of it, and the kindness that was never spoiling; and could sympathize the more with the boy, under the cloud which had come between him and his father, because he knew how happy the relations between them had been till now. He was ready to talk about school and cricket, and his own younger brothers, and anything that seemed to interest him; and was rather startled when, as they sat together after lunch in a queer little arbour at the end of the garden, Cecil suddenly said, 'Do you think a person can help being miserable when they are punished for a fault they haven't done?'

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'I think it is a great trial,' he answered after a moment's reflection. 'But surely they would have more reason to be miserable if they *had* committed the fault.'

Cecil pondered over this a minute; then he said, 'But how is it *just* that they should be

punished for what they haven't done?'

'Why, I suppose the person punishing thinks they have done it.'

'Yes, the person,' said Cecil,—and there he hesitated,—'I mean,' he said at last, not irreverently, but in a low, earnest tone, 'why are things like *this let* happen?'

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Mr. Yorke could only guess what 'this' was, and did not seek to have it explained, not wishing to make himself a judge of anything that lay between Cecil and his father.

'You mean, why is disgrace allowed to come upon a person which they cannot feel they have deserved? I don't think we can always tell why—I think we must be content to trust and submit; but it may often be to teach them some lesson which they could not have learned without it. For instance, suppose a very proud person were punished for telling an untruth, which he had not really told: the humiliation might be a check to his pride, and in that way might be for his real good.'

'And he deserved it, you mean, for being proud, though he didn't for untruth?'

'Yes; and when he came to see this, he would no longer say it was very hard.'

This reminded Cecil of his father's sermon, which indeed Mr. Yorke had in his mind when he spoke. He was silent a good while, then he began on what seemed at first another subject. 'If something that wasn't your own fault had come to hinder you when you were being educated for a clergyman, shouldn't you have thought you weren't meant to be one?'

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'I think it would have depended on what the hindrance was, and a good many other circumstances. It isn't only book-learning that makes people fit to be clergymen; perhaps I might have been hindered in that, only to make me more fit in some other way.'

'What kind of way?'

'Well, I might have needed to learn submission or humility, or a hundred things.'

Cecil clasped both hands round his knees, and went swaying himself backwards and forwards in a queer kind of way that was more reflective than polite.

'I suppose it wouldn't do for a clergyman to be cock-a-hoop,' he said presently.

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'Well, not exactly, if he meant to be in any sense an example to his flock,' returned Mr. Yorke with a smile.

'I know I was very cock-a-hoop just before this disappointment came,' thought Cecil, 'and that last week I was careless and all. I wonder whether that is why all this has happened!'

He did not say any of this aloud, but it was not pride that kept him from the avowal, only a very natural and reasonable shyness of talking about himself. He stopped rocking, and sat with his gaze fixed on the trees in the distance, without really seeing them a bit. A new feeling of half-dismayed contrition was springing up in his heart, but the bitterness of resentment and the sense of injury were passing away.

He started when the church bells began to ring. There was evening prayer, with catechizing, at three o'clock at Wilbourne Church, and evening prayer again, with a sermon, at seven. 'Are you going, sir?' he said as Mr. Yorke rose up.

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'Not to church now, but I must be off to Bar-end, where I have my class of hobbledehoys from the farms.'

'Do you think father will expect me at the catechizing?'

'I should think he would be glad to see you there.'

'I mustn't stand with the choir, I suppose,' said Cecil, hesitating.

'No; but I think, if I were you, I should be all the more anxious to go. You're not sulking, I can see, Cecil; so why should you let any one think you are?'

'I have been, though,' said Cecil rather awkwardly, breaking through his shyness now that truth seemed to require it.

'Well, Sunday is a good day for turning over a new leaf,' said Mr. Yorke, with a smile in his eyes that seemed to make no doubt at all of Cecil's willingness to do it.

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'It seemed so hard at first,' he answered, feeling as if he must excuse himself a little.

'Yes, it *is* a struggle sometimes to accept one's position; but when once one has, all the bitterness goes, and one finds oneself not half so miserable as one expected.'

How true this was, Cecil soon began to find out from his own experience. It was a struggle to take his place beside the schoolboys, instead of with the choir, at the catechizing; it cost him something to open his lips when first his father seemed to address a question to him, but after the first effort it was not half so hard as he had thought it would be. He answered thoughtfully and well, and, without putting himself unduly forward, showed that he was paying attention, and was really anxious to

understand and to learn.

Jessie ran up to him in the churchyard after service.

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'Oh, Cecil, I am so glad you came! I thought you would have gone to Bar-end with Mr. Yorke. Are you coming home now?'

'No, I am going back to his place; he said I might amuse myself with his books till he came in. I haven't had dinner yet,' and Cecil felt a momentary importance in saying it.

'How hungry you must be!' rejoined Jessie innocently. 'Are you going, Cecil? I shall wait for father.'

'Here he is!' said Frances, who was waiting also.

Cecil felt an impulse to rush away instantly, but was glad he had not, when his father said in a kind voice, 'Are you coming with us, Cecil?' Though he answered, of course, in the negative, his heart felt lighter for that kind tone and those few casual words. It was his own sulkiness which had made great part of his misery before, and he could see that plainly now that he was beginning to get the better of it.

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The rest of the day passed very pleasantly, and Cecil enjoyed his talk with his good-natured friend very much, though nothing more was said on the one subject which absorbed him the most. It was quite bed-time when he went home, so he had no opportunity of putting in practice that night the good resolutions which were springing up within him; but the next day all the brothers and sisters remarked how much more amiable he was, and little Jessie's intense belief in his goodness revived in full force. He was not so merry as usual: it was impossible he should be after his deep disappointment, and with the sense of his father's displeasure resting on him, and the prospect of the day school before him. Both father and mother were touched sometimes when they caught the sad expression of his face; but he was no longer sullen; and if a pettish word escaped him, he seemed to catch himself up quickly before it could be followed by another.

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'I can't see the rights of it yet,' he said to Jessie privately, 'nor why I should be so served out for not working, when I *did* work; but I think there were things—feeling set up, you know, and crowing over other fellows, and all that—which may have brought me in for this in a kind of way.'

Jessie could hardly bring herself to believe that he could have deserved it in *any* way, but his submission was much less grievous and perplexing to her than his rebellion had been; and she received these few words—spoken rather gruffly, with his back turned to her—as a great proof of confidence, which indeed they were.

'If being very good makes people ready to be clergymen, I'm sure Cecil's getting ready as fast as he can,' she remarked to Frances.

And though Frances was not so firmly convinced as her sister that Cecil's troubles had not been brought on him by his own fault, she answered readily, 'Yes, he has been so nice and pleasant since Sunday, and hasn't grumbled once about having to go to Mr. Bardsley's.'

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CHAPTER III.

GOOD NEWS.



MR. BARDSLEY'S was rather a large day school, in a town about two miles distant from Wilbourne. His terms were low, and he was not particular who the boys might be that came to him, so that they behaved themselves when they did come; but he taught really well, and was very conscientious, and therefore even very careful parents allowed their sons to go to him, convinced that there they would be at least well grounded in classics and mathematics, and would learn nothing amiss from the general tone of the school, though individual pupils in it might not be all that could be wished.

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Cecil was to start from home each day about half-past eight, and not to return till after the school broke up at five o'clock, except on the two half-holidays—Wednesday and Saturday. Eight miles' walking would have been too much for him; and it had been arranged that on the four other days he should dine with Mr. and Mrs. Bardsley, and his hours of work would be from nine to twelve and from two to five, with tasks to prepare at home in the evening.

It seemed rather hard to begin this routine just in the first days of August, when the weather was so lovely, and the woods so enticing, and holiday cricket-matches going on in Wilbourne Park. Cecil's face was a little dismal at breakfast



'GOOD-BYE, CECIL.'
See page 124.

the first morning, and it was real self-government which kept him from grumbling when Jessie was helping him to put his schoolbooks together. Just as they were firmly strapped, his mother came to bid him 'good-bye for a few hours,' with a tender kiss and a few cheerful words, and after that his heart felt lighter, and he set out bravely; but he was just beginning to think what a long dull walk it was, and what a dusty road, and how delightful it would be if he might shy his books over the hedge and strike off across the meadows to join Percy, who had gone out fishing, when he heard steps behind him, and turning, saw the tall curate running along with rapid strides. His first impression was that something had happened at the Rectory since he started, and that Mr. Yorke was come to take him back; but he was soon undeceived.

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'I've got business in Fairview,' the young clergyman explained, 'and I meant to go in early; and when I saw you pass by, I thought I might as well get ready and try to overtake you. I like company myself; don't you?'

'Yes, very much,' said Cecil, swinging his books over his shoulder cheerfully again, instead of dangling them drearily from the end of the strap, as he had been doing before. 'Lewis wanted to come with me, but mother wouldn't have liked his walking back alone; and besides, one doesn't always want a little chap like that

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after one.'

'I thought Percy might want to get his watch-chain mended,' said Mr. Yorke, with rather a droll expression in his eyes. 'Doesn't it require mending periodically? That was what he always used to tell me last vacation, when I met him going into Fairview.'

'He hadn't had his watch long then, and was always taking it out to look at it,' said Cecil, laughing. 'I think that was how the chain got broken. He's used to it now. I wonder if Uncle Percy will give *me* a watch when I'm sixteen. Of course Percy wanted one particularly, because of his going to Sandhurst. He's gone out fishing this morning: mustn't it be jolly in the water-meadows?'

'Very; but how well this part of the road is watered!—it's quite pleasant walking here. I suppose the Fairview water-carts come out as far as this.'

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'I wish they'd come all the way,' said Cecil; 'I was just thinking how dusty it was before I met you.'

'And I was wondering whether you chose the road instead of the path on purpose, because you *liked* the dust: there's no accounting for tastes.'

'I'll try the path next time,' said Cecil with a smile. 'Do you know old Bardsley, Mr. Yorke?'

'Yes, I met him at the Institute one day, and we had a lively discussion about Greek roots. He's a clever man, I think, and has a real taste for teaching. When he gets hold of a fellow that cares to learn, I'm told there's no limit to the pains he'll take with him.'

'Jim Payne didn't like him at all,' said Cecil, alluding to the son of a small farmer in the neighbourhood; 'he said he was an awful brute.'

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'Jim Payne likes nothing but idleness, and his father is mistaken enough to let him have his way.'

Cecil wisely suppressed some further quotations which he had meant to make from Jim Payne's account of Mr. Bardsley; and they walked on sociably together, talking of other things. It really seemed quite a short walk, after all, though Cecil had fancied it very long when he first set out.

He was in tolerably good spirits when he trod that road again in the evening, though this time he was alone the whole way. He did not dislike either the school or the schoolmaster as much as he had expected; and he felt that if he worked hard, and conformed to rules, there was no danger of his ever finding Mr. Bardsley the terrible monster that Jim Payne had described him to be.

It would, and did, seem a drudgery to prepare school tasks that evening, while Percy was enjoying 'elegant leisure;' but there was the Saturday half-holiday to look forward to, and Cecil's health was good, and not likely to suffer from his speedy return to work. Seeing him so patient and industrious, his father wondered how it was that he still expressed no sorrow for his past idleness, but did not press him for any such acknowledgment. He believed that it would come in time, and was quite content to take his present good conduct as a sign of penitence. 'He would

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not bear his punishment so well if he were not really sorry for his fault,' he said to himself.

'You are not angry with Cecil now, father, are you?' said Jessie softly the next morning, as they stood watching him trudge down the gravel path towards the gate on his way to school.

'No; very much pleased in some ways,' he answered. 'How late the post is this morning! I'm afraid old Hawkins is stopping for a long chat with Mrs. Giles. Just run down the lane and see; and if there is any letter for me, bring it at once to my study. I have to go out in five minutes.' [131]

Jessie was running off directly, with her long hair streaming in the wind, when her mother called to her to put something on; and she came back, snatched her garden-hat and holland cape from their peg, and flew away again. Yes, the old postman was standing gossiping with Mrs. Giles at her garden gate, just as Mr. Cunningham had foreseen. When Jessie breathlessly inquired if there were any letters for the Rectory, the old man answered composedly, 'Yes, Missy, three letters for your house—two for your reverend father, and one for Miss Mary. Shall I take 'em round, or shall I give 'em to you?'

'Oh, I'll take them, please,' said Jessie; and back she flew with them, and straight into the study she went, holding out the two that belonged to Mr. Cunningham. [132]

'Thanks. This is the one I wanted, from your Uncle Percy,' he said as he took them from her; 'and this is from Dr. Lomax. What makes him write again, I wonder?'

'Oh, father, do open it, please!' said Jessie excitedly, a sudden hope springing up in her breast.

'My child, what can there be in it to signify? It is an account for some schoolbooks, perhaps,' said Mr. Cunningham, rather as if he thought her a very silly little girl. But when he looked up and saw her eager, quivering face, he added, with a smile, 'Well, to set your mind at rest, I will just take a glance.'

He opened the letter as he spoke, but it was much more than a glance which he gave it. A minute passed, two minutes, three, and still he read on and did not speak. Jessie never took her eyes off his face; hope and fear struggled together in her heart, and hope was uppermost. But for the gravity of her father's silence, she would have felt sure that all was coming right. [133]

At last he spoke. 'There was a mistake, Jessie: the marks were counted up wrong, it seems, and your brother has not been to blame, after all.'

'And not lost the "exhibition?"'

'No; his marks more than entitle him to keep it.'

'And you will let him go back next month, father?'

'Certainly. Why, my dear——' For Jessie was off like an arrow from a bow, and did not even hear his exclamation.

He supposed she had gone to tell the others, and paused to read over the letter once more, with deep thankfulness, and much sympathy for Cecil. It was from young Mr. Lomax, not from the Doctor: the similarity in the handwriting had misled Mr. Cunningham. He said the mistake had been discovered by his father, but that, as it had been made by him, he could not rest without personally acknowledging it, and expressing his regret. He had been himself surprised, in the first instance, at the result of his addition; but as he had only to do with Cecil in mathematics, in which he was not *remarkably* proficient, it did not seem so astonishing to him as it did to his father, who had watched the boy's progress in classics. Dr. Lomax had not gone over the books himself at the time, but having occasion to refer to them for something the morning of the day on which Mr. Lomax wrote, he had counted up Cecil's marks throughout the year, just for his own satisfaction, and in doing so had discovered the mistake that had been made. 'We have since been over it all together,' continued the son; 'and being now fully convinced of my mistake, I hasten to apprise you of it, and to express my deep regret.' If Cecil had seen this sentence, and some which followed, he would certainly have abandoned his idea that 'young Lomax might have done it to spite him.' [134]

'Mother!' called Mr. Cunningham, suddenly remembering the appointment which this letter had made him forget for a few minutes; and as his wife came running down in answer to his call, he went on: 'Has Jessie told you, love? I mustn't stay—but take the letter; I shall try to get down in time to meet that poor boy as he comes out from morning school.'

'I haven't seen Jessie,' Mrs. Cunningham answered; but she seemed to guess instinctively what the letter contained, and one glance at it confirmed her impression.

'My darling boy! oh, thank God!' she exclaimed. 'Lewis, you will bring him straight home with you, won't you?'

'If I don't, I shall have you following me and hugging him before the whole school,' said her husband, laughing, but almost with tears in his eyes; and he hurried away, while she went joyfully back to the drawing-room to tell Mary and Frances the good news. [135]

They literally 'jumped for joy;' and there was a kind of triple hug between the mother and her daughters, from which Frances was the first to break away, crying, 'Oh, where's Jessie? do let me tell her! how glad she will be!'

'She knows, I think,' said Mrs. Cunningham; 'it was she who brought father the letter. But find her by all means, and Lewis too, that we may all be happy together.'

Lewis was easily found, but nothing could be seen of Jessie; and presently her little brother was sent to the meadows where Percy was fishing, to see if she had run there with the tidings; but there she was not, and there was some consternation at the Rectory when the fact was announced.

'I really think she must have gone to Fairview,' said Mary anxiously.

'Perhaps she thought she could overtake Cecil,' suggested Frances. And though they did not know it, this guess hit the exact truth. [137]

When Jessie left the study, she firmly believed that if she were only quick enough she could catch Cecil, who was very likely to linger on his way; and she had a vision of finding him leaning over a certain gate which opened into a harvest-field, and which was a favourite halting-place with all the young people.

No, he was not at the gate; but Jessie, full of her one idea of overtaking him, flew on and on till she had reached the outskirts of the town, and still she saw nothing of him—the truth being, that not having allowed himself more than enough time for his walk that morning, he had hurried on instead of stopping anywhere, and was in school by this time. She was dismayed when the country road began to turn into a street, and realized for the first time how far she had come. She had not had a thought of doing wrong when she began to run after Cecil, but now she was struck with a sudden sense of misdemeanour, and a fear that 'mother' would be angry. [138]

'I wonder if I ought to go back,' she said to herself, 'or whether I may just go on to Mr. Bardsley's! It isn't far now, and then Cecil could come back with me, I daresay. Perhaps I could still catch him just as he's going in.'

Inspired by this thought, she began to run again, and in a little while she was standing opposite the square brick house which she knew to be Mr. Bardsley's. There was not a sign of a boy on the steps, nor was there any sound of voices from the playground; evidently Cecil and his companions were already at study. She stood there, panting and weary, not very well knowing what to do next.



CHAPTER IV.

'IT'S ALL RIGHT!'

JESSIE fancied that if she rang the bell and asked for Cecil, she should be either sent away or shown into the great schoolroom; and the idea of facing Mr. Bardsley and all the boys seemed to her very terrible—almost too terrible to be entertained for a moment. But then, to leave Cecil in ignorance of the good tidings that she had run all this way to bring to him!—to let him go on through the day still feeling himself in disgrace, and not knowing that all was explained! No, she could not bear that either. She put up a trembling hand, and not daring to meddle with the big knocker, which looked prepared to make any amount of noise, took hold of the bell at the side of it, and gave a feeble tinkle, which would scarcely have been audible to the housemaid had she not happened to be close at hand cleaning the hall lamp. She opened the door so suddenly, that Jessie, who was prepared to wait some time, was quite startled, and so confused that she could not say anything. [140]

'Did you ring?' asked the maid sharply, looking down in amazement at the dusty little figure and flushed frightened face.

'Yes; oh, please,' said Jessie, recovering herself, 'is Master Cunningham here? and would you tell him that I want to speak to him a minute?'

'The young gentlemen are in school—they can't be disturbed now,' replied the servant, preparing to shut the door.

'But oh, please, if you would tell him I've come with news from home, and I want to see him so much,' said Jessie desperately; 'I'm his sister.' [141]

The maid looked hard at her, and Jessie felt sure she spied out the gloveless hands under the holland cape; but with as much dignity as she could muster, the child added, 'I'm Miss Jessie Cunningham;' and something in her tone and manner must have borne out the assertion, for with a quick 'Step in here, please, and I'll speak to Mrs. Bardsley,' the maid opened the door wider instead of shutting it, and allowed her to enter the hall.

She then gave her a chair, and went into a room close by, from which she soon reappeared, followed by a quiet-looking lady, not very old, but with a cap and spectacles, and something about her which made Jessie feel quite ashamed of her own heated, untidy condition.

'You have come with a message for Master Cunningham, I understand; I trust no accident has occurred at his home,' said Mrs. Bardsley in a voice as quiet as her face.

'Oh no! it's all good news, and I thought I should have overtaken him, but I didn't; and oh! if you would please let me see him, and then perhaps he would come back with me.' [142]

'I don't think he can return till after school, unless you have brought an order from his father to that effect,' said the schoolmaster's wife; 'but come and sit down, and then perhaps you will be able to explain yourself more fully.'

She took Jessie into a prim-looking sitting-room; and in rather a confused way the little girl did contrive to explain what had brought her, and how important her news would be to Cecil. 'And if Mr. Bardsley would let him come back with me I don't think father would mind, and mother would like it so much better than my going back alone. I oughtn't to have come, I'm afraid,' she wound up, feeling every minute more and more dismayed at herself.

'I fear you must be causing anxiety at home,' said Mrs. Bardsley, still rather stiffly. 'I will send and ask Mr. Bardsley to allow your brother to speak to you for a minute;' and she went out of the room, leaving Jessie alone. [143]

Some minutes passed, and Jessie grew more and more nervous; but at length appeared Cecil, looking very schoolboyish, with a great dab of ink on his collar.

She jumped off her chair and ran to him, and got out one great 'Oh, Cecil!' and then, instead of saying anything more, she began to sob.

'What is it? what's up?' said he in utter amazement. 'Don't cry, don't cry; is anything wrong at home?'

'Oh no! it's all right! and you've got enough marks, and you're to go back after the holidays. And oh, Cecil! I'm so glad! and I'm so hot, and I've run all the way!'

'And you're obliged to cry about it,' said Cecil, laughing, and kissing her. 'I say, sit down here in this arm-chair; there, I'll fan you with my pocket-handkerchief. How's it all come out? has the Doctor written—or what?' [144]

'Yes, I think it was he; and father's so glad, and he said himself you should go back. He counted up the marks wrong—not father, but somebody, you know—and you've got plenty, and you're not a bit to blame; father says you're not.'

A sort of dancing light came into the boy's black eyes, but he didn't say a word. Jessie was quite astonished, and a good deal disappointed, at his taking the matter so quietly.

'Aren't you glad?' she said; 'I thought you would have been ready to jump out of your skin for joy. I was; but I came straight off, thinking I should overtake you. How fast you must have walked to get here first! Oh, Cecil, do you think I could have a little water?'

'You're too hot to drink cold water,' said Cecil in a wise, elder-brotherly way. 'I've got an apple in my pocket; you shall have a bit of that.' [145]

It was rather a greenish specimen, and one bite of it more than satisfied Jessie, without refreshing her in the least; but she sat holding it in her hand, and looking at Cecil with loving eyes, too happy to mind much about her thirst and fatigue.

'Do you think Mr. Bardsley will let you come back with me?' she said presently.

'Not till twelve o'clock, I'm sure; perhaps he would then. Father didn't say I was to come, did he?'

'No, I was so silly I didn't wait to ask him; he didn't know I was coming. Cecil, do you think they will be very angry with me? I have never been so far alone before.'

'I'm afraid mother won't like it,' said Cecil; but he thought to himself that he should always love her for it; and if he had been a girl instead of a boy, he would have told her so. 'I must go back to study now; but I think you had better wait here, if Mrs. Bardsley will let you,' he continued, after a minute's reflection. [146]

'But what will they think at home? They must have missed me. Cecil, I'd better go;' and she stood up, feeling how dreary the lonely walk back would be, with those tired feet of hers that had run along so merrily when the thought of telling the joyful news had been the only one present to her mind.

'There's father, I do declare, in old Mr. Rawson's gig!' exclaimed Cecil, who was looking out of the window; and sure enough, at this moment, a funny old-fashioned carriage drew up at the door, and Mr. Cunningham got down from it and shook hands with the owner.

He was not afraid of the big knocker, but the maid was much longer in answering his rat-tat-tat than Jessie's feeble ring; and only a sense that they were not in their own house, and must not take liberties, restrained the children from opening the door themselves. They could not resist [147]

running out into the hall to meet him, thus forestalling any inquiry for them by their immediate appearance.

'Well, Cecil!'—oh, such a different 'well' from the one that had greeted him on his return for the holidays!—then to Jessie: 'And so you are *here*, little madam! Mother is making herself quite unhappy about you.'

Before Jessie could answer, he turned to the maid, asking her to request Mr. Bardsley to see him for a minute; and she ushered him into the sitting-room where the children had been, and went off with the message.

Then his little daughter got hold of his hand and whispered, 'I didn't mean to vex mother; I thought I could have overtaken Cecil. I am very sorry.'

'Well, I don't think I need tell you not to do such a thing again,' said Mr. Cunningham with a smile, 'for the temptation is not likely to recur. These things don't happen every day; do they, Cecil? My boy, I am sorry for this week of disgrace, and more glad than I can tell you to find it was not deserved.'

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Cecil looked down, coloured, put his hands in his pockets and took them out again, twisted his eyes in a vain attempt to see the whole extent of the ink spot on his collar, and finally, standing quite upright, and looking straight before him, said in a very modest and yet manly way, 'I am glad you know that I was not really idle, father; but I didn't work so hard as I ought the last week, and I was stuck-up and made too sure of success. I would rather you knew that.'

Jessie, looking to see how her father took this, was struck by the shining of his eyes as they rested on his son; but before he had time to make any reply, Mr. Bardsley came in; only, Cecil was sure, by the way his father's hand remained upon his shoulder while he was speaking to the master, that he understood and appreciated the frank confession, and that they should be closer friends henceforth than ever before.

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Mr. Bardsley gave leave for Cecil to return home at once; and Mr. Cunningham said he would call again the next day, out of school hours, to explain more fully how Cecil's prospects were altered, and 'make some arrangement.' Jessie was rather alarmed at the sound of this, but Cecil guessed that his father meant to withdraw him from the day school, and wished to offer some compensation for taking him away in this sudden fashion, just at the beginning of the half-year.

Spite of Jessie's tired feet, the walk back was very pleasant; and neither she nor Cecil were insensible to the honour of having their father all to themselves, and at this unusual time of day too. He explained that he had met their mother in the village, so anxious about Jessie, that instead of waiting till towards twelve o'clock to go into Fairview, he had got Mr. Yorke to finish his parish business for him, and had started off at once, accepting a lift from Mr. Rawson by the way. And when he added quietly, 'You will take care that she is never made uneasy again by any thoughtlessness on your part, Jessie!' the little girl answered, 'Yes, father,' in a very subdued and humble tone, and felt quite as sorry as if he had lectured her for an hour.

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'Do you think Mr. Yorke will be at home again now? Might I run in for a minute, father?' said Cecil as they passed the curate's lodging.

'I am not sure; you can see if you like.' And Cecil *did* see; and finding his friend busily engaged sermon-writing in the queer little dining-room, tarried only for a few words.

'I suppose father has told you,' he said as he burst in.

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'Yes, I am *so* glad;' and Cecil's inky little paw was enfolded in the curate's heartiest grasp.

'I shan't forget this week in a hurry,' the boy continued; 'but I'm not so very sorry now that it all happened. Thank you for that nice Sunday.'

He did not say, but he implied how much it had helped him through; and Mr. Yorke answered cheerily, 'I could have sympathized more if I had known all that I know now; but I don't think you wanted pity. I believe your father's sermon showed you the way to bear your trouble.'

Cecil's cheeks were burning, and he only said shyly, 'You showed me too;' and then hastily adding, 'I want to catch up with father before he gets home,' ran off again, after one more hearty shake of the hand had been exchanged between them.

If the memory of pain could be effaced by after-happiness, the remainder of this day would have amply sufficed to blot out the past week. Never did Cecil feel more glad than when his mother kissed him, called him her own darling boy, and at his request forgave Jessie's escapade, and gave her and Frances a week's holiday, that he might have as much of their company as he chose. And on the following Sunday, when he took his place in the choir again, and Mr. Yorke came to dinner at the Rectory, and all was thankful rejoicing, that sorrowful Sunday on which he had felt as if the whole world were against him seemed already far away.

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The trial was gone by, and some of the effects it had left behind it were very pleasant. But for it, Cecil felt he never could have known Mr. Yorke so well, nor his own little sister Jessie. They were his especial friends from henceforth, in a way which they had never been before, even though Jessie had always been regarded by Percy and others as 'Cecil's particular chum.' Percy himself had seemed hitherto at an immeasurable distance from Cecil, and had generally appeared to expect to be treated with the same sort of respect as would have been shown to a

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school 'senior;' but now, wonderful to relate, a change came over him, and he condescended to unbend not only a little, but a very great deal. It actually seemed as if he had begun to respect Cecil! No one but a schoolboy, with an admired and venerated elder brother rather given to snubbing, can quite realize how astonishing this change appeared to the person most concerned. For Percy to invite Cecil to come out fishing with him, in the genial tone of an equal who really cared for his companionship, instead of ordering him in a lordly way to take his tackle down to the river for him, was something so unexpected and flattering, that it went nearer to turning Cecil's head than anything that had happened yet. Perhaps it really might have done so, but for the wholesome lessons the boy had learned during his time of humiliation.

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These fishings with Percy became a sort of institution during that week, which Jessie had rather counted on for having Cecil all to herself. 'Francie doesn't care, because she wants to do her gardening; but what made me like so to have holidays, was only that I might go about with Cecil, and now he goes off with Percy and doesn't want me!' thought the poor little maiden, in rather an injured way, as she sat forlornly in the wide window-seat on Wednesday morning, watching the retreating figures of her brothers. Spite of all her unselfishness, that sense of injury *would* come, and was very disagreeable.

'Who will take the boys' dinner down to the meadows for them by and by?' said her father, coming suddenly into the room. 'I have promised them a long, uninterrupted time for their sport to-day, because to-morrow we are all going for a picnic to the Beacon, and there will be no fishing then. You and Francie are the two idlest folk in the house just now, aren't you, Jessie? so suppose you turn errand-women?'

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'Oh, father, are they going to fish all day?' exclaimed Jessie, jumping up when she was spoken to, but showing no great alacrity in offering her services.

'Till tea-time, I believe, if they don't get tired of it. Do you know I am so glad of these fishings, Jessie?'

'Are you, father?' she said, rather drearily, conscious that there was no gladness in her own face or voice.

'Yes, because I know what a brother's friendship is worth. I believe Percy's good-natured patronage seems to Cecil the greatest reward he has had yet for his bravery in bearing his misfortunes.'

Jessie did not like the idea much; it seemed to her that if it were true, her father and she had *both* reason to feel slighted.

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'Use your imagination, Jessie,' said Mr. Cunningham, smiling; 'you have plenty, I know, and the great use of it is to help us to see things from other people's point of view. Shall I tell you something else? I am so glad of this companionship because I believe Cecil, though the younger, will do Percy good.'

Jessie quite understood this; her face brightened, as it always did at anything like praise of Cecil, and she felt it very delightful to be taken into her father's confidence in such a 'grown-up' kind of way.

'I can carry the dinner, if you like, father,' she said briskly.

'Suppose Francie and you both go, and take your own dinners as well? That will be a kind of picnic on a small scale, almost as pleasant, perhaps, as the grand one of to-morrow. You can come away afterwards, and leave the boys to their sport.'

Jessie looked rather cloudy again for a minute; it was so like being offered a little slice when she had wanted the whole loaf!

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Her father was standing quite near her now, and he smoothed down her hair softly with his hand, as he said, 'Jessie, have you ever thought what a sweet and happy thing love is when it has overcome jealousy? It is not worth *very* much till then.'

For one moment there was a sharp struggle within her, and then she pressed her cheek against his arm, with a loving, grateful gesture. He had no fear that his little maiden would give way to jealousy any longer. Now that he had given the sore feeling a name, he knew that she would be as anxious to drive it away as he was.

That dinner in the meadows was very pleasant—'Quite enchanting,' Frances declared. 'Awfully jolly,' said Cecil, who was not so choice in his vocabulary. Percy looked on it as rather a childish entertainment, and said more than once that he wished 'they' hadn't forgotten that he always took pepper with everything; but he never blamed either of his sisters, only this mysterious 'they,' and made an excellent dinner, spite of the absence of the pepper-box. He was very kind to Jessie too,—so kind that she quite forgave Cecil from henceforth for thinking Percy's notice a very grand sort of thing; it seemed as if he almost included *her* in the new respect he had begun to have for his younger brother. And then, Cecil! Cecil was so entirely delightful on this occasion, that she wondered how, even for a moment, she could have thought him anything but the most perfect of all possible brothers. From the noble way in which he dispensed the tart, only leaving himself a very small piece, though she *knew* he liked it better than anything, down to the good-nature with which he gave his last bit of cheese to the lame old setter, that had limped down to see after them, everything in his behaviour was just according to her own heart, and totally

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unlike the selfish greediness of what she called 'common schoolboys.' And then, when, instead of going back to his fishing directly after dinner, he asked her to walk with him as far as the bridge and watch the trout leap, she was the very happiest and proudest of little sisters. If it had not been for what her father had said, she would have lingered near him the whole afternoon; but as it was, she came away quite contentedly after she had watched his angling for a minute or two, and really felt how nice it was that Percy and he should have become such allies,—how much pleasanter for him than having only her for a companion. Percy's vacation would be over before his, and then her time would come perhaps; anyhow, she was much too sure of Cecil's love to have any excuse for jealousy in seeing him taken up with others. He had opened his heart to her when he was in trouble, she should never forget that. Oh! how dear this had made him to her, both 'for then and for always!'

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No after-trial worth recording shadowed Cecil's boyhood; and now he is a man—just such a man as Jessie longed to see him. He very seldom thinks of the incidents here related, but yet the lesson he learnt in that memorable week is still bearing fruit in his life; and when any trial comes to him, he does not say it is 'very hard,' but takes it as a new proof of the fatherly love that watches over him, and, in dark seasons as well as bright ones, is ready to sing with the psalmist, 'Every day will I give thanks unto Thee, and praise Thy name for ever and ever.'



Transcriber's Notes:

The original text had no table of contents. One was added as an aid to the reader.

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOLIDAY TALES ***

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