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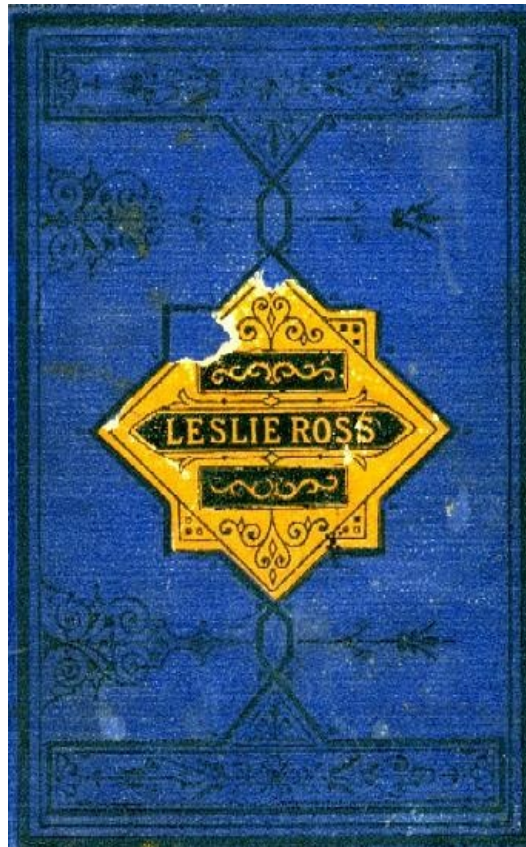
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LESLIE ROSS; OR, FOND OF A LARK ***





LESLIE ROSS:

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OR,

Fond of a Lark.

BY

CHARLES BRUCE,

AUTHOR OF "MY BEAUTIFUL HOME," ETC.

EDINBURGH:
WILLIAM P. NIMMO.

1871.

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CHAPTER I.

WHY LESLIE ROSS WAS SENT TO SCHOOL.

If ever a boy had kind parents and a happy home, that boy was Leslie Ross. He was an only child, and as such the love and care of both father and mother centered upon and surrounded him. He had once had a baby sister, whom he recollected to have kissed several times—and once when her cheeks were very, very cold and pale—but in a few days she had faded away; and now the love which she would have shared was all his, and the care which she would have demanded was expended upon him.

Never were parents so careful that the childhood of a son should be surrounded by pleasant associations and memories, as were Mr and Mrs Ross. They would whisper to each other, while labouring to procure some fresh pleasure for Leslie, "We do not know what his future life may be; it may be a rough and rugged one; it may not be a very happy one; we shall be unable to smooth his path then; so let us make his childhood and boyhood as happy as possible, that he may always look back upon it as the freshest and greenest spot in his life, and carry the recollection of our love in his heart all his days."

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With parents labouring to carry out such an idea, it need scarcely be added that Leslie was a happy boy; such, indeed, he was. One circumstance, which formed a large item in his sum of happiness, consisted in the fact that his home was close to the sea shore. The restless sea could be seen from the windows of the house; and the sound of its waves, as they fell gently or dashed violently on to the shingly beach, could be heard in the warm, cosy parlour, or the silent bedrooms.

As soon as he could walk, Leslie manifested a decided preference for the beach as his playground, and aquatic pursuits as his pleasures; and his daily explorations among the boats and fishing-smacks soon procured for him the notice and friendship of several of the boatmen and fishermen, who almost always take a liking to those who interest themselves in their pursuits; and Leslie did this, for he loved to watch the men, as, waist deep in the sea, they dredged for shrimps; to catch hold of one end of a net and help haul it ashore; to carry the oars of a boat which was about to be launched, and even to add his tiny strength to that of the sturdy men in the attempt to float a fishing smack, while his shrill "*heave ho!*" could be distinctly heard mingling with the gruff tones of the fishers.

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With the sanction of Mr Ross, one of the boatmen taught him to swim at a very early age; while a second manufactured and taught him how to handle a pair of oars; so that by the time Leslie was ten years of age, he could both row and swim very creditably, much to his own satisfaction and delight, and to the contentment of his parents who were happy in their son's happiness; they were, however, too mindful of the risk he ran to allow him to venture on the water unattended, and had strictly enjoined him to observe this rule, and although at times strongly tempted to disobey, Leslie never violated the command.

There was but one trait in the character of their son which gave Mr and Mrs Ross any concern; he was truthful, honest, and brave, but he was fond of what he called "*a lark!*" which was the name Leslie gave to the successful accomplishment of a piece of mischief. He did not actually intend mischief, or intend doing any harm, but his love for "*a lark!*" led him farther than at the time he had any idea, and the expression "*what a lark!*" seemed in his eyes an ample compensation for all the discomforts he inflicted upon others.

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Thus he thought it no end of "*a lark!*" when, one Sunday morning, he put the long hand of all the clocks in the house back, so that his father, who was a clergyman, and very punctual in the performance of his duties, was ten minutes behind time, and found all the assembled congregation anxiously waiting his arrival. And one night when he could not sleep, he stole softly to the door of the servants' bedroom, where he shouted, "Murder! Thieves! Fire!" frightening the poor women out of their first sleep and half out of their senses.

When, however, his father pointed out the consequences of indulging in such a course of action, Leslie would express, and for the moment feel, penitence; but an hour after he would be as ripe for mischief as ever, did any opportunity offer.

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How to destroy this fault in their son gave Mr and Mrs Ross many hours of thought. If children did but consider how much pain and trouble their thoughtless and wilful conduct gave to their parents, they would surely think twice before they performed any action they knew would grieve them.

"I think, my dear," said Mr Ross one day to his wife, "I think the only way we can cure Leslie of his fault will be by sending him to school."

"But do you not think," replied Mrs Ross, "that associating with other boys will be more likely to foster it?"

"No, I think not, for among a number of boys there must be many who would view the consequences likely to arise from indulging in a senseless piece of mischief; these would control the more thoughtless and reckless of their number. Besides, in a good school, and subject to wholesome school rules and discipline, there would be less time and fewer opportunities for gratifying any particular propensity."

"I wish," said Mrs Ross, with a sigh, "some other plan could be adopted. I do not like the idea of his going away from home and home influences, and being subject to others of which we know nothing."

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"I can think of no other," said Mr Ross; "school life will do Leslie a world of good; he is too much alone now, and mixes so little with companions of his own age, that he entertains too great an idea of his own powers and capacities; school life will teach him to moderate this. I think he will have to go, my dear."

At that moment Leslie burst into the room, full of life and spirits, shouting, "Good-bye, ma, good-bye papa, I'm off for a row with old Crusoe."

"Well, be careful, Leslie; and mind, no larks," said Mr Ross, holding up a finger.

"Careful, papa! Oh, you can't think how careful I am; and as for rowing, why, I shall beat Crusoe soon," replied Leslie, as, with a merry laugh, he left the room.

"How bright," said Mrs Ross; "no care sets on his heart."

"No, and his one great fault arises from thoughtlessness; how true are the poet's words:—

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'Evil is wrought by want of thought
As well as want of heart.'

Meanwhile Leslie had made his way to the beach, where he was saluted by a weather-beaten old sailor, who, in his old age, had turned boatman; this was Crusoe, a name Leslie had bestowed upon him because he had visited so many parts of the globe.

"Good morning, sir; are you going to have a row this morning, Master Leslie?"

"Yes, Crusoe, I came on purpose—a good long row, for I feel as strong as a lion," replied Leslie, taking off his jacket and turning up his shirt sleeves.

"Shall it be the 'Lively Nancy,' or 'My Mary?'"

"Oh, the 'Lively Nancy,' she's as light as a feather."

The light and gaily-painted boat was soon skimming over the sparkling waves, which were laughing in the sunshine, and Leslie rowed with a will, the cool breeze fanning his cheeks and lifting the masses of curly black hair. Old Crusoe steered. For more than an hour Leslie kept his place at the oars; but when the boat's head was turned homeward, he resigned it to Crusoe and took his place at the tiller.

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All would have gone well, and the boat would have reached the shore, if Leslie's eyes had not chanced to alight upon the plug used by Crusoe to let the water free after cleaning the boat. "What a lark it would be to frighten Crusoe," he thought; and no sooner had the thought flashed across his mind than he drew the plug, and quietly dropped it into the water.

All unconscious of the invading sea, Crusoe continued to row in silence, until he felt something cool creeping round his boots, and looking down he perceived he was ankle deep in water. "Hallo," he shouted, "What's this? Why, the boat hasn't started a plank, has she? Why, we shall sink!"

"No fear of that," said Leslie.

"No fear! why, it will take us very nearly an hour to get to shore, and she'll sink in less than ten minutes."

"You don't mean it, Crusoe?" cried Leslie, in a startled voice; "why, I've pulled out the plug."

"What?" cried the horrified boatman; "here, take this boat-hook and hoist your hat on it as a signal to those ashore, it's our only hope."

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Leslie did as he was desired, and both he and Crusoe shouted with all the power of their lungs, but apparently in vain, for no boat was seen to put off from the beach.

"We must swim for this," said Crusoe, "although I much doubt if we shall ever be able to reach dry land again. Pull off your boots and your jacket, and put one of these oars under your arms, it will help to keep you up."

Leslie mechanically followed Crusoe's directions. He was too frightened at the result of his thoughtless folly to have the presence of mind to think for himself. The boat soon sank from under them, leaving them to buffet alone and unaided with the waves.

Never before had Leslie attempted, or even dreamt of swimming the distance which now intervened between him and the shore; he felt he should never be able to accomplish it. However, he struggled bravely, occasionally cheered by an encouraging word from Crusoe. How bitterly he repented his foolish act; and as he felt his strength diminishing, his thoughts rapidly travelled to his home and his parents, and in imagination he saw their sorrowful faces, as they bent over his lifeless body as the waves washed it ashore. What would he not have given for the power to undo his folly. But an action once done, however good or however bad it may be, can never be undone. This should make us thoughtful.

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"I can't struggle any longer, Crusoe," said Leslie, in a faint voice.

"Throw one arm on my back, don't clutch," said Crusoe.

Leslie felt himself growing fainter and fainter; the sea and sky seem to mingle and go rapidly round and round; he relinquished his hold of the oar, which floated away, and he gradually sank deeper and deeper into the water; and just as he heard a confused sound as of voices shouting, he relaxed his hold of Crusoe and sank into total unconsciousness.

When Leslie again returned to consciousness, he found himself lying in his own bed, with his father and mother seated by its side. "Where am I?" he murmured.

"Thank God, he is safe," said Mrs Ross, turning away to hide her tears.

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"Oh, father, I'm so sorry," cried Leslie, as the recollection of what he had done flashed across his mind.

"There, there, you must not talk now, you must try and go to sleep;" and, silently kissing him, both Mr and Mrs Ross left the room.

The next morning Leslie felt no ill effects from his long immersion in the water,—youth, a good constitution, and a sound sleep soon restored him to his wonted state of health. He learnt at the breakfast table, that just as he let go his hold of Crusoe and sank, a boat hove in sight, which had put off from the shore to their rescue, the accident having been witnessed. Crusoe immediately dived, and brought him again to the surface, when they were both hauled into the boat and safely conveyed to shore.

"And now, Leslie," said Mr Ross, after detailing the above events, "I have some news to tell you. I am going to send you to school."

"To school, papa!" said Leslie, in surprise.

"Yes, I have thought of doing so for some time past, and the events of yesterday have quite decided me. Not all mine, or your mamma's counsels and warnings can cure you of a very foolish yet dangerous practice. I am going to try if school discipline will."

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"And when am I to go, papa," said Leslie, ready to cry.

"As soon as I can find a school suitable."

"But, papa, I don't want to go."

"Perhaps not, but I cannot afford to pay for all the consequences of your love for '*a lark*;' neither can I or your mamma bear to see our son brought lifeless to the door every day."

"Oh, papa, I'm so sorry."

"Yes, I do not doubt it, but your sorrow will not bring Crusoe's boat up from the bottom of the sea. Recollect, my boy, that *if you do wrong, punishment will always follow*; and I want to teach you this before you go out into the world, for your punishment there will not be so merciful as I or your mamma would inflict."

And this is why Leslie Ross was sent to school.

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CHAPTER II.

LESLIE'S INTRODUCTION TO ASCOT HOUSE.

A few days after his adventure with old Crusoe, Leslie bade farewell to home and all its delights. He tried to be brave and not cry, but in spite of all his efforts he continually felt a kind of choking sensation in the throat, and when he kissed his mother for the last time, he fairly burst into tears, and did not again recover his calmness until he found himself seated by his papa in a first-class carriage, and being whirled to London as fast as an express train could whirl him.

"Come, Leslie," said Mr Ross, "dry up your tears and be a man, you will not find school life so unpleasant as you imagine; after the first few days, you will settle down and soon make friends."

The school to which Mr Ross was conveying Leslie was situated about fifty miles the opposite side of London to that of his own home, and was known by the name of *Ascot House*, and had the reputation of being one of the best private schools in its county; Mr Ross, however, had chiefly selected it from the fact that its principal, Dr Price, had been an old college companion and friend, and he knew him to be a man of probity and honour, and one to whom he could safely intrust both the moral and mental education of his son.

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The school-house was a large building, and contained ample accommodation for many more than the number of scholars the doctor undertook to educate, and was situated a few hundred yards from the banks of a broad, but somewhat sluggish stream; in fact, the school-house seemed much too near to the river to be pleasant, especially when it was known that the building itself was below its level; but as no inundations had ever been known, and all dangerous parts had been well dammed up, and every precaution taken against its overflow, no danger was apprehended. On this river the boys were allowed to row, and in it they were allowed to bathe. To the scholars generally it formed a great feature of attraction.

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"See, Leslie," said Mr Ross, as they neared the school, "you will still have your favourite element on which to exhibit your prowess."

"Yes, I see, papa, but it is nothing compared to the sea."

It was near noon of a beautiful summer day that they drove up to the private entrance of the school-house; the sun was shining brightly, and every flower in the garden was alive with beauty and colour.

"If your school career is as bright as this day is, Leslie, it will do."

"I will try and make it so, papa."

"Do, my son; mine and your mamma's thoughts will be constantly travelling to Ascot House."

"And mine travelling home, papa."

"So I believe, my dear boy; but life is always full of partings, and absence from those

we love."

Mr Ross and his son were ushered into the doctor's library, where they found the doctor himself ready to receive them, who, after shaking hands with his old college friend, placed one on Leslie's head, saying, "This, then, is the young gentleman concerning whom you wrote."

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"Yes, doctor, he is my only son."

"Well, I trust we shall work well and pleasantly together, and that I may always have a good account to transmit to you concerning him."

Leslie murmured something in reply, but what, he scarcely knew. He was glancing round the doctor's library, to ascertain if there were any instruments of punishment to be seen, his ideas of school discipline and punishment being almost one and the same.

"You will, of course, stop and dine with me, Ross, and be introduced to my wife and child; your son also, will like to have one more meal with you; meanwhile I will introduce him to his future companions, with whom he has both to work and play."

"Then I will bid you farewell till dinner time, Leslie," said Mr Ross, as the doctor took his son by the hand to lead him away.

As they approached the school-room door a confused buz of many voices fell upon Leslie's ear, which was hushed, complete silence reigning, as they entered. It was a long and lofty room, containing as many as eighty or ninety boys of various size and age, from the little urchin of nine years in knickerbockers, to the youth of eighteen sporting his first tailed-coat. Leslie gave one hasty look round the room and then lowered his glance, fixing it upon the floor, being unable to withstand the battery of so many eyes, all of which were fixed scrutinisingly upon himself.

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"Boys," said the doctor, "I introduce to you a new companion, who, being a stranger, I hope you will treat with all kindness and courtesy. Hall, I place him beneath your care and protection, make him familiar with the ways of the school. It is my custom, you know, boys," continued the doctor, "to indulge you with a half-holiday whenever a new boy enters the school; we will therefore resume our studies at half-past eight to-morrow morning."

"Hurrah! one cheer for the doctor," cried a boy, jumping on a form and waving a large dictionary in the air. "Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!" was the deafening response. "Now then, one more for the new boy."

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!" was again heartily shouted, in the middle of which the large dictionary slipped from the hand which held it, falling with a crash upon the head of a boy who was just rising to leave his desk.

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"You, Johnnie Lynch," cried the boy, rubbing his head, "just be careful where you throw your books."

"I beg pardon," replied Lynch, laughing; "it was quite an accident, I assure you."

"It is all very well saying so now it is done; I never had so many words thrown at me before."

"Well, never mind, words are but wind."

"Wind, I found them anything but wind."

"Besides, Lynch," chimed in another boy, "your dictionary struck him in his weakest part."

"Come, Mr Sharp-tongue, you had better make yourself scarce," said the boy, making a grab at the last speaker, who, however, was too nimble, for, eluding his grasp, he made his way to where Leslie was standing, and introduced himself as Arthur Hall, to whose protection the doctor had confided him. Hall was a bright, merry-looking boy, about fourteen years of age.

"Well, youngster, what is your name?" commenced Hall.

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"Ross, Leslie Ross."

"Is this your first school?"

"Yes, my father has educated me until now."

"Why does he send you to school?"

"Because I nearly drowned myself and old Crusoe."

"Oh, I say, you're a lively fellow, I hope you won't try it on any of us. I for one don't want my friends to go into mourning on my account," said one boy from the group which had clustered round Leslie.

"Oh, no fear," replied Leslie, who loved a joke, "I won't try it until I'm perfectly sure of success, and will then take the whole school in hand."

"Ah, but unless you can swim, my boy, you will have to keep on dry land; the doctor don't like more than one pupil drowned a term, and Jones, here, was very near it the other day," slapping a quiet-looking boy on the back. "If Hall and I had not stood him on his head, to let the water run out of his mouth, and rolled him over and over on the bank, his place in the class would have been vacant, and you would have seen all our eyes red with weeping; eh, Jones?"

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"That will do Moore," replied Jones; "you must not believe him, you new boy, or he'll cram you with no end of nonsense."

"Nonsense, Jones, nonsense! why, am I not the most sensible boy in the school?"

"Yes, when all the rest of us are away."

"Come, Moore, say no more," broke in Hall, "I have not ended my questioning yet." Then turning to Leslie he said, "Can you swim?"

"Yes, and row too?"

"Where did you learn?"

"Oh, my home is by the sea-shore,—an old sailor taught me."

"Well, come and have a row now, and let's see who's the best man. I never have rowed on salt water."

"You are sure to beat me," said Leslie, "you are so much older than I am. But will there be time before dinner?"

"Plenty; besides, the exercise will sharpen your teeth, and they'll need it to-day, for Fridays are boiled beef days."

"But I am to dine with my father at the doctor's table."

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"Oh, then, you are all right, come along."

Away the boys bounded, as only school-boys can, shouting and laughing, and playing off harmless practical jokes upon each other. They soon reached that part of the river where the boats were hauled up on the bank.

"Who will lend Ross a boat?" inquired Hall, as he stepped into his, and began preparing for the race.

"I will," said Moore; "here, jump in, youngster, and let's see what you're made of."

Leslie seated himself in the boat which Moore pushed into the stream. "You see that solitary tree about a quarter of a mile farther on? well, that's the winning post," said Moore; "now then, all ready? one, two, three, off."

Away the boats flew. Leslie found he had all his work cut out to beat Hall, who, if not so skilful as himself in the use of the oars, was much older and stronger. The other boys ran along the bank shouting and waving their caps by way of encouragement. The two boats for a third of the way kept even pace, then Hall's gradually forged ahead, and, try all he could, Leslie was unable to regain the lost space, so that, when the winning post was reached, Hall won by quite a boat's length.

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"Come," said Hall, as he stepped out of his boat on their return, and gently patted Leslie on the shoulder, "come, I think you and I are likely to be good friends."

Leslie thought so too, although he felt a little hurt at having been beaten.

In the doctor's dining-room Leslie was introduced to Mrs Price, who gave him a very kindly welcome, and when he looked up into her pleasant face, he thought he should be sure to like her, and hoped that he would have many opportunities of being in her company; but when Leslie was introduced to the doctor's little daughter, a year younger than himself, he was quite charmed, and decided in his own mind that the world could not possess a prettier creature than Maud Price.

Leslie had not been much accustomed to the society of girls, and in consequence felt quite bashful when he found himself seated next to her at table; but her quiet, easy, and graceful manner speedily put him at his ease; and during the progress of dinner he could not refrain from stealing a few glances at her face and eyes. The little lady, however, was very quiet, and, until dessert was placed on the table, said not a word, when, lifting up her eyes to his face, she said,—

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"Have you come to be a school-boy?"

"Yes, and this is my first school."

"I'm so sorry, because school-boys are so noisy and troublesome; I can't bear school-boys."

"But perhaps I may turn out different," said Leslie, scarcely knowing what to say in reply to the decided expression of the young lady.

"Well, perhaps so, but I have not much hope."

"Suppose I try to keep as I am now for your sake?"

"Ah, that would be nice, then I would ask mamma to invite you into the parlour sometimes."

"An inducement," said Leslie, with a smile.

The time sped rapidly on, and the hour approached when Mr Ross was compelled to leave, and, taking his son into the garden, he there bade him farewell, saying, "Good-bye, my boy, mind and write home to let us know how you get on; if I may judge from what I have seen of the school, you will be comfortable here."

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"Yes, papa, as comfortable as I can be away from home."

And Leslie thought so again, as at night he knelt down by his bedside, to repeat his evening prayer.



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CHAPTER III.

PEA-SHOOTING AND WHAT CAME OF IT.



leslie soon made himself at home with the boys, more especially those of his own age or two or three years his senior; the elders of the school, those who had discarded jackets and sported tailed-coats, he looked at from a distance, and viewed with a certain amount of awe, thinking he should never attain to their size or standing in the school; and although these superfine gentlemen always gave him a friendly nod when they chanced to meet, or employed him in running an errand, he never presumed to be familiar with one of them. There were also several boys in the school about Leslie's own age, with whom he did not care to associate, whose dispositions, ways of thinking, and ordinary pursuits, were quite opposed to his own. But with Arthur Hall, Johnnie Lynch, Jones, and Moore, he was soon a close and firm friend. He was very pleased to find that he was to occupy the same bedroom as that of his friends.

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The doctor, Leslie found to be a very kind but very firm master; while he made every allowance for a boy's incapacity or sheer inability to learn a particular task, he showed no mercy to those who could learn and would not, either from idleness or

inattention. There were three other masters beside the doctor, who followed in the steps of their principal.

Mrs Price extended many acts of kindness towards Leslie, for his father's sake at first, but after she knew him better, for his own, so that Leslie wrote home glowing accounts of the pleasures of school life; his races on the river, the long country walks with the doctor, and the tales told in bed.

During his first month, everything was too fresh, pleasant, and exciting, for Leslie even to think about having "*a lark*;" but in the first week of his second month he gave evident proof that this fault had not disappeared from, or been overcome in his character. He forgot the promise he had made to his papa, or the nearly fatal results of his last "lark;" he forgot all about the many good resolutions he had made in his own heart; all which led him into fresh trouble.

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Near to Ascot House was a small market-town, which the boys were allowed to visit during play hours and on half-holidays; but after dusk no one was permitted to be absent from the playground, and after the names were read over for the evening, without special leave, no one could absent himself from the school-house; this rule was rigorously enforced by the doctor.

The market-town consisted mainly of three streets in the form of a triangle; but on the outskirts of the town were long rows of cottages, principally tenanted by farm-labourers and working-men. The outer door of each of these cottages opened into the sitting-room without any passage intervening, so that any boy so disposed, by placing one eye at the keyhole, could see all the inmates of the room. Leslie had observed this during his various visits to the town.

One evening, after each name had been called over and answered to, and the boys were preparing lessons for the next day, Leslie shut up his books with a bang, saying to Johnnie Lynch, who sat next to him, "There, those are done; now, what shall I do?"

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"One moment, Ross, and I shall be finished, then we'll both do something."

A minute or two after, Lynch put his books into the desk, saying, "Now, Ross, what is it to be?"

"Follow me, Lynch, and I will show you; mind Wilson don't see you, or he'll want to know where we are going."

The two boys watched for an opportunity, and when the master's head was turned on one side, slipped silently and unobserved from the room, and without detection made their way to the playground.

"Where are you going?" inquired Lynch.

"Into the town," replied Ross.

"But that is against rules, and if discovered we shall be punished."

"Oh, we shan't be found out; but don't come if you are afraid."

"I am not afraid, but I don't see we are doing exactly right."

"But it will be no end of a lark."

"Then I'm all with you."

"Run beneath the shadow of the hedge, so that we are not seen," said Leslie.

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"All right; go a-head."

Away the boys ran, Leslie informing Lynch of his plan as they went, which seemed to meet with Lynch's entire approbation. The outskirts of the town were speedily reached, when, stopping before the first cottage was gained, Leslie pulled two long pieces of round hollow tin from his pocket,—which are known by the name of pea-shooters,—and a handful of peas.

Giving one of the pea-shooters and some of the peas to Lynch, Leslie whispered, "Do you take the right hand side, and I the left; mind and aim straight at the face of the clocks: don't laugh, or the peas will get into your throat and choke you."

"We had better begin a little higher up, so that the road may be clear for a run," said Lynch.

Very silently the boys each approached a cottage, and inserting their pea-shooter in the keyhole, fired a whole mouthful of peas at the glass face of the old-fashioned eight-day clock, with which each cottage was furnished.

There was a start, and a sudden cry of, "Lor-a-mercy, what's that?" from the cottage, which highly amused the boys, who glided on to the next, and then to the next, producing a similar sensation and exclamation in each, until they reached the last on their list, which they favoured with an extra number of shot.

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"Run for it, Leslie," said Lynch, "I hear some one coming."

Neither of them could run with their usual speed, their suppressed laughter was so great; but this soon gave way to alarm as they heard the steps of their pursuer drawing nearer and nearer.

"We shall be caught, Leslie, let us turn into the field and cut straight across to the school."

They soon clambered through the hedge; Leslie catching his foot in a bramble, pitched head foremost into the grass, but before he could recover himself Lynch was lying by his side whispering, "Lie still, he's now passing."

As soon as they thought their pursuer had got to a safe distance, they scrambled on to their feet and darted across the meadow, straight as the crow flies, and in a few minutes gained the school-house without any farther adventure.

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"I fancy I must have broken some of those glasses," said Leslie, "I fired so hard; but what a lark! how they all cried 'Lor-a-mercy!'" and the two boys burst into uncontrollable fits of laughter.

"Come, Leslie," said Lynch, who was the first to recover himself, "let us go in, or Wilson will find we are absent."

No one, however, appeared to have noticed their absence, and the two adventurers gained the school-room and resumed their seats unobserved.

The next morning, as Dr Price was in the act of seating himself at his desk, preparatory to the commencement of school work, a servant entered and informed him that he was wanted on particular business for a few minutes. The doctor was absent for a short time, and then returned accompanied by a man and a boy dressed in the smock-frock of farm labourers. The doctor commanded silence. Leslie's heart gave a quick throb, and he felt a tremor run through his whole frame as his eye alighted upon the group at the principal's desk.

"Boys," began the doctor, in a clear but stern voice, looking round upon his scholars, "boys, I have been informed that some two or three of my pupils perpetrated a very annoying trick at several of the cottages at the entrance of the town last evening. I am unwilling to believe that any of my scholars are guilty, as the hour when the trick was accomplished, was one when no boy has leave to absent himself from the school grounds, or even house; but my informant is so confident it was some of you, that I am compelled for the sake of arriving at the truth to ask whether it is so; are any of you boys guilty of this trick?"

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There was a dead silence.

Leslie whispered to Lynch, "I think we had better tell."

"You are sure the boys ran in the direction of the school?" inquired the doctor, turning to the man and boy.

"Ees, I'm sure and certain," replied the boy, "for I chased 'em, I did, most 'alf the way; so I bee's sure like."

"You hear, boys," said the doctor; "if any of you are guilty you had better confess it at once."

For a minute or two a complete silence again reigned, at the end of which Leslie rose from his seat, and with a face quite scarlet in colour, said, "If you please, I am the guilty one!" and then sat down again.

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"And who was your companion, Ross?"

"If you please, sir, I would rather not tell."

"I was, sir!" said Lynch.

"Lynch; and who else?"

"There was no one else, sir."

"And may I ask what motive induced you to play such a trick, as shooting peas at eight-day clocks."

"It was only a lark, sir," said Leslie.

"A lark! and do you know what your 'lark' has done?"

"No, sir."

"Besides the annoyance you have caused these good people and their families, you have broken three of the clock-glasses."

"Aye, and cracked neighbour Hodge's, and neighbour Smith's as well, 'ee have,"

interrupted the man, "besides frightening Master Sparrow's good 'ooman, who has been that ill for a month as nothing was like afore."

"I am sorry, sir," said the doctor, addressing the man, "that any of my pupils should have been guilty of such a thoughtless action; tell your friends from me that they shall be amply compensated, while the boys themselves shall be duly punished."

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When the visitors had departed, the doctor said, "Ross, and Lynch, do you know why rules are made? Do you think they are made to be broken or kept? Your conduct last evening fully answers the question; and as you have thought proper to break one, that of being absent from school after the proper hours, you must also bear the consequences; recollect no wrong can be done without punishment following it; you will, therefore, each of you confine yourself to the school grounds for one month, and bring me twenty lines each day; besides which, you will have to make good the damage you committed. Boys, to your lessons."

"This is more than I bargained for," said Lynch, making a wry face to Leslie.

"Or I either," replied Leslie, returning the grimace.

"Fancy a whole month!"

"Bad as being in prison."

"I wish we had kept in, now," sighed Lynch.

"Yes, so do I, but it can't be helped."

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"No, we've had the 'lark,' and must now be physicked."

When morning school was over the doctor took Leslie into his study, and seating himself, laid one hand upon his shoulder, and in a kind but grave voice said, "Ross, I am sorry, more so than I can express, that you should have been guilty of so thoughtless an action as that of last night; what do you think your father will say? If you do not overcome this weakness of yours it will lead you into many more troubles. You must keep watch and guard upon yourself. When tempted you must ask yourself whether the action is right, and what are likely to be its results. He that over-cometh himself, is stronger than a man who taketh a walled city."

When Leslie left the doctor's study it was with the fall determination never to indulge in another "lark."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE LINCHPIN.



ain, rain, rain, I think we are going to have a second deluge," said Arthur Hall, looking disconsolately out of one of the school-room windows.

"Yes, I think so, too," said Fred Moore, joining him.

"This makes the second week it has poured down, with not a single bright day all the time."

"It would not be a bad plan if it only rained at night, and not during the day, for play and work could go on quite nicely then," remarked Lynch, who was copying out his twenty lines.

"It is rather fortunate for you and Ross, that all this rain has come during your punishment month."

"Yes," chimed in Leslie, "with the exception of the daily task of twenty lines, our last fortnight has not been much of a punishment, for I assure you I have had no desire to go out."

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"Always your fortune," said Hall, who was manifestly in an ill humour; "now, if I had been punished instead of you, the weather would have been a marvel of fineness, sunny all day and starry all night."

"Well, don't get cross, Hall, the holidays will soon be here; another ten days, and good-bye books, slates, and masters."

"Yes, there is some consolation in that," said Hall; "but you two, Ross and Lynch, just step here and see how it comes down."

"One moment," said Lynch, "I am finishing my last line; there, the doctor ought to give me three good marks, and set me up as an example of clever penmanship before the whole school."

"How quick you write, Johnnie," said Leslie, looking up from his task, as his friend waved his paper round his head, "here I have six more lines to copy."

"Courage, my dear fellow, courage; remember this is our last day, our punishment is now ended."

"Yes, I am happy to say."

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"I already feel a new man," said Lynch, stretching himself; "no longer a slave, bound hand and foot in fetters, I am free as the winds."

"True," said Leslie, a minute after laying down his pen, "my punishment is over, I *am* happy."

"Yes, we have taken all our physic, and are now free from the doctor's rule. When will you have another lark, Leslie?"

"Never again," said Leslie, folding up his paper.

How confidently he spoke.

"Now, then, what is there to be seen," exclaimed Lynch, approaching the group at the window.

"Why, come and inform us what prospect we have of playing our game of cricket to-morrow," said Hall.

"Oh, my! how it rains!"

"Yes, it does come down," said Leslie.

"You will have to play out your game under umbrellas, I fear," said Lynch.

"Yes, and with pattens on the feet."

"Why, if it keeps on much longer, we shall be able to bathe in the playground; just look at the pools," said one boy.

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"Look at the river; how it has risen," said Leslie.

"It has, indeed," said Hall, "and the water is speeding along pretty fast, too."

"I say," exclaimed a boy, "you don't think there's any danger, do you?"

"Danger of what?" inquired Hall.

"Why, of Ascot House taking a fancy to sail down the stream."

"I should imagine not," said Hall, looking out at the waters.

"Here comes Arnold, I will ask him what he thinks," said Lynch, as he saw one of the elder boys approaching.

"Arnold, will you look here a minute."

"What is it you want?" said Arnold, stepping up to the window.

"Do you think there is any danger of the river overflowing?"

Arnold watched the turbulent flow of the waters for a few minutes in complete silence; the conversation we have reported had attracted several more of the boys to the window, so that quite a circle surrounded him, waiting anxiously for his verdict. Arnold knew not what to think; he had never before seen the river in such a state as he now beheld it, so full or so rapid; he was half afraid there *was* danger, but did not care to give his fears expression, for fear of frightening the boys, but in his secret heart he determined to call the doctor's attention to its condition, and ask his opinion.

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Turning to the group, he said, "Well, boys, I am not competent to give an opinion, but such a thing has never before occurred, to my recollection."

"But old Badger, up in the town, says he recollects a flood when he was a boy, which carried away a few cottages," said one of the group.

"Pooh! old Badger is in his second childhood," said Arnold, trying to make light of the affair; "he must mean the great deluge."

"Well, I only know what he told me," said the boy.

"Yes, but if you believe all you hear, you will gain some extraordinary knowledge in the course of your life," said Arnold, walking away in search of the doctor.

The doctor gave it as his opinion that there was no possible danger of a flood; but, that all fears might be set at rest, he would give orders for a thorough examination of the banks of the river, so that whatever damage the continuous rains had done might at once be rectified, and all possible danger averted. But at night time, as the doctor gazed from his bedroom window at the turbulent stream, he could not but think that he had been somewhat too hasty in his conclusion regarding the possibility of a flood; but with the mental determination to order the examination the first thing in the morning, he closed his window and retired to bed.

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The following morning, however, was bright and clear, the rain-clouds had all vanished away, while the glorious sun was flooding the earth with warmth and light. The doctor thought there was no immediate necessity to order the examination, and, receiving some rather important letters, the subject dropped from his mind.

Meanwhile, Leslie's month of punishment had passed away, and with the returning sunlight, returned his liberty. He awoke early on this bright morning, and lay awake for some time before either of the other inmates of the room had unclosed their eyes. He lay thinking how he could best prevent himself falling again into that weakness which had already cost him so much sorrow and punishment. How ardently he wished he could always keep a strict guard and watch on his wayward fancy; he recollected reading of some prisoner who always had an eye watching him; through every hour of the day and night, that eye was ever watching his slightest movement, and noting his every gesture; Leslie wished that some such an eye could watch the secret promptings of his mind.

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"Come what will," he murmured to himself, "I will try and cure myself of this fault," and then he lifted up his heart in prayer for strength to accomplish what he had determined in his own mind. There is always a refuge open from whence strength can be received.

It was market-day in the little town close to Ascot House, and half-holiday with the boys, many of whom took pleasure in sauntering into the market place to view the noisy and exciting scenes; to pull the ears of the pigs, and feel the wool of the sheep; to watch the farmers and higglers making their bargains, or to join in the chase after a refractory bullock, which would run pell-mell through the busy throng, scattering both buyer and seller, master and man.

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Leslie found great pleasure in all this; at his home by the sea-side he had seen nothing of the kind, it was all fresh and novel, and highly exciting as well as amusing. He never lost an opportunity of enjoying this pleasure.

He had wandered about the market all the afternoon; visited every sheep-pen, pig-pen, and cattle-stall; watched the racing up and down of sundry horses; seen the transfer of several baskets of fowl, and peeped into the corn exchange, when he thought it was about time to return home; but as he passed an inn-yard he lingered to see a farmer commence his homeward journey. He was making preparations to start, at the same time boasting how far his horse could trot.

While the man was in the act of mounting, Leslie stood close to one of the wheels of the cart; he noticed the linchpin was nearly half out; "What a lark," he thought, "if I were to take the pin wholly out, the farmer's horse would not trot so very far to-day."

Without another moment's consideration Leslie extracted the pin; but no sooner was it safe in his hand than he repented the action. Was this following out his morning's resolution? Was this turning over a new leaf? He attempted to replace the pin again in its proper position; the farmer, however, had now gathered the reins into his hand, and shouted to him to stand clear.

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"You young monkey," he cried, "do you wish to be run over," and with that the horse started. Leslie set off in chase, shouting for the man to stop; but the farmer, paying no heed to his cries, soon left him far behind with the abstracted linchpin in his hand. He sat down on a bank by the road side and burst into tears. What should he do? How could he remedy what he had done? What would the consequences be? The wheel might come off, the farmer be thrown out and seriously hurt, or perhaps killed, and he, Leslie, would then be a murderer.

It was some time before Leslie could make up his mind to return back to school, he thought it would be best to run away and hide himself somewhere, in some secret place where no one could find him, or would ever dream of searching for him. Then he thought he had better go directly to the doctor and confess what he had done; but this, his wisest plan, was overruled by the lingering hope in his heart that perhaps after all the farmer might reach home in safety.

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When any one does wrong, it is always best to confess it at once; concealing the wrong makes it more, adds to the offence, and to the restless unhappiness of him who committed it. If Leslie had done this,—fully and frankly confessed his fault—

perhaps the result of his mischief might not have fallen so heavily upon himself.

Two days of wretched anxiety passed. Leslie heard that a farmer returning home from market had been thrown from his cart and severely injured, but he could gain no particulars of the accident, how it had occurred, or who had been the victim. He most fervently trusted that it was not the consequences of his thoughtlessness; but it was almost like hoping against hope to believe this.

On the third day, as he was leaving the school grounds in company with Lynch, Hall, and Moore, he felt a rough hand laid on the collar of his jacket, while a harsh voice fell upon his ear, exclaiming,

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"You be the young dog that took out my linchpin."

"Hallo! what's this?" shouted Hall, trying to pull Leslie free from the man's grasp.

The man carried one arm in a sling.

"Just you leave him alone, young sir," said the man, "I have nothing to say to you, but to this young dog I have."

"But what is it all about, man?" enquired Hall; "you must not seize the pupils of Ascot House in this way."

"Pupil or no pupil," said the man, doggedly, "this 'ere one goes along with me to the doctor."

"Don't parley, Hall," said Lynch; "can't you see the man's mad; waste no words, but rescue Ross."

"Yes, come on," cried Moore, seizing one arm, while Lynch hauled at the man's coat behind.

"Hear me a minute," said Leslie, as his friends thus proceeded to active measures; "I had better go with this man to the doctor, for I fear I am only too much in the wrong."

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"Ah! now you speak sensible; so come along," and without removing his hand from his collar he led Leslie up to the doctor's private door, and asked permission to speak with him for a few minutes. They were shown into the library, where the doctor soon made his appearance.

"Good morning, Farmer West, what has this young gentleman done that you should hold him by the collar like a prisoner?"

"Why, sir, I can't positively say this young gentleman did it, but I strongly suspect he took one of the linchpins out of my cart last market day, so that a wheel came off and I was thrown out and broke an arm."

The doctor looked earnestly at Leslie, who had fixed his eyes upon the carpet, too much ashamed to raise them to his master's face.

"Is this true, Ross?"

"Yes, sir, but I did not mean to do it."

"Mean to!" broke in the farmer, "but you did it; look at my arm!"

"I assure you, sir," said Leslie, earnestly, "that I repented the action the moment I had done it, and tried to replace the pin, but the horse started before I was able."

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"Your repentance will not mend this gentleman's arm," said the doctor.

"I know it will not, sir, but believe me I am sorry," said Leslie, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

"How can I place confidence in what you say," said the doctor, "when the very day after your punishment had expired for your former act of folly, you commit a far more serious one?"

Leslie could make no reply, his tears showed his distress.

"Leave me for the present, while I say a few words to Mr West; I must write to your father and consult with him as to what course I shall pursue."

Leslie left the library with a very heavy heart.

Two days after, the doctor sent for him, and informed him that he had written to his father, and that in his reply his father had desired him to keep his son at school during the holidays as a punishment for his fault; at the same time Leslie received this unwelcome intelligence, the doctor handed him a note which had been enclosed in that he himself received.

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Leslie found the note was from his mother; he could scarcely read it, tears blinded his eyes. "Do not think," ran the words of the note, "that we at home are not grieved

and sorry because our son is not to be with us; we were looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you and clasping you once again in our arms; but we think it our duty to forego all this for your sake. We want our little boy to grow up into a brave and good man, and this he will never do unless he learns to govern well his own nature, repress with a strong hand that which is evil, and foster that which is good. You often used to wonder, when we read the *Pilgrim's Progress* together, what could be meant by the '*arrow sharpened by love*;' now you will learn it by experience, *your punishment is an 'arrow sharpened by love.*'"

All Leslie's companions were sorry when they heard what his punishment was to be, and manifested their sympathy in various ways, and by many words of condolence.

"I pity you, old boy," said Hall, one night when they were all in bed, "I pity you, for I know what it is to be at school during the holidays; I must not grumble, however, for the latter part of the time was passed pleasantly enough."

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"What, were you ever at school during holiday time?" inquired Leslie.

"Yes, and at Ascot House, too."

"Tell us all about it, Hall," said Lynch, sitting up in bed.

"Yes, do, Hall!" said the rest of the boys.

"All right, I'm agreeable; so here goes:" and Hall told the story of his holiday passed at school.



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CHAPTER V.

A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY.

Drovided a school-boy is blessed with a happy home and kind friends," commenced Hall, "there is no one in the world who looks forward to a holiday with so much pleasure, or enjoys it so thoroughly. When the time draws near that he is to leave school-life for a season, how old Father Time seems to lag on his journey, as if he had grown tired, or lame, or had met with an accident and was delayed on the way, so slowly does the wished-for day come. And when at length the happy morn arrives, who so joyous as the school-boy as he jumps out of bed and wakes his next bedfellow by throwing his pillow at him, or by the summary process of stripping the clothes from the sleeping form? Too happy and excited to eat his last breakfast in the old dining-hall, what tricks he plays with his schoolmates, who are equally excited as himself! Now he boasts what he will do during the holidays, where he will go, whom he shall see, and what things he will eat. And with what a shout he waves a farewell, as the carriage, or the coach, or the dog-cart rolls out of the school-grounds, and conveys him away out of sight of the old school-house and its master, sounding as he goes, it may be, a tin horn or a brass bugle he had bought for the occasion.

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"Imagination follows the boy to his happy home, where his father welcomes him with a hearty shake of the hand, his mother with a fond clinging embrace, and his sisters with smiles and kisses; while his younger brothers, who have been on the watch for hours, greet him with shouts of delight, and hurry him away to see their favourite rabbits, and pet guinea-pigs, and mice. Who so happy as a school-boy home for the holidays!

"But amid all the excitement, and hurry, and joy, and noise, and confusion, how unutterably miserable is that boy who has no home to go to, and is to remain at school during the holidays; his face is like a cloud amid the sunshine, a frown amid smiles; he views the preparations of each departing boy with envy, and, try all he can, he cannot assume a *nonchalant* or I-don't-care kind of air, nor prevent a lump rising in his throat, and an occasional dimness gathering over his eyes. May he hide himself away that he may not see the general departure of all his school-

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fellows, and as their joyous shouts reach him in his hiding-place, he puts his fingers in his ears to shut out the noise which means such loneliness for himself.

"It so chanced that one Michaelmas I was the one unfortunate boy who was left 'sole monarch of all I surveyed.' My parents were away on the Continent, and, unable to reach home in time, had requested the master, as a favour, to allow me to remain at Ascot House during the holidays. I was anything but pleased myself at the arrangement, but was compelled to grin and bear it.

"I will not be *too* sure, but I think I hid myself and cried, after Willie Wilcox, the last boy to leave, had shaken me by the hand, saying, 'Cheer up, old fellow; I'm sorry for you, but I suppose it can't be helped. I'll write you a line while I am away.' It was all very well to say 'Cheer up,' but my spirits had gradually sunk at each boy's departure, until they were far below zero when I found myself alone. I wandered aimlessly about the playground, which had never before appeared so deserted or silent, kicking stones about with my feet, and making holes in the ground with the heels of my boots. I sauntered up to the school-room windows, and stared in at the empty room, and at the long desks, which looked strange and unfamiliar. Even the doctor's wife did not raise my spirits when she kindly said, 'You may go into the garden, Hall, whenever you like, and pick some fruit, but be sure you do not eat too much, so as to make yourself unwell.' I availed myself of the privilege, and ate more fruit than I have ever done since. No, nothing could banish the cloud from my face, nor the gloom from my heart. I never knew what loneliness was before. Even night did not wrap me in forgetfulness, for although by way of variety I lay in a different bed each night, sleep seemed to have gone home for a holiday as well as the boys, for it would seldom visit my couch.

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"This state of things went on for a week. I took long walks, but the zest seemed to have gone out of them since I was alone, for they were nothing like so pleasant as when my companions were with me. A change came, however, which made the remaining days a little more bright and cheery.

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"On the first day of the second week of the holidays, I had sauntered away from the house, and was hunting for nuts in a little wood or plantation, not far from the grounds of Squire Aveling. I was absorbed in my occupation until I heard a scream in the adjoining lane, and the terrified voice of a girl exclaim, 'Oh! papa! papa! do come!' and then another scream, followed by the deep bay of a dog. I bounded from the wood, cleared the old palings which separated it from the lane with one jump, and was just in time to throttle a big brute of a dog round the neck, as it was in the very act of springing upon a little girl, who, in terror, was crouching down in the road.

"The dog was strong, and I found it no easy matter to hold the brute, and restrain its savage attempts to catch some part of my person between its jaws. But just at the moment when I thought I could hold on no longer, and should be compelled to relinquish my grasp, and while tumbling over and over in the dust, a voice cried out—while I could hear rapid steps approaching,—'Hold on; I'll be with you in a minute;' and almost at the same instant the dog was pulled from my grasp, and a heavy whip descended upon its back and flanks, causing it to yell out so lustily that the wood echoed again.

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"By the time I had risen to my feet, and shaken some of the dust from my clothes, the dog had run howling away, while as pretty a looking little girl as ever I saw was clinging round the neck of a tall gentleman, who was endeavouring to hush her terrified sobs. This was soon accomplished, for what child does not feel safe in its father's arms? and the gentleman, turning to me, held out his hand, and, with a smile, said,—

"Let me thank you heartily and warmly for saving my little girl from that savage dog.'

"Oh, sir,' I replied, blushing up to the roots of my hair, 'it was not much; I should have been a coward had I not done as I did.'

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"My little maid here does not think it was a mere nothing, neither do I. I don't think many boys would have had the courage to do what you did.'

"I think, sir, that you can't know much about boys to say that, for I could bring no end of a number who would have done the same thing; aye, and better than I did.'

"Well, I won't contradict you; but what is your name? and where do you come from?'

"My name, sir,' I replied, 'is Hall—Arthur Hall, and I am one of the boys from Ascot House.'

"But how is it you are here—I thought it was holiday-time?'

"So it is, sir; but my friends are away on the Continent, and I am staying at the school through the holidays.'

"How do you like it?"

"Not at all; I am as lonely and miserable as a rat that has lost its hole."

"Well, come up to the house and give your clothes a brush. I suppose you know who I am?"

"Yes, sir; you are Squire Aveling."

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"When we arrived at the house, Squire Aveling introduced me to his wife, as beautiful and kind a lady as I have ever known, who, when she heard what I had done, fairly kissed me as if I had been her own son. Both the squire and his wife would not hear of my going away until evening; so I stayed and had dinner with them, while their little girl—Alice, they called her—took me round the gardens and grounds to show me all the beauties of the place. Some preparations were going on at the end of the lawn, which was opposite the front of the house; a marquee was being erected, several swings were being put up, while the lawn itself was being mowed. My conductress informed me these preparations were to celebrate her birthday, which was the day after.

"In the evening, the squire himself walked to Ascot House with me, where he saw the doctor's wife, and asked her to allow me to visit them on the morrow, as his little girl was going to entertain a host of young friends, the number of which would not be complete unless I made one of them. Permission was given, and I went to bed to dream of the pleasures the morrow was to bring.

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"I was up early enough on the following morning, no such thing as oversleeping one's-self when there was a prospect of pleasure in view. (How well it would be if we—you and I, young reader—could be as active when duty and not pleasure calls!) I oiled and scented my hair to perfection, put on my best frilled shirt, made Jim, our odd boy, polish my boots until he could see his face in them; discarded my straw hat and took to the chimney-pot (*i.e.* my best beaver), saw that there was not a speck of dirt on my clothes, viewed myself all over in the glass, nearly dislocated my neck in trying to get a glimpse of my back, but found my efforts fruitless; and finally put on my best kid gloves, after which I found I had still two hours to spare, and dinner to eat in the meantime.

"The time went by, and at length I set out for my destination, with both a bounding heart and a bounding step, the one keeping pace with the other, as though there existed some private agreement by which they acted in unison, and fulfilled the requirements of the old proverb, 'A light heart, a light step.'

"I was kindly welcomed by the squire and his lady, and by them introduced to their two sons, who had returned the same day from visiting friends; they both thanked me heartily for the service I had rendered to their sister, whom, they said, they 'would not have had hurt for the world.' This I could well believe, as I watched her darting hither and thither, like a good little fairy, in and out among her friends, with a word for one, a kiss for another, and a caress for a third.

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"I am so glad you are come," said the fairy Allie, taking me by the hand; 'come and be introduced to all my friends.'

"I thought the introducing would never come to an end, so many were the friends with whom I had to shake hands; there were boys from school, and boys who never had been to school; there were short boys and tall boys, fat boys and lean boys; square boys and round boys; in fact, there were boys of all sorts and sizes; some who said very languidly, 'Ah! how d'ye doo?' and others who seized me by the hand and vowed I was a 'brick.'

"But the girls!—I beg their pardon, I mean young ladies!—how shall I describe them in all their loveliness and witchery! I never saw any like them before, with their long golden, or black, or silken curls, their white dresses and blue sashes, their bright faces and rosy lips! and their eyes! how can I describe them? I have seen a few diamonds in my time, but never any that sparkled so brightly as the eyes that flashed on me on this memorable day; indeed to compare them to diamonds was to offer them an insult. On early summer mornings, when the sun was shining over land and sea, I have seen the dew sparkling on every blade of grass, or in the cup or bell of every flower, with a whole rainbow of colours mirrored in their tiny globes, and such were the eyes that beamed on me each time that Allie said, 'Flo,' or 'Clara,' or 'Kate,' as the name chanced to be, 'this is the gentleman who saved me from the dog.'

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"I may say I felt extremely uncomfortable during the process of introduction, and was glad when it all ended; for what with eyes, and the being called 'quite a hero,' and 'a darling brave boy,' and so on *ad infinitum*, I experienced as queer sensations, as if I had been birched by Price, or one of the under-masters.

"But it came to an end at last, and the eldest young Aveling invited me to see his live creatures. I never knew a boy so well off for pets as I found him to be; fine lop-eared rabbits that nibbled out of the palm of his hand, guinea-pigs, white mice, a large

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Newfoundland dog, which would carry anything he wanted it to carry, or go any where, or fetch anything from a distance; a pony came trotting out of the stable, as soon as it heard his voice, neighing with pleasure. There were plenty of pigeons flying about, and I inquired whether he also claimed them, in reply to which he said,

"No, they are my sister Allie's; you should see her come into the yard; they fly round her, perch on her shoulders, pick food from between her lips, and coo with delight. Indeed, every live thing about the place knows and loves Allie. But come, let us be off, and give some of the girls a swing.'

"It was rare fun swinging the girls; the hesitation with which each one seated herself, the injunction not to be sent 'too high;' the terrified scream given when sent off, the flutter of the light dress and the streaming of the curls in the wind, were things worth remembering. When tired with swinging, we started a game of kiss-in-the-ring, in which all heartily joined, except a few languid, swellish-looking fellows who thought it beneath their dignity, and begged to be excused, saying the game was 'too vulgar.'

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"Don't think of those noodles,' said the elder Aveling; 'it is not because the game is "too vulgar," but because they have tight boots, and can't run. Come along, it's rare fun!'

"We had tea in the marquee; no end of cake and fruit, and jam and preserves. It looked, and was, a little different to school-fare: no one was stinted, and the good things disappeared like magic; indeed he must have been a clever magician who could have made them vanish as quickly. Two or three of the youngsters had smothered their faces all over with marmalade and jam, and were sights to behold. One cried because he could not eat any more of the nice things.

"It strikes me very forcibly,' whispered the younger Aveling, 'that that youngster over there will find himself under the necessity of having an additional spoonful of jam with a powder in it to-morrow.'

"After tea, when it was dark, there was a dance on the lawn by torchlight, the torches being held by the servants; the music consisted of a flute, cornet, and violin, but the cornet proved of no use, as some urchin had bunged it up with a cork before the dance commenced. No particular dances were called for; the musicians played just what they chose, the dancers danced whatever they knew best. Some, and these were the majority, knew nothing of dancing whatever, but threw their legs about just as fancy suggested; nevertheless the pleasure derived from this singular and altogether unique method of performing, was as intense as if done in the most scientific and approved manner.

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"We had supper in the large dining-hall. Such a spread! It did one's heart good merely to see it. The pyramids of tarts! the mountains of jelly, shaking their sides like so many jolly, fat old men! the chickens, and ducks, and game, each one of which appeared to be saying, 'Yes, come and eat me, I am willing to sacrifice myself for your pleasure!' I need not say what terrific inroads we made into such eatables, how we piled our fair partners' plates with the good things, until we were obliged to help eat them (the good things I mean, not the partners, although some of them looked good enough to eat).

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"Squire Aveling sat at the head of the long dining-table, and his fair lady at the bottom, each pressing their guests to make a good supper. No pressing was needed. When all had eaten as much as was possible, and nuts, oranges, and grapes and bon-bons took the places of the already vanished delicacies, Squire Aveling rose from his chair, and with the rap of a knife upon a plate commanded silence. He then, much to my discomfiture, spoke as follows:—

"With the exception of one, all now present are old friends of my darling Allie, and this is not the first time I have seen you seated at this table, and I hope it will not be the last. ('Hear, hear!') I hope you have all enjoyed yourselves. ('We have!' from all assembled.) I am glad to think so, and so is Mrs Aveling. But there is one here to-day whom most of you have never seen before—Arthur Hall. (Here all eyes were directed to me.) Yesterday, by his bravery and courage, he saved my darling Allie from a great danger, of which you have all heard. I cannot thank him sufficiently for what he has done. I want you all to help me. Now, each of you fill your glass. Now stand up. Let us drink to Arthur Hall with a three times three!"

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"I did not know whether I was on my head or my heels; I am sure I blushed, and must have looked anything but heroic. When the cheers were ended, the elder Herbert Aveling whispered that I must make a speech. I stood on my feet, and tried to say something in reply, but what I said I never could remember; all I know is that my health was again drunk in lemonade, which some imbibed so hurriedly that it went down the wrong way, and a chorus of coughing followed, under cover of which I resumed my seat.

"And so the party ended. I assisted several fair ladies to their hats and shawls, and

then went back to Ascot House to enact all the scenes over again in my dreams."

As Hall finished his story, the room door opened and one of the under-masters entered to ascertain if the boys were in bed and the lights out. "What! not asleep yet, boys?" he exclaimed, as he heard some one commenting on the story.

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"No, sir," one replied, "we are story-telling, and don't feel much inclined for sleep."

"Story-telling, eh!" said the master, who was a general favourite with the boys; "suppose I were to tell you a story, what would you say?"

"Say? why, say it would be first-class," exclaimed Hall, jumping out of bed.

"Yes, yes, do Mr Arnold," echoed the rest. Mr Arnold entered, and, closing the door, seated himself on Leslie's bed, while all the boys crowded round him, dressed in nothing but their night-shirts.

"Well, now for a start," said Mr Arnold; "you may call it, '*Our Ned*'."

"All right, sir, go a-head," was the general cry.

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CHAPTER VI.

OUR NED.



always feel inclined," began Mr Arnold, "to pity a boy who has no friend or companion to whom he can look up with admiration and love, and whom he regards as quite a hero. It is a good thing ever to have something or some one above us, at whom we can gaze, and after whom we can strive. It should be our aim through life to look up, and not down; men do not climb to great heights by keeping their eyes intently fixed on the ground, but, on the contrary, by looking forward and upward. And no one can say he is in want of a hero to imitate and love, when the greatest hero of all the world is perpetually before him.

"Our Ned' was my hero, and though some people would have it he was a trifle wild, I never found him so, and certainly, after all these years, cannot bring my mind to think so now. He was the boldest, bravest, kindest, most true-hearted and generous boy, that man, woman, or child ever set eyes on. True, he loved a bit of harmless mischief for the fun of the thing, but was far too noble-spirited to do a mean or cowardly action, and would scorn to take an unjust and bullying advantage over a boy who was weaker or younger than himself. Some boys think they are exhibiting a manliness of character if they tease and torment those who are unable to protect themselves, instead of which they are doing just about as mean a thing as boys can do. What is the use of possessing strength if we exercise it in oppressing others? A true boy, or man, should reserve his strength to protect those who are unable to take care of themselves; and as you go through the world, you will find plenty of that sort.

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"I loved our Ned second only to my mother, and I know he loved me in return. We did not express the love we cherished for each other like girls at a boarding-school, by hugging and kissing, and 'dearing' and 'ducking' at every spare moment; no, boys show their love after a different fashion, and kisses with them go for very little, and are considered rather a nuisance than otherwise. If he had a shilling, half of it was mine; I might use his books, pencils, marbles, bat, ball, or, for that matter, anything that was his, and he in his turn was welcome to anything I possessed. If he saw a big boy bullying me, he wasted no words in useless remonstrances, but instead, off with his jacket and fought him at once. You must not think him a quarrelsome boy, who always wanted to be fighting; nothing of the sort, but he cherished a firm conviction—and I don't think he was far wrong—that big, hulking bullies deserved no better treatment than that contained in good, hard, knockdown blows, and these he never hesitated to give, did the occasion warrant it. Of course, he sometimes got the worst of it, but he never minded an atom, not he; he would pick himself up on such occasions, spitting the blood and dirt from his mouth, and cheerily say, as he saw my look of concern: 'All right, Archie, not dead yet; better luck next time!' And his jacket would be on, and he walking by my side as calmly as possible, without once alluding to his wounds and bruises.

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"Yes, Ned was a brave fellow. I remember his coming home one afternoon with a fearfully nasty bite in his left arm, some stingy, big brute of a cur had given him, because he would not let it worry a little girl carrying a big basket, whom it was terrifying into convulsions with yelping and snarling, and making sudden and

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ferocious grabs at her bare little legs. He gave the beast a kick, and it turned and fastened its long yellow-looking teeth in his arm, and almost bit it through. Our mother was in a terrible way, and wanted to have the dog killed, but nobody knew whose it was, or where it had gone. The doctor burned the wound; and although he turned pale, our Ned did not cry out, but stood it, as the doctor admiringly said, 'like a hero.' When it was bandaged up he put on his jacket, saying, 'Well, that's over.' Mother did not appear to think so; she looked troubled and anxious, shook her head doubtfully, and said, 'I am afraid not.' Then brushing back his hair caressingly with her hand, kissing his forehead, and looking into his dark brown, honest, and fearless eyes, added, half chidingly, half admiringly, 'Ned, my boy, though I would not for the world that you should be different from what you are, a brave, true-hearted lad, yet I sadly fear your high spirit will get you into many a trouble.'

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"'Never mind the trouble, mamma,' replied our Ned, 'so long as it keeps me from doing a mean or cowardly action.'

"He was very nearly getting into trouble once, however, for interfering between a brutal tramp and his wife. There was no principle our Ned adhered to so firmly, as that no provocation, however great, justified a boy in striking a girl, or a man a woman; he held to this as staunchly as kings to the doctrine of divine right. 'Depend upon it, Archie,' he would say, 'a boy who would strike a girl is a mean-spirited puppy, and a man who would strike a woman is a cowardly cur, and one deserves drowning, and the other hanging! Why, I read that even dogs respect the sex, and no respectable dog would so far forget himself as to attack his female companion. I can't say whether the feminines are quite so particular; I am not so certain on that point, but then you must make every allowance, they have a deal to put up with. No, no, Archie; rest assured there is nothing so mean and cowardly as striking women and girls.'

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"Thinking thus, boys, it will not surprise you to learn that 'our Ned' was in continual hot water by making himself the champion of every girl he saw ill-treated. Was some little girl having her hair pulled, or her arms pinched, by a thoughtless or cruel urchin, directly she caught sight of my brother, she ran to him for protection, while her tormentor scuttled away equally fast in an opposite direction, his ears tingling in anticipation of the coming correction. Was a larger and older girl threatened by some ill-natured brother, or brother's chum, she felt herself safe if our Ned made his appearance. In short, he was always ready, at whatever odds, to do battle for the 'weaker sex,' as he jestingly called them. This trait in his character procured for him the name of the 'Young Don Quixote,' and he was as frequently called the 'young Don' as he was by his baptismal name.

"But to return to the tramp. We were walking home one afternoon from school, when, just as we turned a bend in the road, we came close upon a man and woman quarrelling; the man was in the act of striking the woman with a stick as we hove in sight. Our Ned's face flushed up as he saw the man's action, and clenching his hands, he was rushing forward, when I caught him by the jacket, imploring him to stay. He flashed a look, half indignant, half surprised, back at me, exclaiming, 'What, Archie?' and was off. The stick had descended before he reached the scene of contention, but he thrust himself between the victim and her tyrant, who was preparing for a repetition of the blow. 'You big, cowardly brute!' he cried; 'haven't you manhood enough left in you not to strike a woman?'

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"The fellow seemed actually paralysed with surprise at Ned's audacity; he gazed at him for a moment or two with amazement, while the stick which had been in the act of descending remained suspended in the air. The man, however, soon recovered himself, and looked so fierce and brutal that I trembled with apprehension for Ned's safety.

"'Get out of the way, you young fool, or I'll be the death of you,' said the man, trying to thrust him on one side.

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"'Not unless you promise not to strike the woman,' replied Ned, undauntedly.

"'What?' roared the infuriated fellow; 'why, she's my own wife!'

"'More shame, then, for you to touch her.'

"The man swore a terrible oath, seized Ned by the throat, struck fiercely at him with the stick, and finally threw him to the other side of the road, where he fell all in a heap, after which the fellow walked off in the direction of the town we had just left. I hastened to my brother, and seeing him lie there so still, and with his face discoloured, I concluded he was dead, and cried out with a great burst of grief, 'He's killed, he's killed!'

"'Hush! laddie, he's not done for,' said a rough but kindly voice, and looking up I saw the woman, on whose behalf he had done battle, bending over him. 'He's not dead; untie his neckerchief, and give him some air; he's only dazed a bit; he's a brave laddie though. There, see, he's coming round! But I must be off. A brave laddie that!'

"Ned was soon able to rise to his feet and resume his walk homeward; he was a little shaky on the legs, and was compelled to lean heavily on my shoulder as he limped along.

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"'You see, Archie,' he said, 'it was such a choker; the beast griped so hard, I couldn't get a chance to kick his shins; it was all grip and tumble. I think he must have hit me on the head, it feels rather sore.' Brave old Ned, throat and head both bore marks of the fellow's violence for more than a week after.

"Such was 'our Ned.' He was always doing something to make my heart throb with pride, and a look of pleasure kindled in our mother's eyes. He was a brother to be proud of, I can tell you.

"Once every year we shut up house and paid a visit to a brother of my father's, who resided by the sea shore, on the eastern coast of our island. This visit was always a source of pleasure to Ned and myself. Living inland, the sight of Old Father Ocean, in calm or in storm, was like the face of a dear old friend which we hail with delight. We usually contrived to make the best of our six weeks' stay, and would crowd as much pleasure as it was possible into every day; no moment hung heavily on our hands, the time passed only too rapidly, so that at the end of each visit we appeared to have been there but three, instead of six weeks.

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"Our Uncle was an uncle that would gladden any boy's heart; he delighted to have us staying in the house; he said it made the old place cheery and pleasant, for he had the misfortune to be a bachelor; and with the exception of his old housekeeper—whom we boys half worried to death—and his female servants, he saw no 'women folk,' all the year round, but our mother. He was one of the right sort, always planning pic-nics, fishing and rowing excursions; and kept his purse continually in his hand, ready to tip us handsomely, for he appeared to have an instinct that money burnt a hole in our pockets.

"But it was seldom we were in the house, except at meals and to sleep; the cliffs and beach proved too attractive, and we were soon 'hail well met!' with all the fishermen, and speedily became acquainted with the inside of each cottage, and the respective qualities of each boat, as we were with the humours and dispositions of their several owners. Many were the rows, and sails the fishermen gave us; morning, noon, and night, we were ever welcome.

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"One of our chief pleasures was to go out fishing with them in the early mornings. Provided the weather was fine, we would be up, and out, and down on the beach long before any of our uncle's domestics were astir, and as soon as the boatmen appeared with whom we were going, it was in boat, out oars, and away we went, skimming joyously over the waters, which already sparkled with the beams of the rising sun.

"Ah, what happy mornings those were. How joyously we laughed, and joked, and shouted; how full of life and health we were; no sorrow as yet had chilled our hearts, wrinkled our brows, or made our spirits look sadly from out our eyes; no, everything was bright, and tipped with the golden light of the morning of life. All the world lay before us, and the unknown and untried future seemed to beckon us onward, and we were only too eager to follow and see what it had in store.

"It was during one of these visits paid to our uncle, and near to its close, that we lost 'our Ned.' The weather had been unusually fine for September, the sun had been hot and bright, and the sky cloudless. Week after week had glided by, and there had been no rain, or cloud; things inland began to look brown and scorched, while the ground showed great gaps and fissures, as though the earth were thirsty, and was opening its mouth for water. But for a visit to the sea coast the weather could not have been more suitable, at least so Ned and I thought. We had but a week longer to stay, when, one evening, the weather gave unmistakable signs of a change. 'There will be a storm to-night,' said the fishermen, as they hauled their boats up high and dry upon the beach beyond reach of the sea. The sea-gulls flew screaming hither and thither; the wind began a low moaning wail, as of pain, because of the fury gathering within its bosom, and the sea fell with a sullen kind of roar upon the sands, while the clouds gathered darker and blacker along the horizon, presently spreading in thick heavy masses over the face of the sky.

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"About six the storm burst in all its fury. I had never witnessed such an one before, and trembled with apprehension as I heard the frantic howling of the wind, and the fearful roaring of the sea, which gathered itself up in mighty waves and dashed against the tall cliffs as if with the intention of washing the whole earth away, added to which the thunder pealed over head, and the livid lightning gleamed and flashed round the sky. 'What a night!' cried our mother. 'God have mercy on our poor men at sea!'

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"Ned and myself could not rest in the house; we felt we must be out battling with the storm, and out we accordingly went. It was hard work to keep our feet, the force of the wind was such that, two or three times we were compelled to hold by each other to prevent ourselves from being blown down. As we made our way slowly to the

beach, we became aware that something of interest was occurring, for we noticed a cluster of men making frantic gestures, and pointing eagerly seaward. Following with our eyes the direction their hands indicated, we were startled by seeing a large vessel driving rapidly on shore. She was in evident and imminent peril, the wind had torn what canvass she carried into ribbons, while the crew appeared to have lost all control over her movements, the vessel not answering to her helm. We could see some of them cutting away at one of the masts, and others employed in loading a gun, which was presently fired as a signal of distress. We took all this in at a glance, yet not very distinctly, as darkness was settling down over sea and land; but the vivid flashing of the lightning enabled us to obtain glimpses of the state of affairs on board the doomed ship.

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"We soon joined the group of fishermen on the beach—among whom were several women with cheeks blanched to a deadly whiteness, and a kind of wild light glowing in their eyes—who were discussing the propriety of launching a boat to aid in rescuing those who, if no help speedily reached them, would in all certainty find a watery grave. The men were divided among themselves, some being for, and some against making the attempt; and words ran high, while gun after gun came booming across the water, each sounding nearer than its predecessor. At length one old boatman shouted: 'It shall never be said I stood by and saw my fellow-creatures drown before my eyes without making an effort to save them. Those who are for trying, follow me!' And away he ran, followed by some three or four others, who with much difficulty launched a boat on the troubled waters, into which they sprang; and seating themselves, each man seized his oar, while the old boatman took the helm, and with a shout from those on the beach, they commenced their dangerous task.

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"In the excitement of the moment I had forgotten Ned, and was greatly terrified by seeing him jump into the boat after the men. I shouted to him to come back, but I doubt whether he heard my voice, so fearfully loud roared both wind and sea. Just at that moment my uncle came up and inquired for Ned. I could make no answer, but pointed to the fast receding boat, which at one moment could be discerned riding on the top of a huge wave, and the next hid from sight in its hollow.

"'You don't mean to say,' shouted my uncle, frantically, 'that Ned's in that boat?'

"'What's that you say?' screamed a voice behind us.

"We turned hastily round, and there stood my mother, without bonnet or shawl, her long hair loose, and streaming in the wind, and both hands clasped tightly over her bosom. Boys, I shall never forget that face. Years and years have gone by since then, but that white face, so full of horror, haunts me still. We tried to get her to go back home, but we might as well have tried to move a mountain; she would not stir from the beach, and all we could do was to try and infuse into her hope which, alas! we did not ourselves possess.

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"Meanwhile the boat was steadily approaching the doomed vessel, which had struck, and over which the waves dashed; a flash of lightning for an instant revealed one of the men standing in the bows of the boat in the act of throwing a rope to those on board, and another showed that some were being transported from the vessel into the boat; then the rope was seen to be cast off and the men commenced rowing back to shore. Would they ever reach it in safety? How long the time appeared. At length the boat was discerned nearing the beach, and men had already rushed breast high into the sea in readiness to seize it and aid in drawing it safely to shore, when a huge wave was seen to overwhelm and swamp it in an instant.

"A cry of horror rose high above the noise of the tempest; and men and women ran frantically hither and thither, unable to lend a helping hand to those drowning close to land. A rope was tied round the body of one, who, rushing into the boiling surf, firmly clasped one poor wretch in his arms, and both were drawn safely to shore. Again, and yet again, did the noble fellow rush into the angry sea, each time rescuing one from death. How eagerly we bent over each, as they were brought to shore, to see if our Ned was the fortunate one, and how heavy grew our hearts as each inspection proved fruitless. Seven had been thus rescued from a watery grave—a woman among the number—ere our Ned was brought to shore, and then the sea had beaten the brave life out of him, and it was only the senseless body we received, while in his arms, and held so tightly in his death grip, that she could not be removed, was a little three-year-old girl. We afterwards learnt that when the heavy sea struck the boat, Ned was seen to snatch up the child and clasp it firmly in his arms. And now both were dead. Ours was a sorrowful home that night; my mother's grief was something awful to see, and such as I never wish to witness again, and over which I will draw a veil of silence.

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"Our Ned was buried in a little churchyard not far from the sea, and all the fishermen along the coast turned out and followed the coffin to the grave, and stood reverently round, with their caps in their hand, and their weather-beaten features working convulsively, while the clergyman read the burial service. The little child was laid in the same grave; she was the daughter of the rescued woman, and the master of the ill-fated ship—who with many another went to his long home on that awful night.

"My mother, boys, never recovered from the shock poor Ned's death gave her: she drooped and drooped, until God's messenger came to lead her to her lost son.

"One of my companions, who had a turn for verse-making, put into my hand a few lines which he said were suggested by poor Ned's death. They were not of much account, but I learnt them, and sometimes even now repeat them as a trifling memento of a lost brother:

Autumn winds are in the sky;
Autumn leaves are whirling by;
Autumn rain falls pattering;
Autumn time goes clattering
On in storm,
While onward borne
To desolate shore,
Billows rage and roar:
On dark waters tost,
A plaything lost,
The big ship creaks and groans,
Starts and moans.
And sailors' oaths, and sailors' prayers,
To wild night cast,
With sea-bird's screams,
Are carried by the blast,
To happy home, where
A mother dreams;
While the son she bore,
Lies still on the shore.
At break of day,
The salt sea spray
Is washing the sand
From the clenched hand;
And the breezes twirl
The glossy curl;
And the silent face,
Without a trace
Of life, lies
Upturned to the skies.
And the sightless eyes,
Their last work done,
Stare up at the sun.

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"That, boys, was the end of poor Ned. Those who die young escape much sorrow, says the proverb; and the old heathens used to say that those who died young the gods loved; but we hear a more sure voice saying, '*Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.*'"

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CHAPTER VII.

THE FLOOD.

Every boy had gone home with the exception of Leslie, their farewell shouts still echoed in his ears as he looked gloomily from one of the deserted school-room windows out into the equally deserted playground; how silent and lonely everything seemed, and to make matters worse, the rain had recommenced to fall. How sad Leslie felt; he pictured to himself the warm and loving reception each of his departed school-boy friends would receive on reaching home. Yes, he pictured it all to himself as he stood watching the falling rain, and the hot tears gushed from his eyes, and, laying his head upon the window sill, he burst into uncontrollable sobs.

How long he remained thus he knew not, but he was roused from his painful sense of desolation by a gentle hand being laid upon his bowed head, and a kind voice saying, "My poor boy! I am very sorry you are left behind; there, there, do not cry, brighten up, and come into the parlour with Maud and me," and Mrs Price wiped the tears from his face, and brushing back his hair, imprinted a kiss upon his forehead.

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This kindness only made Leslie feel more inclined to cry, but repressing his tears, and placing one hand in Mrs Price's, he said, as they walked to the parlour, "You are very kind, ma'am, and your voice is as soft as my own mamma's; thank you very much."

"There, that is a brave boy; you must not let Maud see you cry."

"No, but I could not help it, I did so long to go home, and it is such a disappointment to be kept at school."

"My dear child, the world and life are full of disappointments."

"Are they, ma'am?"

"Yes, and we must all try to meet our share with a brave heart."

"Are they all as bitter as mine?"

"Some are much worse, my boy."

"I will try to be brave, ma'am; but I really did try to put the linchpin back."

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Maud was delighted to have a companion and playfellow who could be with her all day, and was soon engaged in planning various excursions to different, but favourite scenes in the neighbourhood.

"We will spend one long day," she said, "all by ourselves; we will get up very early in the morning, and cook shall fill a basket with nice things to eat; then we will row down the river until we reach the wood, in which we will roam about all day, having our dinner under the boughs of some large tree, and be for all the world like gipsies; will that not be capital?" and Maud clapped her hands with glee.

"Yes," said Leslie, "and I will take a long stick, which shall be my lance, and I will pretend to be a knight who has rescued a beautiful lady from a cruel band of robbers."

"But who is to be the beautiful lady?" inquired Maud.

"Why, you, of course, for I think you very beautiful."

"Suppose real robbers do come," said Maud, opening her large eyes to the full extent at the bare supposition.

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"Oh, I would protect you," said Leslie, with fervour.

"Should you be really strong enough?"

"I think I should, if danger threatened you, Maud."

"Is not Leslie brave, mamma?" said Maud, turning to Mrs Price.

"Yes, my dear," was the answer.

"I don't know ma'am," said Leslie blushing, "but I think every one is brave when those they love are in danger."

"But, my dear children, if the rain keeps falling as it has done to-day, your excursion will have to be postponed for some days."

There seemed every prospect that Mrs Price's prophecy would be fulfilled; the rain fell incessantly, day after day; men shook their head, saying, "It will be a bad season for farmers, and the poor, if no break come in the clouds." But day after day passed away, and no bright sun broke through and dispersed the rain clouds; for miles round, the fields appeared nothing but lakes of water, and some parts of the road were in the same condition.

The river running in front of Ascot House had now become rapid and turbulent. All the boats belonging to the boys had been carried into the school-yard, that they might not drift away. Mrs Price was full of fear and alarm; she was afraid the river would overflow. The doctor was away from home, but she wrote him urgent letters requesting him to return, for she felt her position to be somewhat critical should danger arise, with only two children and two women servants, the rest having gone away to visit their friends.

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One evening the wind began to rise, while the rain seemed to fall faster than ever. Mrs Price, and Maud, and Leslie, stood looking out into the twilight. The mother was pale with anxiety, as she listened to the increasing noise of the wind.

"Do you think there is any danger, Mrs Price?" said Leslie, touching her arm.

"I cannot say, my dear, but I hope not; I wish the doctor was here, I should know what to do then, but to-morrow we will move into the town in case any thing should happen."

"If you please, mum," said a servant, entering, "the back yard is that full of water

that our kitchen will be flooded if something ain't done."

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"Well, Mary, I don't know what can be done; I will come and see," and Mrs Price left the room.

"Ma' seems very much troubled," remarked Maud.

"Yes, Maud, your mamma is afraid the place will be flooded," said Leslie.

"I hope not, for then we might all be drowned."

"Yes, unless some one came and rescued us."

It was with a heavy and foreboding heart that Mrs Price retired to rest. She made her little daughter sleep in her own room, while Leslie was placed in one much nearer her own than that he had previously occupied.

"Good night, Leslie," said Mrs Price, kissing him; "be sure and not forget to say your prayers, for we all need God's help."

Leslie had no idea how long he had been asleep, when he started up in bed with an undefinable impression that something was wrong. He sat rubbing his eyes, and but half awake—a confused sound, he knew not what, fell upon his ear; it seemed as if some dreadful strife was going on outside his window, something seemed in a terrible fury, raging wildly.

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As his senses became more collected, he listened, and then he heard sounds which made him at once spring from his bed, slip on his trousers, and rush to the window; he hurriedly forced it open, and looked out. The night was still dark, and the wind still high, but something unusual was taking place in the playground directly underneath where he stood; for a minute or two he could not make out what it could be, but as his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he could distinctly make it out to be the surging and roaring of water, which appeared to increase even as he gazed.

"Why," he thought, "the banks have given way, and the river has overflown—the house will be washed away."

Then his thoughts instantly reverted to Mrs Price and Maud, perhaps they were unacquainted with the danger which threatened them, which must be greater than his, for their room was on a lower floor. Without a moment's thought about the risk he might possibly run, half dressed as he was, he opened his room-door, and groped his way down stairs as quickly as he could.

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He could hear the water dashing up against the stairs, how far down he knew not, but, judging from the sounds which it made, he concluded it must be very near Mrs Price's bedroom; this fact made him hurry faster, and not quite so cautiously as before, the consequences of which was his slipping down a number of the stairs, and falling plump into the water, which had already reached the landing; it was not deep, however, so he was quickly upon his feet again, and a moment or two after hammering with might and main at the door of the room in which Maud and her mamma were sleeping.

"Who is there?" came Mrs Price's voice.

"I, Leslie Ross."

"What do you want?"

"You and Maud must get up directly, the river has overflown, and the house is surrounded by water; make haste or it will be too late, it has already reached the landing."

"Wait one moment, Leslie, I will procure a light—the water has invaded my room, I feel the carpet is soaked."

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Sooner than Leslie could have thought possible, Mrs Price had dressed herself and Maud, and appeared pale and anxious at her chamber door.

"Why, child, you are not dressed."

"I had not time, the danger was too great."

"Here, carry Maud up into your room, while I wake the servants."

"Don't be long, mamma dear," cried Maud, greatly terrified.

"No, darling. Hold this light, while Leslie carries you."

Leslie had to put forth all his strength to carry his precious burden, yet he contrived to whisper to her not to fear, for he would protect her. But they were both much frightened when they looked over the bannisters and saw the eddying and whirling water.

"You are all wet, Leslie!" said Mrs Price as she left him with Maud in his arms.

"Yes, I fell in coming down."

Maud was safely conveyed to his room, where he wrapped her round in a blanket which he took from his bed, he then hastily dressed himself so as to be in readiness for any emergency that might arise.

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Mrs Price soon joined them with the terrified servants, whose pale faces and trembling bodies almost made Maud cry, but with her mamma's arms around her her fears were soon quieted.

"Thank God we are all safe," ejaculated Mrs Price.

"Yes, at present," said Leslie; "but I wish daylight was here so that we could understand what our position really is."

"The house is strong, Leslie, I don't think we can be washed away," said Mrs Price.

"Listen, mamma, what a noise the water makes!"

"Yes, darling, but it shall not hurt you."

"I will go and ascertain whether it is still rising," said Leslie, taking one of the candles and leaving the room.

He found the water rising fast, and felt that they must make their way to the attics if they did not wish to be swamped. He hurried back with the dismal intelligence, and Mrs Price immediately acted upon his advice, and the whole party were soon assembled in the top-most room of the house.

"We can go no higher," said Mrs Price; "but, children, let us pray to God for help."

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They all knelt down, and in earnest tones and very fervent words, Mrs Price implored help from the great Helper of all mankind, in their time of peril and danger. When they arose from their knees, the little party felt more strengthened and hopeful. What a refuge God is in times of peril. Will my young readers remember this?

The time passed slowly away; the terror of the little party was every moment increased by the loud tumult of the water, and the terrible shocks which the house every instant received, as some large substance was hurled against it; they began to be afraid that it would not stand; that the waters would wash it away. As this fear gained ascendancy, they longed more than ever for daylight to appear, that they might fully realize their position.

"With daylight, help must come," said Mrs Price, trying to soothe Maud, who was crying, "for many must know of our danger."

Leslie did his utmost to quiet his own fears, and infuse hope into the hearts of the rest; he tried to be brave and cheerful; and many times during that dreadful night Mrs Price admired the boy, and blessed him for his faithfulness and courage; and afterwards she said, it was him alone that kept them from utter despair.

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Daylight at length came, but it only served to reveal the hopelessness of their situation. From the window of their refuge nothing was to be seen but a turbulent mass of heaving and seething water, in which uprooted trees were being tossed about, the thatched roofs of cottages, and pieces of household furniture; now and then the drowned carcass of a pig or sheep would float in sight; but look where they might, or in whatsoever direction, nothing but desolation met their view. The little party looked into each other's eyes to see only the reflection of their own despair.

"Look out, Leslie," said Mrs Price, "and see if any help is approaching."

"I cannot see a living creature in sight in any direction," said Leslie, after a long and anxious gaze.

"God help us!" murmured the anxious mother, pressing her daughter closer to her bosom.

Oh how powerless Leslie felt, that he could not effectually help Maud and her mother, that he could not rescue them from danger, and place them in some safe retreat.

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"What is that, Leslie?" cried Mrs Price, as the house received a violent shock.

"A large tree, ma'am," said Leslie, looking out.

"I am fearful the house will not stand; is the water subsiding?"

Leslie shook his head; the water had risen so as to be but a few feet from their last refuge.

Suddenly Leslie gave a cry; he had been leaning out of the window, and an object caught his eye as it floated and drifted on the water.

"What is it, Leslie—help?" inquired Mrs Price.

"One of the school boats, ma'am; if it would only float close to the window we might all get into it, for the house is terribly shaken."

"Pray God that it may!" was the fervent ejaculation.

Leslie intently watched the progress of the boat, as the waters tossed it hither and thither; at one moment he believed it would float quite near, and then again his hopes were dashed, as it was whirled in another direction. At length, after his hopes had been alternately raised and dashed for many times, to his consternation he found it would pass the house a dozen yards distant. What could be done? It seemed their only hope from destruction. How could it be reached and entered? The distance was not great; should he swim to it? He looked at Mrs Price and Maud, and nerved his heart to the task.

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"What are you about, Leslie?" cried Mrs Price, as she saw him climbing on to the window sill.

"I am going to swim to the boat."

"My child, you must not; the risk is too great!"

"Have no fear, ma'am, it is for your sake and Maud's," replied Leslie; and without further words, he plunged into the water and struck boldly out for the boat.

He found the turbulence of the waters stronger than he anticipated, and was compelled to put forth all his strength to prevent being carried away. The lessons he had learnt from Old Crusoe were of good service now. He had to put them all into practical use, or his brave attempt would have ended in death. He gained the boat at last, but he was so exhausted that it was with difficulty he could climb into it, and when he had done so he was obliged to rest himself, to recover a little measure of strength. He found, as he knew he should, the oars safely secured, one to either side of the boat, and by their aid it was not long before he stood beneath the window from which Mrs Price was anxiously watching him.

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"Will you place Maud in, while I prevent the boat from knocking against the wall of the house."

Leslie's head was on a level with the window sill, so that it was not far for Maud to be lowered. The feat was successfully accomplished; then Mrs Price turned to her two servants, desiring them to enter first.

"Make haste," said Leslie, for the girls hesitated, "or the boat will be dashed to pieces."

They entered with fear and trembling; Mrs Price was the last to leave the room.

"All safe!" cried Leslie, pushing away the boat.

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Mrs Price first wrapped a blanket she had brought with her round Maud, and then, turning to Leslie, seized one of the oars, saying, "I can row."

"You must all sit very still, for the boat is rather small to contain so many," said Leslie.

They rowed in the direction of the little market-town, but their progress was slow, as they had constantly to steer wide to prevent being run down by the floating *débris*.

They had not proceeded half way from the house when one of the servants gave a great cry, and, looking round, Leslie perceived a large boat approaching with several men in it; he raised a shout, which was heartily returned by them, as they turned their boat in his direction. What was the astonishment of Mrs Price, as the boat ran alongside of their own, to see that her husband was one of the number.

"Thank God you are safe," he said, as he clasped wife and child in his arms.

"Yes, and we owe it, under Providence, to Leslie Ross," said Mrs Price.

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"My brave boy, I thank you heartily," said the husband, in broken accents.

All were soon conveyed to a place of safety, while the men started again to try and rescue others from their equally perilous positions.

Happily no lives were lost, but the destruction of property was very great; and it was several days ere the water subsided, so as to allow the work of renovation to commence.

Mr and Mrs Price found a refuge in the house of a friend, where Mr Ross speedily joined them, being anxious for the safety of his son, having read and heard accounts of the flood.

"I think," said Mr Ross, smilingly, one evening, "that we may forgive Leslie the

punishment for his last 'lark.'"

"Yes, indeed," said the doctor, "I owe him more than ever I shall be able to repay."

"Some debts are sweet to owe," said Mrs Price, kissing Leslie.

"To-morrow we must start for home," said Mr Ross, "for your mamma will be anxious to see you."

My young readers can picture to themselves what a reception Leslie received when he reached home—all who have affectionate and loving parents can.

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Leslie's adventures during the flood sobered him somewhat, he became more thoughtful, and the consequence was that he never again indulged in a "lark" without first believing it would have no unhappy results; yet he could never feel sorry for taking out the linchpin from the farmer's cart, although he was sorry that the farmer broke his arm.

Ascot House withstood the fury of the flood, but Dr Price thought it advisable to have his school somewhat further removed from the dangerous stream.

As soon as everything could be satisfactorily arranged, the scholars once more assembled, among whom Leslie received a most hearty welcome, and was regarded as quite a hero, while the story of the flood and his adventures became one of the legends of Ascot House School.

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LARK ***

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