

The Quilt that Jack Built; How He Won the Bicycle eBook

The Quilt that Jack Built; How He Won the Bicycle

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* * * * *

[Illustration: "His serious little face puckered into an anxious frown" (See page 4)]

Cosy Corner Series

The quilt

that Jack built

HOW HE WON THE BICYCLE

By

Annie Fellows Johnston

Author of "The Little Colonel" Series, "Big Brother,"

"The Story of Dago," "Joel: A Boy of Galilee," etc.

Illustrated by Etheldred B. Barry

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To

the boy

who has made all boyhood dear to me—

my only son

=John=

[Illustration]

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an anxious frown" (See *page 4*) Frontispiece

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THE QUILT THAT JACK BUILT

HOW HE WON THE BICYCLE

THE QUILT THAT JACK BUILT

"Johnny *make a quilt!*" repeated Rob Marshall, with a shout of laughter. "I'd as soon expect to see a wild buffalo knitting mittens!"

"But you're not to speak of it outside the family, Rob," his mother hastened to say, "and you must not tease the little fellow. You older children have ways of earning pocket-money,—Rhoda with her painting, and you with your bent iron work, but Johnny hasn't had a cent of income all fall. You know when your father explained what a hard winter this would be, and said we must economize in every way possible, Johnny offered to give up the little amount I allowed him every week for chores. He has been doing his work ever since without pay. Now, he is wild to buy Todd Walters' rifle. He can get it for only three dollars, and I want him to have it if possible. He has cheerfully gone without so many things this fall. He followed me around the house all morning, begging me to think of some way in which he could earn the money, until, in desperation, I suggested that he piece a quilt for me at a cent a block. To my great surprise, he consented eagerly. He usually scorns anything that looks like girls' work."

"And mother will have to do without the new bonnet that she had counted on getting with the turkey money that always comes in just before Christmas, in order to pay for it," said Rhoda to her brother. "I think it's a shame. She needs it too badly to give it up for that child's whim."

"No, daughter," answered Mrs. Marshall, gently. "In a country neighbourhood like this it matters little whether I wear my clothes one year or seven: and it is not a mere whim with Johnny. He wants that rifle more than he ever wanted anything in his life before. I think the quilt money would be a good investment. The work will teach him patience and neatness, and above all keep him quiet in the evenings. Since your father has been so worried over his business, he needs all the relaxation possible at home, he enjoys reading aloud in the evenings, and Johnny's fidgeting annoys him. A ten-year-old boy is all wriggle and racket without something to occupy him."

She did not say it aloud, but, as she cut out the gay patchwork, she thought, with a warm glow of heart, of another reason for the investment. The quilt would be such a precious reminder of Johnny's boyhood some day, when he had put away childish things. Every stitch would be dear to her, because of the little stubby fingers that worked so patiently to set them, despite the needle pricks and knotted thread.

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That evening, with every curtain drawn tight, so that no prying outsider might see and tell, and ready to run at the first sign of an approaching visitor, Johnny sat down on the hearth-rug, tailor fashion, to begin the quilt. A slateful of calculations had shown him that, by making five blocks every evening and fifteen every Saturday, he could finish by Christmas. Todd would wait until then for his money. Three hundred and fifty blocks would give him enough for the rifle, and half a dollar besides for ammunition.

“Well, Johnny,” said Mr. Marshall, teasingly, “I suppose your mother signed a contract for this. ‘There’s many a slip,’ you know. What would you do if the turkeys died before Christmas, and she couldn’t pay you?”

“Huh! No danger of mother’s not keeping her word!” answered Johnny, with a confident wag of his head. “She said she’d pay me, not only the day, but the very *hour* they were done. Didn’t you, mother?”

“Yes, son,” was the smiling answer, as she put the first block into his hands, and the quilt was begun. Not only the quilt, but a series of quiet evenings long to be remembered by the Marshall family. The picture of Johnny bending over his patchwork, his serious little face puckered into an anxious frown, as he tugged at the thread with awkward fingers, is one of the ways they love best to think of him. They still laugh heartily over the time when he rolled under the sofa, work-basket and all, to escape the eyes of a gossiping neighbour, who had knocked unexpectedly at the side door, and who stayed so long that he fell asleep and snored loudly.

The following Saturday morning, Mrs. Marshall, going out to the barn for a hatchet, heard voices on the other side of the partition. Peeping through a crack, she saw a sight that confounded her.

Every boy in the neighbourhood seemed to be there, and every one was making patchwork. One boy was dangling his feet over the manger, several were perched on a ladder, and one was sitting cross-legged on a huge pumpkin. Johnny was going around as Grand Inquisitor from one to another. If a seam was puckered, he gave the unlucky seamstress what they called a “hickey,”—a tremendous thump on the head with his thumb and middle finger. If the stitches were big and uneven, he gave two hickies and a pinch, and one boy got half a dozen, because Johnny said his dirty hands made the thread gray. Mrs. Marshall gathered that it was some sort of secret society, and that they had signed an oath in their own blood not to tell.

“Johnny is at the bottom of it,” she thought, laughing as she went back to the house. “He has set the other boys to sewing in order to forestall them. Now they cannot tease him, should they hear of his private quilt-piecing.”

[Illustration]

Another week went by of peaceful, uninterrupted evenings, and every night at bedtime Johnny counted out his tale of finished blocks with a sigh of relief. On the second Saturday evening he disappeared immediately after supper. It was nearly an hour later when he came tumbling excitedly into the house.

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"Look, mother! Look, everybody!" he exclaimed. "It's all done! Here are the three hundred and fifty blocks all in one pile. Now, I'm ready for my money, mother."

"Why, Johnny!" gasped Mrs. Marshall, in astonishment. "It isn't possible you have done them all in two short weeks!"

"Here they are," answered Johnny, smiling broadly. "Todd got in a hurry for his money, and I was so everlasting tired of the old patchwork that I had to think of some plan; so I farmed out two hundred of the blocks at a quarter of a cent apiece. I got up a sort of secret society, and we sewed after school and on Saturdays in the barn. The boys are waiting around the corner for their money now. There's ten of 'em, and I owe each one a nickel. So give me part of the money in small change, please, mother. Todd's there, too, 'cause I told him that you said you'd pay the very hour they were done."

He dropped the bundle in her lap and hopped up and down, holding one foot in his hand. "Now the rifle's mine," he sang. "I can look the whole world in the face, for I owe not any man." He was quoting from the memory exercises at school. His eager face clouded a little at his mother's ominous silence. He shifted uneasily from one foot to another, wondering why she did not speak. At last she said, slowly:

"But I had expected to pay you out of the turkey money, and I can't get that before Christmas. I hadn't an idea you could finish before then. And, oh, Johnny!" she added, sadly, "I thought it would be all your own work. What do I care for a quilt made by Tom, Dick, and Harry? I consented to spend so much money on it, because I thought it would give you employment for six or seven weeks at least, and that we would all set such store by a quilt that you had made with your own little fingers,—every stitch of it!"

Johnny wriggled uncomfortably. It had been purely a business arrangement with him. He could not understand his mother's sentiment. There was another disagreeable pause. Mrs. Marshall gazed into the fire with such a disappointed look in her eyes that Johnny felt the tears coming into his own. Then his father and Rob and Rhoda, seeing the humour of the situation, began to laugh.

"Oh, what a joke!" gasped Rhoda finally, holding her sides.

"Who on? I'd like to know," demanded Johnny, savagely, and threw himself full length on the rug.

"I don't know what to do!" he sobbed, his face buried in his arms, and his feet waving wildly back and forth above his prostrate body. "I don't know what to do-oo! The boys are out there waiting for me around the corner, expecting me to bring the money right away. I told them *sure* I'd bring it—that you promised—the very hour! I didn't know it made any difference to you who finished 'em, just so they was done."

“It was a misunderstanding, Johnny,” said his mother, rising slowly, “but I’ll keep my promise, of course.” She went up-stairs, and in a few minutes came back with a five-dollar gold piece that she had taken out of a little box of keepsakes. They all knew its history.

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"Oh, mother, not that!" cried Rhoda. "Not the gold piece that grandfather gave you because he was so proud of your leading the school a whole year both in scholarship and deportment!"

"Yes, he gave it to me on my tenth birthday, just a little while before he died. It was the last thing he ever gave me, and I have kept it for thirty years as one of my most precious possessions." She was rubbing the little coin until it shone like new, with the bit of chamois skin in which it had been folded. "But dear as it is to me, it is not so dear as the keeping of my word. Here, Johnny, take it down to the corner, and ask Mr. Dolkins to change it for you."

Mr. Marshall listened with a pained contraction of the brows. "Couldn't you wait until the latter part of next week, Abby?" he asked. "I think I could get the money for you by that time, and I hate to have you part with the little keepsake you have treasured so long."

Mrs. Marshall shook her head. "No, Robert," she answered, "for that would make Johnny break his word, too. You know he promised the boys,—and we couldn't afford that, could we, son? We must keep our word at any cost." She slipped the money into his hand, kissed him, and bade him hurry home again; and Johnny, rushing back to his impatient creditors, felt that it was something very solemn indeed which had just taken place.

[Illustration: "DEAR AS IT IS TO ME, IT IS NOT SO DEAR AS THE KEEPING OF MY WORD."]

Johnny's little room at the head of the stairs was heated by the hall stove, so that the door stood open all day long. When the new quilt was folded across the foot of his bed, it was the first thing that caught the eye of every one passing up the stairs.

Rob made up a verse about it, which he sang so often to tease Johnny that the first note was enough to make the child bristle up for a fight:

"This is the patchwork all forlorn,
Made by the boys in Marshall's barn.
The dog and the cat and even the rat
Had a hand in that—
A hand in the Quilt that Jack built!"

"You needn't make fun of it," said Rhoda one day. "It has held me to my word more than once. Yesterday, for instance. I would have broken my promise to poor little Miss Sara Grimes, to help her entertain her old ladies, and would have accepted Harry Dilling's invitation, which came later, to go sleighing. But that quilt would not let me. It showed me mother as she stood there with her precious little gold piece, saying. '*We must keep our word at any cost!*' After that I couldn't disappoint poor old Miss Sara."

"I know," answered Rob, softly, looking up from his algebra. "It's served me the same way. It lies there like the exponent of a higher power,—the exponent of mother's standards and ideals that she expects us to raise ourselves up to."

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Mr. Marshall made a similar confession one day, and it seemed that Johnny alone was the only member of the family who had no sentiment in regard to the quilt, except, perhaps, a feeling of gratitude. It had brought him the rifle. He snuggled down under it on cold winter nights, tumbled out from under it on cold winter mornings, and went his happy-go-lucky way, regardless of what it might have said to him if he had had ears to hear. Then, when, worn and faded by many washings, it outgrew its usefulness as he outgrew his boyhood, one spring morning his mother packed it carefully away in folds of old linen and lavender.

It was toward the middle of John Marshall's freshman year at college. The boy "all wriggle and racket" was a strong, athletic young fellow now, still with the same propensities of his restless boyhood. His overflowing animal spirits made him a jolly companion, and he found himself popular from the start. There was no need now for petty economies in the Marshall homestead. Business had been prosperous since that one hard winter when Johnny made patchwork to pay for his gun, and he found himself now with as liberal an allowance as any one in his class.

"I'm in for having a royal good time," he wrote to Rhoda, who was home-keeper now, for it had been two years since her mother's death, and Rhoda had done her best to fill the vacant place to them all. "And you needn't preach to me, Sis," he wrote. "I'm all right, and I'm not going to get into the trouble which you cheerfully predict. I shall not get into any scrapes that I can't skin out of; but a fellow would be a fool who didn't squeeze as much fun as possible out of his college life."

As he was finishing this letter, three students, who were foremost in all the fun going, came tumbling unceremoniously into his room. "Say, you there, Marshall," cried the first one, "hustle up and get ready for a lark to-night. You know that Sophomore Wilson, the long-faced fellow the boys call Squills? He's rooming in the old Baptist parsonage away out on the edge of town. It's vacant now, and they're glad to let him have a room free for the sake of somebody to guard the premises. We've found that he will be out to-night, sitting up with a sick frat., so we've planned to borrow the parsonage in his absence to give a swell dinner. Tingley and Jones will visit several hen-roosts in our behalf, and we'll roast the fowls in the parsonage stove. If you'll just set up the champagne, Jacky, my boy, we'll be 'Yours for ever, little darling,' and we'll gamble on the green of the defunct parson's study table 'till morning doth appear.'"

He took out a new deck of cards as he spoke, and slapped significantly on his overcoat pocket, bulging with packages of cigarettes.

"What if Squills should come back unexpectedly?" asked Johnny.

"Oh, that's all arranged. We'll toss him up in a blanket until he hasn't breath enough left to squeal on us. Suppose you bring along a blanket, if you have one to spare," suggested the wild senior, whose notice always flattered the susceptible freshman. "In

case Squills does turn up before schedule time, it would be a good thing to have one handy.”

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"All right, I'll be ready. When do you start?"

"At ten o'clock," was the answer. "We'll come by for you," and the three conspirators tramped down the long corridor, shoulder to shoulder, to the whistled tune of "John Brown's Body."

John sat down at his table, frowning over his lessons for the next day. For nearly an hour he tried to work, first at his Latin and then on the theme that he was expected to hand in directly after chapel. But his thoughts were on the coming lark.

"Oh, bother!" he exclaimed at last, tossing the books into a disorderly heap and tearing his theme in two. "What difference will it make fifty years from now, if I'm not prepared to-morrow? I guess I'll get that blanket while I think about it."

At the beginning of the cold weather, he had written home for some extra blankets, and Rhoda had sent a box immediately. It had been standing in the closet several days, waiting for him to find time to unpack it. A sofa pillow made of his class colours came tumbling out as he removed the lid, and, wondering what other extras his sister might have put in the box, he turned it upside down on the bed to investigate. Two fine soft blankets came first, then an eiderdown comfort, and then—something wrapped in a square of time-yellowed linen, and smelling faintly of lavender.

"What under the canopy!" he muttered, beginning to unfold it. "Well, I'll be—jiggered!" he exclaimed, as the familiar squares of faded patchwork met his eye. "It's that old quilt I made for mother!" He had forgotten its existence, but now, as he spread it out full length, smiling at the well-known object, it seemed only yesterday that he had been at work upon it. Rob's old teasing rhyme came back to him:

"This is the patchwork all forlorn,
Made by the boys in Marshall's barn."

[Illustration: "THE FAMILIAR SQUARES OF FADED PATCHWORK MET HIS EYE"]

"It was funny," he thought, "the way I farmed out those two hundred blocks to the other boys. Why, here's a piece of one of those little striped waists I used to wear, and there's a piece of Rob's checked shirt and Rhoda's apron. I wouldn't have imagined that I could have recognized them after all these years, but they look as natural as life. And this,"—his finger was resting on a square of dotted blue calico,— "mother wore this. My! the times I've hung on to that dress, following her around the house, bothering her to stop and cover a ball, or make me a marble bag, or untangle my fishing-lines. And she always stopped so patiently."

He was back in the sunny old kitchen, with its spicy smell of gingerbread and pies, hot from the Saturday baking. Outside, the snow clung to the trees, but the wintry sun

shining through the shelf of yellow chrysanthemums by the window, made dancing summer shadows on the clean white floor. He was looking at the quilt through blurred eyes now. How many, many nights she had spread it over him and tucked him snugly in, and softly kissed his eyelids down, before she carried away the lamp. It came over him all in a swift rush, with a sudden cold sense of desolation, that she could never do that again! never any more! The light had been taken away, never to be brought back.

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Big fellow as he was, he dropped on his knees by the bed, and buried his face in the old quilt, with a long, quivering sob. He had been occupied with so many things in the new experiences of his college life that he had not missed her for the last few months: but the sight of the old quilt brought her so plainly before him that the longing to have her back was almost intolerable.

Several blocks away, a crowd of students crossing the campus in the moonlight started a rollicking chorus. It floated blithely up to him on the wintry night air.

"The fellows will be here in a minute," he thought. "What would she say if she knew? I promised her that I would never, never touch a drop of liquor or a deck of cards, and here I am, getting ready for a night of drinking and gambling and carousing. But I've gone too far to back out now. How they'd hoot and laugh if they knew!"

He got up, and began to fold the quilt, preparatory to putting it back in the box. The old scenes still kept crowding upon him. He saw himself lying on the hearth-rug, the night the boys were waiting for him around the corner, and he was crying out, "But you *promised me! You promised me!*" and there was his mother with the bit of a gold piece in her hand,—the precious little keepsake that she had treasured for thirty years, saying, in answer to her husband's remonstrance: "No, Robert, that would make Johnny break his promise, too, and we couldn't afford that, could we, son? We must keep our word at any cost!"

It stood out fair and fine now, the memory of her unswerving truthfulness, her fidelity to duty. If the commonplace deeds of those early days had seemed of little moment to his childish eyes in passing, he saw them at their full value now. He recognized the high purpose with which she had pieced her little days together, now that he could look at the whole beautiful pattern of her finished life. How sacredly she had always kept her word to him, the slightest promise always inviolate! Ah, the little gold coin was the very least of all her sacrifices.

He was about to say, "No, they shall not all be in vain," when he heard the fellows on the walk outside. A cold perspiration broke out on his forehead, as he considered the consequences should he refuse to go with them. Strong as he was, he had a fear of ridicule. To be laughed at, to be ostracized by the set he admired, was more than he could endure. Like many another brave fellow, fearless in every respect but one, he was an arrant coward before that one overpowering fear of being laughed at.

He gathered the quilt in his arms, debating whether he should hide it hastily in the closet, or come out boldly before them all with its whole homely little story. The fellows were tramping down the hall now. Oh, what *should* he do? Go or not? It meant to break with them for all time if he refused now.

There was an instant more of indecision, as the footsteps halted at the threshold, but, when the door burst open, he had squared his shoulders to meet whatever might come, and was whispering between his set teeth: "*At any cost*, mother! I'll keep my promise *at any cost!*"

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* * * * *

HOW HE WON THE BICYCLE

*This story first appeared in the Central Christian Advocate.
The author wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of the editor in
permitting her to republish it in the present volume.*

HOW HE WON THE BICYCLE

"Looks like everybody in Bardstown has a wheel but us," said Todd Walters, wistfully pressing his little freckled nose against the show-window of the bicycle shop, where a fine wheel was on exhibition.

It was the third time that day that Todd had walked five blocks out of his way to look in at that window, and each time Abbot Morgan and Chicky Wiggins were with him. In the two weeks that the new store had been open, the boys never failed to stop by on their way from school, and the more they looked at the wheel displayed so temptingly in the window, the more each boy longed to own it.

None of them had any spending money. Todd might have by and by when school was out, and he began selling fly-paper again, as he had done the summer before; but it was understood in the tumble-down little cottage that Todd called home that every penny thus earned was to be saved toward the purchase of a much needed new suit.

[Illustration]

Chicky Wiggins never could hope to buy the wheel, for he was a district messenger boy, and it took all his weekly earnings to pay for his board and lodging and washing and shoe-leather. Chicky had no family to look after him, or help him make one nickel do the work of three.

Abbot Morgan was such a well-dressed boy that one might have supposed that his pockets were always supplied with spending money, but those who knew Abbot's uncle, the hard, grasping man with whom he lived, knew better. Peter had worked hard for his little fortune, and, while he was willing to provide a comfortable home for his sister's orphan son, he did not propose that one penny should be spent in foolishness, as he called it. So there was little hope of Abbot ever owning the wheel.

"But I'll have something to spend as I please this summer," he said, as they stood looking in through the window. "Uncle said that after I have done Aunt Jane's chores every morning, I shall have my time to myself this summer. He let me have the two acres back of the house for a garden, and I've got it planted with all sorts of vegetables.

They are coming on fine, and I'm going to sell them and have all the money myself, after uncle has paid for the seed."

Many a conversation about the wheel took place in front of that window, and old Judge Parker, who had his law-office next door, soon began to look for the boys' visit as one of the most interesting happenings of the day. Everybody in Bardstown knew old Judge Parker. He was as queer as he was kind-hearted, which was saying a great deal, as he was the most benevolent old soul that had ever lived in the little town. There was a kindly twinkle in his blue eyes as he laid down his paper and beckoned the boys to come into his office. He had been making inquiries about them for several days, and one of the queerest of his many queer plans was soon unfolded to the wondering boys.

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"I've noticed that you seem to admire that wheel in the window of Stark Brothers a good deal," he said, "and I'm going to give you each a chance to win it. I'll offer it as a prize if you are willing to work for it on my conditions. I've heard that you will each be in business for yourselves in a small way this summer, and I'll make this offer. If each of you boys without any help from any one, will choose a good proverb or text out of the Bible for a business motto, I'll give the wheel to the boy who makes the best choice. You can select any three business men in Bardstown to be the judges; but the proof of a pudding is in the eating, you know, so you must apply that motto to your own business faithfully for two months, and the excellence of the motto will be judged by the results."

The boys looked at the judge in open-mouthed surprise. They thought he surely must be joking, but nothing could be more serious or dignified than the way in which the white-haired old gentleman repeated his offer. So, after awhile, the boys succeeded in naming three business men to be the judges, who were satisfactory to all of them. They chose a grocer, a druggist, and a livery-stable proprietor, who were located on the same street with Stark Brothers.

"Ain't it the funniest thing you ever heard of?" said Chicky Wiggins, when they were once more on the street. "It'll be a long time to keep a secret, and I'll be aching to know what mottoes you kids have picked out. I'll bet it's just a trap to get us to read the Bible. He's one of your pious kind."

"Well, it's a trap worth walking into," answered Abbot, "if it's baited with something as tempting as a bicycle. The only trouble is that it will take so long to find a motto. The Bible is so full of them that a fellow'd feel like he ought to read it clear through, for fear of skipping the very one that might take the prize, and we have only a week to make a choice."

Abbot did not have to search long for his verse. He found it the second day, and chose it the instant his eye caught the sentence on the page. "Why, I've heard uncle say that a dozen times!" he exclaimed, as he read the familiar line, "*The hand of the diligent maketh rich.*" That worked all right in uncle's case, and it will be an easy one to live up to, for, if I buckle down to it, and sell a whole lot of vegetables, I can prove my motto is the best." From that day Abbot began to feel a sense of ownership in the wheel in Stark Brothers' show-window.

Todd Walters worried nearly a week over his choice. It was the last week of school, and he sat with a little pocket Bible hidden between the covers of his geography many an hour when he should have been learning the rivers of Asia, or doing long sums in the division of fractions. Six days of the seven went by before he found a motto to his liking. He was lying stretched out on the old lounge in the tiny sitting-room that noon, waiting for dinner. Todd and his mother lived alone in this little cottage, and she was busy all summer making preserves and pickles and jellies to sell. It was their only means of support.

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As the delicious odour of strawberry preserves floated in from the kitchen, Todd thought of his sweet-faced little mother bending over the steaming kettle, and wished he could tell her the secret of the prize wheel. "I wisht I could ask her for a verse," he said. "She must know pretty near the whole Bible off by heart. I never knew anybody that could say so many verses in a string without stopping."

Just then his eye fell on the old family Bible, lying in state on the marble-topped centre table, and remembering how boldly the big type always seemed to stare out at him when he used to look at the pictures in it, he got up from the lounge to walk across the room and open it. The leaves opened as of their own accord at a chapter in Proverbs, where an old-fashioned cardboard book-mark kept the place. It had been years since his grandfather's trembling hand had placed that book-mark there, the last time he led in family prayers, and his mother had never allowed it to be moved. So the book opened now at the chapter that had been read on that memorable morning, and Todd's eye caught the text at the top of the page: *"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour than silver and gold."*

"I'll take that," said Todd, softly, to himself, as he closed the great volume, "for I remember just what mother said about it when she explained it to me."

So that was the motto which found its way to Judge Parker's office in a sealed envelope, as he had directed they should be sent, with each boy's name signed to the verse of his choice.

It was not so easy for Chicky Wiggins to make a decision. To begin with, nobody in the cheap lodging-house that was his only home had a Bible, and he was ashamed to ask for one from the other boys. Still the daily sight of that wheel in Stark Brothers window finally nerved him to borrow a little old dog-eared Testament from the Swede who swept out the office. The young Swede had gotten it at a mission school he faithfully attended. There was no back on it, and several of the leaves were missing, but some reverent hand had heavily underscored some of the verses, and these were the ones that Chicky spelled out when no one was looking.

"Here's one in Luke that somebody has marked," he said to himself. "That ought to bring good luck, 'cause Luke is my real name, and it was daddy's, too. Everybody that knew daddy says that he was a good man. I believe I'll take this just because it is in Luke, and somebody seemed to think it was an extra good one, or he wouldn't have put three lines under it. The other verses that are marked have only one. *'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.'* I reckon that that's about as good a motto for the district messenger business as any. I'll take this and sign myself Luke. Folks have called me Chicky so long they must have forgotten I have any other name."

[Illustration]

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The Monday after school was out found Abbot in a pair of old overalls, hoeing away in his garden as if his life depended on getting rid of the last weed. Several of the boys stopped at the back fence to beg him to go fishing with them, but he gave them a laughing refusal.

"I'm after bigger fish than your little brook trout," he said, in a mysterious way. "I've got my line set for a whaling big fish that will make you all green with envy. You just wait and see what I get on the end of *my* line."

He chuckled as he spoke. The line he meant was in a sealed envelope on Judge Parker's desk, and he was sure that it would draw the prize which would be envied by every boy in the neighbourhood.

"I'll bet it's tied to a bean-pole," was the mocking answer. "Come along, boys, no use wasting time on an old dig like Ab."

He stood leaning on his hoe-handle a moment, watching the boys file down the alley with their fishing-poles over their shoulders, and thought of the shady creek bank where they would soon be sitting. How much pleasanter to be where the willows dipped down into the clear, still pools than here in the rough furrows of the garden, with the hot sun beating down on him. It was only for a moment he stood there, longing to follow, then he fell to work again.

Every thud of the hoe, as it struck into the rich earth, kept time to the refrain which repeated itself over and over in his mind: "The *hand* of the *dil-i-gent ma-keth rich!*" That was the tune to which he set everything during the two months that followed. He hurried through his Aunt Jane's chores in an impatient way, doing as little as possible in order to get back to his own work. She wondered why he was so absorbed in his garden. When he was not weeding or watering or planting, he was counting the number of pea-pods on every vine, or the ears of corn as they tasselled out on each stalk. He had put brains as well as muscle into his summer's work, asking questions and advice of every gardener in Bardstown, and carefully reading the agricultural papers one of them loaned him. Every vegetable he attempted to raise was a success, and he carried them all three miles down the road toward the city, to some rich customers that he found in the elegant suburban homes there. They were willing to pay nearly double the price that the Bardstown people offered him, everything he had was so fresh and good.

It was a long way to trudge with his heavy baskets, and he longed every day for the wheel he was trying so hard to win. "Won't I spin along then!" he said to himself on more than one occasion, as he dragged his tired feet homeward.

His Aunt Jane wanted to buy some of his vegetables, and hinted several times that he might supply the table once in awhile for nothing; but beyond an occasional contribution

in the way of a few inferior vegetables that he could not sell, he would not part with any at the price she offered.

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"He's a boy after your own heart, Peter Morgan," she complained to her husband. "He's closer than the bark on a tree."

"Well, that's nothing against him," was the answer. "That's business. He'll be rich some day. Keep all you get and get all you can is the only way to get along in the world, according to my notion."

It was the Monday after school was out that Todd Walters also started to work. He was selling fly-paper on commission for his friend, the druggist. It was that sticky kind, called "Tanglefoot," that promises such a pleasant path to the unwary insect, but proves such a snare and a delusion at the last.

Mrs. Walters waved him good-bye from the kitchen door as he started hopefully off, bare-footed and happy, with a smile all over his little, round, honest face. He came back at noon with forty cents and a glowing account of his morning's work.

"I might have made more," he said, "but Mrs. Carr asked me to play with the baby while she ran across the street to ask about another cook. Hers is gone, and she was afraid to leave the baby by itself while she hunted another. Then when I stopped at Mrs. Foster's, the professor's wife, you know, she was nearly crying. She had lost a ring in the grass that she thought everything of. It had belonged to the professor's grandmother. I helped her look for it for nearly an hour, and at last I found it on the tennis-court. It was a beauty, and she was so glad she fairly hugged me, and wanted to pay me for finding it, but of course I wouldn't take anything for a little work like that."

"Of course not," echoed his mother. "Well, what else hindered you?"

"Old Mr. Beemer for one thing. He is too blind to read, you know, and he was sitting out under a tree, with a letter in his hand. His daughter told me she had read it to him five times this morning, but he wants to hear it every half-hour. He is so old and childish. She had bought several sheets of fly-paper, so I stopped and read it through twice, and he seemed so pleased, and called me the light of his eyes. I hope I can do better than this this afternoon."

Mrs. Walters took the four dimes he handed her to put away, and, as they jingled down into the old cracked ginger jar that served for Todd's bank, she said: "Well, under the circumstances, I'm glad you didn't earn any more this morning, if it would have kept you from doing those little kindnesses. You need your clothes bad enough, in all conscience, but it is better to smooth out the way for people as you go along. Old Solomon was right, loving favour *is* better than silver and gold."

Todd's sunburned face grew so red, as his mother unconsciously stumbled upon the motto that he had chosen, that he turned a somersault on the kitchen floor to hide his

embarrassment. He need not have been so confused, for she was always saying such things.

[Illustration]

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Sales were not always so good as they were the first hot morning. Many a day Todd wandered all over the little town, stopping at every door, only to be met by a disappointing “no.” Many a time, when the hot pavements burned his bare feet and he was tired and discouraged, he longed for the wheel which he hoped would some day be his; and every evening, on his way home, he stopped to look in at Stark Brothers’ window, to feast his eyes on that bicycle inside.

One evening, as he stood looking in, Chicky Wiggins slipped up and slapped him on the back in his friendly way. “Hullo, Todd,” he called, “admiring my wheel, are you? I’m letting it stay in there awhile to accommodate Stark Brothers, but the truth is I’ve been thinking seriously of having to take it out. The company sends me on such long errands that I seem to be getting more walking than the doctor prescribed. It doesn’t agree with me.”

“You mean *my* wheel,” laughed Todd. “I’ll lend it to you sometimes, Chicky, my son, if you’ll promise to be good.”

“I say, Todd,” said Chicky, giving him a quizzical glance, “I’d give a doughnut to know what motto you and Ab chose.”

Todd grinned. “You won’t have much longer to wait,” he said. “Time is nearly up, and we’ll know our fate in another ten days.”

The last week in August, the three men whom the boys had selected to decide their case met in Judge Parker’s office.

“If you want my opinion,” said the grocer, when he was called upon, “I think Ab Morgan has worked the hardest for this prize. He has proved the truth of his motto beyond a doubt, for he has made a success of his garden, and has never slacked up a day. He has made a nice little pile of money, too, and I would recommend him to any business man in this town as an example of diligence. I’ll be glad to have him clerk for me any time he gets ready to come.”

“I think that little Todd Walters has made the best choice,” said the druggist. “You see, he has been selling fly-paper for me all summer on commission, and I’ve had a chance to see the inner workings. People are always coming to me with some pleasant thing to say about him. He’s certainly won the ‘loving favour’ of all he’s had anything to do with, whether they were his customers or not, and the good name he has made for himself will stick to him all his life.

“He had a lemonade stand at the baseball game last week, and I heard Doctor Streeter say to a friend: ‘Come on, Bill, let’s go over and get a glass,—patronize the little fellow.’ The man said, ‘No, thank you, doc, none of that weak circus stuff for me,—acid and

colouring matter and sweetened water. I've been an enterprising boy myself, and know how it's done.'

"I assure you it's all right if Todd Walters made it,' answered the doctor. 'I'm willing to guarantee him to any extent. He's "all wool and a yard wide" in everything he does, and, if you don't find his lemonade is pure stuff, made of real lemons, my name is not James Streeter. That little fellow has the respect and confidence of everybody who knows him, and I'd trust him with anything I've got.'"

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"That's all right as far as it goes," interrupted the grocer, "but he hasn't made as much money as Ab. Ab has furnished straight goods, too, and has never misrepresented things."

"Yes," answered the druggist, "but the almighty dollar has been his sole aim and ambition. He has been selfish and miserly in the pursuit of it, and money is all he has gained. Now Todd has been industrious enough, and gone about his business quite as faithfully as Ab, but instead of putting his head down like a dog on the scent of a rabbit, he has had some thought of the people he passed. I like that in a business man. Aside from any ethical consideration, a man makes more in the long run if he cares for the good-will of his customers as well as their cash."

"What have you to say on the subject, Mr. Brown?" asked the judge, turning to the proprietor of the livery-stable.

"Well, my choice is for Chicky Wiggins," answered the man, tipping back his chair and thrusting his hands in his pockets. "I may not have as much book-learning as these other gentlemen, but there's one thing that I do know when I see it, and that's a good steady gait either of a horse or a man. Now Chicky is no thoroughbred, and he'll probably never beat the record of them that is, but I've kept an eye on him this summer, and I tell you he's developing the traits that win every time. Last spring, when the judge made this offer, he was as skittish and unreliable as a young colt. I wouldn't have trusted him around the corner to do an errand for me. I've known him ever since he put on the district messenger uniform, and I wouldn't have given one of his own brass buttons for him. I've come across him too many times, when he'd been sent on an errand, stopping to play marbles and fly kites with the other boys.

"But since he's took up with that motto of his, he's settled down in the harness as steady as a ten-year-old horse. Now I notice if there's anything specially important to be done, Chicky's the one they pick out. There's something almost pitiful in the way he's been trying, when you recollect he has never had any raising, and has shifted for himself all his life. I don't really believe that it's to get the wheel that has made such a change in him as the idea of being faithful in every little thing has taken such a holt on him. I've known him to walk two miles to straighten out the matter of a penny or a postage-stamp.

"I'm not saying but that the other fellows' mottoes are best for them that likes them, but, if I was a-hunting somebody that I could tie to through thick and thin, in any kind of business, and under every kind of circumstance, I'll be blamed if I wouldn't rather choose somebody that was a-living up to Chicky's text in dead earnest."

"He certainly does seem to have made more improvement than the others personally," admitted the grocer, "but in a business way the results do not show so plainly."

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"Well, there's still a week," said Judge Parker, finally. "We'll wait a little longer before we decide."

Several days later, Todd Walters ran breathlessly up the alley that led to the back of the Morgan place, and scrambled over the high board fence. "Hi, Ab!" he called, as he dropped lightly to the ground. "Have you heard the news?"

"No," answer Ab, dropping the basket he was carrying, and straightening up to listen.

"Chicky is in luck. He's had a perfectly splendid position offered him in an express-office in another town. He'll make as much in one month there as he did here in a whole year. I'm going down after dinner to ask all the particulars. All I know now is that some strange gentleman telephoned down to the District Messenger Office a few days ago for them to send the trustiest employee that they had up to the hotel as quick as possible. Something important had to be attended to, and he didn't want anybody that couldn't be trusted in every way. And out of the whole bunch Chicky was the one they picked, as the most reliable one in the office.

"The gentleman was sick and couldn't go to take some important papers somewhere that they had to go, and he was a stranger, and didn't know anybody in town. But he told Chicky it was very particular that they should get there on time, and he would make it all right with the company for sending him out of town. Then he gave him some money to buy a railroad ticket, and told him just where to go, and what to do and everything.

"Well, there was a wreck on the road, somewhere along in the night, and lots of people were hurt. Chicky got a bad cut on his head that bled awfully, and sprained his shoulder besides. But when he shook himself together, and got somebody to tie up his head, he found that the train would be seven hours behind time on account of that smash-up. And that kid just started off on foot. He walked all the rest of the night, and, when he got to the town where he was to leave the papers, he was so near done for that he had to hire a hack to haul him up to the man's house. It turned out that he got there just in time to save the stranger a big lot of property in some way or another, and the man said he'd been looking for years for a boy like that, who could be faithful to a trust, and now that he'd found him he intended to stand by him. I think it was real brave of Chicky to go all that way in the dark, all alone on a strange road. I'll bet it will be in all the papers."

[Illustration]

"And I'll bet he'll get the bicycle now," said Ab, gloomily, as he sat down on the wheelbarrow and kicked his heels against it. "I feel it in my bones. All my summer's work's gone for nothing."

“I wanted it awfully bad, too,” said Todd, with a sigh and a sudden clouding of his bright little face. “Of course, I’d be glad for Chicky to have it, when he hasn’t any home or nothing, but I’ve worked so hard for it, and I can’t help feeling disappointed.”

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All the way home his heart felt as heavy as lead, and, when he came in sight of the little tumble-down cottage, his eyes were blurred with tears for a moment.

“Todd, dear,” called his mother, running out to meet him, “guess who has been here. It was Judge Parker’s wife. Yes, I know all about your secret now. She told me the men have finally decided that Luke Wiggins has won the wheel. But she is so disappointed on your account, and told me so many nice things that people have said about you that I just sat down and cried. I was so proud and happy. And, Todd, what do you think she left here for you to take care of? She’ll pay you well for doing it, and it will be yours to use just as if it were your own,—a pony! A beautiful little Shetland pony. It was her little grandson’s, and they have kept it since he died, because they could not bear to part with anything he had been so fond of. Now they are going away from Bardstown for a long, long time. They have been looking around for somebody to take care of it, and they say they would rather trust it to you than any one they know. You can have it to pet and love and use just as long as you want it.”

“Oh, it’s too good to be true!” cried Todd, giving his mother a hug of frantic joy before he rushed off to the stable. There she found him a little later with his arms around the pony’s neck, saying over and over: “Oh, you dear, beautiful old thing! You’re better than a thousand wheels!”

“It’s all because of your living up to your motto, sonny boy,” she said, as she held out a lump of sugar for the pretty creature to nibble. “It was your ‘good name’ that brought you into Mrs. Parker’s ‘loving favour.’”

Abbot Morgan’s disappointment was not tempered by any such great happiness as came to little Todd, but it was a proud moment when he showed his uncle his bank-book, and heard his hearty praise. Judge Parker and the grocer were there also at the time.

“I came to tell you,” said the grocer, “that there is a man in my store who has a first-class wheel that he wants to sell cheap. You have earned more than enough to pay the price he asks for it, so you see your summer’s work has not been in vain. And I want to say that any time you want to put that ‘hand of the diligent’ into my business. I’ll make a place for you.”

There was a gratified smile on Ab’s face as he thanked him. “I’ll go right down now and buy that wheel,” he exclaimed.

“Well,” said the judge, as he took his departure, “every one of those texts worked out just as true as preaching, and brought its own reward, but I rather think Luke’s is the best one to tie to.”

As he turned the corner, he met Chicky himself, who was coming to find him on the new bicycle that had just been sent to him.

“Oh, Judge Parker!” he cried, jumping off the wheel, cap in hand. “I was just coming to thank you, but,” he stammered, “I—I—don’t know where to begin. I’m tickled nearly to death. It’s a beauty, sure!”

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He looked down, growing red in the face, as he dug his toe in the gravel. Then he said, bashfully: "You've more than put me on a wheel, Judge Parker. I can't help feeling that you've started me on the right track for life, too. I'm glad you had that put on it."

His stubby fingers rested caressingly on the little silver plate between the handle-bars, on which was engraved the motto that had come to mean so much: "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.*"

THE END.

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