

Oscar eBook

Oscar by William Simonds

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OSCAR.

CHAPTER I.

A KITCHEN SCENE.

Bridget, the Irish servant girl, had finished the house-work for the day, and sat down to do a little mending with her needle. The fire in the range, which for hours had sent forth such scorching blasts, was now burning dim; for it was early in October, and the weather was mild and pleasant. The floor was swept, and the various articles belonging in the room were arranged in their proper places, for the night. The mistress of the kitchen,—for Bridget claimed this as her rank, if not her title,—was humming a queer medley of tunes known only to herself, as her clumsy fingers were trying to coax the needle to perform some dextrous feat that it did not seem inclined to do in her hands. What she was thinking about, is none of our business; but whatever it was, her revery was suddenly disturbed, and the good nature that beamed from her face dispelled, by the noisy clattering of more than one pair of little boots on the stairs. In a moment, the door opened with a jerk and a push, and in bounded three boys, with as little display of manners or propriety as so many savages might exhibit. The oldest directed his steps to the closet, singing, as he peered round among the eatables:

“Eggs, cheese, butter, bread,—
Stick, stock, stone-dead.”

“Biddy,” he continued, “I ’m hungry—give me something to eat, quick.”

Bridget paid no attention to this demand, but only twitched her needle with a little more energy.



“I say, Biddy,” continued the boy, “what did you have for supper? Come, give me some, I ’m half starved.”

“And why did n’t ye come when the supper was ready, if ye wanted any?” said Bridget. “If ye won’t ate with the rest, it’s not me that will wait upon ye, Master Oscar.”

“Well,” continued Oscar, “if you won’t help me, I guess I can help myself. Ralph, what did you have for supper?”

The boy addressed named over several articles, among which were cake and mince-pie, neither of which could Oscar find in the closet.

“Where did you put the pie, Biddy?” he inquired.

“It ’s where ye won’t find it,” replied Bridget, “that’s jist where it is.”



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"I bet I *will* find it, come now," said Oscar, with a determined air; and he commenced the search in earnest, prying into every covered dish, opening every drawer and bucket, and overhauling and disarranging every part of the closet. Bridget was just then in too irritable a mood to bear this provoking invasion of her realm with patience. In an angry tone, she ordered the intruder to leave the closet, but he took no notice of the command. She repeated the order, making it more emphatic by calling him a "plague" and a "torment," but he did not heed it. Then she threatened to tell his parents of his misconduct, but this had no effect. Oscar continued his search for some minutes, but without success; and he finally concluded to make his supper of bread and butter, since he could find nothing more tempting to his appetite.

The fact was, Oscar was getting in the habit of being absent from his meals, and calling for food at unseasonable hours, much to the annoyance of Bridget. She had complained of this to his mother several times, without effect; and now she thought she would try a little expedient of her own. So, when she cleared away the supper-table that evening, before Oscar came home, she hid away the cake and pies with which the others had been served, and left only bread and butter in the closet. She gained her end, but the boy, in rummaging for the hidden articles, had made her half an hour's extra work, in putting things to rights again.

As Oscar stepped out of the closet, after his solitary supper, he moved towards the youngest of the other boys, saying:

"Here, George, open your mouth and shut your eyes, and I 'll give you something to make you wise."

George declined the gift, but Oscar insisted, and tried to force it upon him. A struggle ensued, and both rolled upon the floor, the one crying and screaming with anger, and the other laughing as though he considered it good fun. George shut his teeth firmly together, but Oscar succeeded in rubbing enough of the mysterious article upon his lips to enable him to tell what it was. It proved to be a piece of pepper, a plate of which Oscar had found in the closet.

This little experiment, however, did not leave George in a very pleasant frame of mind. It was some time before he got over his blubbing and pouting. Oscar called him a "cry-baby," for making such a fuss about a little bit of pepper, which epithet did not aid him much in forgetting the injury he had received.

After awhile, quiet and harmony were in a measure restored. Ralph and George got their school-books, and began to look over the lessons they were to recite in the morning; but Oscar not only remained idle, himself, but seemed to try to interrupt them as much as possible, by his remarks. By-and-bye, finding they did not take much notice of his observations, he took from his jacket pocket a small tin tube, and commenced blowing peas through it, aiming them at his brothers, at Bridget, and at the lamp. Ralph,



after two or three had taken effect on his face, got up in a pet, and took his book up stairs to the sitting-room. George scowled and scolded, as the annoying pellets flew around his head, but he did not mean to be driven away by such small shot. Bridget, too, soon lost her patience, as the peas rattled upon the newly-swept floor.



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“Git away with yer pays, Oscar,” said she; “don’t ye be clutterin’ up the clane floor with ’em, that’s a good b’y.”

“They aint ‘pays,’ they are *peas*,” replied Oscar; “can’t you say peas, Biddy?”

“I don’t care what ye call ’em,” said Bridget; “only kape the things in yer pocket, and don’t bother me with ’em.”

“Who ’s bothering you?” said Oscar; “me ‘pays’ don’t make any dirt—they ’re just as clean as your floor.”

“Ye ’re a sassy b’y, that’s jist what ye are.”

“Well, what are you going to do about it?”

“Faith, if it was me that had the doin’ of it, I bet I ’d larn ye better manners, ye great, impudent good-for-nothin’, if I had to bate yer tin times a day.”

“You would n’t, though, would you?” said Oscar; and he continued the shower of peas until he had exhausted his stock, and then picked most of them up again, to serve for some future occasion. He had hardly finished this last operation, when his mother, who had been out, returned home. As soon as she entered the kitchen, George began to pour out his complaints to her.

“Mother,” he said, “Oscar ’s been plaguing us like everything, all the evening. He got me down on the floor, and rubbed a hot pepper on my mouth, and tried to make me eat it. And he’s been rummaging all round the kitchen, trying to find some pie. And then he went to shooting peas at us, and he got Bridget real mad, and Ralph had to clear out, to study his lesson. I told him—”

“There, there, George, that will do,” replied his mother; “I am sick of hearing these complaints. Oscar, why is it that I can’t stir out of the house, when you are at home, without your making trouble with Bridget or the children? I do wish you would try to behave yourself properly. You are getting the ill-will of everybody in the house, by your bad conduct. I really believe your brothers and sisters will begin to hate you, before long, if you keep on in this way. For your own sake, if for nothing more, I should think you would try to do better. If I were in your place, I would try to keep on good terms with my brothers and sisters, if I quarrelled with everybody else.”

Oscar made no reply to this, and the subject was soon dropped. His mother was too much accustomed to such complaints of his misconduct, to think very seriously of them; and he was himself so used to such mild rebukes as the foregoing, that they made little impression upon his mind. The boys, who all slept in one chamber, soon retired for the night; but Oscar took no further notice of the occurrences of the evening, except to



apply the nickname of “mammy’s little tell-tale” to George—a title of contempt by which he often addressed his little brother.

I am afraid that the title of “tell-tale” was not wholly undeserved by George. True, he often had just cause of complaint; but he was too ready to bring whining accusations against his brothers and sisters, for every trifling thing. He complained so much that his mother could not always tell when censure was deserved. It had become a habit with him, and a dozen times a day he would go to her, with the complaint that Oscar had been plaguing him, or Ella had got something that belonged to him, or Ralph would not do this or that.



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George, who was the youngest of the children, was at this time seven years old; Ralph was two years and half older, and Oscar, who was the oldest son, was about half way between thirteen and fourteen. They had two sisters. Alice, the oldest, was fifteen years of age, and Eleanor, or Ella, as she was commonly called, was about eleven.

The father of these boys and girls was a shop-keeper in Boston. His business required so much of his attention, that he was seldom with his family, except at meal-times and nights. Even in the evening he was usually at the shop; but when it so happened that he could remain at home after tea, it was his delight to settle himself comfortably down in the big rocking chair, in the well-lighted sitting-room, and to muse and doze, while Alice sang, and played upon the piano-forte. He had so many other cares, that he did not like to be troubled with bad reports of his children's conduct, This was so well understood by all the family, that even George seldom ventured to go to him with a complaint. The management of domestic affairs was thus left almost entirely with Mrs. Preston, and she consulted her husband in regard to these matters only when grave troubles arose.

I have thus briefly introduced to my readers the family, one of whose members is to form the principal subject of the following pages.

CHAPTER II.

OSCAR IN SCHOOL.

The school which Oscar attended was held in a large and lofty brick building, a short distance from the street on which he lived. His brothers attended the same school, but his sisters did not, it being only for boys. The pupils numbered four or five hundred—a good many boys to be together in one building. But though belonging to one school, and under the control of one head master, they did not often meet together in one assembly. They were divided into eight or ten branches, of about fifty scholars each, and each branch had its own separate room and teacher. There were however, only four classes in the whole school; and at this time Oscar was a member of the first, or highest class. There was a large hall in the upper story of the building, in which the entire school assembled on exhibition days, and when they met for the practice of singing or declamation.

There were lively and merry times in the vicinity of the school-house, I can assure you, for half an hour before the opening of school, and for about the same length of time after the exercises closed. Four hundred boys cannot well be brought together, without making some stir. Every morning and afternoon, as the pupils went to and from school, the streets in the neighborhood would for a few minutes seem to swarm with boys, of every imaginable size, shape, manners, dress, and appearance. Usually, they went back and forth in little knots; and with their books and slates under their arms, their

bright, happy faces, their joyous laugh, and their animated movements, they presented a most pleasing sight,—“a sight for sore eyes,” as a Scotchman might say. If anybody disputes this, he must be a sour and crabbed fellow.

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Oscar, although not the most prompt and punctual of scholars, used occasionally to go to school in season to have a little fun with his mates, before the exercises commenced. One day, entering the school-room a little before the time, he put on an old coat which his teacher wore in-doors, stuck a quill behind his ear, and made a pair of spectacles from some pasteboard, which he perched upon his nose. Arranged, in this fantastical manner, he seated himself with great dignity in the teacher's chair, and began to "play school-master," to the amusement of several other boys. It so happened that the teacher arrived earlier than usual that day, and he was not a little amused, as he suddenly entered the room, and witnessed the farce that was going on. Oscar jumped from his seat, but the master made him take it again, and remain in it just as he caught him, with his great-coat, pasteboard spectacles and quill, until all the scholars had assembled, and it was time to commence the studies of the day. This afforded fine sport to the other boys, but Oscar did not much relish the fun, and he never attempted to amuse himself in that way again.

[Illustration: Playing Schoolmaster]

I am sorry that this harmless piece of roguery is not the most serious charge that candor obliges me to bring against Oscar. But to tell the truth, he was not noted either for his studious habits or his correct deportment; and there was very little prospect that he would be considered a candidate for the "Franklin medals," which were to be distributed to the most deserving members of his class, when they graduated, the ensuing July. And yet Oscar was naturally a bright and intelligent boy. He was quick to learn, when he applied himself; but he was indolent, and did not like to take the trouble of studying his lessons. Whenever he could be made to take hold of a lesson in earnest, he soon mastered it; but the consciousness of this power often led him to put off his lessons to the last minute, and then perhaps something would happen to prevent his preparing himself at all.

A day or two after the "kitchen scene" described in the preceding chapter, Oscar was sitting at his desk in the school-room, with an open book before him, but with his eyes idly staring at a blackboard affixed to one of the walls. The teacher watched him a moment, and then spoke to him.

"Oscar," he said, "what do you find so very fascinating about that blackboard? You have been looking at it very intently for several minutes—what do you see that interests you so!"

Oscar hung his head, but made no reply.

"Are you ready to recite your geography lesson?" continued the master.

"No, sir."



“Why do you not study it, then”

“I don’t feel like studying,” replied Oscar.

“Very well,” said the teacher, quite pleasantly; “if you don’t feel like it, you need n’t study. You may come here.”



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Oscar stepped out to the platform on which the teacher's desk was placed.

"There," continued the master, pointing to a blackboard facing the school, "you may stand there and look at that board just as long as you please. But you must not look at anything else, and I would advise you not to let me catch your eyes turning either to the right or the left. Now mind and keep your eyes on the board, and when you feel like studying let me know."

Oscar took the position pointed out to him, with his back towards the boys, and with his face so near the blackboard, that he could see nothing else without turning his head—an operation that would be sure to attract the attention of the master. At first he thought it would be good fun to stand there, and for awhile the novelty of the thing did amuse him a little. When he began to grow weary, he contrived to interest himself by tracing out the faint chalk-marks of long-forgotten problems, that had not been entirely obliterated from the blackboard. This afforded employment for his mind for a time; but by-and-bye he began to grow tired and uneasy. His eyes longed to see something else, and his legs were weary of standing so long in one position. He wondered, too, whether the boys were looking at him, and whether they smiled at his strange employment. At last, after doing penance about an hour, his exhaustion got the better of his stubbornness, and on informing the master that he thought he could study now, he was permitted to take his seat.

After returning to his desk, Oscar had but little time to finish learning his geography lesson, before the class was called out to recite. As was too often the case, he was but half prepared. The subject of the lesson was New York State. Several of the questions put to Oscar were answered wrong, either wholly or in part. When asked what great lakes bordered on New York, he replied:

"Lake Erie and Lake Superior."

When the question was given to another, and correctly answered, Oscar exclaimed:

"That's what I meant—Erie and Ontario; but I was n't thinking what I said."

This was somewhat of a habit with Oscar. When he "missed" a question, he was very apt to say, after the next boy had answered it, "I knew, only I could n't think," or, "I was just going to say so."

Another question put to him was, whether the water of the great New York lakes was fresh or salt. Oscar replied that it was salt. It is but justice to add, however, that nothing was said in the lesson of the day, on this point, although the question had occurred in a previous lesson. Noticing that several of the boys laughed at Oscar's blunder, the teacher remarked:



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“That was a very foolish answer, Oscar, but you are not the first nor the wisest person that has made the same mistake. When the British went to war with us, in 1812, it is said that all their war vessels intended to navigate the lakes, were furnished with tanks and casks for carrying a full supply of freshwater; and I have been told that an apparatus is still in existence in one of the Canadian navy yards, which the English government sent over, some years ago, for distilling fresh water from Lake Erie. But an American school-boy of your age ought to know better than this, if an English lord of the admiralty does not. These great lakes are among the remarkable features of our own country, and every American child should know something about them. I should suppose,” continued the teacher, “that a boy who could afford to look steadily at nothing for an hour, might take a little pains to inform himself about so common a matter as this, so as not to appear so ridiculous, when a simple question is asked him.”

Before the lesson was concluded, Oscar made still another mistake. There was an allusion in the lesson to the great fire of 1885, by which an immense amount of property in New York city was destroyed. When the teacher asked him how many buildings were said to have been consumed, he replied:

“Three hundred and fifty—five hundred and thirty—no, three hundred and fifty.”

“Which number do you mean?” inquired the master.

“I aint sure which it is,” replied Oscar, after a moment’s hesitation; “it’s one or the other, I don’t know which.”

“You are about as definite,” said the teacher, “as the Irish recruit, who said his height was five feet ten or ten feet five, he was n’t certain which. But are you *sure* that the number of buildings burnt was either three hundred and fifty, or five hundred and thirty?”

“Why—yes—I—believe—it was one or the other,” replied Oscar, hesitatingly.

“You *believe* it was, do you? Well, I believe you know just nothing about the lesson. You may go to your seat, and study it until you can answer every question; and after school I will hear you recite it, and remember, you will not go home until you *can* recite it.”

The class continued their recitation, and Oscar returned to his seat, and commenced studying the lesson anew. It was already late in the afternoon, and as he did not like the idea of stopping after school, he gave pretty close attention to his book during the rest of the session. About fifteen minutes after the school was dismissed, he told the teacher he was prepared to recite, and he succeeded in getting through the lesson with tolerable accuracy. When he had finished, the teacher talked with him very plainly about his indolent habits in school, and the consequences that would hereafter result from them.



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"I would advise you," he said, "to do one of two things,—either commit your lessons perfectly, hereafter, or else give up study entirely, and ask your father to take you from school and put you to some business. You can learn as fast as any boy in school, if you will only give your attention to it; but I despise this half-way system that you have fallen into. It is only wasting time to half learn a thing, as you did your geography lesson this afternoon. You studied it just enough to get a few indistinct impressions, and what little you did learn you were not sure of. It would be better for you to master but one single question a day, and then *know* that you know it, than to fill your head with a thousand half-learned, indefinite, and uncertain ideas. I have told you all this before, but you do not seem to pay any attention to it. I am sorry that it is so, for you might easily stand at the head of the school, if you would try."

Oscar *had* received such advice before, but, as his teacher intimated, he had not profited much by it. If anything, he had grown more indolent and negligent, within a few months. On going home that night, Ralph accosted him with the inquiry:

"What did you think of the blackboard, Oscar? Do you suppose you should know it again, if you should happen to see it?"

"What do you mean?" he inquired, feigning ignorance.

"O, you 've forgotten it a'ready, have you?" continued Ralph. "You don't remember seeing anything of a blackboard this afternoon, do you?"

"But who told you about it?" inquired Oscar; for though both attended the same school, their places were in different rooms.

"O, I know what's going on," said Ralph; "you need n't try to be so secret about it."

"Well, I know who told you about it—'t was Bill Davenport, was n't it?" inquired Oscar.

Willie and Ralph were such great cronies, that Oscar's supposition was a very natural one. Indeed, Ralph could not deny it without telling a falsehood, and so he made no reply. Oscar, perceiving he had guessed right, added, in a contemptuous tone:

"The little, sneaking tell-tale—I 'll give him a good pounding for that, the first time I catch him."

"You 're too bad, Oscar," interposed his brother; "Willie did n't suppose you cared anything about standing before the blackboard—he only spoke of it because he thought it was something queer."

Seeing Oscar was in so unamiable a mood, Ralph said nothing more about the subject, at that time.



CHAPTER III.

PAYING OFF A GRUDGE.

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The morning after the events just related, as Ralph was on his way to school, he fell in with Willie Davenport, or “Whistler,” as he was often sportively called, by his playmates, in allusion to his fondness for a species of music to which most boys are more or less addicted. And I may as well say here, that he was a very good whistler, and came honestly by the title by which he was distinguished among his fellows. His quick ear caught all the new and popular melodies of the day, before they became threadbare, which gave his whistling an air of freshness and novelty that few could rival. It was to this circumstance—the quality of his whistling, rather than the quantity—that he was chiefly indebted for the name of Whistler. Nor was he ashamed of his nickname, as he certainly had no need to be; for it was not applied to him in derision, but playfully and good-naturedly.

Whistler and Ralph were good friends. There was a difference of between two and three years in their ages, Whistler being about twelve years old; but their dispositions harmonized together well, and quite a strong friendship had grown up between them. A very different feeling, however, had for some time existed between Oscar and Whistler. They were in the same class at school; but Whistler studied hard, and thus, though much younger than Oscar, he stood far before him as a scholar. This awakened some feeling of resentment in Oscar, and he never let slip any opportunity for annoying or mortifying his more industrious and successful class-mate.

On their way to school, on the morning in question, Ralph told Whistler of Oscar’s threat, and advised him to avoid his brother as much as possible, for a day or two, until the affair of the blackboard should pass from his mind. Whistler heeded this caution, and was careful not to put himself in the way of his enemy. He succeeded in eluding him through the day, and was on his way home from school in the afternoon, when Oscar, who he thought had gone off in another direction, suddenly appeared at his side.

“You little tell-tale, you,” cried Oscar, “what did you tell Ralph about the blackboard for! I ’ll learn you to mind your own business, next time, you mean, sneaking meddler. Take that—and that,” he continued, giving Whistler several hard blows with his fist. The latter attempted to dodge the blows, but did not return them, for this he knew would only increase the anger of Oscar, who was so much his superior in size and strength, as well as in the art of fisticuffs, that he could do just about as he pleased with him. The affray, however, was soon brought to an unexpected end, by a gentleman who happened to witness it. Seizing Oscar by the collar of his jacket, he exclaimed:

“Here, here, sir! what are you doing to that little fellow? Don’t you know enough, you great lubber, to take a boy of your own size, if you want to fight? Now run, my little man, and get out of his way,” continued the stranger, turning to Whistler, and still holding Oscar by the collar.



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[Illustration: The Assault.]

Whistler hesitated for a moment between the contending impulses of obedience and manliness; and then, drawing himself up to his full stature, he said, with a respectful but decided air:

“No, sir, I have n’t injured him, and I won’t run away from him.”

“Well said, well said—you are a brave little fellow,” continued the gentleman, somewhat surprised at the turn the affair was taking. “What is your name, sir?”

“William Davenport.”

“And what is this boy’s name?”

“Oscar,” replied Willie, and there he stopped, as if unwilling to expose further the name of his abuser.

“Well you may go now, Oscar,” said the gentleman, relinquishing his hold; “but if you lay your hands on William again, I shall complain of you.”

The two boys walked off in opposite directions, the gentleman keeping an eye upon Oscar until Whistler was out of his reach.

A little knot of boys was drawn together by the circumstance just related, among whom was George, Oscar’s youngest brother. He witnessed the attack, but knew nothing of its cause. As he went directly home, while Oscar did not, he had an opportunity to report to his mother and Ralph the scene he had just beheld. Ralph now related to his mother the incident of the preceding day, which led to the assault; for, seeing Oscar’s unwillingness to have anything said about it, he had not mentioned the matter to any one at home. Ralph was a generous-hearted boy, and in this case was actuated by a regard for Oscar’s feelings, rather than by fear.

Oscar did not come home that night until after dark. As he entered the sitting-room, Alice, who was seated at the piano-forte, broke short off the piece she was playing, and said, looking at him as sternly as she could,

“You great ugly boy!”

“Why, what’s the matter now?” inquired Oscar, who hardly knew whether this rough salutation was designed to be in fun or in earnest; “don’t I look as well as usual?”

“You looked well beating little Willie Davenport, don’t you think you did?” continued his sister, with the same stern look. “I ’m perfectly ashamed of you—I declare, I did n’t know you could do such a mean thing as that.”

“I don’t care,” replied Oscar, “I ’ll lick him again, if he does n’t mind his own business.”

As Oscar did not know that George witnessed the assault, he was at a loss to know how Alice heard of it. She refused to tell him, and he finally concluded that Whistler or his mother must have called there, to enter a complaint against him. Pretty soon Mrs. Preston entered the room, and sat down, to await the arrival of Oscar’s father to tea. She at once introduced the topic which was uppermost in her mind, by the inquiry:

“Oscar, what is the trouble between you and Willie Davenport?”

“Why,” replied Oscar, “he ’s been telling stories about me.”



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“Do you mean false stories?”

“Yes—no—not exactly false, but it was n’t true, neither.”

“It must have been a singular story, to have been either false nor true. And as it appears there was but one story, I should like to know what it was.”

“He told Ralph I had to stand up and look at a blackboard an hour.”

“Was that false?”

“Yes,” said Oscar, for in replying to his mother, of late, he had usually omitted the “ma’am” (madam) which no well-bred boy will fail to place after the yes or no addressed to a mother; “yes, it was a lie, for I need n’t have stood there five minutes, if I had n’t wanted to.”

“Did you stand before the blackboard because you wanted to, or was it intended as a punishment for not attending to your lesson!”

“Why, I suppose it was meant for a punishment, but the master told me I might go to my seat, whenever I wanted to study.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Preston, “after all your quibbling, I don’t see that Willie told any falsehood. And, in fact, I don’t believe he had any idea of injuring you, when he told Ralph of the affair. He only spoke of it as a little matter of news. But even if he had told a lie about you, or had related the occurrence out of ill-will towards you, would that be any excuse for your conduct, in beating him as you did this afternoon! Do you remember the subject of your last Sabbath-school lesson?”

Oscar could not recall it, and shook his head in the negative.

“I have not forgotten it,” continued his mother; “it was on forgiving our enemies, and it is a lesson that you very much need to learn. ‘If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses,’—that was one of the verses of the lesson. It is noble to forgive, but it is mean to retaliate. You must learn to conquer your resentful spirit, or you will be in trouble all the time. I shall report this matter to your father when he comes. I suppose you remember what he promised you, when you had your fight with Sam Oliver?”

Oscar remembered it very distinctly. On that occasion, his father reprimanded him with much severity, and assured him that any repetition of the fault would not go unpunished.

Mr. Preston soon came in, and as the family sat at the tea-table, he was informed of Oscar’s misconduct. After scolding the culprit with much sharpness, for his attack upon Willie, he concluded by ordering him immediately to bed. Although it yet lacked two



hours of his usual bed-time, Oscar did not consider his punishment very severe, but retired to his chamber, feeling delighted that he had got off so much easier than he anticipated. Indeed, so little did he think of his father's command, that he felt in no hurry to obey it. Instead of going to bed, he sat awhile at the window, listening to the music of a flute which some one in the neighborhood was playing upon. Presently Ralph and George, who slept in the same chamber with him, came up to keep him company. They amused themselves together for some time, and Oscar quite forgot that he had been sent to bed, until the door suddenly opened, and his father, whose attention had been attracted by the noise, stood before him.



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“Did n’t I tell you to go to bed an hour ago, Oscar?” he inquired.

“Yes, sir.”

“Why have n’t you obeyed me, then?”

“Because,” said Oscar, “I ’ve got a lesson to get to-night, and I have n’t studied it yet.”

“If you ’ve got a lesson to learn, where is your book?” inquired his father.

“It ’s down stairs; I was afraid to go after it, and so I was trying to coax Ralph to get it for me.”

“O, what a story!” cried George; “why, father, he has n’t said one word about his book.”

This was true. Oscar, in his extremity, had hastily framed a falsehood, trusting that his assurance would enable him to carry it through. And he would probably have succeeded but for George; as Ralph, in his well-meant but very mistaken kindness for Oscar, would not have been very likely to expose him. But the lie was nailed, and Oscar’s bold and wicked push had only placed him in a far worse position than he occupied before. His father, for a moment, could scarcely believe his ears; but this feeling of astonishment soon gave way to a frown, before which Oscar cowered like a sheep before a lion. Mr. Preston was a man of strong passions, but of few words. Having set forth briefly but in vivid colors the aggravated nature of Oscar’s three-fold offence,—his attack upon Willie, his disobedience when ordered to bed, and the falsehood with which he attempted to cover up his disobedience,—he proceeded to inflict summary and severe chastisement upon the offender. It was very rarely that he resorted to this means of discipline, but this he deemed a case where it was imperatively demanded.

Silence reigned in the boys’ chamber the rest of the night. Oscar was too sullen to speak; Ralph silently pitied his brother, not less for the sins into which he had fallen than for the pain he had suffered; and George was too much taken up with thinking about the probable after-clap of this storm, to notice anything else.

Oscar was fond of his bed, and was usually the last one of the family to rise, especially in cool weather. On the morning after the occurrences above related, he laid abed later than usual even with him. His father had gone to the store, and the children were out-doors at play, before he made his appearance at the breakfast-table. He sat down to the deserted table, and was helping himself to the cold remnants of the meal, when his mother entered the room. Oscar noticed that she looked unusually sad and dejected. After sitting in silence a few moments, she remarked:

“You see how I look, this morning, Oscar. I did not sleep half an hour last night, and now I am not fit to be up from my bed—and all on your account. I am afraid your



misconduct will be the death of me, yet. I used to love to think how much comfort I should take in you, when you should grow up into a tall, manly youth; but I have been sadly disappointed, so far. The older you grow, the worse you behave, and the more trouble you make me. Do you intend always to go on in this way?"



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Oscar nervously spread the slice of bread before him, but made no reply. His mother continued her reproofs, in the same sad but affectionate tone. She appealed to his sense of right, to his gratitude, and to his hopes of future success and respectability in life. She described the sad end to which these beginnings of wrong-doing would inevitably lead him, and earnestly besought him to try to do better, before his bad habits should become confirmed. Her earnest manner, and her pale, haggard cheeks, down which tears were slowly stealing, touched the feelings of Oscar. Moisture began to gather in his eyes, in spite of himself. He tried to appear very much interested in the food he was eating, and to look as though he was indifferent to what his mother was saying. And, in a measure, he did succeed in choking down those good feelings which were beginning to stir in his heart, and which, mistaken boy! he thought it would be unmanly to betray.

Yes, he was mistaken—sadly mistaken. Unmanly to be touched by a mother's grief, and to be moved by a mother's tender entreaties! Unmanly to acknowledge that we have done wrong, or to express sorrow for the wrong act! Unmanly to resolve to resist temptation in the future! Where is this monstrous law of manliness to be found? If anywhere, it must be only in the code of pirates and desperadoes, who have renounced all human laws and ties.

The school hour was at hand, and Oscar was obliged to start as soon as he had finished his breakfast. Had he not stifled the better promptings of his heart, and thus done violence to his nature, he would not have left his mother without assuring her that he felt sorry for his misconduct; for he *did* feel some degree of regret, although he was too proud to acknowledge it. His mother, however, saw some tokens of feeling which he could not wholly conceal, and she left him with a sad heart, but with the hope that at least some faint impression had been made upon him.

And, indeed, some impression was made upon Oscar's heart. The feeling of sullenness with which he awoke, had subsided into something resembling "low spirits." Nor was this all the effect his mother's conversation had upon him. As he lay awake in the morning, he had planned the secret destruction of a beautiful sled which had been given to George, the winter previous, and which was very precious in the eyes of the owner; but now he relinquished this mean and revengeful design. Little George thus escaped the dreaded "after-clap," but he never knew what a blow it would have been, nor how near he came to feeling its full force.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOTEL.

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One of Oscar's most intimate companions was a boy of about his own age, named Alfred Walton, who attended the same school with him. Alfred's father was dead; but he had a step-father, whom he called father, and with whom he lived. His home was to Oscar a very attractive one; for it was a public house, and had large stables and a stage-office attached, and was usually full of company. Alfred's step-father was the landlord of the hotel, and of course he and his young friends were privileged characters about the premises. Oscar and Alfred were together a great deal of the time, when out of school, and quite a warm friendship existed between them. On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and during the other play hours of the week, Oscar might generally be found about the hotel premises, or riding on the coaches with Alfred. He only regretted that he could not stay there altogether; for he thought it must be a fine thing to live in such a place, where he could do pretty much as he pleased, without anybody's interference. Such, at least, seemed to be the privilege of Alfred; for everybody, from his step-father down to the humblest servants, appeared to have too much other business on their hands to give much attention to his boyish movements.

Oscar made many acquaintances at the hotel, not a few of which were anything but desirable for a boy of his age and character. He was on chatty terms with all the stage-drivers, hostlers, and servants about the premises, and also got acquainted with many strangers who stopped there for a season. He was very fond of listening to the stories of the drivers and other frequenters of the stage-office, and he would sit by the hour, inhaling the smoke of their cigars, admiring their long yarns, and laughing at the jokes they cracked. Much of this conversation was coarse and even vulgar, such as a pure mind could not listen to without suffering contamination, or at least a blunting of its delicate sensibilities. It is a serious misfortune for a youth to be exposed to such influences, but Oscar did not know it, or did not believe it.

Among the hangers about the stable, was a queer fellow who went by the name of Andy. His real name was Anderson. He was weak-minded and childish, his lack of intellect taking the form of silliness rather than of stupidity. Indeed, he was bright and quick in his way, but it was a very foolish and nonsensical way. He was famous among all the boys of the neighborhood, for using strange and amusing words, and especially for a system of spelling on which he prided himself, and which is not laid down in any of the dictionaries. He afforded much sport to the boys, who would gather around him, and give him words by the dozen to spell. The readiness and ingenuity with which he would mis-spell the most simple words, was quite amusing to them. He never hesitated, nor stopped to think, but always spelt the given word in his peculiar way, just as promptly as though he did it according to a rule which he perfectly understood.



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One Saturday afternoon, as Oscar and Alfred were looking about the stable, Andy suddenly made his appearance, and asked them for a bit of tobacco. Both of the boys, by the way, wished to be considered tobacco-chewers, and usually carried a good-sized piece of the vile weed in their pockets, though it must be confessed that the little they consumed was rather for appearance sake, than because they liked it. They also smoked occasionally, for the same reason.

“You must spell us a word or two, first,” said Alfred, in reply to Andy’s request.

“No, I can’t stop—got important business to negotiate,” replied Andy.

“Yes, you must,” continued Alfred; “spell fun.”

“P-h-u-g-n,” said Andy.

“Spell hotel,” continued Alfred.

“H-o-e-t-e-l-l-e.”

“Spell calculate,” said Oscar.

“K-a-l-k-e-w-l-a-i-g-h-t—there, that ’ll do,” continued Andy.

“No, spell one more word—spell tobacco, and you shall have it,” added Alfred.

“T-o-e-b-a-c-k-k-o-u-g-h—now hand over the ‘baccy.’”

“I have n’t got any—have you, Oscar?” said Alfred

Oscar fumbled in his pockets, but there was none to be found.

“You mean, contemptible scalliwags!” exclaimed Andy, “why did n’t you tell me that before? You catch me in that trap again, if you can!” and he walked off in a passion, amid the laughter of Oscar and Alfred.

“Let’s go and see the pups, Alf,” said Oscar, after they had got done laughing over the joke they had played upon Andy.

Alfred’s step-father had a fine dog of the hound species, with a litter of cunning little pups. A bed had been made for her and the little ones in a corner of the yard, adjoining the stable, with a rough covering to shelter them from wind and storms. The pups were now several weeks old. There were five of them, and a fat and frolicsome set they were too. As the boys approached them, they were frisking and capering as usual; tumbling and rolling over one another, climbing upon the back of their mother, and pulling and barking at the straw. Their mother, whose name was Bright, sat watching



their gambols with a very affectionate but sedate look. Perhaps she was wondering whether *she* was ever so mischievous and frisky as these little fellows were. When the pups looked up and saw the boys, they stopped their fun for a time, for they were not yet much accustomed to company. Bright, however, knew both Alfred and Oscar; and as she was a dog of good education and accomplished manners, she did not allow herself to be disconcerted in the least by their presence.

“You did n’t know father had given all the pups but one to me, did you, Oscar?” inquired Alfred.

“No,—has he, though?” asked Oscar.

“Yes, he has. I knew I could make him say yes, and so I teased him till he did. He ’s going to pick out one, to keep, and I ’m to have all the rest.”



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“That’s first-rate,” said Oscar; “and you ’ll give me one, won’t you?”

“Yes, you may have one,” replied Alfred; “but don’t tell the boys I gave it to you, for I mean to sell the others.”

“Then I ’ll pay you for mine,” continued Oscar; “I can get the money out of father, I guess.”

“No, you shan’t pay for it, for I meant you should have one of them, if you wanted it,” replied Alfred.

“Thank you,” said Oscar, “I should like one very much.”

After looking at the dogs awhile, and canvassing their respective merits, they happened to notice that one of the drivers was about starting off with his coach.

“Halloo, Mack!” cried Alfred, “where are you going!”

“To the depot,” replied the driver.

“Let’s go, Oscar,” said Alfred; and both boys ran for the coach, the driver stopping until they had climbed up to his seat.

A ride of five minutes brought them to the depot, where the driver reined up, to await the arrival of a train, which was nearly due. Many other carriages, of various kinds, were standing around the depot, for the same purpose. Oscar and Alfred rambled about the building and adjoining grounds, watching the operations that were going on; for though they had witnessed the same operations many times before, there is something quite attractive about such scenes, even to older heads than theirs. On one track, within the depot, were six or eight cars, beneath which a man was crawling along, carefully examining the running gear, and giving each wheel two or three smart raps with a hammer, to see if it had a clear and natural ring. These cars had lately arrived from a distant city, and must undergo a careful scrutiny before they are again used. If any break or flaw is discovered, the car is sent out to the repair-shop. On another track, the men were making up the next outward train. The particular baggage and passenger cars that were to be used, had to be separated from the others, and arranged in their proper order. Another track was kept clear, for the train that was soon to arrive. Two or three locomotives, outside of the depot, were fizzing and hissing, occasionally moving back or forward, with a loud coughing noise, or changing from one track to another.

The bell of the looked-for train was at length heard. The engine, as it approached, was switched upon a side-track, but the cars, from which it had been detached, kept on their course until the brakes brought them to a stand in the depot. The passengers now swarmed forth by hundreds—a curious and motley crowd of men, women, and children; good-looking people, and ill-looking ones; the fine lady in silk, and the rough



backwoods-man in homespun; the middle-aged woman in black, with three trunks and four bandboxes, and the smooth-faced dandy, whose sole baggage was a slender cane.



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The cars were at length emptied of their living freight, and most of the passengers had secured their baggage. Those who wished to ride, had mostly engaged seats in the various hacks and coaches, whose drivers accosted every passenger, as he got out of the cars, with their invitations to "ride up." Alfred and Oscar now started to look after the stage-coach in which they rode to the depot. They found it loaded with passengers and baggage, and the driver was talking with two small lads, of from twelve to thirteen years of age.

"Here, Alf," said the driver, "you are just the fellow I want, but I thought you had gone. These boys want to go to the hotel, but I have n't room to take them. They say they had just as lief walk, and if you 'll let them go with you, I 'll take their trunk along."

This was readily agreed to. The driver made room for the trunk on the top of the coach, and the young strangers started for the hotel, in company with Alfred and Oscar. As they walked along, they grew quite sociable. The two new-comers,—who, by the way, were quite respectable in their appearance,—stated that they belonged in one of the cities of Maine, and had never been in Boston before. They were brothers; and both their parents being dead, they said they were on their way to the west, where they had an uncle, who had sent for them to come and live with him. They had a good many questions to ask about Boston, and said they meant to look around the city some the next day, as they must resume their journey on Monday. Alfred said he would go with them, and show them the principal sights; and Oscar, too, would have gladly volunteered, were it not that his father required him to go to church and the Sabbath-school on that day, and to stay in the house when not thus engaged.

The boys had now reached the hotel, where the trunk had already arrived. A room was appropriated to the young guests, and Alfred and Oscar conducted them to it, and remained awhile in conversation with them. By-and-bye, the oldest of the strangers asked Alfred if he would go and show them where they could buy some good pistols. Alfred readily agreed to this, and the four boys started off towards the shops where such articles are sold. On their way through the crowded streets, the new-comers found much to attract their attention. They seemed inclined to stop at every shop window, to admire some object, and it was nearly dark when they reached the place where they were to make their purchase. Here, amid the variety of pistols that were exhibited to them, they were for a time unable to decide which to choose. At length, however, aided by the advice of Alfred and Oscar, they picked out two that they concluded to buy. They also purchased a quantity of powder and balls, and then desired to look at some dirks, two of which they decided to take. Some fine pocket-knives next arrested their attention, which were examined, and greatly admired by all the boys. The oldest of the strangers, who did all the business, concluded to take four of these, and then settled for all the articles purchased. The bill was not very small, but his pocket-book was evidently well supplied, and he paid it with out any difficulty.



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After they had left the store, the oldest boy gave Oscar and Alfred, each, one of the pocket-knives, to pay them for their trouble, as he expressed it. They were much pleased with their present, and felt very well satisfied with their afternoon's adventure. They were a little surprised, however, that their new friends should think it necessary to invest so largely in weapons of defence; and on their hinting this surprise, the boy who purchased the articles said, with a careless, business-like air:

"O, we 've got to travel a good many hundred miles, and there 's no knowing what rough fellows we may fall in with. But give me a good revolver and dirk, and I bet I will take care of myself, anywhere."

The seriousness with which this brave language was uttered by a boy scarcely yet in his teens, would have made even Alfred and Oscar smile, but for the consciousness of the new knives in their pockets.

It was now quite dark, and on coming to a street which led more directly towards his home, Oscar left the other boys, with the promise of seeing them again Monday morning.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG TRAVELLERS.

The Sabbath came, and a fine autumnal day it was. Oscar's thoughts were with Alfred, and the boys whose acquaintance he had made the afternoon previous; but there was little chance for him to join them in their walks on that day. He could not absent himself from church or the Sunday-school, without his parents' knowledge; and Mr. Preston had always decidedly objected to letting the children stroll about the streets on the Sabbath. Oscar felt so uneasy, however, that in the afternoon, a little while before meeting-time, he left the house slyly, while his father was upstairs, and walked around to Alfred's. But he saw nothing of the boys, and was in his accustomed seat in the church when the afternoon services commenced.

The next morning, Oscar rose earlier than usual, and as soon as he could despatch his breakfast, he hurried over to the hotel. The travellers had concluded to defer their journey one day longer, that they might have a better opportunity to see Boston; and when Oscar approached them, they were trying to persuade Alfred to stay away from school, and accompany them in their rambles. They immediately extended the same invitation to Oscar. Both he and Alfred felt very much inclined to accede to their proposition, but they were pretty sure that it would be useless to ask their parents' consent to absent themselves from school for such a purpose. The point to be settled was, whether it would be safe to play truant for the day. Seeing that they hesitated, the oldest boy, whose name was Joseph, began to urge the matter still more earnestly.



“What are you afraid of?” he said; “come along, it’s no killing affair to stay away from school just for one day. You can manage so that nobody will know it; and if they should find it out, it won’t make any difference a hundred years hence. Come, now, I ’ll tell you what I ’ll do; if you two will go around with us to-day, I ’ll give you a quarter of a dollar apiece.”



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Oscar and Alfred, after some little hesitation, yielded to their request, and the four boys started on their tramp. It was not without many misgivings, however, that Oscar decided to accompany them. With him, the chances of detection were much greater than with Alfred. No brothers of the latter attended school, to notice and report his absence. With Oscar, the case was different, and he did not see exactly how his truancy was to be concealed from his parents and teachers. But as Alfred was going with the boys, he finally concluded that he, too, would run the risk for at least half a day, and trust to luck to escape punishment.

It was decided to go over to the neighboring city of Charlestown, first, and visit the Monument and Navy-Yard, both of which the young strangers were quite anxious to see. Joseph, the oldest and most forward, began to be on quite intimate terms with Oscar and Alfred. He threw off every restraint, and laughed and talked with them just as if they were old acquaintances. One thing very noticeable about him, was his profanity. Neither Alfred nor Oscar, I am sorry to say, was entirely free from this wicked and disgusting habit; but they had made so little advance in this vice, compared with their new friend, that even they were slightly shocked by the frequent and often startling oaths of Joseph.

The younger lad, whose name was Stephen, appeared to be quite unlike his brother. Though sociable, he was less gay and more reserved than Joseph, but he seemed to be much interested in the novel sights that met his eye at every step.

On their way, the boys came to a cellar which was occupied by a dealer in fruits and other refreshments. Around the entrance were arranged numerous boxes of oranges, apples, nuts, candy, and similar articles, to tempt the passer-by to stop and purchase. The owner was not in sight, and Joseph, as he passed along, boldly helped himself from one of the boxes, taking a good hand-full of walnuts. On looking around, a moment after, he saw a man running up the cellar steps, and concluded that he, too, had better quicken his pace. He accordingly started on a brisk run, the other boys joining in his flight. The man, who happened to witness the theft from the back part of the cellar, soon saw that pursuit would be useless, and contented himself with shaking his fist, and uttering some anathemas which were inaudible to those for whom they were intended.

"That was a pretty narrow escape, was n't it?" said Joseph, after they had got a safe distance from the man.

"It was so," replied Alfred; "and it was lucky for you that he did n't catch you."

"Why, what do you suppose he would have done?"

"He would have taken you up for stealing, I guess, for he looked mad enough to do anything," said Alfred.



“Stealing? Pooh, a man must be a fool to make such a fuss about a cent’s-worth of nuts,” replied Joseph.



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“I knew a boy,” said Oscar, “who stole a cake of maple sugar from one of these stands, and his father had to pay two or three dollars to get him out of the scrape.”

“I would n’t have done it,” said Joseph; “I ’d have gone to jail first—that ’s just my pluck.”

“But the boy did n’t do it—it was his father that paid the money,” added Oscar.

“O, then, I suppose the boy was n’t to blame,” said Joseph, with all seriousness; as though he really believed that somebody was to blame, not for stealing the maple sugar, but for satisfying the man who had been injured by the theft.

They were now upon one of the bridges which cross Charles River, and connect the cities of Boston and Charlestown. After passing half-way over, they stopped a few minutes to gaze at the scene spread out around them. Oscar and Alfred pointed out to the strangers the various objects of interest, and they then continued their walk without interruption until they reached the Monument grounds, on Bunker Hill. After examining the noble granite shaft which commemorates the first great battle of the American Revolution, they threw themselves down upon the grass, to contemplate at their leisure the fine panorama which this hill affords on a clear day.

After lingering half an hour around the Monument, they turned their steps towards the Navy-Yard. On reaching it, they found a soldier slowly pacing back and forth, in front of the gate-way; but he made no objection to their entering. Joseph and Stephen, who had never before visited an establishment of this kind, were first struck by the extent of the yard, and the air of order and neatness which seemed everywhere to prevail. They gazed with curiosity upon the long rows of iron cannons interspersed with pyramids of cannon-balls, piled up in exact order, which were spread out upon the parks. Then their wonder was excited by the dry-dock, with its smooth granite walls, its massive gates, and its capacious area, sufficient to float the largest frigate. The lofty ship-houses in which vessels are constructed, and the long stone rope-walk, with its curious machinery, also attracted their attention. So interested were they in these things, that nearly two hours elapsed before they started for home.

On their way back to the hotel, Joseph entertained Alfred and Oscar with some incidents of his life. His mother, he said, died when he was quite young. His father went to sea as the captain of a ship, two years before, and had never been heard from. He had rich relatives, who wanted him to go to West Point and be a cadet, but he did not like to study, and had persuaded them to let him and Stephen go and live with their uncle at the west, who had no boys of his own, and wanted somebody to help him to manage his immense farm. Such, in brief, was Joseph’s story.

On their return route, the boys were careful to avoid passing by the cellar from which Joseph had stolen the nuts. With all his pluck and bravery, he did not care about meeting the man whose displeasure he had excited a few hours before.



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It was twelve o'clock before the boys reached the hotel. Oscar, during the latter part of the walk, had been unusually silent. He was thinking how he should manage to conceal his truancy, but he could not hit upon any satisfactory plan. The more he reflected upon the matter, the more he was troubled and perplexed about it. He might possibly hide his mis-spent forenoon from his parents, but how should he explain his absence to his teachers? He could not tell. He decided, however, to see his brothers before they should get home from school, and, if they had noticed his absence, to prevail upon them to say nothing about it.

"You 'll be back again after dinner, Oscar?" said Alfred, as his friend started for home.

"Yes," replied Oscar, with some hesitation; "I 'll see you before school-time."

"School-time? You don't intend to go to school this afternoon, do you?" inquired Alfred.

Oscar did not reply, but hastened homeward. He soon found Ralph and George, but as neither of them spoke of his absence from school, he concluded that they were ignorant of it, and he therefore made no allusion to the subject.

After dinner, Oscar had about half an hour to spend with Alfred; for he felt so uneasy in his mind, that he had decided not to absent himself from school in the afternoon. He had gone but a short distance when he met his comrade, who had started in pursuit of him.

"Well," said Alfred, "we 've been taken in nicely, that's a fact."

"Taken in—what do you mean?" inquired Oscar.

"Why, by those young scamps that we 've been showing around town."

"I thought they told great stories," said Oscar; "but what have you found out about them?"

"I 've found out that they are the greatest liars I ever came across—or at least that the oldest fellow is," replied Alfred; and he then went on to relate what transpired immediately after Oscar left them, on their return from Charlestown. The landlord, it seems, requested the two strange boys to step into one of the parlors; and Alfred, not understanding the order, accompanied them. They found two men seated there, the sight of whom seemed anything but pleasant to Joseph and Stephen. These men were their fathers—for the boys were not brothers, and Joseph's account of their past life and future prospects was entirely false. They had run away from home, and the money which they had so profusely spent, Joseph stole from his father. The men, who had been put to much trouble in hunting up their wayward sons, did not greet them very cordially. They looked stern and offended, but said little. Joseph was obliged to deliver



up his money to his father, and they immediately made preparations for returning home by the afternoon train.

“Well,” said Oscar, when Alfred had concluded his story, “I did n’t believe all that boy said, at the time, but I thought I would n’t say so.”



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“Nor I, neither,” said Alfred. “I guess he did n’t expect his father’s ship would arrive so suddenly, when he tried to stuff us up so.”

“Did your father know you went off with them in the forenoon?” inquired Oscar.

“Yes, but he did n’t care much about it. He told me I must go to school this afternoon, and not stay away again without leave.”

The rules of the school required a written note of excuse from the parents, in case of absence. Neither of the boys was furnished with such an excuse, and after a little consultation, they concluded that their chances of escaping punishment would be greatest, if they should frankly confess how they had been duped and led astray by the young rogues whose acquaintance they had so suddenly and imprudently formed. They supposed that the peculiar circumstances of the case, coupled with a voluntary confession, might excite some degree of sympathy, rather than displeasure, towards them. To make the matter doubly sure, it was arranged that Alfred should speak to the master about the matter before school commenced.

When the boys reached the school-room, they found the master already at his desk. He listened with interest to Alfred’s story of the runaways, and was evidently pleased that he had so frankly confessed his fault. As the hour for commencing the afternoon session had arrived, he told Alfred and Oscar they might stop after school, and he would take their case into consideration.

The afternoon passed away, without any unusual occurrence. When school was dismissed, the teacher called Alfred and Oscar to his desk, and gave them some excellent advice in regard to forming acquaintances, and yielding to the solicitations of evil associates. He told them that the deception which had been practiced upon them, should serve as a lesson to them hereafter. They should not form sudden acquaintances with strange and unknown boys, but should choose their associates from among those whom they knew to be of good habits. He also earnestly cautioned them against yielding to the enticements of those who would persuade them to do wrong. He told them that whenever they laid the blame of their faults upon others, they made a sad confession of their own moral weakness. They must often encounter temptations, and evil examples and influences, even if they took pains to avoid them; but they were not obliged to yield to these influences. They must learn to resist temptation, or they would speedily be swept away before it.

Having faithfully pointed out their error and danger, the teacher dismissed the boys. They listened respectfully to his advice, and, when they were beyond his hearing, chuckled over their escape from a species of admonition that might have proved far more feeling and affecting, if not more salutary, than the kindly-meant reproof which had been administered to them. The leniency of the teacher, however, must be attributed to his not fully understanding the character of their offence; for Alfred had so artfully

represented the facts of the case, as to make their truancy appear in a milder light than it deserved to be regarded.



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CHAPTER VI.

Work.

"Oscar, go down cellar and get some coal," said Mrs. Preston one evening, when the fire was getting low.

"I 'm reading—you go and get it, Ralph," said Oscar, without looking up from the newspaper in his hand.

"No, I shan't," replied Ralph; "I 've done all your chores to-day, and I won't do any more."

"Tell Bridget to bring it up, then," added Oscar, his eyes still fastened upon his paper.

"Oscar," said Mrs. Preston, sharply, "I told you to get it, and do you obey me, this minute. Bridget has worked hard all day, and Ralph has already had to do several errands and jobs that you ought to have done, and that is the reason why I did not ask them to get the coal. You have done nothing but play, when you were out of school, since morning, and now, when I ask you to do a trifling thing, you try to shirk it upon somebody else. I do wish you would break yourself of your laziness, and have a little consideration for other people."

Oscar reluctantly obeyed his mother's order. Indeed, it was seldom that he was very prompt to obey, when any kind of labor was required of him. He had a peculiar knack of getting rid of work. If he was directed to do a thing, he was almost sure to try to coax Alice, or Ella, or Ralph, or Bridget, or somebody else, to do it for him. He never taxed his own legs, or hands, or muscles, when he could make use of other people's. This lazy habit was a source of no small anxiety to his mother, and was a constant annoyance to all the family.

"Well, you did make out to get it," said Mrs. Preston, in a pleasant tone, when Oscar returned with the coal. "I hope it did n't hurt you much."

"I was n't afraid of its hurting me," said Oscar "but I was reading, and did n't want to stop."

"I am afraid that is only an excuse," replied his mother. "It has really got to be a habit with you to call upon somebody else, whenever you are told to do a thing. We have all noticed it, a hundred times, and you alone seem to be blind to it. In a year or two, when you are old enough to leave school, and go to a place, what do you suppose you will be good for, if you keep on in this way? Why, the man who should take you into his employ, would have to hire another boy on purpose to wait upon you."



“It is just as mother says, Oscar,” added his eldest sister, Alice. “It was only this morning that Bridget was scolding, because you wanted to be waited upon so much. She says you make her more trouble than all the rest of us together.”

Oscar could not deny these charges, and so he said nothing, but appeared to be reading his newspaper very intently. Mr. Preston came in soon after, and the family sat down to tea.

“Oscar,” said Mr. Preston, “next week is vacation, is it not?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Oscar.



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“Well, I shall want you in the store a part of the time,” continued his father. “Frank is going home to spend Thanksgiving, and as it will be a busy week with us, we must have somebody to take his place.”

“Why can’t Henry do the errands while Frank is away?” inquired Oscar.

“Because Henry will have as much other work as he can attend to,” replied Mr. Preston.

“I don’t see why you let Frank go off at such a time,” said Oscar, pettishly.

“It is not necessary that you should see,” replied his father. “I can manage my business without any advice from you, and I don’t want you to call me to account for what I do. I have given Frank a vacation, and I shall expect assistance from you—that is all it is necessary for you to know about it.”

Frank was the errand-boy in Mr. Preston’s shop. Henry, upon whom Oscar wished to lay the burden occasioned by Frank’s absence, was a young clerk, who had formerly served as chore-boy, but was now quite useful as a salesman.

It was evident, from Oscar’s looks, that he did not much relish the idea of taking Frank’s place for a week. His mother, noticing this, said:

“Why, Oscar, I thought you and Frank were good friends, and I should suppose you would be willing to relieve him a few days. The poor boy has been away from his mother nearly a year, and it is natural that he should want to go home and spend Thanksgiving. If you were in his place, and he in yours, don’t you think you should like the arrangement your father proposes?”

“I suppose I should,” replied Oscar; “but it’s hard for me to lose my vacation, for the sake of letting him have one.”

“You will not lose all your vacation,” said his father “If you are lively, you can do all I shall want you to do in four or five hours, and have the rest of the day to yourself.”

“And I ’ll help you, too,” said Ralph, who was always ready to offer his assistance in such a case as this.

“Thanksgiving week” soon arrived, and the busy note of preparation for the approaching festival was heard throughout the house. Bridget was invested with a new dignity, in the eyes of the children, as she bustled about among the mince-meat and the pie-crust, the eggs and the milk, the fruit and the spices, that were to be compounded into all sorts of good things. The house was filled with savory odors from the oven, and long rows of pies began to fill up every vacant space in the closet. Mrs. Preston was busy, superintending the operations of the household; while Alice and Ella rendered such assistance as they could, in the chopping of pie-meat, the paring of apples, the picking



of raisins, &c. The boys, for their share, had an unusual number of errands to run, to keep the busy hands inside supplied with working materials. Oscar, however, was released for the week from all home chores, in consideration of his engagements at the store.

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Oscar did not find his duties as temporary store-boy quite so irksome or disagreeable as he anticipated. The work was light, and the novelty of it served to offset the confinement, which he had dreaded more than anything else. With some assistance from Ralph, he managed to do all that was required of him, and still have several hours each day for play. He also had an opportunity to learn some useful lessons during the week.

One morning, his father sent him up-stairs to sweep out a room which was devoted to a certain branch of the business. Happening to go into it an hour or two after, Mr. Preston observed that it was in a dirty state, and called to Oscar to get a broom and sprinkler, and come up.

"I told you to sweep this room out," said he, as Oscar made his appearance; "did you forget it?"

"I *have* swept it," said Oscar, in a tone of surprise.

"You have?" exclaimed Mr. Preston, with an air of incredulity; "I guess you are mistaken. You may have shaken the broom at it, but I don't think you swept it. See there—and there—and there,"—and he pointed out numerous little heaps of dirt, and scraps of paper, which had escaped Oscar's broom. "Now," he continued, "let me show you how to sweep. In the first place, always sprinkle the floor a little, to prevent the dust flying, as I told you a day or two ago. You omitted that this morning, did n't you?"

"Yes, sir," replied Oscar.

"Well, just remember it hereafter, for the dust injures the goods. There 's water enough, now pass me the broom, and I 'll show you how to handle it. Look, now—that 's the way to sweep—get all the dirt out from the corners and crevices, and along the edges, and under the counters. Use the broom as though you meant to do something, and were not afraid of it. There, that 's the way to sweep clean—so—and so," and Mr. Preston continued his explanations and illustrations, until he had swept the entire floor.

"There, now, does n't that look better?" he added, after he had finished sweeping. "If a thing is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well—that's the true doctrine, Oscar. I hope you won't get in the habit of making half-way work with whatever you undertake. If I never expected to do anything but sweep chimneys or dig clams for a living, I would do it thoroughly and faithfully. Of all things, I despise a lazy, slovenly workman."

It was a very common thing with Oscar to slight his work, when he could not get rid of it entirely. This was partly the result of a want of interest in it, and partly the result of habit. The child who performs a task reluctantly, will not be very likely to do it well.

The day before Thanksgiving, as Oscar was on his way to the store, after dinner, he met Alfred Walton.

“You ’re just the chap I ’m after, Oscar,” said Alfred; “I’m going out to Cambridge, all alone in a wagon, and I want you to go with me. Come, jump in and go, won’t you?”



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This was a tempting invitation to Oscar, but he did not see how he could accept it. He was needed at the store more than ever, that afternoon, but it was too bad to lose such a fine chance to enjoy himself. Alfred was in a hurry, and could not stop long for him to consider the matter. So he concluded to run home, and ask his father's permission, while Alfred went and got the horse ready. But when he got home, his father had left. He found Ralph, however, who readily agreed to take his place at the store, for the afternoon; and on the strength of this arrangement, he hurried to the hotel and rode off with Alfred.

It was a mild, pleasant afternoon, and the boys had a fine ride. Alfred had been among horses so much, that he understood their management pretty well, and was a very good driver. He prided himself on his ability to turn a neat corner, and to steer through the narrowest and most crooked passage-ways, such as abound in the contracted and crowded streets of a city. When they reached the broad avenues of Cambridge, he allowed Oscar to take the reins awhile, at his request.

Alfred's step-father had been out to Cambridge, in the forenoon of the same day, and had purchased a horse at the cattle-market which is held weekly at that place. As he was obliged to return home by the cars, he left word that he would send out for the horse, in the afternoon. This was Alfred's errand. After several inquiries, the boys found the man who sold the horse. Having examined the new purchase, and freely expressed their opinions of the animal's "points," they hitched his halter to the wagon, and set out for home.

The sun was rapidly descending, when the boys reached the hotel stable. Oscar, who felt somewhat uneasy about his absence from the store, turned his steps in that direction, soon after he alighted from the wagon. He found all hands very busy, and for a long time no one appeared to notice him. At length his father happened to come to the part of the shop where he was, and asked him where he had been all the afternoon. Oscar proceeded to explain the cause of his absence, but Mr. Preston was in too much of a hurry to listen to his long excuses, and so he cut him short, and told him, in not very pleasant tones, that Ralph had done the work, and he (Oscar) might go home again, just as soon as he pleased—a privilege of which he quickly availed himself.

At the tea-table, that evening, Mr. Preston expressed his displeasure with Oscar's conduct in very pointed terms. Oscar now explained the circumstances of his going away—his attempt to get his father's consent, and the promise of Ralph to supply his place. But the explanation did not satisfy Mr. Preston. He said Oscar knew he was needed that afternoon, and he ought not to have asked to go away, or even to have thought of it. Even if Ralph was willing to do his work, he did not like his putting so much upon his younger and weaker brother.

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He then complimented Ralph for his industry, and his willingness to make himself useful, and held him up to Oscar as a pattern he would do well to imitate. He concluded his lecture to the latter, by drawing from his pocket a quarter of a dollar, and presenting it to Ralph, as a reward for his services. This touched Oscar's feelings rather more than his father's reproofs. He thought to himself that he had performed as much work in the store as Ralph, to say the least, and was therefore as much entitled to a reward as he. There was this difference, however, which he entirely overlooked: Oscar did his share of the work reluctantly and from compulsion; Ralph did his cheerfully and voluntarily, and solely for the purpose of making himself useful.

CHAPTER VII.

THANKSGIVING-DAY.

Thanksgiving-Day had come. Among the multitude of good things it brought with it, not the least important, in the eyes of the children, was a visit from their grandmother, Mrs. Lee, who arrived the evening previous. She was the mother of Mrs. Preston, and lived in a distant town in Vermont. She had not visited the family for several years, and the children and their parents were all very glad to see her once more. She was much surprised to find how the young folks had grown since she last saw them. Alice had shot up into a young lady, Oscar, who she remembered as "a little bit of a fellow," was a tall boy, Ella, too, was quite a miss, and Georgie, "the baby," had long since exchanged his frock for the jacket, trowsers, and boots, of boyhood. All these changes had happened since their grandmother's last visit; and yet she was just the same pleasant, talkative old lady that she was years ago. The children could not discover that time had left so much as one new wrinkle on her well-remembered face.

[Illustration: Thanksgiving Market Scene.]

After breakfast, their grandmother proceeded to unpack her trunk. From its capacious depths she drew forth sundry articles,—specimens of her own handiwork,—which she distributed among the children, as gifts. They were all articles of utility, such as warm, "country-knit" mittens and socks for the boys, and tippetts and stockings for the girls. A large bag filled with nuts, and another of pop-corn, were also among the contents of the trunk, and were handed to the children to be divided among them.

In accordance with an agreement made the day before, Oscar soon left the house, and went in search of Alfred. Having found him, they set out for South Boston, in company with two or three boys, to witness a shooting-match got up by a man who worked about the stable. The spot selected for the sport was a retired field, where there was little danger of being interrupted. On reaching the ground, the boys found a small collection

of young men and lads already engaged in the cruel amusement; for the mark was a live fowl, tied to a



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stake. The company assembled were of a decidedly low order, and Oscar at first felt almost ashamed to be seen among them. Smoking, swearing, betting, and quarrelling, were all going on at once, interspersed with occasional shouts of laughter at some vulgar joke, or at the fluttering and cries of a wounded fowl. Sometimes a poor chicken would receive several shots, before its misery would be terminated by a fatal one. When one fowl was killed, a fresh one was brought forth. Each man who fired at the mark, paid a trifling sum for the privilege, and was entitled to the fowl, if he killed it.

Oscar and his young companions lingered around the grounds for an hour or two, familiarizing themselves with scenes of shameful cruelty, and breathing an atmosphere loaded with pollution and moral death. The repugnance which Oscar at first felt to the party and its doings was so far overcome, that before he left he himself fired one or two shots, with a rifle which was lent to him.

Oscar reached home before the hour for dinner. As he entered the sitting-room, his mother, who had missed him, inquired where he had been all the forenoon.

"I 've been with Alf," he replied.

His mother did not notice this evasion of her question, but added:

"Why do you want to be with Alfred so much? It seems to me you might find better company. I 'm afraid he is not so good a boy as he might be. I don't like his looks very much."

"Why, mother," said Oscar, "Alf is n't a bad boy, and I never heard anybody say he was. I like him first-rate—he 's a real clever fellow."

"He may be clever enough, but I do not think he is a very good associate for you," replied Mrs. Preston.

"Who ought to know best about that, you or I?" said Oscar, with a pertness for which he was becoming a little too notorious. "I see Alf every day, but you don't know hardly anything about him. At my rate, I 'll risk his hurting me."

Oscar's grandmother looked at him with astonishment, as he uttered these words. He felt the silent rebuke, and turned his head from her.

"Well," added Mrs. Preston, "if Alfred is not a bad boy himself, I do not believe that the kind of people you spend so much of your time with, around the hotel-stable, will do either you or him any good. The lessons a boy learns among tavern loungers do not generally make him any better, to say the least. I wish you would keep away from such places—I should feel a good deal easier if you would."



The subject was dropped, and dinner,—the event of Thanksgiving-day, in every New England home,—soon began to engross the attention of the household. It was a pleasant feast, to old and young. The children forgot all their little, fanciful troubles, and the traces of care were chased from their parents' brows for the hour.

The afternoon was stormy, and the children amused themselves with in-door sports. After tea, however, Oscar asked his father for some money, to buy a ticket to an entertainment that was to take place in the evening. But both his parents thought he had better stay at home, with the rest of the family, and he reluctantly yielded to their wishes, coupled with the promise of a story or two from his grandmother, about old times.



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A cheerful fire was burning in the grate, when the family returned to the parlor, from the tea-table. The lamps were not yet lit, although the gray twilight was fast settling down, and the ruddy coals began to reflect themselves from the polished furniture. Mrs. Preston was about to light the lamps, when Ella exclaimed:

“No, no, mother, don’t light the lamps—let’s sit in the dark awhile, and then grandmother’s stories will seem twice as romantic. You don’t want a light, do you, grandmother?”

“No,” said the grandmother, “I can talk just as well in the dark. But I don’t know as I can tell you any very interesting stories. I can’t think of anything now but what you have already heard. That’s just the way when I want to tell a story. If I was all alone, I should think of lots of things to tell you.”

“Can’t you tell us something about the Indians?—I like to hear about them,” said Oscar.

“You would like to know how they served naughty boys, would n’t you?” inquired his grandmother; and if the room had not been quite so dark, Oscar would have seen something like a roguish twinkle in her sober gray eye, as she spoke.

“O yes, grandmother,” interrupted Ella, “that will suit him, I know. At any rate, it ought to interest him—so please to tell us what they did to their bad boys, and perhaps we shall learn how to serve Oscar.”

“And while you are about it, grandmother,” said Oscar, “tell us what they did to naughty girls, too.”

“I don’t know how they punished girls,” said the old lady; “but I have heard it said that when they wished to punish a boy very severely, they made him lie down on the ground, upon his back. They then put their knees on his arms, and held his head back, while they took into their mouth some very bitter stuff, made from the roots of a certain plant, and squirted it into the boy’s nose. They kept repeating the dose, till the poor fellow was almost strangled, and I suppose by that time he was cured of his fault.”

“Pooh, was that all?” said Oscar; “I thought something terrible was coming.”

“I guess you would not like to try the Indian remedy more than once,” replied his mother; “but if you think it is so pleasant to take, perhaps your father will give you a taste of it, one of these days, if you do not behave better than you have done of late.”

“Did you ever get frightened by the Indians, grandmother?” inquired Ralph.

“No,” replied the old lady; “there were plenty of them around, when I was a little girl, but they had got to be quite civil, and we were not afraid of them. I wish I could remember all the stories my mother used to tell me about them—they were plenty and



troublesome, too, in her day. I recollect one fight that took place in our neighborhood, when she was young. One evening, a man who was returning from another settlement, happened to discover a party of Indians, making their way very quietly

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up the river in their canoes, towards our little village. He watched their movements as narrowly as possible, but was careful not to let them see or hear him. When they got within about half a mile of the settlement, they pulled their canoes ashore, and concealed them among the bushes. They meant to creep along very slowly and slyly, the rest of the way, and then fall suddenly upon the whites, and murder and plunder them before they could know what the matter was. But the man who discovered them hurried on to the settlement, and gave the alarm. Ten men was all he could muster, for there were but a few families in the town. These men armed themselves, and by the time they were ready for action, the Indians had already begun their work of plunder.

“But the Indians were not cunning enough for the white folks, that time. The settlers formed themselves into two parties—one of seven and one of three men. The three men went down very cautiously to the Indian’s landing-place, and after cutting slits in their bark canoes, they hid themselves, and awaited the result. While they were doing this, the other party made such a furious and sudden attack upon the enemy, that the Indians thought they were assailed by a force far superior to their own, and so they fled as fast as they could. When they reached the landing-place, they jumped pell-mell into their canoes, and pushed out into the stream. Now they thought they would soon be out of the reach of harm; but, to their astonishment, the canoes began to fill with water, and were entirely unmanageable. The three men in ambush now began to attack them, and pretty soon the other seven came to their aid, and in a little while the Indians were all shot or drowned, and not one of the party escaped, to inform their kindred what had befallen them. The stream on which this happened is called Laplot River. Laplot, they say, means ‘the plot,’ and a good many people think the river got its name from the stratagem of the settlers, but I don’t know how that is.”

After musing awhile in silence, Ralph called for another story.

“Let me see,” said his grandmother; “did I ever tell you about Widow Storey’s retreat, in the Revolution!”

“No ma’am,” said Oscar; “I’ve read about General Burgoyne’s retreat; but I never heard of Widow Storey before: who was she?”

“O, it was n’t that kind of a retreat that I meant,” said his grandmother; “but I will tell you who she was. She lived in Salisbury, some twenty or thirty miles from where I belong. Her husband was the first man who settled in Salisbury, but he was very unfortunate. After he had worked hard, and got a log cabin ready for his family, it took fire, and was destroyed; and he himself was killed by the fall of a tree, soon after. But his widow was a very smart woman; and though she had eight or ten small children, she moved on to the place her husband had selected; and the proprietors of the township gave



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her a hundred acres of land to encourage and reward her. She worked just like a man, and didn't mind chopping down trees, and cultivating the soil, with her own hands. But by-and-bye the Revolution broke out, and as there were British soldiers in the neighborhood, she was afraid they would make her a visit. She fled several times to another town, where there was less danger; but after awhile a new idea entered her head, and she proceeded to carry it out, with the aid of a man who lived near her. The idea was, to construct a hiding-place, where the British could not find them, if they should pay her a visit. They selected a spot on Otter Creek, and dug a hole right into the bank, horizontally. The hole was a little above the water, and was just large enough for a person to crawl into. It was so covered up by bushes that hung from the bank, that a stranger would not notice it. This passage led to a large lodging-room, the bottom of which was covered with straw. Good comfortable beds were prepared, and here the families found a secure retreat, until the danger was past."

"That was complete," said Oscar; "but I should think the British might have tracked them to their retreat, for it's likely they had to go home pretty often, to get food, and look after things."

"Yes," added his grandmother; "but they reached their retreat by a canoe, so that no footsteps could be seen leading to it; and they were careful not to go out or in during the day-time. I have heard my brother James tell about it. I believe he saw the very hole once, where they went in."

"Uncle James was a famous hand for telling stories," remarked Mrs. Preston. "I shall never forget what a treat it was to me, when I was a child, to have him come to our house. I used to run out and meet him, when I saw him coming, and coax him to tell me a good lot of stories before he went off. I can remember some of them even now. He used to tell a story of a crabbed old fellow, who was very much annoyed by the boys stealing his apples. So, after awhile, he got a spring-trap, and set it under the trees, to catch the young rogues. But the boys got wind of the affair, and the first night he set it, they picked it up, and very quietly put it on his door-step, and then went back to the orchard, and began to bellow as though they were in great distress. The old man heard the uproar, and started out, in high glee at the idea of catching his tormentors; but he hardly put his foot out of the door, before he began to roar himself, and he was laid up a month with a sore leg."

"That was old Zigzag," said the grandmother; "I knew him very well."

"Old Zigzag!—what a funny name!" exclaimed Ralph.



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“That was n’t his name, although he always went by it,” added the old lady. “He was a very odd character, and one of his peculiarities was, that he never walked directly towards any place or object he wished to reach, but went in a ‘criss-cross,’ zigzag way, like a ship beating and tacking before a head-wind. He was a hard drinker, and was almost continually under the influence of liquor, and perhaps that was the cause of his singular habit. He was a terribly ugly fellow, when he was mad, and the boys used to tease him in every possible way; but wo to them if he got hold of them. He lived all alone, for he never had any wife or children; and he would not allow anybody to enter his house, on any account, but always kept the door locked. If his neighbors had business to transact with him, he would step into the yard and attend to them; but even in the severest weather, he would not let them cross his threshold. He never would speak to or look at a woman, and would always avoid meeting them, if possible. Poor fellow, he had a dreadful end. He was missing for several days, and at last some of the town’s-people broke into his house, and found him dead, with his head badly burned. They supposed he was intoxicated, and fell, striking his head upon the andiron, which stunned him; and while he lay helpless, he was so badly burned that he soon died. And that was the last of poor old Zigzag.”

“There was another story Uncle James used to tell, about the naming of Barre, in Vermont; do you recollect it, mother?” inquired Mrs. Preston.

“Yes, indeed, and I ’ve heard old Dr. Paddock tell it many a time. He was there, and saw it all. The people did n’t like the name of their town, which was Wildersburgh, and determined to have a new one, and so they met together in town-meeting, to talk the matter over. One of the leading men came from Barre, Massachusetts, and he wanted the town to take that name. Another prominent citizen came from Holden, Massachusetts, and he insisted that the town should be called Holden. The people liked both of these names well enough, and it was finally determined that the question should be decided by a game of boxing, between these two men. So the meeting adjourned to a new barn, with a rough hemlock plank floor, and the contest commenced. After boxing awhile, one of them threw the other upon the floor, and sprang upon him at full length; but the one who was underneath dealt his blows so skilfully, that his opponent soon gave in; and rolling the Holden man out of the way, he jumped up and shouted, ‘There, the name is Barre!’ and Barre it hasten, to this day. The next day, the man who won this victory had to call on the doctor to extract from his back the hemlock splinters he had received while struggling on the barn floor.”

Thus the evening was beguiled with stories, mingled with a few songs by Alice and Ella, and a few favorite airs upon the piano-forte. Before the hour of retiring arrived, even Oscar was quite reconciled to the loss of the evening’s entertainment away from home which he had promised himself.



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CHAPTER VIII.

GRANDMOTHER LEE.

Mrs. Lee, the grandmother of the Preston children, remained with the family for several weeks, after Thanksgiving. Her visit was, on the whole, a pleasant one, though there were some shadows thoughtlessly cast over it by the children. Age had somewhat impaired her sense of hearing, but yet she always wanted to understand everything that was said in her presence. Often, when the children were talking to each other in a low tone, she would ask them what they were saying. Ella did not like these interruptions, and was the first to complain of them.

"O dear," said she, one day, "I do wonder what makes grandmother so inquisitive. I really believe she thinks we are talking about her all the time. I can't open my mouth, but she wants to know what I said. Don't you think she is getting childish, Alice?"

"Why, Ella!" exclaimed Alice, in astonishment, "I should think you would be ashamed to speak so of your poor old grandmother. What do you think mother would say if she knew what you said!"

"I can't help it," replied Ella; "I don't see why grandmother need be so curious about every little thing that's said. I mean to ask her some time when I have a good chance."

"I should think you had better, Miss Impudence," said Alice; "perhaps she would like to have you give her some lessons in good behavior."

Alice did not for a moment suppose that her sister meant to speak to their grandmother upon this subject. But she had miscalculated the pertness of Ella. A day or two after this, as several of the children were talking among themselves, the attention of the old lady was arrested. She could not hear distinctly what they said, but Oscar took a prominent part in the conversation; and a moment after, on his leaving the room, she asked Ella what he wanted.

"O, it was n't anything that you care about, grandma'am," replied Ella.

"Is that the way your mother teaches you to answer questions, Ella?" inquired Mrs. Lee, in a mild, reproachful tone.

"No, no, grandmother," replied Alice, with considerable earnestness; "I shall tell mother how impudently she spoke to you. A boy has given a little dog to Oscar, and that was what he was telling us about, just before he went out."



“Why, grandmother,” added Ella, “I did n’t mean to be impudent; but I ’ve noticed that you always want to hear what everybody says, even when they are not talking to you, and mother says that is n’t polite.”

“I am much obliged to you, my dear,” replied her grandmother, very meekly; “after I have taken a few more lessons from you, perhaps I shall know how to behave.”



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The feelings of the old lady were more hurt by the rudeness of Ella, than her mild rebukes indicated. Alice felt bound to inform her mother of what had taken place; and Mrs. Preston was greatly mortified, on learning that her little daughter had spoken so impudently to her aged mother. She apologized for Ella, as well as she could, by saying that she was naturally forward and impulsive. At noon, when the children returned from school, she called Ella into a room by herself, and talked with her about her conduct. At first, Ella tried to justify herself; but after awhile her better nature triumphed, and she felt heartily ashamed of her treatment of her grandmother. To think that she, a girl eleven years old, should have attempted to teach her aged grandmother politeness, and in such an uncivil way, too! No wonder she hung her head in shame.

To be candid, perhaps Ella's grandmother was a little too inquisitive to know what was going on around her. But this was one of the infirmities of old age which were slowly stealing upon her, and which the young should regard with pity and forbearance, but never with a censorious spirit.

Ella was really a good-hearted girl, when her generous feelings were aroused. From that day, she treated her grandmother with marked kindness and respect; and her unfortunate attempt to rebuke the venerable woman was never alluded to again.

Among the articles which Mrs. Lee brought from the country, for the children, was a small bag of corn for popping. One evening, George happened to think of this corn, which none of them had yet tried; and partly filling one of his pockets from the bag, he slipped quietly into the kitchen, and commenced popping it by Bridget's fire. There was no person in the kitchen but himself, and putting a handful of corn in the wire popper, it soon began to snap and jump about, the hard, yellow kernels bursting forth into light and beautiful milk-white balls. But by-and-bye the savory odor of the corn found its way up stairs, and Ella and Ralph ran down to get their share of the treat. George had put the corn upon the table to cool, as fast as it was popped; but when he heard footsteps approaching, he scrambled it into his pocket as quick as possible.

"Halloo, popped corn! Give me some, Georgie, won't you?" said Ralph.

"And me, too," added Ella.

"No I shan't, either," said George; "I popped it for myself."

"You're real stingy," replied Ella; "but no matter, Ralph and I will pop some for ourselves. Where is the bag?"

"You must find it for yourselves—I had to," was George's selfish reply, as he gathered the last of his popped corn into his pocket, badly burning his fingers, in his anxiety lest his brother or sister should get hold of a kernel or two.



Ella and Ralph commenced searching for the bag of corn, but they could not find it. They looked in every place where they supposed it might be, but in vain. Their mother had gone to bed with a sick headache, or they would have ascertained where it was from her. At length they gave up the search, and returned to the sitting-room, in no very pleasant frame of mind.



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"I do declare, George," said Ella, "you are the meanest boy I ever heard of."

"Why, what is the matter with George?" inquired his grandmother.

"He 's been popping some of the corn you gave us," replied Ella; "and he won't give us a kernel of it, nor tell us where the bag is, so that we can pop some for ourselves."

"Why, George," said Mrs. Lee, "that is too bad; I would tell them where the corn is, for I intended it as much for them as for you."

"I don't care," said George; "they've called me mean and stingy, and now they may find it for themselves."

"We did n't call you mean and stingy till you refused to tell us where it was," added Ella.

"If I could find it, I guess you would n't get another kernel of it," said Ralph, addressing George; "I'd burn it all up first."

"No, no, Ralph, that is wrong," replied his grandmother. "The corn is n't worth quarrelling about. If George wants to be selfish, and keep it all to himself, I 'll send down some more for the rest of you, when I go home. But I guess Georgie does n't mean to be selfish," she added, coaxingly; "he only wants to plague you a little, that's all. He 'll tell you where he found the corn, pretty soon."

George, who was growing uneasy under this combined attack, now retreated to bed, leaving his grandmother more astonished than ever at his obstinacy.

"There," said Alice, "it's of no use to try to drive or coax him out of his selfishness. Mother says he 'll outgrow it by-and-bye, but I don't see as there is any prospect of it. You know what made him so selfish, don't you, grandmother?"

"I am afraid he has been humored too much," replied Mrs. Lee.

"Well, he has been," added Alice; "but you know when he was little, he was very sick for a whole year, and the doctor said he must n't be crossed any more than we could help, for crying and fretting were very bad for him. So he had his own way in everything, and if we children had anything he wanted, we had to give it to him, and let him break it to pieces, for he would scream as loud as he could, if we refused him. This was the way he got to be so selfish; and now he thinks we must humor him just as we did when he was sick."

"There is some little excuse for him, if he fell into the habit when he was very young and sick," observed Mrs. Lee; "but he is old enough and well enough now to know better, and ought to be broken of the fault."



“Father and mother have tried to break him of it,” replied Alice, “but they have not succeeded very well yet. They have talked to him a good deal about it, but it does no good.”

The next day, the children found the bag of corn, and their mother told George she should punish him for his selfishness by not letting him have any more of it. The corn was accordingly divided among the other children, and thus George, in trying to get more than his share, actually got less than the others did.



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It was about this time that Oscar came into possession of the pup which Alfred Walton had promised him two or three weeks before. He at first had some difficulty in obtaining the consent of his mother to bring it home. She thought it would be troublesome, and tried to dissuade him from taking it; but Oscar's heart was so strongly set upon the dog, that she at length reluctantly assented to its being admitted as an inmate of the family.

Fastening a string to the neck of the dog, Oscar led him to his new home, where he received every attention from the younger members of the family. Quite a grave discussion at once ensued, as to what the name of the new-comer should be. Each of the children had a favorite name to propose, but Oscar rejected them all, and said the dog should be called "Tiger;" and so that became his name, but it was usually abbreviated to "Tige."

[Illustration: Tiger's Countenance.]

Tiger had grown very rapidly, and was now about twice as large as he was when Alfred promised Oscar one of his litter of pups. He was a handsome fellow, especially about the head, as you may see by his portrait. At times, he looked as old and grave as his mother; but for all that, he was a great rogue, and there was very little dignity or soberness about him. He was brim-full of fun, and would play with anybody or anything that would allow him to take that liberty. He would amuse himself for hours with an old shoe or rag that he had found in the street, and it seemed as if he never would get tired of shaking, and tearing, and biting it. This disposition sometimes led him into mischief, in the house; but he was always so happy, so good-natured and so affectionate, that it was difficult to blame him very hard for his misconduct. If Oscar's grandmother happened to drop her ball of yarn, when Tige was about, he would seize it in an instant, and she would have to work hard to get it away from him. She kept her work in a bag, which she usually hung upon the back of a chair; but one day, the little rogue pulled the bag down upon the floor, and had its various contents scattered all about the room, before the old lady noticed what he was doing.

These mischievous pranks were very amusing to Oscar, and he set all the more by Tiger, on account of this trait in his character. The other members of the family, too, seemed to enjoy the sport he made; and it was easy to see that even old Mrs. Lee, though she pretended to be angry with the dog for his mischievousness, was in reality pleased with the attentions he bestowed upon her and her knitting-work.

Oscar's grandmother usually retired to her chamber, soon after dinner, to take a short nap. One noon, after she had been scolding, with assumed gravity, about the dog's mischievousness, Oscar thought he would play a joke upon the old lady; so, on rising from the dinner-table, he carried Tiger up to her bed-room, and shut him in. He wanted to conceal himself somewhere, and witness the surprise of his grandmother, when she should open the door, and the dog should spring upon her; but it was time to go to school, and he could not wait.



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It so happened that Mrs. Lee did not take her nap so early as usual that day. When she did go to her chamber, Tiger, impatient of his long confinement, sprang out so quickly, that she did not observe him. But such a scene as met her gaze on entering the chamber! The first thing that caught her eye, was her best black bonnet lying upon the floor, all crumpled up and torn into shreds, looking as though it had been used for a football by a parcel of boys. She entered the room, and found a dress upon the floor, with numerous marks of rough handling upon it; while towels and other articles were scattered about in confusion. The cloth upon the dressing-table had been pulled off, and the articles that were kept upon it were lying upon the floor, including a handsome vase, which, in the fall, had been shattered to pieces. There was in the chamber a stuffed easy-chair, the covering of which was of worsted-work, wrought by Mrs. Preston when she was a young girl. This chair, which was highly valued as a relic of the past, was also badly injured. A part of the needle-work, which had cost so many hours of patient toil, was torn in every direction, and some of the hair, with which the cushion was stuffed, was pulled out, and scattered about the floor.

As soon as Mrs. Lee had fully comprehended the extent of the mischief, she went to the stair-way, and called her daughter. A glance satisfied Mrs. Preston that Tiger must have been there; and she was confirmed in this belief by Bridget, who remembered that the dog came down into the kitchen, just after Mrs. Lee went up. But they could not tell how the little rogue got shut into the room. They concluded, however, that some of the children did it by accident, or that the dog slipped in unperceived when Mrs. Lee came out from the chamber before dinner.

Oscar did not go directly home from school, but as soon as he entered the house, he learned what Tiger had done, from the other children. He felt sorry that what he intended as a harmless joke, should end in so serious a matter; but he determined that no one should know he had a hand in it, if he could prevent it. He regretted the destruction of property, but this feeling did not cause him so much uneasiness as his fear of losing his dog in consequence of this bad afternoon's work. His mother, as soon as she saw him, inquired if he had been to his grandmother's chamber that noon. He replied that he had not. She inquired if he let Tiger into it, and he answered in the negative. His mother questioned him still further, but he denied all knowledge of the matter.

It was not very hard work for Oscar to tell a lie, now, for practice makes easy. He could do it, too, in such a plausible and seemingly innocent way, that it was difficult to believe he was deceiving you. His falsehoods, in this instance, were readily believed; and as all the other children denied having any knowledge of the affair, it was the general conclusion that Tiger must have obtained admittance to the chamber accidentally and unperceived.



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When Mr. Preston came home to tea, and saw what the dog had done, he was very angry with poor Tiger, and told Oscar he must sell him or give him away, for he would not have such a mischievous animal about the house another day. A day or two after, Mrs. Preston replaced the articles belonging to her mother that had been injured, and the excitement about the dog soon died away. Oscar did not try to get rid of his pet; but he was careful not to let him stay in the house much of the time especially when his father was at home.

“Oscar,” said his grandmother a day or two after as he came into the kitchen with Tiger, “I thought your father told you he would n’t have that dog around here any more.”

“O, he did n’t mean so,” replied Oscar; “he was mad when he said that, but he ’s got over it now. Besides, I don’t let Tige stay in the house much.”

“A good dale ye cares for what yer father says,” remarked Bridget, who was never backward about putting in a word, when Oscar’s delinquencies were the subject of conversation.

“You shut up, Bridget,—nobody spoke to you,” replied Oscar.

“Shet up, did ye say? Faith, if ye don’t git shet up yerself where ye won’t git out in a hurry, afore ye ’re many years older, it ’ll be because ye don’t git yer desarts. Ye ’re a bad b’y, that ye are, an’—”

“There, there, Biddy,” interrupted Mrs. Lee, “I would n’t say anything more—it only aggravates him, and does no good. But, Oscar,” she added, “I ’m sorry you don’t pay more attention to what your father says. It’s a bad habit to get into. I knew a disobedient boy, once, who came to the gallows; and I ’ve known several others who made very bad men.”

“But you don’t call me disobedient, do you, grandma’am?” inquired Oscar.

“I don’t know what else to call it,” she replied, “if your father tells you to do a thing, and you take no notice of it.”

“But father does n’t want me to give Tige away—I don’t believe he ’s thought of it again since that night.”

“Then, if I were you,” replied his grandmother, “I would ask his consent to keep the dog. If he did n’t mean what he said, that night, you will be safe enough in asking him.”

But this was a kind of reasoning that Oscar could not appreciate. If he could carry his point just as well without his father’s formal consent, he thought it was useless to ask any such favor. As long as he could keep his dog, it was all the same to him whether his father withdrew his command, or silently acquiesced in his disobedience of it.



But grandmother Lee's visit was drawing to a close, and early one bright, cool morning, in the latter part of December, the coach called, to take her to the railroad depot; and after a few kisses, and words of affectionate advice, and lingering good-byes, she departed on her homeward journey. Of those she left behind, next to her own daughter, the saddest of the group was little Ella, who, for many days, missed the pleasant face of her good old grandmother.



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CHAPTER IX.

WINTER SPORTS.

It was now mid-winter, and a few inches of snow lay upon the frozen ground, sufficient to make pretty fair sleighing for a few days, and to afford good coasting for the boys on the hill-sides. The favorite place for this amusement, among the boys in Oscar's neighborhood, was the Common. Here they always found good, long, smooth coasting-places, when there was any snow on the ground; and there was no danger of tripping up foot passengers, or getting under the heels of the horses, or being tapped on the shoulder by a policeman, which often happened to boys who coasted down the steep streets of the city,—a practice, by the way, prohibited by a city law.

Oscar had a handsome new sled, which was a new year's present from his father. It was long and narrow, the two steel-shod runners projecting forward far beyond the top or seat, and ending in sharp points. It was painted light blue, and varnished. Upon the sides, in gilt letters, was its name—CLIPPER; and upon its top it bore the initial of Oscar's name, with an ornamental device. It had what a sailor would call a decidedly rakish look, and was really a fast as well as a stylish "team," to use the term by which Oscar usually spoke of it. It even eclipsed George's small but elegant sled, which, the winter previous, had been regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of sled architecture.

Ralph's sled, by the side of these, presented a very cheap and antiquated appearance, and it was seldom that he took it with him to the Common. He often borrowed Oscar's, however, when it was not in use for his elder brother, with all his faults, was not selfish boy, but was willing to lend his property to others, when he was not using it himself. One pleasant Wednesday afternoon, a portion of the week always devoted to recreation by the Boston school children, Ralph obtained leave to take the "Clipper" with him to the Common. George also went with him with his sled. The coasting is very good, and some hundreds of boys are enjoying it. Long lines of sleds, freighted with from one to three or four juveniles, are dashing down in various directions from the Beacon Street mall; and an odd collection of juveniles and sleds it is, too. There comes a chubby, red-faced lad, with his exact counterpart, on a smaller scale, clinging on behind him with one hand, and swinging his cap with the other. Their sled is called the "Post-Boy," and it seems to "carry the males" very expeditiously. Close at their heels is a pale, poetic youth, lightly skimming over the inclined plane upon a delicate craft that looks like himself, and which he calls the "Mystery." Here comes a rude, unpainted sled, with two rough but merry youngsters lying prone upon it, one over the other, and their heels working up and down in the air in a most lively manner. Anon goes by an aristocratic-looking craft, bearing upon it a sleek



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and well-dressed boy, whose appearance speaks of wealth, indulgence, and ease. His sled is appropriately named the "Pet;" but in gliding down the icy track it strikes a tree, and its pampered owner is sent sprawling upon his back, in a very undignified way, while his "Pet" gives him the slip and soon finds the bottom of the hill. Poor fellow! we wonder if this is an omen of what is to befall him in sliding down the hill of life. And here comes the "Clipper" itself, with our Ralph seated proudly upon it, and apparently enjoying the fleet and beautiful sled as much as though it were really his own. And there, too, comes George, with his pretty "Snow Flake;" and close behind him are the "Tempest," and the "Yankee Doodle," and the "Screamer," and the "Snow ball," and the "Nelly," and the "Racer," and a host of other craft, of every imaginable appearance, and strided by all sorts of boys.

Ralph and George spent an hour or two upon the Common. Nothing occurred to mar their pleasure till just before they started for home, when Ralph met with an adventure that sadly ruffled his temper. He was descending the hill upon his sled, when another craft, having two boys upon it larger than himself, managed to run into him. The "Clipper" being lightly loaded, the other sled descended with greater impetus; and the force of the collision, together with a vigorous kick from the stout boots of one of the boys, overturned Ralph upon the steepest part of the hill. He quickly picked himself up, and, forgetful of self, his first care was to see whether Oscar's sled had sustained any damage. When he beheld the marks of the rough encounter, in the form of sundry ugly scratches upon the polished sides of the "Clipper," the tears came in his eyes; and it was some time before he noticed that he himself bore upon his hands and knees several unmistakable tokens of the collision.

Ralph knew very well that the collision was not accidental. The kick of the boy who guided the sled, and the hearty laugh of both its occupants, when Ralph was overturned, satisfied him that he had been run down purposely. He did not know the names of the boys, having only met them occasionally on the Common. They soon came along again, on their way up the hill, and Ralph asked the owner of the sled why he run him down.

"Because you got in our way," replied the boy.

"No, I did n't," said Ralph; "there was room enough for you to go by, but you steered out of your course, and gave my sled a kick, too."

"Don't you tell me I lie, you little snipper-snapper," answered the boy "or I 'll put you in my pocket, and carry you off."



“See what you did,” continued Ralph, pointing to the scratches on the “Clipper;” “I should n’t care anything about it, but the sled is n’t mine. I borrowed it of my brother, and it had n’t a scratch on it when I took it.”

“Pooh,” said the other boy, “that does n’t hurt it any. I ’ll be bound it will be scratched worse than that, before the winter ’s over. If you get in my way with it again, I shall serve it worse than I did this time.”



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The boys passed on their way, and Ralph and George, whose “fun” had been thus suddenly and unjustly spoiled by their insolent and domineering companions, concluded to return home. Poor Ralph dreaded to meet Oscar; but yet he hunted him up, as soon as he got home, and told him what had befallen the beautiful sled. Oscar was very angry when he heard the story, but he generously acquitted his brother of all blame in the matter, and declared that he would pay back the boy who had thus taken advantage of his weakness. He knew the offender, from Ralph’s description, and from the name of his sled, which was the “Corsair.” He even proposed to go directly to the Common, and settle the account at once; but Ralph, in whose heart revenge held a very small place, persuaded him out of the notion.

But Oscar, unlike Ralph, was not the boy to forget or forgive an injury. A day or two after the occurrence just related, while coasting on the Common, he fell in with the boy who run into his brother. Keeping his eye upon him until he could catch him a little aside from the other boys, when the favorable moment came, he suddenly dealt him a severe blow, which nearly knocked him over, accompanying it with the remark:

“There, take that for running down my little brother, when he was coasting with my sled, the other day.”

The other boy, without saying a word, sprang at Oscar, and, for a moment or two, blows and kicks were freely exchanged. But though they were about of a size, it was evident that Oscar was the stronger or most resolute of the two, and his antagonist soon gave up the contest, but not until he had been pretty roughly handled. Other boys soon came flocking around, to whom Oscar explained the cause of the assault; but his antagonist denied all knowledge of the affair for which Oscar had attacked him. An angry war of words ensued, but the excitement finally subsided without any further resort to blows, and Oscar returned home, well pleased with his adventure.

One of Oscar’s favorite winter amusements was skating. Early in winter, as soon as the little pond on the Common was frozen over, he might be seen gliding over the smooth ice; but later in the season, when there was good skating on “Back Bay,” he preferred that locality, because of its greater extent. Tiger usually accompanied him in his skating excursions, and seemed to enjoy the sport as much as his master did. It was amusing to see him try to make a short turn, in running upon the ice. He would slide some distance before he could change his course. Oscar would often plague him, when he was in full chase after his master, by suddenly turning upon his skates, and taking a contrary direction, leaving Tiger to get back as he could.



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But an event happened, one day, that almost wholly cured Tiger of his fondness for this kind of sport. He was gaily tripping over the ice, by the side of his young master, when the latter suddenly turned about, and Tiger, in his haste to follow him, slid directly into an air-hole. This was probably the first time he had enjoyed so extensive a cold bath; and as he was not a water-dog, it is not surprising that he was terribly frightened. His piteous cries brought Oscar to his relief, who could not help laughing at the sorry plight in which he found his half-drowned canine friend. He was floundering and paddling about in the water, now lifting himself almost out, upon the edge of the ice, and now slipping off again, and plumping over-head in the uncomfortable element; his intelligent countenance, in the meantime, wearing the impress of despair. But Oscar soon helped him from his disagreeable position. Finding himself on his legs again, he did not resume his sport; but, shivering with cold, and dripping with water, almost at the freezing point, and with his head hanging downward, and his tail drooping between his legs, he started towards home—a wiser and a sadder dog.

When Oscar got home, he found the family some what alarmed for his own safety. Tiger had arrived some time before, and as it was evident that he had been overboard, and as he was known to have gone off with his master, Mrs. Preston felt some anxiety, not knowing but that both Oscar and the dog had broken through the ice. But his arrival dispelled all fears, and his account of Tiger's misfortune served to amuse the children for the rest of the day. As for Tiger himself, he seemed heartily ashamed of the part he had played, and could hardly be persuaded to leave the chimney-corner for a moment, or even to look up, when the children inquired for his health.

"I don't see what good air-holes do. I wonder if anybody knows what they are for," exclaimed Ralph, as the children and their mother were seated around the sitting-room table in the evening.

"They are traps set to catch skaters, I suppose," said Oscar.

"And dogs," added Ella.

"But don't you know what they are for, Alice?" continued Ralph.

"Yes," replied Alice, who had studied natural philosophy at school, "they are the breathing holes of the fishes. Fishes can't live without air, any better than we can; and a pond or river frozen over solid, without any air-holes, would be as bad for them as a room from which all fresh air was shut out would be to us. You can sometimes catch fish very easily by cutting a hole in the ice, for if they feel the need of air, they will rush right up to the opening."

"But how are the air-holes made?" inquired Ralph.



“I believe,” replied Alice, “that they are generally made by springs that bubble up from the bottom. These springs come from the earth, and the water is so warm that it gradually thaws the ice over them. The fish often finish the process by jumping up through the ice before it has entirely melted. When the cold is very intense, and these springs have frozen up, some of the water is absorbed by the earth, which leaves a vacuum or empty space between the ice and the water; and then the ice gives way under the weight of the atmosphere, and air is admitted into the water beneath.”



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“Well, I ’m glad air-holes are good for something,” said Oscar; “they ’re troublesome enough to skaters. Jim Anderson skated right into one the other day, and came pretty near getting drowned. But I always keep my eyes open for them. I never got into one yet.”

“You cannot be too careful when you are on the ice,” remarked Mrs. Preston. “I felt so uneasy, that I was just going to send Ralph in search of you, when you got home.”

After that day it required considerable coaxing to induce Tiger to go upon the boys’ skating-ground. He manifested a decided preference to remain upon the shore, and look on; and when he did venture to accompany his master, he kept close by his side, and travelled over the treacherous ice with a degree of circumspection, which said very plainly, “You won’t catch me in that scrape again, master Oscar!”

But there was nothing that the boys enjoyed more at this season of the year, than a real good snowstorm. Such a storm they were favored with during this month. It came on in the evening, and the next morning, when they arose, their basement windows were more than half buried up in snow, and the drifts, in some places, were higher than Oscar’s head. The streets were deserted and almost impassable. Thick crusts of snow hung over the roofs of the long blocks of houses; while the blinds, windows, doors and balustrades were heavily trimmed with the same delicate material. The huge banks which stretched themselves along the street and sidewalk, were as yet undisturbed; for the few passers-by had been glad to pick their way through the valleys. The wind roared and piped among the chimneys and house-tops, and whisked through narrow passage-ways, and whistled through the smallest cracks and crevices, in its merriest and busiest mood. Now it would scoop up a cloud of snow from the street, and bear it up far above the house-tops, and then it would repay the debt by gathering a fleecy wreath from some neighboring roof, and sweeping it into the street beneath. The storm still continued with unabated severity, and the air was so full of snow, that one could hardly see the length of the street.

After a hasty breakfast, the boys tucked the bottoms of their trowsers into their boots, and sallied forth, to explore the half-buried streets. And now the light snow-balls began to fly thick and fast, and every few moments, one and another would measure his full length in some deep drift, which for a moment almost buried him from sight. Tiger, who accompanied them, entered fully into the sport, and very good-naturedly received his share of the snowballs and snow-baths. But their exercise was too violent to be continued a great while. They soon returned home, coated with snow from head to heel, and the cheeks of the boys glowing with health and enjoyment.

“After you get rested, Oscar,” said Mr. Preston, who was just leaving for the store, “I want you to shovel a path in front of the house.”



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“What is the use?” inquired Oscar. “The storm is n’t over yet, and if I make a path, it will fill right up again.”

“No it won’t,” replied his father. “I don’t think it will storm much longer; and the snow is so light, now, that you can shovel it easily, but if you leave it till noon, it maybe trodden down hard. You need not clean off the whole side-walk now; only make a comfortable passage-way, and perhaps I will help you finish the job at night.”

Oscar still thought it would be a waste of labor to shovel a path then, and he did not evince any haste in obeying his father’s order. After loitering about the house a long time, he took the shovel, and worked lazily at the path for awhile. Although he only undertook to cut a narrow passage-way through the drift in front of the house, he worked with so little spirit, that when the time came for him to get ready for school, he had not half completed the task. He asked permission to stay at home and finish his path, but his mother did not think this necessary, and refused her consent. So he went to school, and in the meantime the storm died away, and the clouds dispersed.

Towards noon the door-bell rang, and on Bridget going to answer it, a little printed paper was handed to her, directing the occupant of the house to have the snow removed from his sidewalk within a given number of hours. After school, Oscar thought no more of his path, but went off with Alfred Walton, and did not go home until dinner-time. He had but little time now to shovel snow; but his father told him to be sure and come home directly from school, in the afternoon, and not to play or do anything else until the sidewalk was cleared off.

Oscar accordingly went home after school, and resumed his work. He found that the snow was trodden into such a solid icy mass, that an axe was necessary to cut it up in some places. He was not the boy to hurt himself with hard labor, and although he kept his shovel at work in a leisurely way, he did not accomplish much, except the removal of a little snow that had not got trodden down. Wearied at length with his feeble and fruitless efforts, he returned into the house, saying to his mother:

“There, I can’t get the snow off the sidewalk, and it’s of no use to try. It’s trodden down just as hard as ice. Besides, if I should shovel it all off, there will be an avalanche from the top of the house to-night, that will bury the sidewalk all up again. The snow is sliding off the roofs, all around here;—have n’t you heard it, mother?”

“Yes, I thought I heard it,” replied Mrs. Preston; “but if you can’t get the snow off the sidewalk, you had better speak to your father about it, when he comes home, and perhaps he will help you, or hire somebody to do it for you. It must be got off as soon as possible, for the police have notified us to attend to it.”

In spite of this advice, Oscar neglected to speak to his father in regard to the matter, and no one else happening to think of it, nothing was said about it. The next morning,



he chopped away upon the ice a little while, but getting tired of it, he soon abandoned the job, and went to play. When Mr. Preston came home to dinner, an unusual cloud was on his brow; and as soon as Oscar came in, the cause was explained.



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“Oscar,” he said, “why did you not shovel the snow from the sidewalk, as I told you to, yesterday morning?”

“I tried to,” replied Oscar; “but it was trodden down so hard, I could n’t get it off.”

“But you should have done it before it got hardened. I told you to clear a passage-way, yesterday morning. That would have saved the rest from getting trod down, and at noon you could have finished the job. Why did you not do as I told you to?”

“I did begin to make a path,” replied Oscar; “but I did n’t have time to finish it, and when I got home from school, the snow was all trodden down hard.”

“Did n’t have time?” said his father; “what do you tell me such a story as that for? You could have made all the path that was necessary in fifteen or twenty minutes, if you had been disposed to do it. By neglecting to obey me, you have got me into a pretty scrape. I have had to go before the Police Court, this forenoon, and pay a fine and costs, amounting to over five dollars, for your negligence and disobedience. And now,” he added, “you may try once more, and see if you can do as I tell you to. As soon at you have done dinner, take the hatchet and shovel, and go to work upon the sidewalk; and don’t you leave it until the ice is all cleared off. As sure as you do, I will dust your jacket for you when I come home to-night, so that you will not forget it for one while.”

Oscar thought it best to obey his father this time. It being Saturday, school did not keep, in the afternoon, and he had ample time to complete the task, although it was time which he intended to spend in a different way. Ralph, however, volunteered his assistance, and before the middle of the afternoon, the task was finished.

CHAPTER X.

APPEARANCES.

Those who impose upon the weak, sometimes get punished for their meanness in an unexpected manner. This truth was very effectually impressed upon Oscar, one March morning, as he was going to school. The streets were in a very bad condition, being several inches deep with a compound of snow, water, and mud, familiarly known as “slosh.” Just before reaching the school-house, he overtook two little boys with a sled, and throwing himself upon it, he compelled them to drag him along. It was hard sledding, and the boys naturally objected to drawing such a heavy load; but Oscar kept his seat, and compelled them to go on. For a few minutes, he rode along very quietly, although his span of youngsters, who were continually muttering to themselves, did not seem to enjoy the sport as well as he did. But, by a dexterous movement, they soon balanced the debtor and creditor account. Giving the sled a sudden jerk and lurch, in one of the sloppiest places they had met with, their lazy passenger was thrown



backward into the mud, and imprinted a full length picture of himself in the yielding material. The incident happened almost in front of the school-house, and as Oscar rose from the mud, he was greeted by the shouts and laughter of a hundred boys who witnessed the scene. Several men, also, who were passing at the time, joined in the laughing chorus; and one, who had observed the whole affair from the beginning, told Oscar the boys had served him just right.



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[Illustration: The Overturn.]

Ralph came to the relief of his brother, and having wiped off as much of the mud and water from his back as he could, with a handkerchief, Oscar started for home, wet to his skin. He was keenly sensitive to any mortification of this kind, and it was a bitter pill for him to appear in the crowded streets in such a plight. He imagined everybody he met or overtook was staring at him, and laughing at the figure he cut, and he wanted to hide his face from their sight. He never went home from school so fast before; but when he had changed his dress, and washed the dirt from his hands and face, it was too late to return. In the afternoon, when he made his appearance at school, he was quite generally greeted with the significant nickname of "Stick-in-the-mud," and had to stand a most remorseless fire of wit, pleasantry, and ridicule the rest of the day, both at home and in the street.

Oscar thought quite as much as was proper of outward appearances. He was commendably neat in his personal habits, and was seldom caught with dirty hands and face, or uncombed hair, or soiled and ragged dress. He loved to dress well, too, and no amount of persuasion could induce him to wear a garment, if he fancied it did not set right, or was much out of fashion, or had an old and patched-up look. In such a case, nothing but the stern arm of authority was sufficient to overcome his prejudices.

"There," said his mother one evening, after spending some time over one of his jackets, which had become a little worn at the elbows; "there, that will last you a spell longer, and look almost as well as it ever did, too."

Oscar examined the garment. It was neatly mended, and looked very well; but his eye rested upon a slight patch upon one of the elbows, which entirely spoilt it for him, although it had previously been a favorite garment.

"It's too small for me," he said; "why can't you keep it for Ralph?"

"No, you needn't keep it for Ralph," quickly replied the owner of that name; "I haven't had anything but your old clothes to wear for a year or two, and I should think it was my turn to have some of the new ones, now. Make him wear that out, mother, won't you?"

"Yes, I intend he shall wear it awhile longer," replied Mrs. Preston. "It looks well enough for any body."

"But see that detestable patch," said Oscar; "I don't want to wear *that* to school; folks will think I have borrowed one of Ben. Wright's old jackets."

Ben Wright was one of Oscar's schoolmates. He was the son of a poor widow, and was the most be-patched boy in Oscar's class, at the head of which he stood. As he had



nothing to recommend him but fine scholarship, exemplary deportment, and a good character, in school and out, he was a boy of little consequence in the eyes of Oscar.

“I wish you were *worthy* to wear one of Benny’s old jackets,” replied Mrs. Preston. “If you were half as good a boy as he is, I would not complain. But you need not be afraid that anybody will mistake you for him, even if you *do* wear a patched garment.”



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"I believe you think Ben. Wright is a little angel," said Oscar, who never liked to hear his humble but diligent classmate praised.

"I think he has some traits that you would do well to imitate," replied his mother.

"I shall think I am imitating him, when I get that thing on," added Oscar, in a contemptuous manner, alluding to the jacket.

"There, that will do, Oscar," replied Mrs. Preston, "You've said enough about the jacket; don't let me hear another word of complaint. I took a great deal of pains to mend it neatly, and it looks well enough for you or any other boy. You may put it on to-morrow morning, and don't you leave off wearing it till I tell you to."

Oscar nodded his head in a way that seemed to say, "You 'll see how long I wear it;" but his mother did not observe the motion. He had a short and easy way of getting rid of garments that he disliked. Somehow other they were sure to waste away in a much faster manner than those he had a fancy for; or, perhaps they would be rendered suddenly useless, by some mysterious accident. But he would never admit that their period of usefulness had been purposely shortened, though suspicions of this kind were occasionally hinted.

Soon after this, Mr. Preston entered the room, and took a seat by the fire. He pulled out his watch to wind it up, as was his custom just before bed-time, when Oscar said:

"Father, I wish you would buy me a watch. Frank King, and Bill Andrews, and Charlie Grant, and almost all the large boys that I know, have got watches, and I should think I might have one too; why can't I, father?"

"What do they do with watches?" inquired Mr. Preston.

"Why, what does anybody do with them? They carry them to tell the time of day, of course," replied Oscar.

"And to make a display of watch-chain," added his father.

"No, that isn't it," replied Oscar; "but it's convenient to have a watch with you. You don't know how I 'm plagued to tell what time it is, sometimes. It would make me a good deal more punctual, if I had one. I was late to school this morning, but it was n't my fault, for I did n't know what time it was until I got to the school-house, and found that the boys had all gone in."

"When I was of your age," said Mr. Preston, "boys never thought of carrying watches, and yet they were taught to be as punctual as the clock, in their attendance at school. If I had been tardy, and tried to excuse myself by saying that I had no watch, I should



have got laughed at by the whole school. But where were you this morning, that you did not know when it was school-time?"

"Over to Alf. Walton's."

"And couldn't find a time-piece about the premises?"

"Why—no—I—forgot—" replied Oscar, somewhat embarrassed by the question.

"Just as I supposed," added his father; "you got along with that boy, and forgot all about your school; and it would have been just the same, if you 'd had half a dozen watches in your pocket."



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“O no, father,” said Oscar; “for if I ’d had a watch about me, I should have looked at it.”

“Well,” added Mr. Preston, “if you don’t care enough about punctuality to take a little trouble to ascertain what time it is, when you have an engagement, I don’t think a watch would help you any in acquiring the habit. You have n’t made out a very strong case.”

“No,” remarked Mrs. Preston, “he wants a watch for show, and not punctuality,—that’s plain enough. He has just been making a great fuss because I put a little bit of a patch on the elbow of his jacket. He is getting to be quite fastidious, for a gentleman of his size.”

“If you would think a little less of outside appearances, Oscar,” continued his father, “and a little more of inward character, your judgment of men and things would not be quite so much at fault as it is now. If you judge of boys or men by the cloth and watches they wear, and select your companions accordingly, you will soon find that you have got a pretty set of friends. And so, too, if you think you can secure the good opinion and respect of the world, merely by dressing well, you are greatly mistaken. You must learn to judge people by their characters, and not by their dress or appearance. If I could see you trying to form a good character, I should care very little what sort of garments you wore. I would buy you a watch, or anything else in my power, if it would only make you behave better. In fact, I will make you a handsome offer now, if you wish.”

“Well, what is it?” inquired Oscar.

“I will agree to give you a nice watch, in six months from this time, if you will do three things,” continued his father.

“What are they?” inquired Oscar; “are they things that I can do?”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Preston; “you can do them if you will only try. The first is, that you render prompt obedience to your parents, during these six months. Is n’t that within your power?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Oscar, somewhat reluctantly.

“The second is,” continued Mr. Preston, “that you behave toward your playmates and all other people in such a way, that no serious complaint shall be made against you. Can you do that, if you try?”

“Yes, sir, I guess so,” replied Oscar.

“And the last condition is, that you give sufficient attention to your studies to gain admission to the High School, at the end of the term. Is that in your power?”

“I suppose it is,” said Oscar.



“You admit, then, that you *can* keep these conditions,” continued his father; “the question now is, *will* you do it?”

That was a hard question for Oscar to answer. He hesitated, and twisted about in his chair, and at length replied:

“Why, I don’t suppose I should make out, if I tried.”

“No, you certainly would not, if that is your spirit,” replied his father. “You cannot accomplish anything unless you have some confidence that you can do it, and firmly resolve to try. You just admitted that you could keep these conditions, but it seems you are not willing to make the attempt. You want a watch, but you don’t intend to obey your parents, or to conduct yourself properly, or to attend to your lessons, for the sake of getting it—that’s what you mean to say, is it not?”



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Oscar remained silent.

"I am sorry," continued his father, "that you will not take up with my offer; for though I do not think it important that you should get the watch, it is important that you should reform some of your habits. You are getting to be altogether too wayward and headstrong, as well as vain."

"If I get into the High School next summer, may I have the watch?" inquired Oscar.

"No," replied his father, "not unless you comply with the other conditions. But I want you to remember what I told you the other day, that if you don't get into the High School at that time, I shall send you to some boarding-school away from home, where you will be made to study, and to behave yourself too. If strict discipline can do anything for you, you shall have the benefit of it, you may depend upon that."

Oscar was now two-thirds of the way through his last year in the school he attended. His parents were anxious that he should go through the High School course of studies, and, indeed, he had applied for admission to that school the summer previous to this, but did not pass the examination. There was still some doubt whether he would succeed any better at the next examination; and in case of his failure, his parents had decided to send him to a boarding-school in the country. But there was nothing very alarming to him in the idea of going into such an establishment, notwithstanding all his father said of the strict discipline to which he would be subjected. There would be a novelty about it, he imagined, that would make it quite pleasant. Consequently, he cared very little whether he was accepted as a High School pupil or not.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MORAL LESSON.

Oscar had the name among his fellows of being a shrewd and sharp boy at a bargain; and, like too many men who have acquired a similar reputation, he was not over-scrupulous in his manner of conducting his business operations. If he could drive a profitable trade, it mattered little *how* he did it; and if somebody else lost as much as he gained by the bargain, that was not his business; every one must look out for himself. So he reasoned, and so constantly did he act on this principle, that, to tell the truth, his integrity was by no means unimpeachable among his comrades. It was a very general opinion, that in many of their boyish games, such as marbles, he would cheat if he could get a chance; and the notion was equally prevalent, that in a bargain, he was pretty sure to get decidedly the best end.

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Oscar was very desirous that his dog Tiger should wear a brass collar, by way of ornament and distinction. All other respectable dogs bore upon their necks this badge of ownership, and he thought it highly important that Tiger should be on a good footing with his canine friends. But how to get the collar, was the question that perplexed him. He had asked his father to buy it, and met with a flat refusal. He had even called at several shops, and inquired the price of the coveted article, but it was hopelessly beyond his means. The subject lay heavily upon his mind for several days, for when he took a notion that he wanted a thing, it was hard to reason or drive him out of it. His thoughts and his dreams were of brass dog-collars, and his talk among his companions run upon the same theme. At length, while prosecuting his inquiries, he happened to learn that a little boy who attended his school, owned just such a collar as he wanted, and had no dog to wear it. Here was a chance for a speculation. Oscar lost no time in seeing this boy, and in getting his lowest price for the collar, which was fifty cents. This was much less than the price at the shops, and Oscar thought his father might be induced, by this fact, to let him have the money to purchase it; but Mr. Preston did not think Tiger needed any such appendage, and Oscar's request was again denied.

Oscar now set his wits to work to devise a way of buying the collar, without his father's aid. He looked over the little collection of "goods and chattels," which he called his own, to see what there was he could exchange for the article he wanted. His eye soon fell upon a brass finger ring, and his plan was quickly formed. The ring had been tumbled about among his playthings for a year or two, and was now dull and dingy; but he remembered that he once cleaned and polished it, so that it looked very much like gold, so long as the lustre lasted. He subjected it to this process again, and it soon looked as well as the plain gold ring he wore upon his finger, which it somewhat resembled in size and color. Substituting it for the gold ring, he wore it to school that afternoon; and a little negotiation, after school was dismissed, settled the business—the coveted dog-collar was his! Indeed, so craftily did he conduct the bargain, that he made the other boy throw in a pretty ivory pocket-comb to boot! The little boy who was thus cruelly deceived, supposed he was buying the ring that Oscar usually wore; and, in truth, Oscar did give him to understand, in the course of the barter, that it was fine gold, a point on which the other boy did not appear to have much doubt.

Oscar did not dare to tell any one what a good bargain he had made, for fear that the other boy would hear of it. Tiger appeared with a handsome collar around his neck the next morning; and all the explanation any one could get from his young master was, that he "traded for it."



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A week or two elapsed before Oscar's victim discovered the imposition that had been practiced upon him. The ring, which had been proudly worn, at length began to look dim and brassy; and on being submitted to careful inspection, it was pronounced by competent authority to be not worth one cent. The owner was of course indignant, and he went at once to Oscar, and demanded a return of the collar and comb. But Oscar laughed at the proposal.

"A bargain is a bargain," said he, "and there can't be any backing out, after it's all settled. You agreed to the trade, and now you must stick to it."

"But it was n't a fair bargain," said the other boy; "you told me the ring was gold, and it is nothing but brass."

"No, I did n't tell you it was gold," replied Oscar. "You imagined that. And I did n't tell you it was the one I wore either,—you imagined that too. It was my other ring that I said was gold, and I told you it cost two dollars, and so it did. I never told you this ring was gold,—I recollect perfectly about it."

"Well, you know I supposed it was gold, or I would n't have traded for it," replied the boy; "and besides, you made me think it was gold, whether you really said it was or not."

"That was your look-out," said Oscar. "When a man sells a thing, he is n't obliged to run it down. You must look out for yourself when you make a bargain—that's what I do."

"I should think you did," replied the other; "and I guess I shall remember your advice, if I ever trade with you again. There's your old ring: now give me back my collar and comb," he continued, handing the ring to Oscar.

"I shan't do any such thing," said Oscar, and he refused to take the ring, and turned upon his heel, leaving the other boy in no very pleasant state of mind.

"Then you 're a great cheat and a swindler," cried the victim, gathering courage as Oscar retreated.

"And you 're a little greeny," replied Oscar, with a loud laugh.

Oscar had prepared his mind for this explosion of indignation, and though he did not care much about it, he was glad it was over with. He regarded the transaction which led to it as a shrewd business operation, to be chuckled over, rather than repented of; and he had no idea of spoiling it all, by undoing the bargain.

In Oscar's school, it was customary for the first class (of which he was a member) to devote the first half hour of every Monday morning to a lesson in morals. In these lessons, the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to one another, were explained and enforced. Although a text-book was used, the teacher did not confine



himself to it, in the recitations, but mingled oral instruction with that contained in the printed lessons, often taking up incidents that occurred in school, to illustrate the principle he wished to establish.

It so happened that on the Monday morning after the occurrence just related, the subject of the moral lesson was dishonesty. The various forms of dishonesty,—theft, robbery, fraud, &c.,—were explained, and the distinction between them pointed out. The teacher then proceeded as follows:



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“A gentleman was riding in the cars, one evening, when a newsboy passed through the train, and he purchased a paper, giving the boy by mistake a gold eagle instead of a cent. The boy noticed the mistake, but said nothing about it. Albert, you may tell me what you think of that boy’s conduct.”

“It was dishonest,” replied Albert; “because he knew that the money did not belong to him, and yet he kept it.”

“But did not a part of the blame belong to the man who made the mistake?” inquired the teacher.

Albert, after thinking a moment, replied:

“He was to blame for his carelessness, but not for the boy’s dishonesty.”

“You are right,” said the teacher. “The boy was guilty of stealing, just as much as if he had picked the man’s pocket, or broken into his house. But suppose, instead of the mistake being to the amount of ten dollars, it had only been a few cents,—how then?”

“It would have been just the same,” replied the boy.

“But what if the man was very rich, and would never feel the loss, while the boy was poor, and needed the money?”

“That would have made no difference,” replied Albert.

“Very good,” continued the teacher; “when an honest man discovers a mistake in his own favor, he always hastens to rectify it. He will receive only what he is entitled to. Robert,” he added, addressing an other pupil, “how is it with regard to lost articles?”

“When we find anything that has been lost,” replied the boy addressed, “we should try to ascertain the owner, and return the article to him.”

“Is there any guilt in neglecting to do this?”

“Yes, sir, it is a kind of dishonesty.”

“You are right,” added the teacher; “the courts often punish men for this very offence, for it is a species of theft. And how of borrowing articles, and neglecting to return them,—is that honest?”

“It is not,” replied Robert.

“Oscar,” continued the teacher, “you may give your opinion of this case: suppose one of your acquaintances wants a certain article belonging to you, and by way of barter, offers



you a finger-ring for it. You take it for granted that the ring is gold, but a week or two after the bargain is concluded, you discover that it is of brass, and of no value what ever. The other boy knew all the while it was brass, and also knew you supposed it was gold. What should you say of such a transaction? Was it honest?"

Oscar turned red, and looked confused, as this question was put to him. It was a minute or two before he made any reply, and then he said, in a hesitating manner:

"If the other boy did n't *tell* me it was gold, I don't see as he was to blame."

"But we will suppose there was no need of his telling you so," added the master; "we will suppose he managed the bargain so adroitly, that you never suspected he was not dealing fairly with you. In that case, should you think he had acted honestly towards you?"



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“No, sir,” replied Oscar, but it came out with the utmost reluctance.

“Certainly not,” said the teacher; “it is dishonest to take advantage of another’s ignorance, or simplicity, or necessity, in a bargain. Overreaching in trade is often dignified with the name of shrewdness, but, for all that, it is contrary to the rule of honesty. And now I have one more question to ask you: After you have discovered how your comrade has imposed upon you, what should you expect of him?”

Oscar made no reply.

“Should you not expect him to make full restitution?”

“Yes, sir,” he replied, in a scarcely audible voice.

“Of course you would,” continued the master; “and if he refused, he would deserve double punishment.”

Several other forms of dishonesty were then considered, such as the following;— withholding from another his just dues; contracting debts which we know we cannot pay, or making promises we know we cannot fulfil; wasting or injuring the property of others, &c. In concluding, the teacher remarked, that it was not very pleasant to feel that we had been wronged and cheated; but there was another feeling, a thousand-fold more to be dreaded—the feeling that we have wronged and cheated others. And so ended the moral lesson for that morning.

The particular bearing of this lesson upon Oscar, and the pertinency of the “case” he was called to decide upon, were not generally known to the class, though their suspicions might have been somewhat excited by his confusion, and his reluctance to answer the questions put to him. The teacher had been informed of Oscar’s dishonest bargain by the boy who suffered from it, and he chose this way to impress upon him the immorality of the transaction. He concluded, however, to give him an opportunity to make a voluntary restitution, and so no further reference was made to the matter.

Oscar was wise enough to heed the warning. Before night, the brass dog-collar and the ivory pocket-comb were returned to their rightful owner.

CHAPTER XII.

SICKNESS.

“You have got a bad cold, Oscar,” said Mrs. Preston one evening towards the close of winter, as Oscar came in from his play, and was seized with a coughing spell. “And no wonder,” she added, on glancing at his feet; “why, do you see how wet the bottoms of



your pantaloons are? I should like to know where you have been, to get so wet—it is strange that you will not keep out of the water.”

“I should like to know how anybody could help getting wet feet this weather, with the slosh up to your knees,” said Oscar.

“I could walk about the streets all day without going over my shoes,” replied his mother, “and so could you, if you tried to. I believe you go through all the mud-puddles you can find, just to see how wet you can get. But it won’t do for you to sit down in this condition. Take off your wet boots, and run up stairs and put on a pair of dry pantaloons and some dry stockings, and then you may sit down to the fire and warm yourself.”



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“I don’t want to change my pantaloons and stockings,” said Oscar; “I ’ll take off my boots and dry myself—that will do just as well.”

“No it won’t,” replied his mother; “you had better change your clothes, for you’ve got a real bad cold now, and I don’t want you to get any more. Come, do you hear me? Run up to your chamber and put on some dry clothes.”

Oscar paid no attention to the command, but after removing his wet boots, sat down before the range to dry his feet and legs. Such instances of disobedience were too common in the family to attract any special notice, and Mrs. Preston said nothing more about the matter.

Oscar, that afternoon, had been down to the shores of Charles River, near Cambridge Bridge, with Alfred Walton and several other boys. They had been amusing themselves upon the ice that had formed along the edge of the river, and which was now breaking up. They loosened some of the large cakes, and set them floating off upon the current towards the ocean. It was in this way that Oscar got his feet so wet.

The next afternoon, when school was dismissed, Oscar, forgetting his wet feet and his cold, went again to the same place, with several of his cronies. Tiger also accompanied the party, for his master seldom went anywhere without him, except to school. The boys amused themselves, as on the previous day, with shoving off large blocks of ice into the stream, and with running rapidly over floating pieces that were not large enough to bear them up. Sometimes they narrowly escaped a ducking, so venturesome were they; and all of them got their feet pretty thoroughly soaked.

It happened, after awhile, that a cake of ice upon which the boys were all standing, got disengaged from the shore, unperceived by them, and commenced floating into the river. They were all at work upon another ice-block, trying to push it off, and did not notice that they were going off themselves, until they were several feet from the shore. The distance was too great to leap, and the water was so deep that none of them dared to jump off from their precarious footing.

“Well, this is a pretty joke,” said one of the boys, with some appearance of alarm. “I should like to know how we are going to get out of this scrape?”

“Get out of it?—who wants to get out of it?” replied Oscar. “I don’t, for one—we shall have a first-rate sail down into the harbor; shan’t we, Alf?”

“The tide will take us right under the bridge, and I ’m going to climb up one of the piers,” said Alfred, who appeared to be thinking more of a way of escape than of the pleasures of the trip.



“Pooh, I shan’t get off there,” said Oscar. “I ’m in for a sail, and if the rest of you back out, I shan’t. You ’ll go too, won’t you, Tom?”

Before Tom could answer, they all began to notice that their ice-cake gave signs that the burden upon it was greater than it could safely bear. The swift current began to whirl it about in a rather uncomfortable manner, and it was gradually settling under water. They all began to be very much alarmed—all but Tiger, who did not quite comprehend the situation of affairs, and who looked up into the boys’ faces with an expression of curiosity, as though he wanted to say:



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“I wonder what mischief these little rogues are up to now?”

Several people who were crossing the bridge now noticed the perilous situation of the boys, and stopped to look at them. As soon as Alfred noticed them, he cried out slowly, at the top of his voice:

“Halloo, there! send us a boat, will you? we 're sinking!”

[Illustration: Afloat on the Ice.]

There was some doubt whether the people on the bridge understood the cry, and the other boys repeated it as loud as they could, in the meantime also trying to manifest their want by signs and gestures. Some of the spectators upon the bridge, who were now quite numerous, shouted back in reply; but the boys, being to their windward, could not understand what they said. Their frail support was now moving rapidly along, and whirling about in the eddies more alarmingly than ever. It had sunk so low that they were all standing in the water, and they expected it would shortly break to pieces and precipitate them all into the river. There were four of them upon the cake, besides the dog. The two youngest boys began to cry with fright; but Oscar and Alfred, though they were as much alarmed as the others, did not manifest it in this way, but were looking anxiously towards the bridge and the shore for relief.

The boys were not long kept in this dreadful state of suspense; for pretty soon they discovered a boat putting out towards them from the end of the bridge. There were two men in it, each of whom was plying an oar. They called out to the boys not to be frightened, and in a few minutes they were alongside the fugitive ice-cake, whose living freight was safely transferred to the boat. The boatmen then pulled for the wharf from which they came, and the rescued party had the pleasure of standing once more upon firm ground. They were so overjoyed at their escape that they forgot to thank the men who had taken so much trouble to rescue them. They were not ungrateful however; though it would have been better if their words as well as their looks had expressed the sentiment they felt. As soon as they reached the wharf, the men advised them to run home and dry themselves, which they proceeded to do.

When Oscar reached home, he was so hoarse, from hallooing, that he could not speak aloud. When his mother heard of his exposure, and saw how wet he was, she was much concerned for him. She wished him to change his damp clothing, but he did not think it necessary, and instead of complying with her desire, he sat down to the fire and dried himself. He had but little appetite for supper; and a headache coming on in the evening, he retired to bed early. Before doing so, however, he took a dose of medicine which his mother had prepared, to “throw off” his cold.



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After a feverish and restless night—in which, in his troubled dreams, Oscar had floated to sea upon a small piece of ice, and, after a long agony, foundered alone in fathomless waters—he awoke in the morning feeling very strangely. Every few moments a cold chill ran through his body, that made him shiver until the bed trembled beneath him. His head ached badly, and there was also a pain in his back. He tried to raise himself up, but his arms had lost their strength, and he was barely able to support himself a moment upon his elbow. By-and-bye his brothers, who slept in the same room in another bed, got up, and Oscar informed them that he was too weak to get off the bed. They soon called in their father and mother, who, after looking at the sick boy, concluded to send for a physician.

After breakfast, Ralph was despatched for the doctor, who soon arrived, and was conducted into Oscar's chamber. Seating himself upon the bedside, he took the sick boy's wrist into his hand, and began to talk with him very pleasantly, asking him various questions about his feelings, the manner in which he took cold, &c. Having ascertained all the facts and symptoms of the case, he told the family he thought Oscar was suffering from an attack of lung fever, and he then gave directions as to the manner in which the disease should be treated. He also wrote a recipe for some medicine, to be procured at the apothecary's. The terms used in it were Latin, and very much abbreviated, besides, so that they were unintelligible to Mrs. Preston; for this is a custom among physicians, that has come down from ancient times. Seeing Mrs. Preston was in some doubt about the prescription, he explained to her what the articles were that composed it, and the effect they would have upon the patient.

After the doctor had gone, it was decided to remove Oscar into another chamber, in a lower story, where he would be more comfortable, and where, also, it would be more convenient to wait upon him. Wrapping him up warmly in the bed-clothes, his father took him in his arms, and carried him to the room he was to occupy for the present.

In spite of his medicine, Oscar continued to grow worse, through the day. He longed for night to come, that he might go to sleep; but when it came, it did not bring with it the refreshing slumber of health. Short naps and troubled dreams alternated with long, weary hours of wakefulness; and the sun, at its next rising, found him sicker than before. The pains in his head and chest were more severe; his skin was hot and dry; his cheeks were flushed with fever; he breathed with difficulty, and his cough had become quite distressing. He felt cross and fretful, too, and nothing that was done for him seemed to give him satisfaction. He was unwilling that any one should attend upon him, except his mother, and refused to receive his food or medicine from any hand but hers. If she happened to be absent from his room more than a few moments, when he was awake, he would insist upon her being called back.



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But though Oscar would not allow his mother to leave him, she did not suit him much better than the other members of the family. It was with considerable difficulty that she could coax him to take the medicines the doctor had ordered. Then she was obliged to deny him all forms of nourishment, except a little gum-arabic water,—an arrangement at which he complained a good deal.

Oscar's fever continued to run for more than a week, the violence of the disease increasing from day to day. Then a favorable change took place, and the doctor told him the fever had turned, and he was getting better. For a day or two before this, however, he was very ill; so ill, indeed, that he submitted to whatever the doctor ordered, without a word of complaint. He felt that there was danger, and he dare not stand in the way of the means used for his recovery. To this, perhaps, he owed the favorable turn the disease had taken; for had he refused to take his medicines, as he did at the commencement of his sickness, or even had he only engaged in a fruitless but exhausting contest with his mother, the scale might have turned the other way, and the fever ended in death.

Getting better! That was the best news Oscar had heard for many a day. He almost wanted to kiss the lips that spoke those encouraging words. He always liked Dr. Liscom, but never so well as at that moment. It was good news to all the household, too, and flew quickly from one to another. In fact, the children grew so jubilant over it, that their mother had to remind them that Oscar was yet too sick to bear any noise in the house.

"O dear," said George, "I 've got tired of keeping so still. How long will it be before we can make a real good noise, mother?"

"And how long before I can sing, and practice my music-lessons, mother?" inquired Ella.

"And how long before Oscar can go out and play?" inquired Ralph, more thoughtful for his sick brother than for himself.

"I can't tell," replied their mother; "you must all keep still a few days longer, for Oscar is very weak now, and the noise disturbs him. The doctor thinks it will take several weeks for him to get fully well, but he will soon be able to sit up, I hope."

The next morning, Oscar felt decidedly better, and so he continued to improve day by day. But his old impatience soon began to return. He grumbled every time the hour returned to take his drops, and he fairly rebelled against the food that was prepared for him—a little weak gruel, when his appetite was clamoring for a hearty meal of beef and potatoes! During his sickness, many little delicacies had been sent in to him by friends and neighbors, and from most of these too he was still debarred by the inexorable doctor. He teased his mother to let him have things the doctor had forbidden, and was offended with her when she refused. He thus made a great deal of unnecessary trouble

and suffering for his mother, who had served him so devotedly through this sickness that her own health was giving way.



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A day or two after his fever turned, Oscar wished to sit up in a chair, and begged very hard to be allowed to get up from the bed.

“Why, Oscar,” said his mother, “you could not sit up two minutes, if I should put you in a chair. You have no idea how weak you are.”

“No, I aint weak,” replied Oscar; “I bet you I can walk across the room just as well as you can—you don’t know how strong I ’ve grown within a day or two. Come, mother, do let me get up, will you?”

“You are crazy to talk so, my son,” answered Mrs. Preston. “If you should try to stand up, you would faint away as dead as a log. It will be a week before you are strong enough to walk about.”

“I believe you mean to keep me sick as long as you can,” was Oscar’s unfeeling reply. “I am tired almost to death of laying a-bed,” he added, and the tears began to gather in his eyes.

His mother felt hurt by these words, but she attributed them to the weakening and irritating influence of disease, and forgave them as quickly as they were uttered. She even yielded to his wishes so far as to offer to let him sit up in bed a little while. He gladly acceded to the proposal, and putting his arms around her neck, she slowly raised him up; but he had no sooner reached an upright position than his head began to “fly round like a top,” and he was very glad to be let down again to his pillow. This little experiment satisfied him for the day.

It was a fine April morning when Oscar was first taken up from his sick bed, and placed in an easy chair, well lined with blankets and comforters. This was a memorable event in his life, the first time he sat up after nearly three weeks’ confinement to his bed. He was dragged to the front window, from which he could see the people upon the street below. How familiar, and yet how strange, everything and everybody looked to his sick eyes! And then, to have his toast and drink set before him upon a corner of the table, where he could help himself, and eat and drink with some comfort,—was n’t that “grand,” to use his own expressive term!

Oscar’s recovery was now pretty rapid, but his mother had to watch him very sharply, to prevent him from running into excesses, to which his impatience continually prompted him. It was hard to make him realize that there was yet some danger of a relapse, and that prudence would be necessary for several weeks to come.

CHAPTER XIII.

GETTING WELL.



Oscar had reason to remember the first time he went down stairs, after his fit of sickness. It was in the night-time. He awoke, feeling quite hungry; for he was yet kept on a spare diet, which was far from satisfying the cravings of his appetite. He was alone in his room, and all the rest of the family were asleep. A lamp was burning dimly in the fire-place of his chamber, and the door that led into his mother's room was open, that she might be ready, at the least sound of alarm. After thinking the matter over a few minutes, and satisfying himself that no one in the house was awake, he determined to go down stairs in quest of something to eat.



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“What is the use of starving a fellow to death, because he has been sick!” he said to himself. “I might as well die one way as another; and if there ’s anything to eat in the house, I’m bound to have it. I ’ve lived on slops and toasted bread three weeks, and I can’t stand it any longer.”

He accordingly got up, and taking the lamp, stole very cautiously into the entry, and down stairs, having nothing but his night-clothes upon him. The snapping of the stairs, under his tread, was the only noise that was heard, and this did not awake any of the household. He proceeded at once to the kitchen closet, and commenced helping himself with a free hand to its contents. He began upon a dish of corned beef and vegetables, from which he partook quite liberally. He then hastily swallowed a piece of mince-pie, and a slice or two of cake, when, the night air beginning to feel chilly, he hurried back to bed. This last operation was by no means so easy as he had imagined it would be. His knees were very weak and “shaky,” and it seemed as though they could not support him, when he undertook to go up stairs. He was alarmed, and would have given up the attempt, and called for help, but for the dread of being caught in such a flagrant act of disobedience. So he persisted in his efforts, and finally reached his chamber, quite exhausted.

After a heavy and troubled sleep, Oscar awoke in the morning, feeling quite wretchedly. As soon as his mother entered the room, her quick eye detected the unfavorable change; but he did not seem inclined to complain much of his feelings, and appeared averse to conversing about them. She ascertained, however, after awhile, that Oscar was more feverish than he had been, that he had a severe pain in his chest, and that his cough was worse. Many were the surmises thrown out, by his father and mother, as to the probable cause of this change in his symptoms; but as for himself, he seemed entirely at a loss to account for the mystery, and left them to form their own conjectures.

The doctor, who now visited Oscar only two or three times a week, was sent for after breakfast. When he arrived, he questioned Mrs. Preston very closely as to the manner in which the patient had been treated, and he also addressed many inquiries to Oscar; but he learned nothing from either that could account for the renewed attack of fever. He sat a few moments, in a thoughtful mood, seemingly at a loss what to say, when Oscar, who had complained much of nausea for the last half hour, began to show symptoms of vomiting. A basin was brought, and the contents of his stomach were quickly discharged into it.

The mystery was now explained. Mrs. Preston looked on in silent astonishment, while the doctor could hardly repress his anger at this exhibition of the contents of his patient’s stomach. There were great pieces of unchewed meat and potato, mixed up with a porridge of half-dissolved pie and cake, the whole forming a medley of hearty and indigestible substances, that would have taxed the strong stomach of a healthy man.



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“Well,” said the doctor, turning to Mrs. Preston, when Oscar got through, “what does all this mean?”

“I know not; you must ask him,” replied Mrs. Preston.

The same question, put to Oscar, brought from him a reluctant confession of the last night’s folly. When he had concluded, the doctor arose, and taking his hand, said:

“I will bid you good-bye. It’s of no use for me to attend upon you any longer, if you abuse my confidence in this way. If you want to kill yourself I won’t stand in your way. Good morning.”

Before Oscar recovered from his astonishment, the doctor had reached the entry. Addressing his mother who was following him, he said:

“Call him back, mother—tell him I won’t do so again—call him back.”

The doctor heard the message, and returned.

“I will consent to prescribe for you only on one condition,” he said; “and that is, that you will agree to do precisely as I tell you to. You must take the medicines I order, and eat only what I tell you to, or I will have nothing more to do with you. Do you agree to that?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Oscar.

The doctor resumed his seat, and felt the patient’s pulse. He had not yet got entirely over his irritation, and, turning to Mrs. Preston, he remarked:

“If the patient was a little stronger, my first prescription would be a smart external application of birch or ratan; but, as it is, we shall have to omit that for the present. You need not think you will escape punishment, however,” he continued, turning to Oscar. “This scrape of yours will put you back more than one week and if you are not careful you may never get your health again. You may trifle with the doctor, but you can’t trifle with the lung fever.”

The doctor then gave directions as to Oscar’s diet and medicine, and departed, but not until he had again warned him against leaving the room without his mother’s consent, or eating any articles forbidden by her.

Oscar found no opportunity after this to evade the commands of the doctor, had he been so disposed, for some one was always with him by day and night. Still, his recovery seemed to have been checked very much by his relapse, and the doctor’s skill was taxed pretty severely to bring the fever to a favorable termination. As it was, his attempt was not fully successful; for the fever, in spite of all he could do, left behind it a



cough, and a weakness of the lungs, which gave Oscar's parents no little alarm at times.

For a fortnight after his midnight supper, Oscar allowed his mother and the doctor to do just as they pleased with him. He yielded to their wishes, and their orders were law to him. At the end of that time the doctor discontinued his regular visits. Oscar was now able to go out-doors a little in very pleasant weather; but his cough rendered prudence still very necessary. His confinement, however, was daily growing more irksome, and sometimes he disregarded the positive commands of his parents by going out when the weather was unsuitable.



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One morning, a menagerie, or collection of wild beasts, was to enter the city in grand procession. There were to be several elephants and camels on foot, besides hundreds of other animals (invisible) in carriages. There was also to be a mammoth gilt chariot, filled with musicians, and drawn by ever so many horses. The procession was to pass very near the street where Oscar lived, and he intended to go and see it; but when the morning came, there was a cold, drizzling rain, with an uncomfortable east wind, and his mother told him he must not think of going out. He did think of it, however, and not only thought of it, but went. While his mother was up stairs, he quietly slipped out, and went to the corner the procession was expected to pass. There he waited about an hour, until he became thoroughly wet and chilled, and then returned home, without seeing the sight; for the showmen had shortened their intended route on account of the storm. He entered the house, vexed by his disappointment and the uncomfortable plight he was in; and when his mother mildly reproved him for his conduct, and entreated him to be more careful of himself, he only replied that he did not wish to live, if he must be shut up in the house all the time. This act of imprudence and disobedience made him a close prisoner in the house for several days, besides causing him no little suffering.

Oscar employed much of his leisure time in reading, during his confinement in-doors. His acquaintances lent him many interesting books, with which he beguiled the weary hours. One day, happening to think of a volume belonging to his classmate, Benjamin Wright, which he thought he should like to read, he sent word by Ralph that he wished to borrow it. The next morning Benjamin brought it to school, and Ralph took it home to Oscar. On removing the paper in which it was wrapped up, a letter dropped out, which Oscar found was directed to himself. He opened it, and a smile lit up his countenance as he glanced over the sheet, which was filled up with drawings and writing of an amusing character. Benjamin was quite famous among the boys for the skill and facility with which he made sketches, and in this letter he had given a curious specimen of his artistic talent. The following is a copy of this production:

DEAR OSCAR:

I am sorry to hear you 're in weakness and pain,
And I send you a book to beguile your tired brain;
I send also some puzzles, to stir up your wit,
And tempt you to laugh, when you really don't feel like it one bit!

[Illustration: A Queer Name.]

What a queer name!

What do we all do when we first get into bed?
Why is swearing like an old coat?
What is that which is lengthened by being cut at both ends?



My first, if you do, you won't hit;
My second, if you do, you will have it;
My whole, if you do, you won't guess it.



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[Illustration: The Double Face.]

Turn me over, pray.

A word there is, five syllables contains;
Take one away, no syllable remains.

What is that which is lower with a head than without one?
Who was the first whistler?
What tune did he whistle?
How do you swallow a door?
What is that which lives in winter, dies in summer, and
grows with its root upwards?
If you were to tumble out of the window, what would you fall against?

[Illustration: The Cat-Erect.]

Why is this like the Falls of Niagara?
If my puzzles are simple, and my pictures a fright,
Then just laugh at me, and it will all
B. WRIGHT.

This letter was the prime source of attraction to all the children, the rest of the day; and its reception formed an era in Oscar's sick-day experience, not easily to be forgotten. All the family, from Mr. Preston down to little George, set themselves to work to guess out the riddles; but in some of them, they found more than their match. To Oscar, however, the letter was something more than a collection of drawings and puzzles. It was a token of interest and sympathy from a boy towards whom he had never manifested a very friendly spirit. Benjamin's high standing in the school, both for scholarship and behavior, had awakened in Oscar a secret feeling of jealousy or resentment towards him. He was a poor boy, too, and this by no means increased Oscar's respect for him. But now, Oscar began to feel ashamed of all this; and as instances of his unkind treatment of his generous classmate came up in remembrance, he wished he had the power to blot them from existence. He determined thenceforth to "stand up" for Benjamin, and began to plan some way of making a return for his manifestation of good feeling.

Ella wanted to carry Benjamin's letter to school, to show to the girls, but Oscar would not allow it to go out of his hands. She then begged the privilege of copying it, to which he consented. She did the best she could, no doubt, but her drawings probably did not quite do justice to the subjects; for Oscar declared that her copy was more comical than the original. She lent it to some of her schoolmates, one of whom was roguish enough to show it to Benjamin himself! He laughed heartily at the caricature; but thinking it was



getting him rather more notoriety than he wished, he put it in his pocket, and that was the end of it.

In consequence of his many acts of imprudence, Oscar got along very slowly in his recovery. Yet he was daily growing more impatient of his long confinement, and the utmost vigilance of his parents was necessary to restrain him from doing himself harm. During stormy weather, which was not rare at that season of the year, he was not allowed to go out, and the time passed heavily with him. One rainy afternoon, as he was sitting listlessly at a front window, watching for some object of interest to pass, a coach stopped at the door, and his heart beat high at the thought of his dulness being dispelled by the arrival of "company." The driver opened the coach door, and out jumped a stout, brown-faced man, whom Oscar at once recognized as his uncle, John Preston, from Maine.



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The arrival of Uncle John was soon heralded through the house, and a warm greeting extended to him. He usually visited the city thrice a year on business, and on such occasions made his brother's house his stopping-place. He lived in the town of Brookdale, where he had a family; but he was engaged in the lumber business, and generally spent the winter months in the forests of Maine, with large gangs of loggers, who were employed to cut down trees, and convey them to the banks of the streams, where they were floated down to the mills in the spring freshets. These forests are far from any settlement, and the lumber-men live in log-huts, in a very independent and care-for-nobody sort of way. Oscar had often heard his uncle describe their manner of life, and, to him, there was something quite fascinating about it. He thought he should like the logging business very much—all but the *working* part of it; he was afraid that would spoil the whole, for his Uncle John always represented it as being pretty hard work.

Oscar had four cousins in Brookdale, the children of his Uncle John, none of whom he had ever seen. He had many questions to ask about them, in the course of which he expressed a wish that he might visit them. His uncle replied that he should like to take him home with him, and, as he was sick, he thought the journey might do him good. He afterwards talked with Oscar's parents about the matter, and they finally concluded to let him go, hoping that a few weeks in the country would improve his health.

NOTE.—The following are the solutions of the puzzles, &c., in Benjamin's letter, contained in this chapter. The first puzzle is the name of Oscar Preston, enigmatically expressed. 2. Make an impression. 3. It is a bad habit. 4. A ditch. 5. Mistake. 6. Monosyllable. 7. A pillow. 8. The wind. 9. "Over the hills and far away." 10. Bolt it. 11. An icicle. 12. Against your inclination. 13. It is a cataract (cat erect).

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JOURNEY.

Oscar's valise was well packed for his journey, and many were the injunctions given him by his mother, in regard to his conduct during his absence from home. The morning for his departure soon came, and, in company with his uncle, he proceeded to the depot, and took the cars for Portland. It was a mild spring morning, near the close of May. Oscar secured a seat by a window, from which he could see the country they passed through; while his uncle, to whom the journey was no novelty, seated himself by his side, and was soon absorbed in his morning newspaper.

The keen relish with which Oscar set out upon his long ride gradually wore off, and he began to feel weary long before the train reached its destination. It was just noon when they arrived at Portland; and as it was too late to reach Brookdale that day, Oscar's uncle concluded to stop there until the next morning. They proceeded to a hotel, where

they booked their names, and were shown to a chamber. After dinner, Mr. Preston took Oscar to walk, and showed him some of the most notable places about town. But the latter felt too tired to walk about a great deal, and spent most of the afternoon in the hotel, while his uncle was off attending to some business.

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After supper, Mr. Preston again went out to make some calls. He invited Oscar to go with him, but he preferred to remain in the hotel. He lounged awhile in the bar-room, as it was called (though there was no bar in it), listening to the conversation of the men who had gathered there. At length, beginning to grow sleepy, he retired to his chamber, taking with him a queer little lamp the landlord gave him, which appeared to hold only about a thimblefull of oil. Oscar thought it was a stingy contrivance, and had some notion of sitting up to see how long it would burn; but his eyelids grew heavy, and he gave up the idea. Throwing off his clothing, he extinguished his diminutive lamp, and took possession of one of the beds in the room, of which there were two. As he composed himself to sleep, a slight sense of lonesomeness stole over him, when he remembered that he was alone in a strange house and a strange city, more than a hundred miles from his home; and almost unconsciously he found himself reverently repeating the little prayer he had been taught by his mother in infancy, but which of late years, in his sad waywardness, he had outgrown and almost forgotten:

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the lord my soul to take.”

He had occasionally repeated to himself this simple but appropriate evening petition during his late illness; but, strange to tell, for several years previous to that time, the thought of asking anything of the great Giver of all good had scarcely ever entered his mind.

Oscar was soon fast asleep, and the next thing he was conscious of was the striking of a strange church-clock, that awoke him in the morning. His uncle was dressing himself, and the sun was shining in at the window. For a moment, he was puzzled to determine where he was; but his recollection returned when his uncle remarked:

“Come, Oscar, it is time to get up,—we have got to be at the depot in an hour.”

Oscar jumped out of bed, and was dressed and ready for the breakfast table before the bell rang. After the morning meal was despatched,—for it was literally a work of despatch, judging from the celerity with which the heaping plates of hot biscuits and beef-steak disappeared from the long table,—Mr. Preston settled with the landlord, and proceeded with Oscar to the railroad depot.

“How much further have we got to go?” inquired Oscar, after they had taken their seat in the car.

“About one hundred and twenty miles,” replied his uncle; “and thirty-five of it will be in a stage-coach—that is the worst of the whole journey.”



“I shall like that part of it first-rate, I guess,” said Oscar. “If they have good horses, I know I shall.”

“You will find out how you like it, before night,” added Mr. Preston, with a smile.

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The cars were soon on their way, and Oscar's eyes and attention were fully engaged in taking note of the scenery from the windows. The appearance of the country did not differ much from that through which he passed the day previous; and long before he reached the end of his eighty-miles' ride, his attention began to flag, and his eyes to grow weary. It was about eleven o'clock, when they arrived at the depot at which they were to leave the train. Here they had an opportunity to rest an hour, and to take dinner, before resuming their journey.

After dinner, the stage-coach made its appearance, and the passengers began to stow themselves away within it, Oscar mounted the outside, and took a seat with the driver, with whom he was soon on intimate terms. All things being ready, the horses started, at the familiar "Get up!" and they were on their way toward Brookdale.

The horses did not prove quite so smart as Oscar hoped they would, and the coach was a heavy and hard-riding concern, compared with those he was accustomed to ride upon at home. But the road was good, though hilly, and the scenery, much of the way, was very pleasant. The driver, too, was quite talkative, and Oscar being the only outside passenger, enjoyed the full benefit of his communicativeness. Occasionally they passed through a village, with its rows of neat white houses, its tall church steeple, its bustling store, and its groups of children playing in the streets. Now and then they stopped a few moments, to leave a passenger, a package, or a mail-bag; for the strong leathern bags, with brass padlocks, which the driver had carefully packed away under his box, contained the United States' mails for the towns along his route.

As they advanced on their way, the villages became less frequent, the farm houses were more scattering, and the country grew more wild. Sometimes the road extended for miles through thickly-wooded forests. Occasionally they would come in sight of a river, and, perhaps, would hear the clatter and whizzing of a saw-mill, or get a glimpse of a raft of logs floating lazily down the stream. It was about six o'clock when the stage stopped at the post-office of a small settlement, and the driver told Oscar he was going to leave him there. His seat had grown tiresome, during the last few hours, and he was by no means sorry to leave it.

"Well, Jerry, here I am again," said Mr. Preston, addressing a boy who stood by. "How are all the folks at home?"

"They are well," replied the boy addressed.

"This way Oscar," said Mr. Preston, pointing to a horse and wagon on the opposite side of the street. "Oscar, this is your cousin Jerry," he continued, and the boys shook hands with each other, in acknowledgment of the introduction.

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Oscar now learned that they were yet five miles from Brookdale, and that as the stage did not pass any nearer to his uncle's, Jerry had come over with a horse to take his father home. There being but one seat to the wagon, Mr. Preston and Oscar took possession of it, while Jerry seated himself on the floor behind them. While on the way to Brookdale, Oscar addressed several remarks to his cousin; but the latter seemed shy, and they did not get acquainted with each other very fast. They passed but very few houses, and Oscar looked in vain for any signs of a village. At length, when he thought they could not be far from their journey's end, he inquired:

"Where is the village, uncle John? Shan't we see any of it, going to your house?"

"This is the village," replied Mr. Preston.

"This a village!" exclaimed Oscar; "why, I don't see any houses."

"This is all the village there is," replied his uncle; "there are hardly any two houses in sight of each other in the town."

They were now approaching an old, two-story farmhouse, in the doorway of which a woman and several children were standing, looking towards them. This proved to be the end of their journey. Having driven the wagon into the large barn which stood nearly opposite the house, Mr. Preston left Jerry to put up the horse, and proceeded at once to the house with his nephew. Mrs. Preston had seen Oscar in Boston, and came out to meet him. She welcomed him very cordially, and inquired after all the other members of the family. She then introduced him to his three other cousins, Emily, Harriet, and Mary, all of whom were younger than Jerry, and quite as shy and silent as he, at the presence of a stranger.

Supper was now ready, and all the family, including James, the hired man, seated themselves at the table. Mr. Preston, during the meal, talked freely of what he had seen and done since he left home; but the children maintained their gravity and silence, though Oscar tried hard to break the ice of restraint with Jerry, who sat by his side. A strange face was an unusual thing among them, and they could not get over it in a moment.

After supper, Mrs. Preston and her oldest daughter cleared off the table and washed the dishes; James and Jerry went out to the barn; Mr. Preston sat down to a table to examine some papers he had in his pocket-book; while Harriet and Mary remained, to keep Oscar company. The latter now began to make advances towards his youngest cousin, who was the prettiest and most interesting of the children. A little coaxing brought her to his side.

"Do you know what my name is, Sissy?" he inquired.



“Yes; it’s Oscar,” she replied.

“Oscar what?” he inquired.

“Cousin Oscar,” she answered, after a little hesitation.

“Yes, but that is n’t all of it,” replied Oscar; “don’t you know the other part of it—Cousin Oscar——what?”



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Mary looked thoughtful a moment, and then replied, in a confident tone, "Boston."

Oscar could not help laughing at this amusing mistake, and Mary, feeling hurt at the liberty he took, began to move away; but he held her by the hand, saying:

"No, don't go yet, Sissy—you got my name almost right, after all. Cousin Oscar Preston, from Boston,—that was what you meant to say, was n't it?"

"Yes," replied Mary.

"Now tell me what your name is?" continued Oscar.

"Mary Preston," she replied.

"And how old are you?"

"I 'm going to be six next winter," she answered, with animation.

"Very well,—you 're a smart little girl," replied Oscar.

"How old be you?" inquired Mary, now turning the table upon her questioner.

"I 'm fourteen," said Oscar.

"You 're a smart little boy," added Mary, with a roguish twinkle in her eye, and she darted out of the room with a merry laugh.

After that, there was no more shyness between Mary and Oscar. With the older children, however, Oscar did not get acquainted quite so easily, particularly with the girls. He made but little progress with any of them that evening, until he retired with Jerry, with whom he was to sleep during his visit. After they had got into bed, Jerry's tongue was loosed, and before they went to sleep his reserve had almost entirely vanished.

CHAPTER XV.

BROOKDALE.

The next morning the air was extremely raw and chilly, and there were strong indications of rain. Oscar's uncle and aunt advised him so earnestly not to expose himself to the cold and damp wind, that he did not extend his rambles any further than to the barn that day. But if he did not go far, he made many new acquaintances. Having made sure of Jerry and Mary, he left his other two cousins to "surrender at



discretion,” and turned his attention in another direction. His first performance was to introduce himself to Billy, the horse, who was eating the breakfast James had just given him. After rubbing and talking to him awhile, he paid his respects to a pair of oxen and three or four cows, which he helped James and Jerry to drive into the pasture near the barn. He next visited the hogs, and then the hens. This completed the list of life stock on the farm. He then had a frolic with Jerry in the hay-loft, in the midst of which he suddenly stopped and inquired:

“Is n’t it almost time for you to go to school, Jerry?”

“No,” his cousin replied, with a laugh, “it wants just six months of it.”

“Six months!” exclaimed Oscar; “what do you mean? Don’t you go to school?”

“Yes, I go when there is any school; but it does n’t commence till next December,” replied Jerry.

“That’s a queer idea,” said Oscar; “I should like to know how long your school keeps, after it begins.”



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“It keeps three months,” replied Jerry.

“I should like that first-rate—I wish I lived here,” said Oscar; “I have to go to school all the time. But why does n’t your school keep more than three months?”

“I don’t know,” replied Jerry; “I guess it’s because folks are too stingy to pay for it. They ’ve been talking of having a summer school, but I don’t believe it will amount to anything.”

“I should hope it would n’t if I lived here,” said Oscar. “What capital times you must have!—no school to bother you, and no lessons to get. But I suppose you have to work some—don’t you?”

“No, not much,” said Jerry; “I help a little in planting and haying time, and have a few chores to do about the house,—that’s all.”

“Do you have many boys to play with?” inquired Oscar.

“There are boys enough,” replied his cousin, “but they are scattered all over town,—that’s the worst of it. There is only one fellow of my age that lives near here, and he’s half a mile off.”

“If you call that near, I should like to know what you call distant,” said Oscar. “I ’m afraid I should be lonesome if I lived here.”

“Halloo, it rains!” said Jerry, as the big drops began to sound upon the roof over their heads.

“Then I ’m going in,” added Oscar, and they both started for the house.

It proved to be a rainy day, and Oscar was obliged to find his amusement in-doors through its remaining hours. With his four cousins to help him, this was not a very difficult matter. When he retired at night, he felt quite at home in his new quarters.

The sun rose clearly the next morning, and everything looked the more beautiful for the rain. To Oscar, the fields not only seemed greener, but the hills looked higher, and the trees more majestic, than they did the day before.

“Why,” he exclaimed, as he stood before the chamber window, “there is a pond away off there, is n’t there? I did n’t know that before.”

“Yes, that’s a pond,” replied Jerry, “and we ’ve got a small river, too, but you can’t see it from here. We ’ll go over to the pond, some warm day, and go into water; it’s a real good place to bathe.”



“Perhaps we ’ll go to-day,” said Oscar; “it looks as though it were going to be real warm.”

Mrs. Preston now called to the boys that breakfast was ready, and they hurriedly finished dressing themselves, and descended to the kitchen. Having washed his face at the sink, Oscar stepped to the door, and used his pocket-comb; but Jerry was in too great a hurry to go through this last operation, and he was about taking his seat at the table, with his hair standing up in every direction, when his father inquired:

“Jerry, what have you been doing to your head?”

“Nothing,” replied Jerry, with a look of surprise.

“Well, I think you had better do something to it, before you come here,” said his father. “Oscar will think you were brought up among the wild Arabs, if you come to the table with such a mop of hair as that about your head. Don’t you see how nicely he has smoothed his hair?”



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“He’s got a comb of his own. I wish you would buy me one, father,” said Jerry.

“Don’t stand there talking—go and comb your hair,” said Mr. Preston, somewhat sharply.

To tell the truth, Jerry did need a lesson in neatness; and in this respect, Oscar was a very good model for him to imitate. Having reduced his snarly locks to something like order and smoothness, Jerry took his seat at the table, much improved in appearance.

“You ’ll have a chance to go about some to-day, Oscar,” said Mr. Preston; “it’s about twenty-five degrees warmer than it was yesterday.”

“Father,” said Jerry, “I and Oscar—”

“I and Oscar—where did you learn your manners?” interrupted his mother.

Jerry was for a moment in doubt whether to be offended or not at this second unexpected lesson in good-breeding; but he finally concluded to make the best of it, and went on with his story:

“Oscar and I, then—were going over to the pond this forenoon, and I guess it will be warm enough for us to go into water. Should n’t you think it would?”

“No, indeed,” replied Mr. Preston, “you mustn’t think of such a thing. It’s only the first of June, and you ought not to go into water for two or three weeks yet. Besides, Oscar ’s an invalid, and I should n’t like to have him go in, even if it was warm enough for you. I would n’t walk about much, either, at first,” he continued, addressing Oscar. “You ’re weak, and must look out, and not overdo yourself. This afternoon, when the horse is at leisure, Jerry shall give you a ride; so you had better not go far this forenoon.”

The river of which Jerry spoke is a small stream that has its source in the lake Oscar saw from the chamber window. It flows in a south-westerly direction, crossing the road on which Mr. Preston lived, not far from his house. A small bridge is thrown over the river at this point. After breakfast, Jerry and Oscar walked down to this bridge, and then, leaving the road, followed the river through the fields and woods, to its fountain-head. Here they found a beautiful sheet of water, more than half a mile across, in one direction, with an irregular shore, fringed most of the way with woods. A two-masted sail-boat was riding at anchor, a little off from the shore, which Oscar regarded with wishful eye; but as it did not belong to Mr. Preston, and they could not reach it without going into the water, it was of no use to think of taking a sail. They now walked along the edge of the pond, some distance, and after wandering some time in the woods, they returned home by a circuitous route.

The annexed map of Brookdale will show the location of the pond, river, &c. Jerry lived in the house numbered 2.

[Illustration: Map of Brookdale.]

Oscar and Jerry spent the rest of the forenoon in the barn and wood-shed, and in the fields immediately around the house. After dinner, Mr. Preston told the boys they could have the horse and wagon, and as the family wanted some groceries, they might ride over to the store and get them. They accordingly tackled up the team, and were soon on their way.



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The store at which Mr. Preston traded was at the village where the stage left Oscar, which goes by the name of the "Cross-Roads," from the fact that two of the principal thoroughfares of that section of country cross at this point. Though this store was about five miles distant, there was no other one nearer to Mr. Preston's. The boys had a fine ride over to the village. Oscar drove, and was quite anxious to put Billy to a test of his speed; but as his uncle told them not to hurry, because the horse had been worked some in the forenoon, he did not dare to make any experiment of this kind. Jerry assured him, however, that he once drove Billy over to the Cross-Roads in just twenty minutes, which was the quickest time he had ever been known to make. He thought this a remarkable feat; but Oscar did not seem much astonished at it, and said he knew of horses that could go a mile in three minutes, and even in less time if the road was smooth and level.

After riding about three-quarters of an hour, they arrived at the Cross-Roads, and drove up to a post and chain for tying horses in front of the store. The store was kept in a large wooden building. Over the door was the sign, "J. FLETCHER, VARIETY STORE;" and the shutters were covered with columns of names of articles sold within, such as "Bacon," "Cheese," "Flour," "Grain," "Shoes," "Dry Goods," &c. Another sign in one of the windows indicated that this was also the post-office of the village.

The boys went into the store, and while Jerry was ordering the articles his mother had sent for, Oscar improved the opportunity to look around the premises. It was to him a queer assortment of goods. There seemed to be a little of everything for sale. Here you could buy of one salesman articles that you could obtain in Boston only by visiting a dozen different shops. Groceries and dry goods, country produce and hardware, boots, shoes, and hats, confectionary and fancy articles, stoves and children's toys, were in most neighborly companionship. Before leaving the store, Oscar invested a few cents in candy and cigars; for his father had given him a little spare change beyond what was necessary to defray the expenses of the journey. He shared the candy with Jerry, and put the cigars in his pocket for future use.

Jerry having finished his business at the store, they set out on their return, and arrived home in safety and without meeting with any remarkable adventure. The boys employed themselves the rest of the afternoon in planning excursions and amusements, and before they got through, they had laid out "fun" enough to occupy them for several days.

The evenings were now quite short, and as it was the custom to retire to bed early at Mr. Preston's, it frequently happened that no lamps were lit in the house for several days in succession. As twilight came on that evening, Oscar, who began to feel pretty tired, laid down upon the sofa in the sitting-room, and in a few minutes was fast asleep. Jerry got a straw, and was about to tickle his ear, when his mother stopped him. Oscar's nap, however, was a short one, and suddenly waking up, he began to laugh.



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"I guess you had a pleasant dream," said his aunt.

"I had a real funny one," replied Oscar. "I thought you sent me over to the store to get some things, and when I got there, I had them all jumbled together in my head, and I told the man I wanted a yard of molasses, and a pound of calico, and a gallon of shingle-nails, and I did n't know what else. And I thought the man laughed, and asked me if I would take them loose, or have them done up in a rag. Then another boy that was in the store set up a loud laugh, and that woke me up. I wonder how long I slept—do you know, aunt?"

"Only two or three minutes," replied Mrs. Preston.

"I was real smart, then," replied Oscar; "for you gave me my errand, and I harnessed the horse and drove away over to the Cross-Roads, and went through the scene in the store, and woke up again, all in two or three minutes. I thought I 'd been asleep half an hour."

"I should think you 'd dream about the store," said Jerry; "you 've made fun enough about it, if that 's all."

"Well, I 'll leave it to aunt if it is n't odd to see such a queer lot of stuff in one store; I 've heard about country stores, but I never saw one that would come up to that before. It is almost equal to going into a fair, to go in there. There was everything you could think of, from a grindstone to a pop-gun."

"There is n't business enough to support more than one trader, and that is the reason why Mr. Fletcher keeps such a variety," said Mrs. Preston.

"I know that," said Oscar, "and I suppose the folks are glad to have him keep all sorts of knick-knacks; but it seems queer to me, to see groceries and dry goods, and everything else, in the same shop."

"Did you see any babies there?" inquired little Mary, who was amusing herself by walking around the room backwards.

"What sort of babies—live ones, or rag ones, or wax ones?" inquired Oscar.

"No, none of them," replied Mary; "I mean crying babies, like Annie Davenport's."

"O, you mean those little dolls that make a squeaking noise when you squeeze them. No, I believe I did n't see any," said Oscar.

"No, Mr. Fletcher would n't keep such silly things as them," said Jerry, who was very fond of teasing his sisters.



“No, they aint silly, either, are they cousin Oscar?” said Mary.

“No,” replied Oscar, “seeing it’s you, they aint silly.”

Mary was continuing her backward walk around the room, and was just at that moment passing before Jerry, when he suddenly put out his foot, and stumbling over it, she fell heavily upon the floor, striking her head against a corner of the sofa. A loud scream immediately followed this mishap, and as the author of it hastened to raise up his sister, he was himself a little frightened; but seeing no blood flowing from her head, he concluded she was “more scared than hurt,” and tried to turn the affair into a joke, saying:



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“There, sis, you’re a little crying baby yourself, now. Come, stop your noise; you ’ve blubbered enough about it. It didn’t hurt you, did it?”

“Come here, dear, what is the matter?” said Mrs. Preston, who had left the room a moment before, and hurried back on hearing Mary scream.

“Jerry knocked me over,” said Mary, sobbing bitterly, as her mother lifted her up into her lap.

“Where did it hurt you, dear?—there? Well, let mother rub it, and it will feel better soon. Jerry is a naughty boy to do so. Why need you torment your little sister so?” Mrs. Preston added, turning to Jerry.

Mr. Preston, who had been sitting upon the door-step, smoking his pipe, as was his custom in the evening, came in, on hearing the uproar; and having ascertained what the trouble was, he boxed Jerry’s ears pretty severely, and sent him off to bed. Oscar soon followed him; but Jerry was so mortified at the rough handling he had received, that he scarcely spoke again that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE WOODS.

It was soon evident that the air of Brookdale agreed with Oscar. He was fast gaining his strength, and the increased fulness and color of his countenance betokened returning health. No part of this improvement was to be attributed to the bottle of cough drops his mother packed away in the bottom of his valise, and charged him to take every morning and night; for the drops were not very palatable, and he had not opened the bottle since he left home. In fact, he had by this time quite forgotten both the medicine and his mother’s injunction.

So rapid was the improvement in Oscar’s health, that two or three days after his trip to the Cross-Roads, Mr. Preston gave his consent to an excursion he and Jerry had planned, which was to occupy a whole day. “Old Staple’s Hut,” as it was called, was the place they proposed to visit. It was about four miles distant, beyond the hills in the north-east part of the town, represented in the upper corner of the map of Brookdale. They were to carry their dinner, and Mrs. Preston accordingly filled a small basket with eatables. While she was doing this, Jerry took Oscar aside and said:

“There is one thing more we want, and that is father’s gun. I know he won’t let me have it, but I guess he would lend it to you, if you should ask him.”

“Yes, we must have a gun,” replied Oscar; “and I should just as lief ask him for it as not.”



Oscar hunted up his uncle, and made known his request. Mr. Preston hesitated a moment, and then inquired:

“Does your father allow you to use a gun at home?”

“He never says anything about it, either way,” replied Oscar.

“Well, I guess you had better not take the gun,” said Mr. Preston. “I ’m afraid you might get hurt,—that’s all I care about. I don’t allow Jerry to use firearms, and I should n’t like to put anything of the kind into your hands without your father’s consent.”



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“But I ’ll be very careful if you ’ll let me have it,” added Oscar. “I ’ve fired a gun several times, and know how to handle it.”

“No, I think you had better not carry the gun with you,” replied his uncle. “If you used it, Jerry would think he must, and I know he is too careless to be trusted with it. He ’d shoot you, just as like as not, if he did n’t kill himself.”

Mr. Preston’s tone was so decided, that Oscar saw it would be useless to say anything more about the gun, and so he and Jerry were obliged to abandon the idea of taking it with them. Taking their basket of provisions, they accordingly set out on their long tramp. Leaving the road, and turning into a footpath through the fields, they passed close by the upper edge of the pond. In this part of their walk there was a good deal of swamp land, and a number of brooks to cross. Sometimes they had to pick their way along upon stones which had been placed at regular intervals in wet places, or upon old logs that served for bridges; and at times it required no little skill in balancing to avoid getting a wet foot. After they had got beyond the pond, however, the land gradually ascended, and was mostly occupied as pastures for cattle. But they still occasionally came to a brook, flowing down from the hills towards the pond. Most of them were so narrow, they could easily jump over them; but in one instance they were obliged to take off their shoes and stockings and wade across.

“Now you see why this place is called Brookdale,” said Jerry, after they had passed four or five of these little streams.

“Is that the reason, because there are so many brooks? I never thought of that before,” said Oscar.

“Yes, that’s it,” replied Jerry. “In the spring these brooks make quite a show; but they get low in the summer, and generally dry up in August, unless it’s a very wet season.”

“I ’m going to cut me a cane,” said Oscar, taking out his knife; “I see a real straight and handsome one in there,” and he pointed to a thicket they were approaching.

“That’s nothing but birch—that won’t make a good cane,” replied Jerry; “stop a minute, and I ’ll find you something better.”

After looking about a little, Jerry found some beeches, which he said would make good canes. They accordingly cut two of the straightest and handsomest.

“I mean to try an experiment with mine,” said Oscar, “and see if I can’t crook the top of it. Do you know how they do it, Jerry?”

“No, I always thought they grew in that shape,” replied Jerry.



“A man told me they boiled the end of the stick and then bent it,” said Oscar. “He said that was the way all the hooked canes were made. I don’t know whether he knew or not, but I mean to try it some day, and see how it works.”

“I don’t believe in that,” said Jerry. “It is n’t very likely you can bend such a stick as that without breaking it; just see how stiff it is.”

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“I don’t care, I’ll try it, just to satisfy myself,” replied Oscar.

Oscar was right in regard to bending wood. The hooked-top walking-sticks are made in the way he described,—by boiling the end, and then bending it into an arch. In boiling wood, several substances which enter into its composition are dissolved, and others are softened, so that it is rendered flexible.

The boys trudged slowly on their way, now aided by their canes, which, in a long walk, are of no slight service to the pedestrian. As they sauntered along, chatting, singing, and whistling, as merrily as the birds around them, Oscar remembered the cigars he bought at the store, and soon the pure atmosphere of the fields was polluted with the vile odor of bad tobacco. Oscar had been in the habit of smoking occasionally for some time; but though he considered it a manly accomplishment, he was very careful not to let his parents know that he was addicted to it. He prevailed upon his cousin to take a cigar; but Jerry was not very partial to tobacco, and a few whiffs satisfied him for that occasion.

They had now reached the foot of the long, steep hills, over which they must climb. These hills were thickly wooded most of the way, forming beautiful groves, cool, dark, fragrant with resinous odors, and softly carpeted with moss and decayed leaves. Oscar and Jerry concluded to rest a few minutes before scaling the hills. Selecting a favorable spot, they stretched themselves at full length upon the ground, and looked up towards the distant tree-tops. It was a pine forest, and the trees were as straight as an arrow, and so tall that their tops almost seemed among the clouds. The moaning of the wind among the topmost branches sounded like the distant roar of the sea. Birds were skipping merrily among the “tasselled boughs,” and curiously eying the young strangers who had invaded their solitude.

“O, how I wish I had that gun now!” said Oscar, as a fine plump robin lit on one of the lower branches of a tree right over his head.

In repay for this generous wish, Signor Robin executed one of his choicest songs in his handsomest style, and, without waiting for an encore from his audience, darted off and was quickly out of sight. But it is probable the audience thought more of the “good shot” he presented, than of the sweet strains he poured forth for their entertainment.

“There’s better game than that in these woods,” said Jerry, after the robin had taken his departure.

“Is there anything besides birds?” inquired Oscar.

“Yes,” replied Jerry, “there are rabbits, and woodchucks, and weasels, and skunks, and squirrels; and some folks say there are wild-cats here, but I don’t know about that. Jim Oakley, a fellow who lives about a mile from our house, comes over here gunning very



often; and he says he saw a real savage-looking creature here, a few weeks ago, that he took to be a wild-cat. He fired at it, but it got clear of him. He says it looked a good deal like a cat, only it was larger, and had a little short tail. I wish he 'd killed it. I should like to know what it was. I never saw a wild-cat; did you?"



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“No,” replied Oscar.

“But that was n’t equal to something a man came across in the woods the other side of these hills, two or three years ago,” continued Jerry. “What do you suppose it was?”

“I don’t know; was it a moose?” inquired Oscar.

“No,” replied Jerry; “moose come down into this neighborhood, once in awhile, but that was n’t what I was going to tell you about. There is a road through these woods, a little beyond the hills. It is n’t travelled much, except by the loggers in the fall and spring. A man was riding along this road, one afternoon in summer, when he suddenly came across a monstrous black bear. As soon as the bear saw him, he squat down on his haunches, right in the middle of the road, and began to show his teeth. The man didn’t dare to drive by him, and his horse was so frightened that it was as much as he could do to hold him in. He had a loaded revolver with him, but he knew there was n’t much hope of killing the bear with that. So he turned his horse about, and concluded to go back to the nearest house, and get a gun and somebody to help him kill the bear. The bear sat still, watching him, as much as to say, ‘If you’ll let me alone, I ‘ll let you alone;’ but just as the man was starting up, he thought he would try his pistol, and so he blazed away at the bear. Two or three of the shot hit the bear in the shoulder. They did n’t hurt him much, only enough to rouse his dander; but he sprang up as quick as lightning, and started after the team. The man whipped up his horse, and the bear ‘pulled foot’ after him, and did n’t give up the race till he had run about a quarter of a mile. The man said if he had been afoot, the bear would have beat him at running, but he could n’t keep up with the horse.

“Well, the man went back three or four miles, and got another man to go with him in search of the bear. They armed themselves with guns and hunting-knives; but when they drove back to where the man met the bear, they could n’t find anything of him. They traced his tracks into the woods, but after awhile they lost them, and as it was getting late, they gave up the hunt; and nobody hereabouts has seen that bear from that day to this.”

“Perhaps he’s about here now—who knows?” said Oscar.

“No, I guess he went right back to the place he came from,” replied Jerry. “Somebody would have seen him, if he ‘d stayed around here.”

“Where do you suppose he came from?” inquired Oscar.

“From way back in the woods, fifty miles from here,” replied Jerry. “There had been great fires in the woods that summer, and I suppose he got burned out, or frightened, and that was the reason he came down this way.”



“I should like to meet such a customer,” said Oscar; “only I should want to have a good double-barrelled gun with me. I read in a newspaper, the other day, about a boy up in New Hampshire, who met a bear and two cubs, all alone in the woods. He had a gun with him, and killed the old one, and one of the cubs, but the other cub got off. That was doing pretty well, wasn’t it?”



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“Twas so,” said Jerry; “but I guess you would n’t have done quite so well as that.”

“I bet I should have tried, at any rate,” said Oscar, who really was not deficient in courage, though he had hardly practiced hunting enough to justify him in believing that he could master so savage an animal as a bear.

Having rested themselves, the boys resumed their journey, and after ten minutes’ hard work, reached the top of the range of hills. The highest summit was a bare ledge of rock, and they concluded to climb to the top of it, for the sake of the view to be obtained. It was called “Prospect Rock,” and was very appropriately named. As the boys stood upon it, the country for miles around was spread out at their feet,—houses, and cultivated fields, and forests, and roads, and narrow streams. A distant mountain was visible in the west, which Jerry said was about twenty miles off, though it seemed much nearer. After enjoying the scene a few minutes, they began to descend the hill on the other side. They kept their eyes open, for game, but they saw only a few squirrels, and one rabbit, which bounded off, and was out of sight in a moment. Jerry pointed out to Oscar a woodchuck’s hole, near the foot of the hill.

“I should like to see a woodchuck,” said Oscar; “what do they look like?”

“They ’re about as big as a rabbit, and are of a brownish color,” replied Jerry.

“Do you suppose there’s one in that hole?” inquired Oscar; “let’s see if we can’t scare him out.”

“I don’t know whether there is or not,” replied Jerry; “but if there was, we could n’t dig him out without shovels. They burrow real deep. If we had brought a dog with us, how he would dig into that hole!”

“I wish I had my Tiger here,” said Oscar; “it’s too bad father would n’t let me bring him with me.”

Oscar thrust his cane into the hole, but did not reach the end of it; and if the occupant of the tenement was within, he did not think it worth while to show himself. The boys accordingly renewed their journey. After they had reached the foot of the hill, they had to cross a swamp. With its wet and miry bottom, and its dense growth of vines, bushes, and small trees, this was no easy matter; but they succeeded in getting through with no damage save wet feet, a few slight scratches, and a good many mosquito bites. This latter trouble was the most serious of all. The mosquitoes were large and ferocious. They bit right through jacket, vest, and all, and Oscar declared that their sharp stings even penetrated his boots.

After the boys emerged from the swamp, they came to the road in which the man met a bear. They followed this road a short distance, till it brought them to the shore of a large



and beautiful pond. Leaving the highway, they now walked along by the edge of the water, and soon came to the old hut they were in pursuit of. It was but a few rods from the pond, and was directly under the brow of a steep and rocky hill. It had a very old and decayed appearance. The roof had fallen in, the door had disappeared, and the single window was without sash or glass. It contained but one apartment, and that was very small, and so choked up with rubbish that the boys did not try to enter.



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“Well, that must have been a great place for a man to live in,” said Oscar, after he had inspected the premises. “How long has the old fellow been dead?”

“I don’t know,” said Jerry; “it must be fifteen years, for he died before I was born.”

“I wonder what he lived here for; does anybody know?” inquired Oscar.

“No, he was a hermit, and that’s all anybody knows about him. They say he used to have a garden, and raised everything he wanted to eat. In the summer time he used to work a good deal for two or three farmers that lived over at Cedar Hill, at the further end of the pond. He had a little skiff, and rowed back and forth in that. He never used to spend any money, and people say he must have had all of a thousand dollars, that he had earned, when he died; but nobody knew what became of it. They suppose he buried it about here somewhere, or hid it in some rock.”

“A thousand dollars!” said Oscar; “I ’m going to hunt for that; what will you bet I won’t find it?”

“Pooh!” replied Jerry, “people have searched all round here, and dug holes, and pulled up the floor of the hut, more than a hundred times; and I guess there’s no danger of your finding the money now.”

“I ’m going to try, at any rate,” said Oscar, and he get up from the stone upon which he was seated.

“Stop, don’t go now,” said Jerry; “let’s make a fire and get dinner first—I ’m just about half starved.”

Oscar fell in with this suggestion, and they gathered together a lot of brush and other dry wood, and soon had a good fire kindled against a large stone, which happened to be hollowed out something like a fireplace. Among the provisions they had brought with them were half a dozen potatoes, which they buried in the embers after the fire had got well under way. While these were baking, they employed themselves in gathering wood and watching the fire. They also found some slices of cheese in their basket, which they toasted by holding it before the fire upon the point of a sharp stick. When their preparations for dinner were about completed, Oscar inquired:

“Where shall we find some water to drink? Is there a spring about here?”

“Water, why, there’s plenty of it,” replied Jerry pointing to the pond.

“What! you don’t mean to drink pond water, do you?” said Oscar, somewhat surprised.

“Yes I do,” replied Jerry; “that’s good water—old Staples drank it all the time he lived here.”



“Well, come to think of it, I suppose it is good,” said Oscar; “for our Cochituate water, in Boston, is nothing but pond water. It seems queer, though, to dip it right out of the pond; but I suppose it is just as good as though we drew it from an aqueduct.”



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There was a tin dipper in the basket, and Oscar took it, and went down to the pond, to try the water. He found it clear, and agreeable to the taste, though not very cold. Filling the dipper, he returned to the fire, where Jerry now had the dinner in readiness. They found a large flat stone, which answered for a table, and spreading their provisions upon it, they threw themselves upon the grass, and began to eat. The potatoes were nicely roasted, and, indeed, all the articles that helped to form their rural repast, tasted uncommonly well. Even the pond water, Oscar confessed, would have been equal to the Cochituate, if they had only had a little ice to put in it.

[Illustration: The Dinner in the Woods.]

After dinner, Oscar commenced his search for the hidden treasures, and Jerry, impelled by sympathy, joined in the hunt, though with no very sanguine expectations of finding the hermit's gold. They examined the hut, and poked over the rubbish, within and about it. They walked over the ground, around the cabin, turning over stones, looking after holes in the trunks of trees, and peering curiously into every crack and crevice they could find. They then climbed up the rocks behind the hut, and patiently continued their search, talking earnestly, the meanwhile, about what they should do with the money, if they found it. Oscar said if he found the money, he should buy the best horse he could find. He should not go to school any more, but should spend his time in riding, and going to places of amusement. If his father did not like it, he should leave home, and board at a hotel. Jerry, on the other hand, wanted to see the world. If *he* found the money, he was going to travel all over the country. After visiting the great Atlantic cities, he should go to California, and stop a few months, just long enough to dig a few thousand dollars out of the mines—and then he should push on to China, and India, and Europe, and come home in one of the Collins steamers. It was finally agreed, however, that if either of them found the treasure, it should be equally divided between them, and with this friendly understanding, they renewed their search, with fresh zeal.

“It’s real hot; what do you say about going into water?” inquired Oscar, after they had ransacked the neighborhood pretty thoroughly, and worked themselves into a perspiration.

“I ’ll go in if you will,” said Jerry. “Father did n’t tell us not to go in to-day—I was afraid he would; but he did n’t say anything about it.”

“He need n’t know it, if we do go in,” suggested Oscar, who knew very well that his uncle would not approve of his bathing so early in the season, and so soon after his sickness.

“No, he won’t know anything about it,” added Jerry; “and I don’t believe it can do us any hurt, for it is as warm as it is in the middle of summer. I ’ve been into water many a time, when it was colder than it is now.”



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They did not debate the question long, but throwing off their clothes, they soon plunged into the clear lake. The water did not feel quite so warm to their bodies, as it tasted when they washed down their dinner with it. Still, it was not very cold; and as the place was quite convenient for bathing, having a hard, gravelly bottom, with a gradual slope, they enjoyed their dip in the water as well as they *could* enjoy a forbidden gratification.

After they had dressed themselves, they sat a little while with their caps off, that the warm sun might dry their hair, and thus remove all evidence of their stolen pleasure. This accomplished, they concluded, from the position of the sun, that it was time to start for home; and taking their basket and canes, they commenced their homeward march. They met with no incident of any moment in returning, except that they got off their course at one time; but Jerry, who was quite at home in the woods, soon found where he was, and set himself right again. The last two miles of their jaunt were the hardest of all, especially to Oscar, who was more troubled with sore feet and stiff legs than Jerry. They were both, however, as tired and hungry as need be, when they got home.

No questions were asked about their going into water. This was fortunate, for it probably saved them from the additional guilt of falsehood. They experienced no punishment for their disobedience, except the consciousness that they had committed a wrong act. To some boys, that alone would have been no slight punishment; but I fear this was not the case with Oscar and Jerry.

CHAPTER XVII.

CLINTON.

"Come, Jerry, let's go over to Clinton's this forenoon," said Oscar, the morning after their excursion to the hermit's hut.

"Agreed," replied Jerry, "we 'll start right away as soon as I can find my cap. Let me see—where did I leave it, I wonder?"

"Jerry," said Mrs. Preston, who overheard this conversation, "bring me in an armfull of wood before you go."

"I 'll get the wood while you 're looking for your cap," said Oscar, and he started for the wood-house.

Oscar almost repented of his offer when he discovered that there was no wood split. However, he took the axe and split a few logs, and carried them into the kitchen. Jerry had not yet found his cap, though he had searched all over the house for it. He began to suspect some one had played a trick upon him by hiding his cap, and when Emily laughed at his impatience, he concluded she was the guilty one. In vain she protested that she had not seen the missing cap, and did not know where it was. He searched



every part of the girls' chamber, and then, in his vexation, he pulled Emily's bonnet from off her head, and tossed it out of the window into an apple-tree, in the branches of which it lodged.



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It was now Emily's turn to fly into a pet, and she availed herself of the opportunity. Running to her mother, she reported what Jerry had done, setting off his foolish conduct in the worst possible light. Jerry soon made his appearance in the kitchen, and retorted upon his sister by charging her with having hid his cap. Mrs. Preston tried to settle the difficulty by directing Jerry to get Emily's bonnet out of the tree, and ordering Emily to tell Jerry where his cap was, if she knew; but Emily protested she knew nothing about the cap, and her brother did not seem inclined to obey his portion of the decree, while his sister failed to comply with hers. The quarrel was thus becoming more and more complicated, when Oscar suddenly entered the room with the lost cap in his hand.

"Here's your cap, Jerry," he said; "I found it just where you left it last night, out in the barn. Don't you remember, you threw it at the cat to scare her?"

"Yes, so I did, and I forgot to pick it up again," said Jerry.

"There, do you believe me now?" said Emily, with an air of triumph.

Jerry did not stop to reply; but, going into the garden, he climbed the apple-tree, and tossed the bonnet down to Emily.

"Now I 'm ready to start, just as soon as I 've had a drink of buttermilk," said Jerry to Oscar; "come into the buttery and get some, won't you?"

There was only one bowl-full of buttermilk left from the morning's churning, but Mrs. Preston told the boys they might have that. Jerry proposed that they should "go snacks," and gave the bowl to Oscar that he might drink his share first. The latter took one mouthful, but quickly spit it out, and puckered his face into all sorts of shapes.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "you don't call that sour stuff good, do you?" and he handed the bowl back to Jerry, with a look that would have soured the buttermilk, if it had not already undergone that process.

As soon as Jerry could get over laughing at his cousin's grimaces, he swallowed the contents of the bowl, and then smacking his lips, said:

"There, don't you think I like it? You just drink it a few times, and then see if you don't like it, too. I could drink a quart of it now if I had it."

"You may have it, for all me; I don't want any more of it," replied Oscar.

"Jerry, have the hens been attended to?" inquired Mrs. Preston, as the boys were about starting from home.

"I don't know—I have n't fed them," replied Jerry.



“You ought to know whether they are seen to or not; it’s your business to take care of them,” said his mother. “Don’t you go off this morning till you have fed them. You ought to have done it an hour ago.”

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The care of the fowls had been committed to Jerry, but he did not feel much interest in them, and needed to be reminded of his duty pretty often. His negligence had been more marked than ever since Oscar's arrival, and more than once the hens had been without food and water nearly a whole day because he forgot to attend to them. Jerry now went back, in obedience to his mother, and gave the fowls their usual allowance of corn, and a vessel of fresh water. He also looked into the nests to see if there were any new-laid eggs; and he was not a little surprised to find in one of them a small billet, neatly folded up, and addressed, "*To Master Jerry.*" He looked at it a moment, and tried to imagine what it could be; then he opened it, and read the following, which was neatly written with a pencil:

"THE HENROOST, June 12th.

"MASTER JERRY:"

"I have determined to write you a few words in behalf of my dear suffering family. The sun is scorching hot, and yet we have not got a drop of water to save us from parching up. My poor biddies have been walking back and forth all day, panting for water, and calling for it as plainly as they could speak; but all in vain. We have received our food at very irregular times, too, and sometimes we have had to keep fast nearly all day. If I were the only sufferer, I would say nothing about it; but I cannot bear to see my poor flock dying by inches in this way. Do take pity on us, and see that we have plenty of corn and water hereafter. Some of my family, who pride themselves on being good layers, complain that since you have kept us shut up in such narrow quarters they cannot find anything to make their egg-shells of. Now, if you would give us some old burnt bones, pounded up fine, or a little lime, once in awhile, I do not think you would lose anything by it. And as you will not let us go out to scratch for ourselves, what is the reason that you cannot dig us a few worms occasionally? It would be a great treat to us. I hope you will heed my suggestions. If you do not, I can assure you of two things: you won't have many eggs this summer; and fat chickens will be a scarce article in this neighborhood next Thanksgiving time. But Mrs. Yellowneck has just laid an egg, and I must help her cackle over it; so I will write nothing more at present, but sign myself

"Your faithful, but afflicted,

"SHANGHAE ROOSTER."

Before Jerry had finished reading this mysterious letter, Oscar, who wondered at his long absence, went to see what the matter was, and found his cousin deeply absorbed in the document. After Jerry had read it, he handed it to Oscar, telling him where he found it.

"Well, that is queer," said Oscar, after he had read it. "Who do you suppose wrote it?"



“I know where it came from well enough,” said Jerry; “keep dark—don’t say anything about it,” he added, as he put the letter in his pocket. Then stepping to the kitchen-window, he inquired, “Mother, was Clinton over here yesterday?”

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"I believe he was," replied Mrs. Preston.

"That accounts for it," said Jerry to Oscar; "that letter sounds just like Clinton. I knew he wrote it just as soon as I saw it."

"But can he write as well as that?" inquired Oscar.

"Yes, he 's a very good writer," replied Jerry. "He ought to be, for he has to get a lesson every day, just as though he went to school, and recite to his mother in the evening. I wish I knew as much as he does, but I should n't want to study so hard."

They had now started on their way to Clinton's. The Shanghae letter continued to be the topic of remark for some time. It was finally concluded that they should say nothing to Clinton about it. To tell the truth, Jerry felt a little mortified at the deserved rebuke he had received, and he thought the easiest way to get over it would be, to pretend that the letter had never reached its destination.

Clinton Davenport, the suspected author of this letter, lived in the nearest house to Mr. Preston's. The house is marked 1, on the map of Brookdale. He was three or four months younger than Jerry, and, like him, was an only son. They had been intimate playmates from early childhood, though their tastes and dispositions were very different. Clinton was an industrious boy. He liked to work, and took an interest in all his father's plans and labors. He was an ingenious boy, too; and, in addition to his other commendable traits, he was a good scholar.

Oscar had seen Clinton once or twice, at Jerry's house, but this was his first visit to him. They soon came in the sight of the house. It was a neat, but plain cottage, situated near the foot of a hill. There were several noble oaks around it, and fruit trees in the rear. Luxuriant vines were trained around and over the front door. A large and substantial barn stood a little one side, and back from the road, with its great doors swung open. On a tall pole, behind the house, there was a complete miniature of the cottage, which appeared to be occupied by a family of birds, who were constantly flying back and forth. This pretty birdhouse Clinton had made with his own hands the previous winter.

When Oscar and Jerry reached the house, they saw Clinton doing something in the orchard, behind the buildings, and walked along towards him. They found him employed in destroying caterpillars' nests, in the apple-trees. He had a light ladder, with which he ascended the trees; and having his hands protected by a pair of old gloves, he swept down the nests, and destroyed the young caterpillars by the hundred.

"This is n't very pleasant work," said Clinton, "but it has got to be done. I've been all over the orchard this morning, and this is the last tree I 've got to examine. I shall be done in a few minutes, and then I 'll walk around with you."

“I should like to know where all these caterpillars come from,” said Oscar; “do they come up from the ground?”



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“No,” replied Clinton. “A miller lays the eggs, the summer before, on a branch of the tree, and there they stay till about the first of June; then they hatch out, and build their nest. The nests look something like tents, don’t you see they do?”

“Yes, so they do,” said Oscar.

“That’s the reason they are called tent-caterpillars. There are three or four hundred of them in every nest. In about a month from now, they would all turn into millers, if nobody disturbed them, and lay millions of eggs for next year’s crop.”

“That ’s curious—I ’ve learnt something new by coming here,” said Oscar.

“There, I believe that’s all,” said Clinton, as he cast his eye over the tree; “now come and see my turkeys.”

Jerry slyly winked at Oscar, and both thought of the Shanghae rooster’s letter; but they said nothing, and followed Clinton to a tree near the barn, where there was a large, motherly hen, surrounded by her happy brood. They were young turkeys, but it was all the same to the poor simple hen. She had set four weeks upon the eggs from which they were hatched, and no wonder she honestly believed they were her own children. To confess the truth, they did look so much like chickens, that a city boy like Oscar would hardly have suspected they were turkeys, if he had not been told that they were. They were black, and of about the size of chickens of their age. They had also the sharp, piping cry of genuine chickens. But their necks were a little longer than usual, and that was almost the only badge of their turkeyhood. The hen was confined to the tree by a string, to prevent her roving off. A barrel turned upon its side, served them for a house at night.

There was another hen, confined under a tree near by, which was the proud mother of a large brood of chickens. There were about twenty-five of them, but though they now constituted one brood, they were hatched by two hens. Clinton said he usually managed to set two hens together, so that one of them might bring up all the chickens, thereby saving some trouble for himself, as well as one hen’s time, which was of some value to him. Hens do not seem to have much knowledge of arithmetic, and biddy was apparently unconscious of any difference between twelve and five-and-twenty.

A loud and prolonged “Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o-o” now attracted Oscar to the hen-yard near by, behind the barn, where the rest of Clinton’s poultry were confined. It was a large enclosure, connected with a shed, in which the fowls roosted and laid their eggs. Its occupants, and indeed all the poultry on the place were the exclusive property of Clinton, and he took the entire management of them in his own hands. He raised the corn they consumed on a patch of ground his father gave him for the purpose. He sold his eggs, chickens, and turkeys to whom he pleased, and kept a regular account in a book of all his business transactions. Of course, all the money he made was his own,

and he told Oscar he had nearly seventy-five dollars in the bank, which he had earned in this way.



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"I don't see how you do it," said Jerry; "I could n't make anything that way if I should try. I don't believe our hens more than pay their way, if they do that."

"If you should manage as I do, I guess you would make something," replied Clinton.

"No, it isn't my luck," said Jerry; "if I worked ever so hard, I should n't be any better off for it."

"I don't believe that," said Clinton; "there 's no luck about it. Any boy could make out just as well as I have done, if he took the same trouble. You try it, now, and see."

"No, I shan't try, for I know just as well as I want to, how it would turn out," replied Jerry.

"How can you know if you never tried it?" inquired Clinton.

Jerry did not answer this question, and perhaps he could not. He preferred to comfort himself with the foolish plea of the lazy, that he was not one of "the lucky ones," and it was useless for him to think of succeeding in anything of that kind.

Clinton did not make the most distant allusion to the Shanghae Rooster's letter, although Jerry felt sure that he knew all about it. The latter also avoided all reference to it. Oscar could hardly keep from introducing the matter, but his cousin's injunction to "keep dark" prevailed, and he was able to restrain his impatient tongue.

The boys now took a look at the piggery, where they found several fat, dignified grunTERS, together with a family of little squealers, who seemed quite too clean and delicate to occupy such an enclosure. They then went all over the great barn, which happened to be tenantless, the cows being at pasture and the oxen and horse off at work. Oscar's attention was attracted to a scrap cut from a newspaper, which was pasted upon one of the posts of the horse's stall. It read as follows:

"THE HORSE'S PRAYER.

"Up hill, spare thou me;
Down hill, take care of thee;
On level ground, spare me not,
Nor give me water when I 'm hot."

Clinton said he found these lines in a newspaper about the time he began to drive alone, and he stuck them up upon the stall that he might not forget them.

"Hallo, who is this?" inquired Oscar, as a little curly-haired girl of six years came tripping into the barn.



The little girl to whom the inquiry was addressed turned a shy and roguish look towards the strange boy, and then edged along to Clinton, and nestled her little hand in his.

“Can’t you tell him who you are?” inquired Clinton. “He came all the way from Boston, where cousin Ettie and cousin Willie live. He ’s Jerry’s cousin, and little Mary Preston’s cousin. Now you’ll tell him what your name is, won’t you?”

“Annie Davenport—that’s my name,” she replied, in her artless, winning way.

“Then you’re Clinton’s sister, are you?” inquired Oscar.

“Yes, and he ’s my brother,” she quickly added, with a proud look that greatly amused the boys.



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“Did you say you have a cousin Willie in Boston, Clinton?” continued Oscar.

“Yes, Willie Davenport,” replied Clinton.

“I know him—he’s about your size, is n’t he? and his father is a lawyer?”

“Yes, that’s him—why, I want to know if you know him?”

“O yes; he goes to our school. The boys have nicknamed him Whistler, because he whistles so much; but he ’s a real clever fellow, for all that. My brother Ralph is quite intimate with him. It’s strange that I never knew before that he had relations down here,” added Oscar.

“Do you know his sister, Ettie?” inquired Clinton.

“No, I never saw her,” replied Oscar.

“Come into the house with me,—I must tell mother we ’ve heard from Boston,” said Clinton.

They all entered the house, and Mrs. Davenport was soon informed of the pleasant discovery they had made, and had many questions to ask concerning her Boston friends. Oscar seemed to become at once an old acquaintance. The fact that he was a schoolmate of Willie gave him a direct passport to the good graces of all the family. When Oscar called to mind his peculiar relations towards Willie, this unlooked-for friendship was not particularly agreeable to him; for he was not, and never had been, on very friendly terms with Clinton’s cousin. This, however, was more than he dared say to Clinton, and so he concealed his dislike of Willie as well as he could.

After sitting in the house a little while, Clinton invited Oscar and Jerry into the “shop,” which was a room back of the kitchen, where Mr. Davenport kept a variety of carpenter’s tools. Here, in cold and stormy weather, Clinton’s father mended his broken tools and implements, and performed such other jobs as were required. Clinton, too, spent many odd moments at the work-bench, and patient practice had made him quite a neat and skilful workman. He showed the boys several boxes, a pine table, and a cricket, made entirely by his own hands, which would have done no discredit to a regular carpenter.

After remaining an hour or two with Clinton, Oscar and Jerry started for home, well pleased with their visit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LETTER.



“Oscar, you have n’t written home since you came down here, have you?” inquired Mr. Preston one morning at the breakfast table.

“No, sir,” replied Oscar.

“Well, you ought to write,” added Mr. Preston; “your mother told you to, and I suppose she has been looking for a letter every day for a week or more. It’s over a fortnight since you left home, and your folks will feel anxious about you, if they don’t hear from you soon. You ’d better write a letter to them this morning, before you do anything else, and then it will be out of the way. I shall either go or send over to the post-office to-day, and the letter will start for Boston to-morrow morning, and get there the next day.”



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“O dear, I hate to write,” said Oscar. “Why can’t you write to mother, aunt, and tell her how I am?”

“No, no,” said Mr. Preston, “that won’t do. You promised your mother that you would write yourself, and she ’ll expect to hear from you, and not from somebody else. Your aunt can write, if she chooses, but you must write too. I ’ll give you a pen and some paper and ink after breakfast, and you can write just a much as you please.”

“I guess it won’t be much—I don’t know how to write a letter,” replied Oscar.

“A boy of your age not know how to write a letter—and been all your lifetime to such grand schools as they have in Boston, too! I don’t believe that,” said Mr. Preston, shaking his head.

“I shall have to go and see the Shanghae Rooster,” said Oscar, looking at Jerry very knowingly.

Jerry laughed at this allusion, but the others did not appear to understand its meaning. It was evident that they were innocent of all knowledge of the mysterious letter; and as Jerry wished them to remain so, he adroitly turned the remark by replying:

“No you won’t—father has got plenty of steel pens.”

After breakfast, Mr. Preston told Oscar to follow him. They went up stairs, and Mr. P. took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the door of what was known by the name of “the private room.” It was a very small apartment, and was originally designed for a closet or store-room; but Mr. Preston now used it as a sort of office. Here he kept his business papers, and here he did what little writing he had to do. There was one window in the room, which looked out upon the garden in the rear of the house. The furniture consisted of a chair, a small portable desk, placed upon a table, an old map of the State of Maine, a dictionary, almanac, and several other odd volumes and pamphlets.

“There,” said Mr. Preston, “you may sit right down to my desk, and write as long as you please, if you won’t disturb my papers. There are paper, ink, pens, and wafers—you can use what you want. When you get done, lock the door, and give the key to your aunt.”

Oscar found there was no backing out from a letter this time; so he sat down, and tried to make up his mind to face the dreaded duty. He heard his uncle tell the children not to interrupt him, till he had finished his letter; and when Mr. Preston and his man James went off to work, Jerry accompanied them. Oscar was thus left to himself. After thinking about the matter a few moments, he dipped his pen in the ink-stand, and, having consulted the almanac, wrote the proper date for the letter, together with the



address, "Dear Mother." Here he came suddenly to a stand. He was at a loss how to commence. He sat uneasily in his chair, now nibbling the end of the pen-holder, and now running his fingers slowly through his hair, as if to coax out the thoughts he wished to express.



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At length he got started, and wrote several lines without stopping. Now he thought he should go ahead without further trouble; but he soon found himself again brought to a dead halt. He began to scribble and draw rude figures upon a piece of waste paper, hoping the next sentence, in continuance of his letter, would soon pop into his head; but instead of anything popping in, his ideas began to pop out, so that he almost forgot the letter, amid the unmeaning flourishes his pen was making. Then, suddenly thinking of the scarcely-commenced task before him, he read and re-read the few lines he had written, but could not determine what to say next. Lifting up the lid of the desk, he found a variety of bills, receipts, accounts and letters scattered about. Disregarding the injunction of his uncle, and in violation of one of the plainest rules of good breeding, he concluded to open one of the letters, and see if he could not gain some hint from it, to aid him in completing his own. The letter he opened proved to be a short business message, and it was written in such a difficult hand, that he could not read half the words. He then looked into several other letters, but none of them afforded him any aid.

After idling away half an hour in this manner, he resumed his letter, and began to make some progress upon it, when the lively chirping and twittering of a party of birds in an apple-tree near the window, attracted his attention. He laid down his pen, and watched their movements awhile. They were swallows; and from their actions, Oscar soon discovered that the old birds were teaching their little ones how to fly. There were several nests of these swallows, under the rafters of Mr. Preston's barn; and as they had recently had accessions to their families, Oscar concluded this must be the first appearance of the new-comers in public. The old birds fluttered back and forth, twittering and talking to the young ones all the while, and trying to entice them to commit themselves again to their wings. The little fearful things looked doubtingly, first one way and then another, as though they would gladly launch away upon their destined element, if they were only sure they should not tumble ingloriously to the ground. The clamor of the old ones increased every moment. They called and coaxed more earnestly, and fluttered more impatiently, until at length the young birds worked up their courage to the requisite point, and away the whole flock darted, towards the barn.

Now that the swallows were out of his way, Oscar returned to his letter once more. Had he learned a lesson of self-confidence from the example of the little swallows, the few minutes he spent in watching their movements would have been well employed. But instead of his confidence increasing, he was now almost sick of the sight of the letter, and began to doubt whether he should ever finish it. While he was hesitating whether he had better tear it up, or try once more to go on with it, a sweet childish voice from the garden engaged his attention. He looked from the window, and saw little Mary sitting down upon the grass, in a shady spot, with a large book open before her. She was looking at the engravings in the volume, and was talking very earnestly to herself, and to the figures in the pictures.



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“There is Emily,” she was saying, “and there is father with a shovel; and this one is me, and that is Jerry, and that’s Oscar, carrying a basket. I guess they ’re going to dig potatoes. O, what lots of houses over the other side of the pond; and there ’s one, two, three, five, ten, eight meeting-houses, too. It must be Boston, I guess, there are so many houses there. And there’s a great boat coming—O what a smoke it makes!—and it’s got wheels, too. Now we’ll get right into it, and go and see Uncle Henry and all the folks. Stop, stop, you boat! Now that’s too bad—it goes by, and we can’t go to Boston.”

[Illustration: Mary and the Picture-Book.]

Thus little Mary continued to talk to the pictures and to herself, unconscious that any one was listening to her. She was a pretty child, and, all unknown to herself, she made almost as attractive a picture as any in her book, with her fair face, her flowing hair, and her clean dress, set off by the green grass and climbing vines around her. Oscar sat listening to her childish prattle for some time, when the striking of the kitchen clock reminded him that he had been seated at the desk an hour, and had not yet written a dozen lines. He was about to tear up the sheet of paper over which he had sat (but not labored) so long, and give up the attempt. Then he thought of his promise to write, and how ashamed he should feel to have his uncle’s folks know that he had tried a whole hour, and could not write a letter to his own mother. He finally determined to make one more attempt.

Finding that the sound of Mary’s voice disturbed him, Oscar now shut down the window, and thus cut off all communication with the outer world, except by the eye. He soon got under way again with his letter, and, to his own surprise, he went along quite easily and with considerable rapidity. The reason of this was, he was now really in earnest, and had given his mind wholly to the letter. Before, his thoughts were flitting from one trifle to another; now they were directed to the object he wished to accomplish. Before the clock struck the next hour, the letter was finished, sealed, and directed. It was quite a respectable sort of a letter, too. When he had got through, Oscar was himself surprised to find that he could write so good an epistle. The spelling, punctuation, and penmanship might have been improved, but in other respects the letter was creditable to him. I will print it as he intended it should read, and not precisely as he wrote it:

“BROOKDALE, June 15, 185—.

“DEAR MOTHER:

“I suppose you are looking for a letter from me, and I meant to have written before this, but somehow I have neglected it. I got here safe the next day after I left home. We stopped one night in Portland, and put up at the —— Hotel. The next day we rode in the cars all the forenoon, and in the stage all the afternoon. The stage does not go within five miles of uncle’s, but

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Jerry went over with a horse and wagon to get us. I like Brookdale first-rate. It is a real countryfied place, but I like it all the better for that. The nearest house to uncle's is half a mile off; and, by the way, tell Ralph that a cousin of Whistler's lives there. His name is Clinton Davenport. I have got acquainted with him, and like him very much. I like Jerry, too. We have capital times together. All the boys here are rather 'green,' as we say in Boston; and you would laugh at the ideas they have of city things; but I suppose they think I am green about country things, and so we are square. I have lots of rides, and good long walks, too. A few days ago, Jerry and I walked four or five miles through the woods and pastures, to an old hut where a hermit used to live. They say he was a miser, and buried his money there, and people have dug for it, but nobody has found it. We carried our provisions, and made a fire, and ate dinner there. There is a fine pond close by, where we got our water to drink.

"There are lots of birds here. We are going to set some snares in the woods, and catch some. There are some swallows' nests in uncle's barn, just over the door. You can look right up into them, and see the birds. They are quite tame. They are just making their young ones learn how to fly. It is real amusing to see them.

"Uncle has quite a large farm. I forget how many acres he told me there was, but it is a good many. They have cows, and pigs, and hens, and live in real country style. I have learned how to make butter, but I have not learned to like buttermilk yet. I can't bear it, but all the other folks think it is a great treat. The schools don't keep here but three months in the winter, so Jerry and I are together about all the time. We sleep together, too. I almost forgot to tell you that I have got quite strong and hearty again. My cough is gone, and aunt says I look a good deal better than I did when I came here. I want to hear from home, but I hope you won't send for me to go back just yet. But I am tired of writing, and must close up my letter. Excuse errors and bad writing. Give my love to all the family, including Tiger.

"Your affectionate son,

"OSCAR."

Oscar felt quite relieved when his letter was ready for the post-office. Having locked up the little room, he carried the key to his aunt.

"Have you written your letter?" inquired Mrs. Preston.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Oscar.

"Where is it? You 're going to let me read it, aint you?" inquired Emily.



“There it is,” said Oscar, taking the letter from his jacket pocket; “but I guess you won’t read it, miss.”

“Yes, do let me read it,” persisted Emily, who really had an undue proportion of inquisitiveness in her nature.

“No, I can’t; it’s sealed up,” replied Oscar.

“Then tell me what you wrote, won’t you?” continued Emily.



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“Why, you silly child, what business is it to you what he wrote?” said her mother. “Don’t ask any more such foolish questions; Oscar will think you have n’t got common sense if you do.”

“Did you write anything about me?” continued Emily, in a lower tone.

“Did you hear me, Emily?” inquired Mrs. Preston, in a sharper tone.

“O no, I did n’t write much,” said Oscar, in reply to Emily; “there’s nothing in the letter that you would care about seeing.”

“I did n’t know you were going to seal up the letter so soon. I wanted to send a message to Alice and Ella,” continued Emily.

“You are too late now,” replied Oscar; “but I ’ll give you a chance next time. What message do you want to send?”

“You must n’t be so inquisitive,” said Emily, with a laugh; “just as though I were going to tell you, when you would n’t let me read the letter!”

“Well, I can tell you one thing,—I don’t want to know,” replied Oscar. “Aunt Eliza, do you know where Jerry is?”

“He has gone with his father down to the meadow lot,” replied Mrs. Preston. “I guess they will be back before a great while.”

Oscar set out for the “meadow lot,” which was a quarter of a mile from the house, on the other side of the river. He had not gone far, however, when he met Mr. Preston and Jerry returning.

“I ’ve written my letter, uncle, and it’s all ready to go to the post-office,” said Oscar; “can’t Jerry and I carry it over?”

“I ’ll see about that this afternoon,” said Mr. Preston; “I ’ve got something else for Jerry to do now.”

“I ’m going over to the old wood-lot to get a load of mulching,” said Jerry to Oscar; “and you can go too, if you want to.”

“Mulching—what is that?” inquired Oscar.

“It’s stuff that they put around young trees, to keep the roots from drying up in summer,” replied Jerry. “You know all those small apple and pear trees back of the barn? well, it’s to put around them.”



Having reached the house, the boys ate some luncheon, and then proceeded to tackle Billy into the hay-cart. After Mr. Preston had given Jerry sundry cautions and directions, which the latter seemed to think quite unnecessary, the boys hopped into the cart, and drove off towards the woods. Mr. Preston owned several tracts of woodland in Brookdale. The lot to which the boys were going, was called the "old" one, because the wood had all been cut off once, and it was now covered with a young growth, not large enough for firewood. It was but a short distance from the house, and the boys soon reached the spot, and commenced operations. They were each provided with large jack-knives, and with these they proceeded to lop off the young and tender ends of the birches, which trees were quite abundant in that spot; for birches are very apt to spring up after a pine forest has been cleared away. Many of the trees were yet so small, that the boys did not have to climb up to reach the branches.



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Though all this was really work, it seemed so much like play to Jerry and Oscar, that they actually *forgot to be lazy*. The consequence was, the job was done before they thought of it. Gathering up the heaps of small twigs scattered around them, they threw them into the cart, and found they had quite a respectable load; respectable in bulk at least, though not a very heavy burden for Billy. Taking their seats upon the top of the mulching, which was almost as soft as a load of hay, they drove back to the barn, and alighted. Mr. Preston now appeared, and led the horse into the orchard, where, with the aid of the boys, he scattered the birch twigs around the young trees, so as to protect their roots from the fierce heat of the sun. There was not enough for all the trees, but he told them they need not get any more at that time.

After dinner, Mr. Preston said he should have to go over to the Cross-Roads himself, as he wanted to see a man who lived there; but he told Oscar he might go with him, if he wished. Oscar accepted the invitation, and they were soon on their way, leaving Jerry not a little disappointed that he could not go with them. Oscar handed his letter to the postmaster, who marked it with the stamp of the office, and deposited it in the mail-bag, Mr. Preston stopped to purchase a few articles in the shop where the post-office was kept. When he was ready to start, he inquired:

“Have you mailed your letter, and paid your postage, Oscar?”

“I ’ve mailed it, but I did n’t pay the postage,” replied Oscar.

“That was n’t right,” said his uncle; “when you mail a letter to a friend, you should always pay the postage. If you pay it now, in advance, it will be only three cents; but if the postage is not paid till the letter is delivered, it will be five cents.”

“I did n’t think of that,” said Oscar; “I wonder if it is too late to pay it now? I ’ll go and see.”

On making known his request, the postmaster drew forth the letter from the bag, and imprinted another stamp upon it. Oscar paid the three cents, and departed, with his uncle.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RECALL.

Oscar was bent upon going a-gunning. He had allowed his mind to dwell upon the idea, until it seemed to him as though he could no longer resist the impulse to play the sportsman, without a sacrifice of his happiness. His uncle, it is true, had tried to dissuade him from it, and had positively refused to lend him his gun. But there were other guns in Brookdale, and everybody was not so particular as Mr. Preston about trusting boys with fire-arms. Why could n’t he borrow a gun of somebody else? So he



asked himself; and by-and-bye he put the same question to Jerry. Jerry heartily entered into the proposal. He thought Jim Oakley would lend him a gun. At any rate, he was not afraid to ask him. Jim was a famous gunner, in that region. He had several fowling-pieces; and if he would not lend them his best rifle, it was not likely that he would refuse them one of his old guns. So Jerry reasoned, and Oscar fully agreed with him. They went to see Jim, that very afternoon, and by dint of teasing, they got the gun, together with a small quantity of powder and shot. Thus armed, they set out for the woods, in quest of game.



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They had been in the woods but a short time, and had not yet shot anything, though they had fired several charges, when a dispute arose between them about the gun. Jerry claimed a right to it half the time, on the ground that he had borrowed it. Oscar was willing that he should use the gun occasionally, but he resisted his claim to it half the time. He contended that the gun was loaned to him, and besides, he had agreed to pay the owner for all the ammunition they used. The dispute waxed warmer and warmer. Oscar was obstinate, and Jerry grew sulky. It was the first serious difficulty that had arisen between them. Neither of them, as yet, knew the other's temper, but now they were in a fair way of finding each other out. It was the clashing of two strong wills. Oscar soon saw that their sport was at an end for that day, and throwing down the gun and powder flask upon the grass, he said, in an angry tone:

"There, take the old thing, and do what you please with it; and when you carry it back, see that you pay for the powder, for I won't."

So saying, he turned upon his heel and walked off. He had not gone far when Jerry, who had picked up the gun, called out:

"Here! you 've broken the trigger, throwing it down so. You may carry it back yourself now, I won't."

"I shan't carry it back," replied Oscar; "you say he lent it to you, and you may take care of it now."

Oscar went back to his uncle's, leaving Jerry and the gun to keep each other company. Not feeling in a very pleasant mood, Oscar did not go into the house, but loitered around the barn, avoiding the family as much as he could. Pretty soon he saw Clinton driving up, and he stepped inside of the barn, as he did not care about speaking with him. Clinton stopped however, when opposite to the barn, and called to him.

"What would you give for a letter from home?" said Clinton, when Oscar made his appearance.

"I don't know—why, have you got one for me?" inquired Oscar, with remarkable coolness.

"That's for you, I guess," said Clinton, handing him a letter. "I 've been over to the post-office, and as I happened to see a letter directed to you, I thought I would take it along with me."

"That's right, I'm glad you did," said Oscar, taking the letter. "Much obliged to you for your trouble," he added, as Clinton drove off.

Oscar now went into the barn, and, seating himself upon a stool, opened and read his letter. It was from his mother. She acknowledged the receipt of his letter, and



expressed much gratification at hearing that he was well and enjoying himself. His father, she wrote, thought he had better return home, and resume his place at school, from which he had been absent nearly three months. The term would close in about a month, and he wanted Oscar to be prepared to enter the High School at that time. Then followed various little messages from the children, directions about his journey home, &c. In closing, she requested him to return that week, that he might be ready to go to school the following Monday.

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Oscar was not very much pleased with the contents of the letter. He did not expect to be recalled so suddenly. He had hoped that, at any rate, he should not be sent to school again that term. But, his plans and hopes were all overturned by this letter. He went into the house, and told the news to his aunt, who expressed regret that he was to leave so soon.

By-and-bye Jerry came home, but he brought the same scowl upon his face that Oscar left with him up in the woods. Oscar, too, was as “stuffy” as ever. No words passed between the two, and each seemed bent upon giving the other a wide berth. At the supper table, something was said about Oscar’s letter, and his going home; but Jerry was too obstinate to ask any questions, and so he remained in tormenting uncertainty in regard to the matter. Oscar, too, had some curiosity about the gun, but he did not intend to “speak first,” if he never spoke again to his cousin.

During the whole evening, Oscar and Jerry were at the opposite poles of the little family circle. When Oscar retired for the night, he found Jerry not only abed, but asleep, or pretending to be. It was a wonder that both did not tumble out of bed that night; for each slept upon the extreme edge of the mattress, as far as possible from the other.

When Oscar awoke in the morning, he found himself alone, Jerry having quietly arisen and slipped out of the room, without disturbing him. They did not see each other until they met at the breakfast table. Here, their sober and quiet demeanor, so unusual with them, soon attracted notice.

“See how down in the mouth Jerry is!” said Emily. “He looks as though he had lost all his friends. And Oscar does n’t look much better either, poor fellow!”

Both boys changed color, and looked queerly, but they said nothing.

“Never mind, boys,” said Mrs. Preston, “you ’ve got one day more to enjoy yourselves together. You ’d better make the most of that, while it lasts, and not worry about the separation till the time comes.”

“That’s good doctrine,” said Mr. Preston; “never borrow trouble, for it comes fast enough any way. Come, cheer up, Oscar, you have n’t gone yet.”

“It’s too bad to make me go home so soon—I thought I was going to stay here a month or two,” said Oscar, who was very willing that his unusual demeanor should be attributed entirely to his summons home.

“You must ask your father to let you come down and spend your vacation,” said Mr. Preston. “I expect to go up to Boston about that time, and I guess he will let me bring you home with me.”

“I should like to come,” said Oscar, “but I don’t believe father will let me, it’s so far.”

“O yes, he will, when he knows what good friends you and Jerry are,” replied Mr. Preston.

“Jerry ’s crying, as true as I ’m alive!” exclaimed Emily, who had been watching the workings of her brother’s face for several moments, and thought she saw moisture gathering in his eye.



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“No I aint, either!” replied Jerry, in such a prompt and spiteful tone, and with such a scowl upon his face, that all the others, including even Oscar, joined in a hearty laugh.

“I hope you feel good-natured,” said his mother; “Oscar’s going off seems to have had a queer effect upon you.”

“I don’t care, you ’re all picking upon me—it’s enough to make anybody cross,” said Jerry, in a surly tone.

“You’re mistaken—nobody has picked upon you,” replied his mother.

“Yes, you have, too,” responded Jerry.

“Jerry! don’t let me hear any more of that—not another word,” said Mr. Preston, sternly.

“Then you ’d better make Emily hold her tongue,” said Jerry.

“Hush! do you hear me?” said Mr. Preston, with considerable excitement.

Jerry undertook to mutter something more, when his father jumped up, and, taking him by the collar, led him to the cellar-door, and told him to go down and stay until he was sent for. Then, shutting the door, and turning the button, he resumed his seat at the table, and the family finished their meal in silence.

Jerry was released from his confinement soon after breakfast; but the unfortunate affair at the table continued to weigh heavily upon his mind. Throughout the rest of the day, he kept out of everybody’s way, and said nothing, but looked sour, cross, and wretched. Oscar, too, felt very unpleasantly. He found it hard work to amuse himself alone. He was a boy of strong social feelings, and abhorred solitary rambles and sports. It was a long and dull day, and when he retired to bed at night, he almost felt glad that it was his last day in Brookdale.

Soon after he had got into bed, Jerry, who had retired before him, called out:

“Oscar!”

“What?” inquired the other.

There was a long pause, during which Jerry hitched and twisted about, as if hesitating how to proceed. He at length inquired:

“Are you mad with me?”

“No,” replied Oscar, somewhat reluctantly, and in a tone that was almost equivalent to “yes.”



“I don’t want you to go off without making up with me,” added Jerry; and as he spoke, his voice trembled, and had it been light enough, Oscar might have detected something like moisture in those very eyes that had flashed in anger at Emily in the morning, for reporting the same thing of them.

“I ’m ready to make up with you,” replied Oscar, turning over toward Jerry.

Having thus broken the ice, the constraint and reserve that had existed between them since the previous day, gradually melted away, and they were once more on sociable terms, although their intercourse was not quite so free and unembarrassed as it was before their quarrel. In fact, they did not properly heal up the difficulty between them, inasmuch as neither made any confession or apology—a duty that both should have performed, as they were about equally guilty. Oscar’s first inquiries were concerning the gun. Jerry told him that he carried it home, and that the owner was quite angry, when he saw the damage it had sustained, but said nothing about making the boys pay for it.



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The next morning the family arose at an earlier hour than usual, as Oscar had got to be on his way soon after sunrise. It was decided that Jerry should drive him over to the Cross-Roads. Accordingly, after a hasty breakfast, he bade them all good-bye, one by one, and taking a seat in the wagon with Jerry, started for home. It was delightful, riding while the birds were yet singing their morning songs, and the grass was spangled with dew, and the cool air had not felt the hot breath of the sun; but the separation that was about to take place, and the unpleasant recollection of their recent quarrel, lessened their enjoyment of the ride very much. They reached the Cross-Roads nearly half an hour before the stage-coach came along. At length it drove up to the post-office, and Oscar, mounting to the top, took a seat behind the driver. The mail-bag was handed to the driver, and the coach started again on its way, Oscar bowing his farewell to Jerry, as they drove off.

[Illustration: The Stage Coach.]

Nothing of special interest occurred the forenoon's ride. The coach reached its destination about eleven o'clock and Oscar had barely time enough to brush the dust from his clothing, and to obtain a drink of cold water, when the signal was given for the cars to start, and he took his seat in the train. His thoughtful aunt had placed a liberal supply of eatables in the top of his valise, and to that he now had recourse, for his long ride had given him a sharp appetite. There were but few passengers in the train when it started, but at almost every station it received accessions.

On reaching Portland, Oscar found that he had nearly half an hour to spare, before taking the Boston train; for it was his intention to "go through" in one day, which his early start enabled him to do. After treating himself to a few cakes, which he purchased at a refreshment stand in the depot, he walked about until it was time to take his seat in the cars.

The clock struck three, and the train started. One hundred and eleven miles seemed to Oscar a long distance to travel, at one stretch, especially after riding all the forenoon; and, indeed, he did begin to feel quite tired, long before he reached the end of the journey. To add to his uneasiness, a particle of cinder from the locomotive flew into his eye, and lodged there so firmly that all his efforts to remove it were in vain. In a little while, the eye became quite painful, and he was obliged to keep it closed. A kind-looking gentleman, who sat near him, noticed his trouble, and offered to assist him in removing the mote; but it was so small that he could not find it. He advised Oscar not to rub the inflamed organ, and told him he thought the moisture of the eye would soon wash out the intruder, if left to itself. Oscar tried to follow this advice, but the pain and irritation did not subside, and he closed his eyes, and resigned himself to darkness.



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The nine o'clock bells of Boston were ringing, as Oscar left the depot and turned his steps homeward. He hurried along through the familiar streets, and had just turned the corner from which his home was in sight, when somebody jumped suddenly from a dark passage-way, and seized him by the hand. It was Ralph, who had been on the watch for his brother half an hour, and, concealed himself just as he saw him approaching. Each gave the other a cordial greeting, and then they hastened into the house, where Oscar found the rest of the family waiting to receive him. The general commotion that followed his arrival, aroused Tiger from the comfortable nap he was taking on a mat, and on hearing the well-remembered tones of his master's voice, he sprang toward Oscar, and nearly knocked him over with his demonstrations of welcome.

So Oscar was at home again; and from the welcome he received, he learned that there is pleasure in getting back from a journey as well as in setting out upon one. His inflamed eye soon attracted the notice of his mother, and she examined it to see if she could detect the cause of the irritation; but the troublesome atom was invisible. She then said she would try the eye-stone, and, going to the drawer, she got a small, smooth, and flat stone, and told Ella to go down into the kitchen and bring up a little vinegar in a saucer. On putting the stone into the vinegar, it soon began to move about, as though it were possessed of life. When it had become sufficiently lively, Mrs. Preston wiped it dry, and put it between the lid and ball of Oscar's inflamed eye. After it had remained there a few minutes, he allowed it to drop into his hand, and on a close-examination, he found that it had brought with it the offending substance that had caused him so much pain. It was a little black speck, so small that it was barely perceptible to the unaided eye. It now being quite late, Mrs. Preston thought that further inquiries and answers concerning Oscar's visit had better be deferred till morning, and the family soon retired to their beds.

CHAPTER XX.

DOWNWARD PROGRESS

The next day was Saturday. Oscar was off most of the day with his comrades, among whom he was quite a lion for the time. During one of the brief intervals that he was in the house, his mother said some thing about his going to school on Monday.

"O dear, I don't want to go to school again this term," said Oscar. "What's the use? Why, it 's only four or five weeks before the term will be through."

"I know that," replied his mother, "but your father is very anxious that you should get into the High School, and he thinks you can do it if you finish up this term."

"I can't do it—I 've got all behindhand with my studies," said Oscar.



“O yes, you can if you try,” replied his mother. “You might have got into the High School last year if you had studied a little harder. You were almost qualified then, and I’m sure you ought to be now. If you find you are behind your class in your lessons, you must study so much the harder, and you ’ll get up with them by-and-bye.”



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“But I don’t believe it will do me any good to be confined in the school-room,” continued Oscar. “I don’t think I’m so strong as I was before I was sick.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Preston, “when you ’re sick you need not go to school; but I guess there ’s no danger of your staying at home for that reason, at present. You never looked better in your life than you do now.”

Oscar tried his pleas again in the evening with his father, but with quite as poor success. He saw that it was fully determined that he should resume his seat at school, and he reluctantly submitted to this decision. When Monday morning came, he proceeded to school, but found that his old desk was in possession of another boy. The head teacher in Oscar’s department soon appeared, and seemed quite glad to see him once more. He appointed Oscar a new seat, and told him he hoped he would study so diligently as to make up for lost time.

The hopes of Oscar’s teacher and parents were doomed to disappointment. It was soon evident that he cared less about his lessons than ever. He was behind his class, and instead of redoubling his efforts to get up with them, he became discouraged and indifferent. His recitations were seldom perfect, and often they were utter failures. His teachers coaxed, and encouraged, and ridiculed, and frowned, and punished, all in vain. One day, after Oscar had blundered worse than usual, the teacher who was hearing the recitation said to him, in a despairing tone:

“You remind me, Oscar, of what one of the old Roman emperors said to an archer who shot his arrows a whole day, and never once hit the mark. He told him he had a most wonderful talent for missing. So I must say of you—you ’ve got the greatest talent for missing of any boy I know.”

Seeing a smile on the faces of Oscar’s classmates, he added:

“But this is too sober a matter to make light of. If you could not get your lessons, it would be a different matter; but I know, and you know, that this is not the trouble. You are quick enough to learn and to understand, when you have a mind to be. If you would only try to get your lessons as hard as the other boys do, you would n’t be at the foot of the class a great while. If you keep on in this way, you will see your folly as plainly as I see it now, before you are many years older.”

This admonition had little effect upon Oscar. When school was dismissed, a few minutes after, he rushed out with as light a step as any of his comrades, and his gay laugh was heard as soon as he reached the entry. In the general scramble for caps, one had fallen from its peg, and instead of replacing it, two or three of the boys were making a football of it. Oscar joined the sport, and gave the cap a kick that sent it part of the way down stairs. A moment after, he met Willie Davenport returning with it.

“Halloo, Whistler, that is n’t your cap, is it?” inquired Oscar.



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“No, but it’s *somebody’s*,” said the good-hearted boy, as he brushed off the dust, and put the lining back into its place. He was about hanging it up, when Benny Wright appeared, and claimed it as his property.

Had Oscar known that the cap was Benny’s, he would not have made a foot-ball of it. He remembered the kind epistle he received, when sick, and the amusement it afforded him, when amusements were scarce. Since his recovery, he had treated Benny with much more consideration than before, and quite a kindly feeling had sprung up between them.

Oscar’s inattention to his studies was not his only fault at school. His general behavior was worse than it had ever been before. Vexed that he was compelled to return to school so near the expiration of the term, it seemed as though he was determined to make as little improvement in his studies, and as much trouble for his teachers, as he could. He not only idled away his own time, but he disturbed other boys who were disposed to study. He was repeatedly reprovved and punished, but reproof and punishment did no good; on the contrary, they seemed rather to make him worse. The teachers at length gave him up as incorrigible, and consoled themselves with the thought that his connection with the school would cease in two or three weeks, at which time his class would graduate. They still aimed to keep him in check, during school hours, but they ceased spending their time and breath in trying to bring about a reformation in his conduct.

One day as the scholars were engaged in writing, the master, while passing along among the boys, and inspecting their writing-books, noticed that somebody had been spitting what appeared to be tobacco juice, near Oscar’s seat. This was a violation of the rules of the school, and the teacher concluded not to let it pass unnoticed. Having no doubt, from several circumstances, that Oscar was the offender, he said to him:

“Oscar, what are you chewing tobacco in school for, and spitting the juice on the floor?”

“I have n’t chewed any tobacco this afternoon,” replied Oscar.

“What is it, then, that you have been spitting upon the floor?” inquired the teacher.

“I have n’t spit upon the floor,” replied Oscar.

“Who did that?” continued the teacher, pointing to the puddle upon the floor.

“I don’t know,” said Oscar; “it was there when I took my seat.”

It was possible that Oscar told the truth, but the teacher had his doubts. He might perhaps, have settled the matter at once by putting a question to one or two of the boys who sat near the supposed offender but as he always avoided the system of making one boy inform against another, when he could properly do so, he took another course.



He told Oscar, if he had any tobacco in his mouth, or anywhere about his person, to give it up to him. Oscar declared that he had none.

“Let me look into your mouth,” said the teacher.



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Oscar had a small piece of the weed in his mouth, which he tucked behind his upper lip with his tongue, and then opened his mouth. The teacher of course saw nothing but what belonged there. He *smelt* something, however, that left him no longer in doubt that Oscar had told a falsehood.

"I can't see your cud, but I can smell it plain enough," said the master; "and I'll examine your pockets, if you please."

Oscar was far from pleased with this proposition, and tried to prevent its being carried into effect. The master, however, easily overcame the difficulties he put in the way, and running his hand into the pocket which he seemed most anxious to defend, brought forth a piece of tobacco large enough to kill a horse!

"What is that?" he inquired, holding the contraband article before Oscar.

Oscar neither looked at it nor made any reply.

"And you are the boy who said a moment ago that you had no tobacco about you," continued the master "I declare I don't know what to do with you. I have said and done all that I can to make a better boy of you, and now I shall report this matter to your father, and let him settle it with you. But I want you to remember one thing. When you tell me a lie, you break God's law, and not mine; and you can't settle the matter in full with me, or any other human being."

The teacher then threw the piece of tobacco out of the open window, and taking Oscar's writing-book, told him he would set a new copy for him. He soon returned, with the following line written upon the top of a clean page:

"Lying lips are abomination to the Lord."

As Oscar wrote this fearful sentence over and over again, he could not fully escape the force of its meaning. It reminded him of his feelings during his recent illness, when at times the terrible thought that his sickness might possibly be unto death intruded upon his mind. But thoughts of God, and death, and a future world, were alike unpleasant to him, and he banished them as speedily as possible.

During the afternoon, the principal of the school wrote a letter to Mr. Preston, informing him of Oscar's indolence and bad conduct, and referring particularly to the incident that had just occurred. By way of offset to the complaint, he spoke in very high terms of Ralph, who attended the same school, but was in another department and another room. He sent the letter by Ralph, but told him not to let Oscar know anything about it. Ralph had some suspicions of the nature of the letter, but he did his errand faithfully, going directly from school to his father's store.



Mr. Preston was at first very much irritated by the teacher's complaints of Oscar's misconduct; and could he have taken the culprit in hand at the time, he would probably have handled him rather roughly. But several days elapsed before he found it convenient to talk with Oscar about the matter, and by this time his passion had subsided into anxiety and sorrow. He showed Oscar the letter, in which he, the eldest son, was severely censured, and his little brother was so highly commended. With tears in his eyes, he warned him of the dangers before him, and entreated him to change his course.



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Oscar had never seen his father exhibit so much emotion before. Usually, on such occasions, he was stern, if not passionate; more ready to threaten and punish than to appeal to the heart and conscience. Now, all this was changed, and sorrow seemed to have taken the place of anger. Oscar was somewhat affected by this unusual manifestation of parental anxiety. He was pretty well hardened against scoldings and threatenings, but he did not know how to meet this new form of rebuke. He tried to conceal his feelings, however, and preserved a sullen silence throughout the interview.

This affair made no abiding impression upon Oscar. In a day or two it was forgotten, and the slight compunctions he felt had entirely disappeared. But the schoolmaster's complaint was soon followed by another that was quite as unpleasant. As Mrs. Preston was sitting at her sewing, one day, the door suddenly opened, and in came Bridget, the servant girl, with a face as red as rage and a hot fire could make it.

"I'll be goin' off this night, ma'am—I'll pack me chist, and not stop here any longer at all," said Bridget, in a tone that betokened her anger.

"Going off—what do you mean? You don't say you 're going to leave us so suddenly, Biddy?" inquired Mrs. Preston, with surprise.

"Yes, that I be," replied Bridget, very decidedly; "I 'll not be after staying in the same house with that big, ugly b'y, another day."

"Who, Oscar? What has he done now?" inquired Mrs. Preston.

"He's did nothing but bother the life out o' me ivery day since he coom back, that's jist all he 's did," replied Biddy. "Jist now, ma'am, he slopped over a hull basin o' dirty whater right on to the clane floor, and thin laffed at me, and sassed me, and called me, all sorts o' bad names—the little sass-box! It's not the like o' Bridget Mullikin that 'll put up with his dirty impidence another day. I 'd like to live with ye, ma'am, and Mister Pristen, good, nice man that he is but I can't stop to be trated like a dog by that sassy b'y."

"I 'll go and see what he has been about," said Mrs. Preston, laying down her work.

When they reached the kitchen, Oscar was not to be found. There was the puddle of dirty water upon the floor, however, and so far Bridget's story was corroborated. As she proceeded to wipe it up, she continued to speak in not very complimentary terms of the "ugly b'y," as she delighted to call Oscar. It was in vain that Mrs. Preston attempted to soothe her ruffled spirits. She refused to be comforted, and insisted upon taking her departure from the house that night.

Oscar did not make his appearance again until late in the afternoon. When his mother called him to account for his treatment of Bridget, he denied the greater part of her story. He said that the basin of water was standing upon the floor, and that he



accidentally hit it with his foot, and upset it. He denied that he called her bad names or was impudent, but he admitted that he laughed, to see her so angry. He also complained that she was as “cross as Bedlam” to him, and “jawed” him whenever he entered the kitchen.



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Mrs. Preston, puzzled by these contradictory stories, brought the two contending parties face to face, in hope of either eliciting the truth or effecting a treaty of peace between them. She failed in both objects, however. Bridget not only adhered to her first statement, but boldly accused Oscar of sundry other misdeeds that had come up in recollection since the first outbreak; while Oscar, on the other hand, stoutly denied most of her charges, and insisted that she was ill-natured, and irritated him in every possible way. The contest finally waxed so warm between them that Mrs. Preston was obliged to interpose, and to withdraw with Oscar.

Mrs. Preston never ascertained the real facts in the case. Candor compels me to say that Bridget's complaints were essentially true. Knowing the poor Irish girl's weak side (her quick temper), Oscar had for some time taxed his ingenuity to torment her, for the sake of hearing her "sputter," as he termed it. He was not only impudent, and applied offensive names to her, but sometimes he purposely put her to extra labor and trouble by misplacing articles, making dirt about the house, &c. These things were a sad annoyance to Bridget, and she soon came to regard Oscar as "the plague of her life," and treated him accordingly. He did very wrong to annoy her in this way; and she was foolish to take so much notice of his hectoring. The ill-will thus established between them grew day by day, until it resulted in the open rupture just described. But Mrs. Preston did not give full credit to Bridget's story. She believed the difficulty was owing quite as much to Bidy's irritable temper and ignorance as to Oscar's impudence, and consequently the latter escaped with a slight reprimand. She also prevailed upon Bridget to remain with them the week out, thinking she would by that time get over her anger. But, to the surprise of all, when Saturday night came, Bridget took her departure. She had got another "place," where she would be out of the reach of the provoking Oscar.

The week for the annual examination of the public schools soon arrived. Oscar begged hard, but in vain, for permission to absent himself, on the eventful day that the grave committee and other distinguished visitors were to sit in judgment upon the condition of the school to which he belonged. But though he was present, he did not appear to much advantage among the "bright particular stars" of the day; and as one and another of the flower of his class were called out, to receive the "Franklin medals," his name was not heard, and no silken ribbon, with silver medal attached, was hung around his neck.

The same day, in obedience to the orders of his father, but very much against his own inclination, Oscar applied to the head master for the certificate required of boys who present themselves for admission to the High School. The teacher seemed a little puzzled what reply to make. At length he said:



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“Do you know what kind of a certificate is required?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Oscar, who had read the advertisement in the paper that morning.

“The certificate must say that you are a boy of good character, and that your teacher believes you are qualified for admission to the High School,” continued the master.

“Now I want to ask you if you think I can honestly say that of you?”

Oscar hung his head in shame, but made no reply. It had turned out just as he feared it would.

“It is very hard to refuse such a request,” continued the teacher; “but, really, if I should give you the certificate, I am afraid it would do you no good, while it might do me some harm, for I don’t like to have my scholars rejected. I cannot honestly say that I think you are qualified for the High School; and besides your conduct has been such of late, that I do not see how I could give you a very high recommendation. I would advise you to give up the idea of applying for admission. I am very sorry it is so, but that will not help the matter.”

What could Oscar say to this? He said nothing, but his looks betrayed the deep mortification he felt, and moved his teacher to pity, while he denied his request. Nor was this the end of Oscar’s troubles. He had got to face his father, and to confess to him that he was found unworthy even to be a candidate for the school for which he had so long been preparing. In doing this, he smoothed over the matter as well as he could; but at best it was a bitter thing to him, and thus he began to experience some of the sad but natural effects of his own misconduct.

CHAPTER XXI.

NED MIXER.

The long summer vacation had now commenced. Oscar wished to spend it at Brookdale, but his parents did not seem much inclined to yield to his wishes. They had not yet fully determined what to do with him; whether to send him to a private school, when the vacations were over, or to put him to work in some shop or store. Meanwhile, Oscar was idling away his time about the streets, and devoting all his energies to the pursuit of amusement. His favorite place of resort continued to be the hotel where Alfred Walton lived. Here he found congenial spirits in Alfred, and Andy the speller, and the several drivers and hostlers, with whom he was on intimate terms. Here, too, he often met with strangers who took his fancy.

At this time, a boy named Edward Mixer was boarding at the hotel. He had lately come to Boston from another city, and Oscar and Alfred were soon captivated by his free and easy manners, and his sociable qualities. He was between fifteen and sixteen years



old, and represented that he was travelling about, to see the world. He said he had plenty of money, and should have a great deal more, when he became of age. He was fashionably dressed, and Oscar and Alfred felt proud of his acquaintance, and were soon on terms of intimacy with him.



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It was not long before Oscar discovered that Edward was a very bad boy. His conversation was low and profane, and he seemed to take special delight in relating sundry “scrapes,” in which he himself figured in a character that was something worse than mischievous, and bordered on the criminal. He “talked large,” too, amazingly large; and Oscar and Alfred were at length forced to the reluctant conclusion that he was an unmitigated liar. But these were small faults, in their view. They considered Ned a capital fellow, and a right down good companion, in spite of these little drawbacks, and they sought his company as much as ever.

Ned spent a good deal of his time around the several railroad depots. He seemed to have quite a mania for such places. Oscar and Alfred often accompanied him to these favorite old haunts of theirs. One morning, as the three were loitering around a depot, having nothing in particular to amuse themselves with, an excursion on foot into a neighboring town was proposed, and all readily agreed to the suggestion. They immediately set out, accompanied by Oscar’s dog, Tiger. They walked along the railroad track, and crossed the river by the railroad bridge, thus saving their tolls, besides many extra steps. They passed several small sign-boards, on which was painted the warning, “*No Person allowed to cross this Bridge;*” but this did not check their progress, and as no one interfered with them, they were soon safely over the river. They still followed the track for some distance, until they had reached the open country, and then they turned off into the green fields.

There were many fine orchards and gardens on every side, but ripe fruits and berries were very scarce. Strawberries and cherries had pretty much disappeared, and it was not yet time for plums, peaches, and early apples and pears. Ned appeared to regret this very much.

“Just see there!” he exclaimed, as they approached a large garden, remote from any house, whose trees were loaded with green fruit. “What fine picking we should have, if it were only a few weeks later! I mean to come out here again next month, you see if I don’t. We must mark this place; let me see; there’s an old rough board fence—I shall remember that, I guess. Didn’t you ever rob an orchard, Alf? I’ve robbed more than you could shake a stick at. I’m a first-rate hand at it, I can tell you—never got caught in my life; but I’ve come pretty near it, though, a good many times. Hold on—I’m going to get over the fence, and see what they’ve got. Those plums over there look as if they were pretty near ripe. Come, Alf and Oscar, won’t you get over?”

“You two may,” said Oscar, “but I’ll stay here with Tiger. He might bark if we all got over, where he could n’t see us.”

Edward and Alfred were soon upon the other side of the fence. While they were exploring the garden, Oscar’s attention was attracted to a dense thicket, from which two or three birds suddenly flew on his approach. He thought there might be a nest there, and concluded to see if he could find it. Carefully brushing aside the leaves and twigs,

he began to hunt for the suspected nest, while Tiger stood looking on. Absorbed in this occupation, he lost sight of his comrades.



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[Illustration: Hunting for Birds' Nests.]

After searching for several minutes, Oscar found a small nest, within his reach, but it was empty. He turned to inform the other boys of his success, but they were nowhere to be seen. He walked along by the fence, but could see nothing of them. He was afraid to call to them, lest the owner of the garden might hear, and take the alarm. He listened, but could not hear them. He walked along still further, and kept his eyes wide open, but they were not to be seen. He concluded they were playing a trick upon him, and had hid themselves. If that was the game he thought, he would not worry himself about it. He accordingly turned about, and was going to sit down and wait for them to make their appearance, when he happened to espy them in a distant field, running at the top of their speed, with a man in full chase after them. It was soon evident that the boys were gaining on their pursuer; but they were approaching a brook, over which there was no bridge, and the man probably supposed that would bring them to a stand. It did not, however, for they ran right through the shallow water, without stopping to think about it. The man did not think it prudent to follow their example, and he accordingly gave up the chase, and went back with dry feet.

After Edward and Alfred had got rid of their pursuer, they began to look around for Oscar. The latter, putting his fingers into his mouth, gave a loud and shrill whistle, which they immediately recognized, and answered in a similar way. Oscar started towards them, and taking a wide sweep through the fields, they all came out together upon the highway. They did not think it safe to remain long in the neighborhood, and so they hurried on towards Boston. It appeared, from Edward's story, that he and Alfred knocked a few hard peaches from a tree, while in the garden, but they proved unfit to eat. They also found some ripe currants, and were leisurely helping themselves, when they heard somebody ask them what they were about. They turned, and saw a man approaching; whereupon, without stopping to answer his question, they leaped over the fence, and took to their heels, the man following closely upon them. The conclusion of the race Oscar had witnessed.

As they were walking home, and talking about various matters, Edward suddenly gave the conversation a new turn, by inquiring:

"Boys, do you want to go into a grand speculation with me?"

"Yes, what is it?" was the response of both the others.

"We should make something handsome out of it, but we should have to run some risk," continued Edward. "I've got the scheme all laid out, so that I know just how to go to work. But it's no use talking about it. I don't believe either of you have got pluck enough to go into it."

"I 've got pluck—the real, genuine article; try me, and see if I have n't," said Alfred.



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“So have I,” said Oscar; “I should like to have you show me a boy that’s got more pluck than I have, when I get stirred up.”

“Pooh, you don’t know what pluck is, neither of you,” replied Edward. “What would you do if a policeman should nab you?”

“I should run, just as *you* did, when the man caught you stealing fruit,” said Oscar, with a laugh. “That’s a specimen of *your* pluck, aint it?”

“But what is the speculation you were telling about?” inquired Alfred.

“I guess I shan’t tell you about it now,” replied Edward. “I ’m afraid you would n’t keep it to yourselves.”

“Yes we will. *I* will at any rate,” said Alfred.

“So will I,” added Oscar.

“If I let you into the secret, and you should blab it out, I would n’t mind killing both of you,” said Edward, with forced gravity, which he could not long maintain, it gradually relaxing into a smile. “I mean what I say,” he added, “you needn’t laugh at it.”

Both the others renewed their promise to keep the matter a secret; but Edward, after talking about his scheme a quarter of an hour longer, and exciting the curiosity of the others to the highest point, finally informed them that he could not let them into the secret then, but that he would tell them all about it in a few days, if he was sure that they would keep it to themselves.

Oscar saw Edward almost every day, and often inquired about his speculation, but got no definite answer. He and Alfred both felt very curious to know what it was; but though expectation was on tiptoe, it was not gratified. Edward assured them, however, that things were nearly ready, and that in a few days he would let them into the mysterious scheme.

Oscar’s uncle, from Brookdale, was now in the city, and was stopping for a few days at Mr. Preston’s. He no sooner arrived, than Oscar applied to his parents for permission to return with him to Maine; but they did not give much encouragement to his proposal, although his uncle said he should like to have him make his family another visit. Oscar, however, daily renewed his request, for he believed that he should yet accomplish his object by teasing.

The day before Oscar’s uncle was to return to his home, a gentleman called into Mr. Preston’s store, and told him he wished to see him alone. Having with drawn to a private room, the stranger introduced himself as an officer of the police.



“You have a son fourteen or fifteen years old?” inquired the officer.

“Yes, I have,” replied Mr. Preston.

“Are you aware that he is getting into bad company?” continued the officer.

“No, sir,” said Mr. Preston.



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“Well,” resumed the other, “I ’ve called to acquaint you of a few facts that have come to my knowledge, and you can act in the matter as you think best. There is a young fellow stopping at the —— Hotel, who came to this city a few weeks ago, and who calls himself Edward Mixer. He is a little larger than your son, and is well dressed, and looks like a respectable boy; but for a week or two past we have suspected that he was a rogue. He hangs around the railroad depots, and as several persons have had their pockets picked, when getting out of the cars, since he made his appearance, we began to watch him. We have got no evidence against him yet; but yesterday I pointed him out to a New York policeman, who happened to be here, and he says he knows him well. It seems he is a regular pickpocket by profession, and has served a term at Blackwell’s Island. [1] He was liberated last month, and came on here to follow the business where he isn’t known. But we keep a sharp eye on him, and as we have noticed that your son is quite intimate with him, I thought it my duty to inform you of it. I don’t suppose your boy knows the real character of this fellow, or has anything to do with his roguery; but it isn’t safe for him to be in such company, and I thought you ought to know what is going on.”

Mr. Preston thanked the officer very cordially for the information, and promised to see that Oscar was immediately put out of the way of danger from this source. When he went home at noon, he had a long private interview with his son, and informed him of the disclosures the officer had made. Oscar was not a little astonished to learn that the genteel and sociable Ned Mixer, whose company he prized so highly, was a thief by trade, and was fresh from a prison. He assured his father that he knew nothing of all this. This was true; but after all Oscar knew too much of the character of Ned to believe him to be a good boy, or a safe companion. He had heard him swear and lie. He had also heard him sneer at virtue, and boast of deeds that no well-ordered conscience would approve. And yet he courted his company, and considered him a “capital fellow”! O, foolish boy!

But Oscar’s plea of ignorance did not fully excuse him, even in the eye of his father, who did not know how little force that plea really had.

“I don’t suppose you knew his character,” said Mr. Preston; “but are there not good boys enough in the neighborhood for you to associate with—boys that have always lived here and are well known—without your cultivating the acquaintance of every straggler and vagabond that comes along? I wish you would not make yourself so intimate with Tom, Dick, and Harry, before you know anything about them. I ’ve cautioned you against this a good many times, and now I hope that you ’ll see there is some cause for it. If this intimacy had gone on a few weeks longer, it might have ruined you and disgraced your mother and me.”

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After consultation with his wife and brother, Mr. Preston concluded to let Oscar go down to Brookdale; and remain until they could make some permanent arrangements for him elsewhere. He did not think it safe for him to remain longer exposed to the temptations of the city. He charged Oscar not to speak again to Ned, and not to inform any one of the facts he had learned about him, lest it might thwart the efforts of the police to detect his rogueries. On second thought, he concluded to take Oscar to the store with him that afternoon, to prevent the possibility of an interview between him and Ned. Oscar thus remained under the eye of his father through the day. In the evening he packed his valise for the journey, and the next morning he started for Brookdale with his uncle.

A day or two after Oscar's departure, Ned was arrested in the act of picking a lady's pocket at a railroad depot. Being unable to obtain bail, he was committed for trial. When his case came up in court, he was brought in guilty; and it appearing, from the testimony of the officers, that, though young, he was quite old in crime, he was sentenced to one year in the House of Correction.

Oscar never ascertained the nature of Ned's "grand speculation," and probably it was well for him that he did not. Had he been let into the secret, and had the scheme been carried into effect at the time it was first talked of, I might have been obliged to add another and a still sadder chapter to the history of "THE BOY WHO HAD HIS OWN WAY."

[1] The New York Penitentiary.