

The Court of Boyville

William Allen White

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THE COURT OF BOYVILLE

By

William Allen White

Author Of The Real Issue, etc.

Illustrated by ORSON LOWELL (with the exception of the first story, the illustrations for which are by GUSTAV VERBEEK).

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Where is Boyville? By what track
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The three boys were scuffling for the possession of a piece of rope

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He withdrew from the game and sat alone against the barn

As she turned to her turkey-slicing
The new preacher, for whom the party was made
The first long dress
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"Did you know my dad was a soldier?"
During the next two hours the boy wandered on the prairie
"Mary Pennington, aged two years, three months, and ten days"
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She stroked his hand and snuggled closer to him
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Chased the little girls around the yard with it
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8 Funny Clowns--count them 8

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"Now, Henry, don't ever have anything to do with that kind of trash again"

"Here's a dollar I got for ridin' the trick mule ... I thought it would be nice for the missionary society"

"Gee, we're going to have pie, ain't we"

PROLOGUE

We who are passing "through the wilderness of this world" find it difficult to realize what an impenetrable wall there is around the town of Boyville. Storm it as we may with the simulation of light-heartedness, bombard it with our heavy guns, loaded with fishing-hooks and golf-sticks, and skates and base-balls, and butterfly-nets, the walls remain. If once the clanging gates of the town shut upon a youth, he is banished forever. From afar he may peer over the walls at the games inside, but he may not be of them. Let him try to join them, and lo, the games become a mockery, and he finds that he is cavorting still outside the walls, while the good citizens inside are making sly sport of him. Who, being recently banished from Boyville, has not sought to return? In vain does he haunt the swimming hole; the water elves will have none of him. He hushes their laughter, muffles their calls, takes the essence from their fun, and leaves it dust upon their lips.

But we of the race of grown-ups are a purblind people. Otherwise, when we acknowledge what a stronghold this Boyville is, we the banished would not seek to steal away the merry townsmen, and bruise our hearts and theirs at our hopeless task. We have learned many things in our schools, and of the making of books there has been no end; so it is odd that we have not learned to let a boy be a boy. Why not let him feel the thrill from the fresh spring grass under his feet, as his father felt it before him, and his father's father, even back to Adam, who walked thus with God! There is a tincture of iron that seeps into a boys blood with the ozone of the earth, that can come to him by no other way. Let him run if he will; Heavens air is a better elixir than any that the alchemist can mix. What if he roams the woods and lives for hours in the water? What if he prefers the

barn to the parlor? What if he fights? Does he not take the risk of the scratched face and the bruises? Should he not be in some measure the judge of the situation before him when the trouble begins? Boys have an ugly name for one of their kind who discovers suddenly, in a crisis of his own making, that he is not allowed to fight. And it were better to see a boy with a dozen claw-marks down his face than to see him eat that name in peace.

Now this conclusion may seem barbaric to elders who have to pay for new clothes to replace the torn ones, And according to their light perhaps the elders see clearly. But the grown-up people forget that their wisdom has impaired their vision to see as boys see and to pass judgment upon things in another sphere.

For Boyville is a Free Town in the monarchy of the world. Its citizens mind their own business, and they desire travellers in this waste to do likewise. The notion that spectacled gentry should come nosing through the streets and alleys of Boyville, studying the sanitation, which is not of the best, and objecting to the constitution and by laws,--which were made when the rivers were dug and the hills piled up,--the notion of an outsider interfering with the Divine right of boys to eat what they please, to believe what they please, and, under loyalty to the monarchy of the world, to do what they please, is repugnant to this free people. Nor does it better matters when the man behind the spectacles explains that to eat sheep-sorrel is deleterious; to feed youngers Indian turnip is cruel; to suck the sap of the young grapevine in spring produces malaria; to smoke rattan is depraving, and to stuff one's stomach with paw-paws and wild-grapes is dangerous in the extreme.

For does not the first article of the law of this Free Town expressly state, that boys shall be absolved from obeying any and all laws regulating the human stomach, and be free of the penalties thereto attaching? And again when Wisdom says that the boy shall give up his superstitions, the boy points to hoary tradition, which says that the snakes tail does not in fact and in truth die till sundown; that if a boy kills a lucky bug he shall find a nickel; that to cross one's heart and lie, brings on swift and horrible retribution; that letting the old cat die causes death in the family; that to kill a toad makes the cow give bloody milk; that horsehairs in water turn to snakes in nine days; that spitting on the bait pleases the fish, and that to draw a circle in the dust around a marble charms it against being hit. What tradition, ancient and honorable in Boyville, declares is true, that is the Law everlasting, and no wise mans word shall change the law one jot nor one tittle. For in the beginning it was written, to get in the night wood, to eat with a fork at table, to wear shoes on Sunday, to say "sir" to company, and "thank you" to the lady, to go to bed at nine to remember that there are others who like gravy, to stay out of the water in dog days, to come right straight home from school, to shinny on your own side, and to clean those feet for Heaven's sake,--that is the whole duty of boys. As it was in the beginning, so it shall be ever after.

Now most of us grown-ups do not admit these things, and not being able to speak the language of the people whose rights we are seeking to destroy, we will never know how utterly futile are our conspiracies. But that is immaterial.

The main point that the gentle reader should bear in mind is this:

The town of Boyville is free and independent; governed only by the ancient laws, made by the boys of the elder days--by the boys who found bottom in the rivers that flowed out of Eden; by little Seth, little Enoch, little Methuselah, and little Noah; by the boys who threw mud balls from willow withes broken from trees whereon David hung his harp a thousand years thereafter. For Boyville was old when Nineveh was a frontier post.

Boyville hears from afar the buzz about principalities and powers, the clatter of javelins and the clash of arms, the hubbub of the "Pride and pomp and circumstance of glorious war." The courtiers of Boyville cheer for each new hero, and claim fellowship with all "like gentlemen unafraid." But the Free Town has its own sovereign, makes its own idols. And the clatter and clash and hubbub that attend the triumphs of the kingdoms of the earth pass by unconquered Boyville as the shadow of a dream.

THE MARTYRDOM OF "MEALY" JONES

A WAIL IN B MINOR

Oh, what has become of the ornery boy,
Who used to chew slip'ry elm, "rosum" and wheat:
And say "jest a coddin'" and "what d'ye soy;"
And wear rolled-up trousers all out at the seat?

And where is the boy who had shows in the barn,
And "skinned a cat backards" and turned "summersets;"
The boy who had faith in a snake-feeder yarn,
And always smoked grape vine and corn cigarettes?

Where now is the small boy who spat on his bait,
And proudly stood down near the foot of the class,
And always went "barefooted" early and late,
And washed his feet nights on the dew of the grass?

Where is the boy who could swim on his back,
And dive and tread water and lay his hair, too;
The boy who would jump off the spring-board ker-whack,
And light on his stomach as I used to do?

Oh where and oh where is the old-fashioned boy?
Has the old-fashioned boy with his old-fashioned ways,
Been crowded aside by the Lord Fauntleroy,--
The cheap tinselled make-believe, full of alloy
Without the pure gold of the rollicking joy
Of the old-fashioned boy in the old-fashioned days?

[Illustration: The Court of Boyville
The Martyrdom of Mealy Jones]

His mother named him Harold, and named him better than she knew. He was just such a boy as one would expect to see bearing a heroic name. He had big, faded blue eyes, a nubbin of a chin, wide, wondering ears, and freckles--such brown blotches of freckles on his face and neck and

hands, such a milky way of them across the bridge of his snub nose, that the boys called him "Mealy." And Mealy Jones it was to the end. When his parents called him Harold in the hearing of his playmates, the boy was ashamed, for he felt that a nickname gave him equal standing among his fellows. There were times in his life--when he was alone, recounting his valorous deeds--that Mealy more than half persuaded himself that he was a real boy. But when he was with Winfield Pennington, surnamed "Piggy" in the court of Boyville, and Abraham Lincoln Carpenter, similarly knighted "Old Abe," Mealy saw that he was only Harold, a weak and unsatisfactory imitation. He was handicapped in his struggle to be a natural boy by a mother who had been a "perfect little lady" in her girlhood and who was moulding her son in the forms that fashioned her. If it were the purpose of this tale to deal in philosophy, it would be easy to digress and show that Mealy Jones was a study in heredity; that from his mother's side of the house he inherited wide, white, starched collars, and from his father's side, a burning desire to spit through his teeth. But this is only a simple tale, with no great problem in it, save that of a boy working out his salvation between a fiendish lust for suspenders with trousers and a long-termed incarceration in ruffled waists with despised white china buttons around his waist-band.

No one but Piggy ever knew how Mealy Jones learned to swim; and Harold's mother doesn't consider Piggy Pennington any one, for the Penningtons are Methodists and the Joneses are Baptists, and Very hard-shelled ones, too. However, Mealy Jones did learn to swim "dog-fashion" years and years after the others had become post-graduates in aquatic lore and could "tread water," "swim sailor-fashion," and "lay" their hair. Mrs. Jones permitted her son to go swimming occasionally, but she always exacted from him a solemn promise not to go into the deep water. And Harold, who was a good little boy, made it a point not to "let down" when he was beyond the "step-off." So of course he could not know how deep it was; although the bad little boys who "brought up bottom" had told him that it was twelve feet deep.

One hot June afternoon Mealy stood looking at a druggist's display window, gazing idly at the pills, absently picking out the various kinds which he had taken. He had just come from his mother with the expressed injunction not to go near the river. His eyes roamed listlessly from the pills to the pain-killer, and; turning wearily away, he saw Piggy and Old Abe and Jimmy Sears. The three boys were scuffling for, the possession of a piece of rope. Pausing a moment in front of the grocery store, they beckoned for Mealy. The lad joined the group. Some one said,--

"Come on, Mealy, and go swimmin'."

"Aw, Mealy can't go," put in Jimmy; "his ma won't let him."

"Yes, I kin, _too_, if I want to," replied Mealy, stoutly--but, alas! guiltily.

"Then come on," said Piggy Pennington. "You don't dast. My ma don't care how often I go in--only in dog days."

[Illustration: _The three boys were scuffling for the possession of a piece of rope_.]

After some desultory debate they started--the four boys--pushing one another off the sidewalk, "rooster-fighting," shouting, laughing, racing through the streets. Mealy Jones longed to have the other boys observe his savage behavior. He knew, however, that he was not of them, that he was a sad make-believe. The guilt of the deed he was doing, oppressed him. He wondered how he could go into crime so stolidly. Inwardly he quaked as he recalled the stories he had read of boys who had drowned while disobeying their parents. His uneasiness was increased by the ever-present sense that he could not cope with the other boys at their sports. He let them jostle him, and often would run, after his self-respect would goad him to jostle back. Mealy was glad when the group came to the deep shade of the woods and walked slowly.

It was three o'clock when the boys reached the swimming-hole. There the great elm-tree, with its ladder of exposed roots, stretched over the water. Piggy Pennington, stripped to the skin, ran whooping down the sloping bank, splashed over the gravel at the water's edge, and plunged into the deepest water. Old Abe followed cautiously, bathing his temples and his wrists before sousing all over. Jimmy Sears threw his shirt high up on the bank as he stood ankle-deep in the stream. Piggy's exhilaration having worn off by this time, he picked up a mussel-shell and threw it at Jimmy's feet. The water dashed wide of its mark and sprinkled Mealy, who was sitting on a log, taking off his shoes.

"Here, Piggy, you quit that," said Mealy.

Jimmy said nothing. He sprang into the air head foremost toward Piggy, who dived from sight. His pursuer saw the direction Piggy took and followed him. The boys were a few feet apart when Jimmy came to the surface, puffing and spouting and shaking the water from his eyes and hair. He hesitated in his pursuit. Piggy observed the hesitation, and with a quick overhand movement shot a stinging stream of water from the ball of his hand into his antagonist's face. Then Piggy turned on his side and swam swiftly to shallow water, where he stood and splashed his victim, who was lumbering toward shore with his eyes shut, panting loudly. With every splash Piggy said, "How's that, Jim?" or "Take a bite o' this," or "Want a drink?" When Jimmy got where he could walk on the creek bottom, he made a feint of fighting back, but he soon ceased, and stood by, gasping for breath, before saying, "Let's quit."

Then followed the fun of ducking, the scuffling and the capers of the young human animals at play--at play even as gods in the elder days. Mealy saw it all through envious eyes and with a pricking conscience, as he doggedly fumbled the myriad buttons which his mother had fastened upon his pretty clothes. He heard Piggy dare Abe across the creek, and call him a cowardly calf, and say, "Any one't 'ull take a dare'll steal sheep." Mealy saw Jimmy grin as he cracked rocks under water while the other boys were diving, and watched Old Abe, as he made the waves rise under his chin, swimming after the fleeing culprit. He saw Abe catch Jimmy and hold his head under water until Mealy's smile faded to a horrified grin. Then he saw the victim and the victor come merrily to the shallows, laughing as though nothing unusual had occurred. It was high revel in Boyville, and the satyrs were in the midst of their joy.

[Illustration: _He saw Abe catch Jimmy and hold his head under

water_.]

Then Mealy heard Piggy say, "Aw, come in, Mealy; it won't hurt you."

"Is it cold?" asked Mealy.

"Naw," replied Piggy.

"Naw, course it ain't," returned Jimmy.

"Warm as dish-water," cried Abe.

Mealy's ribs shone through his skin. His big milky eyes made him seem uncanny, standing there shivering in the shade. He hobbled down the pebbly bank on his tender feet, his bashful grin breaking into a dozen contortions of pain as he went. The boys stood watching him like tigers awaiting a Christian martyr. He paused at the water's edge, put in a toe and jerked it out with a spasm of cold.

"Aw, that ain't cold," said Piggy.

"Naw, when you get in you won't mind it," insisted Abe.

Mealy replied, "Oo, oo! I think that's pretty cold."

"Wet your legs and you won't get the cramp," advised Jimmy Sears.

Mealy stooped over to scoop up some water in his hands. He heard the boys laugh, and the next instant felt a shower of water on his back. It made the tears come.

"Uhm-m-m--no fair splashin'," he whined.

Mealy put one foot in the water and drew it out quickly, gasping, "Oo! I ain't goin' in. It's too cold for me. It'll bring my measles out." He started--trembling--up the bank; then he heard a splashing behind him.

"Come back here," cried Piggy, whose hands were uplifted; "come back here and git in this water or I'll muddy you." Piggy's hands were full of mud. He was about to throw it when the Jones boy pretended to laugh and giggled, "Oh, I was just a-foolin'."

But he paused again at the water's edge, and Piggy, who had come up close enough to touch the rickety lad, reached out a muddy hand and dabbed the quaking boy's breast. The other boys roared with glee. Mealy extended a deprecatory hand, and took Piggy's wet, glistening arm and stumbled nervously into the stream, with an "Oo-oo!" at every uncertain step. When the water came to Mealy's waist Abe cried, "Duck! duck, or I'll splash you!" The boy sank down, with his teeth biting his tongue as he said, "Oo! I wouldn't do you that way."

When the shock of the tepid water had spent itself, Mealy's grin returned, and he shivered happily, "Oo--it's good, ain't it?"

Ten minutes later the boys were diving from the roots of the elm-tree into the deep water on the other side of the creek. Ten minutes after that they were sliding down a muddy toboggan which they had revived by splashing water upon the incline made and provided by the town boys

for scudding. Ten minutes afterward they were covering themselves with coats of mud, adorned--one with stripes made with the point of a stick, another with polka-dots, another with checks, and Mealy with snake-like, curving stripes. Then the whole crew dashed down the path to the railroad bridge to greet the afternoon passenger train. When it came they jumped up and down and waved their striped and spotted arms like the barbarian warriors which they fancied they were. They swam up the stream leisurely, and, as they rounded the bend that brought their landing-place into view, the quick eye of Piggy Pennington saw that some one had been meddling with their clothes. He gave the alarm. The boys quickened their strokes. When they came to the shallows of the ford they saw the blue-and-white starched shirt of Mealy Jones lying in a pool tied into half a dozen knots, with the water soaking them tighter and tighter. The other boys' clothes were not disturbed.

"Mealy's got to chaw beef," cried Piggy Pennington. The other boys echoed Piggy's merriment. Great sorrows come to grown-up people, but there is never a moment in after-life more poignant with grief than, that which stabs a boy when he learns that he must wrestle with a series of water-soaked knots in a shirt. As Mealy sat in the broiling sun, gripping the knots with his teeth and fingers, he asked himself again and again how he could explain his soiled shirt to his mother. Lump after lump rose in his throat, and dissolved into tears that trickled down his nose. The other boys did not heed him. They were following Piggy's dare, dropping into the water from the overhanging limb of the elm-tree.

They did not see the figure of another boy, in a gingham shirt, blue overalls, and a torn straw hat, sitting on a stone back of Mealy, smiling complacently. Not until the stranger walked down to the water's edge where Mealy sat did the other boys spy him.

"Who is it?" asked Abe.

"I never saw him before," replied Jimmy Sears.

"Oh, I'll tell you who it is," returned Abe, after looking the stranger over. "It's the new boy. Him an' his old man come to town yesterday. They say he's a fighter. He licked every boy in the Mountain Jumpers this mornin'."

By this time the new boy was standing over Mealy, saying, "How you gittin' along?"

Mealy looked up, and said with the petulance of a spoiled child, "Hush your mouth, you old smartie! What good d't do you to go an' tie my clo'es?"

Piggy and Jimmy and Abe came hurrying to the landing. They heard the new boy retort, "Who said I tied your clo'es?" Mealy made no reply. The new boy repeated the query. Mealy saw the boys in the water looking on, and his courage rose; for Mealy was in the primary department of life, and had not yet learned that one must fight alone. He answered, "I did," with an emphasis on the "I," as he tugged at the last knot. The new boy had been looking Mealy over, and he replied quickly, "You're a liar!"

There was a pause, during which Mealy looked helplessly for some one to defend him. He was sure that his companions would not stand there

and see him whipped. One of the boys in the water said diplomatically, "Aw, Mealy, I wouldn't take that!"

"You're another," faltered Mealy, who looked supplication and surprise at his friends, and wondered if they were really going to desert him. The new boy waded around Mealy, and leaned over him, and said, shaking his fist in the freckled face, "You're a coward, and you don't dast take it up and fight it out."

Mealy's cheeks flushed. He felt anger mantling his frame. He was one of those most pitiable of mortals whose anger brings tears with it. The last knot in the shirt was all but conquered, when Mealy bawled in a scream of passionate sobs,--

"When I git this shirt fixed I'll show you who's a coward."

The new boy sought a level place on the bank for a fight, and sneered, "Oh, cry baby! cry baby! Say, boys, where's its bottle?"

[Illustration: "_Say, boys, where's its bottle_?"]

Mealy rose with a stone in each hand, and hobbled over the pebbles, trying, "Touch me now! Touch me if you dare!"

"Aw, you coward! drop them rocks," snarled the new boy.

Mealy looked at his friends imploringly. He felt lonely, deserted, and mistreated, but he saw in the faces of his comrades the reflection of the injunction to put down the stones. He did so, and his anger began to cool. But he whimpered again, "Well now, touch me if you dare!"

The new boy came over briskly, and made a feint to slap the naked lad, who warded off the blow, sniffing, "You just leave me alone. I ain't hurtin' you." The boys in the water laughed--it seemed to Mealy such a cruel laugh. Anger enveloped him again, and he struck out blindly through his tears, hand over hand, striking the new boy in the mouth and making it bleed, before he realized that the fight had begun. The new boy tried to clinch Mealy, but the naked body slipped away from him; and just then the combatants saw the satisfied grin freeze on the faces of the boys in the water. A step crunched the gravel near them, and in a moment that flashed vividly with rejoicing that the fight was ended, then with abject, chattering terror, Mealy Jones saw his father approaching. Mealy did not run. The uplifted cane and the red, perspiring face of his father transfixed the lad, yet he felt called upon to say something. His voice came from a dry throat, and he spoke through an idiotic grin as he said, "I didn't know you wanted me, pa."

After the burst of his father's anger ten awful minutes of shame passed for Mealy while he was putting on his wet clothes. The boys in the water swam noiselessly upstream to the roots of the elm-tree, where he saw them looking at his disgrace. During those ten minutes Mealy realized that his father's deepening silence portended evil; so he tried to draw his father into a discussion of the merits of the case by whimpering from time to time, "Well, I guess they ast me to come," or "Piggy said it wouldn't hurt, 'cause 't ain't in dog days," or "I wasn't in where it was deep. I was only a-wadin'." The new boy, who was seated upon a log near by with a stone in his hand, which he had picked up fearing the elder Jones would join the fray, sniffed audibly. He called to the other boys derisively, "Say, any of you boys

got the baby's blocks?" It did not lift the mantle of humiliation that covered Mealy to hear his father reply to the new boy, "That will do for you, sir." While Mealy wept he wiped away his tears first with one hand and then with the other, employing the free hand in fastening his clothes together. He did not fear the punishment that might be in store for him. He was thinking of the agony of his next meeting with Piggy Pennington. Mealy fancied that Abe Carpenter, who was a quiet, philosophical boy, would not tease him, but horror seized him when he thought of Piggy.

As Mealy fastened his last button, he felt his father's finger under his collar, and his own feet shambling blindly over the pebbles, up the path, into the bushes; he heard the boys in the water laugh with the new boy, and then--stories differ. The boys say that he howled lustily, "Oh, pa, I won't do it any more," over and over again. Mealy Jones says that it didn't hurt a bit.

[Illustration: _He felt his father's finger under his collar and his own feet shambling_.]

This much is certain: that Master Harold Jones walked through the town that day a few feet ahead of his fathers who tapped the boy's legs with a hooked cane whenever his steps lagged. At the door of the Jones home Mrs. Jones stood to welcome the martial procession, which she saw, and then heard, approaching some time before it arrived. To his wife, whose face pictured anxious grief, Mr. Jones said, as he turned the captive over to her: "I found this young gentleman in swimming--swimming and fighting. I have attended to his immediate wants, I believe. I leave him to you."

Harold Jones was but a lad--a good lad whose knowledge of the golden text was his Sunday-school teacher's pride. Yet he had collected other scraps of useful information as he journeyed through life. One of these was a perfectly practical familiarity with the official road map to his mother's heart. Therefore, when he crossed the threshold of the Jones home Harold began at once to weep dolefully.

"Harold Jones, what do you mean by such conduct?" asked his mother.

The boy stood by the window long enough to see that his father had turned the corner toward the town. Then he fell on the floor, and began to bewail his lot, refusing to answer the first question his mother asked, but telling instead how "all the other boys in this town can go swimmin' when they want to," hinting that he wouldn't care, if papa had only just come and brought him home, but that papa--and this was followed by a vocal cataract of woe that made the dish-pans ring.

He noted that his mother bent over him and said, "My poor boy;" at which sign little Harold punctured the levees of his grief again, and said he "never was goin' to face any of the boys in this town again"--he "just couldn't bear it." Mrs. Jones paused in her work at this, put down a potato that she was peeling, and stood up stiffly, saying in a freezing tone, "Harold Jones, you don't mean to tell me that your father punished you in front of those other little boys?"

Her son only sobbed and nodded an affirmative, and gave lusty voice to the tearful wish that he was dead. Mrs. Jones stooped to the floor and took her child by an arm, lifting him to his feet. She smoothed his hair and took him with her to the big chair in the dining-room, where

she raised his seventy pounds to her lap, saying as she did so, "Mama's boy will soon be too big to hold." At that the spoiled child only renewed his weeping and clutched her tightly. There, little by little, he forgot the mishaps of the day. There the anguish lifted from his heart, and when his mother asked, "Harold, why did you go into the water when we told you not to?" the child only shook his head, and, after repeated questioning, his answer came,--

"Well, they asked me, mom."

"Who asked you?" persisted Mrs. Jones.

"Piggy Pennington and Jimmy Sears," returned the lad.

[Illustration: _Mrs. Jones stooped to the floor and took her child by an arm_.]

To the query, "Well, do you have to do everything they ask you to, Harold?" the lad's answer was a renewal of the heart-breaking sobs. These softened the mother's heart, as many and many a woman's heart has been melted through all the ages. She soothed the truant child and petted him, until the cramping in his throat relaxed sufficiently to admit of the passage of an astonishingly large slice of bread and butter and sugar. After it was disposed of, Harold busied himself by assorting his old iron scraps on the back porch, and his mother smiled as she fancied she heard the boy trying to whistle a tune.

Harold had left the porch before his father came home with the beefsteak for supper, and Mrs. Jones met her husband with: "Pa Jones, what could you be thinking of--punishing that boy before the other children? Do you want to break what little spirit he has? Why, that child was nearly in hysterics for an hour after you left!"

Mr. Jones hung up his crooked cane, put a stick of wood in the stove, scraped his pipe with his knife, and blew through the stem.

"I guess he wasn't hurt much," replied the father. Then he added, as he put a live coal in the pipe: "I s'pose you went an' babied him an' spoiled it all." There was a puffing pause, after which Mr. Jones added, "If you'd let him go more, an' didn't worry your head off when he was out of sight, he'd amount to more."

Mrs. Jones always gave her husband three moves before she spoke. "Yes! yes! you'd make that boy a regular little rowdy if you had your way, William Jones."

In the mean time Harold Jones had heard a long, shrill whistle in the alley, and, answering it, he ran as rapidly as his spindling legs would carry him. He knew it was the boys. They were grinning broadly when he came to them. It was Piggy Pennington who first spoke, "Oh, pa, I won't do it any more," repeating the phrase several times in a suppressed voice, and leering impishly at Mealy.

"Aw, you're makin' that up," answered Mealy in embarrassment. But Piggy continued his teasing until Abe Carpenter said: "Say, Mealy, we want you to go to the cave with us to-morrow; can you?"

The "can you" was an imputation on his personal liberty that Mealy resented. He replied "Uh-huh! you just bet your bottom dollar I can."

Piggy began teasing again, but Abe silenced him, and the boys sat in the dirt behind the barn, chattering about the new boy, whose name, according to the others, was "Bud" Perkins. Mealy entered the conversation with much masculine pomp--too much, in fact; for when he became particularly vain-glorious some one in the group was certain to glance at his shoes--and shoes in June in Boyville are insignia of the weaker sex, the badges of shame.

But Mealy did not feel his disgrace. He walked up the ash path to the kitchen with an excellent imitation of manly pride in his gait. He kicked at a passing cat, and shook his head bravely, talking to himself about the way he would have whipped the new boy if his father had not interrupted the fight.

As Mrs. Jones heard the boy's step on the porch, she said to his father, "Now, pa, that boy has been punished enough to-day. Don't you say a word to him." Harold walked by his father with averted face. At supper the boy did not look at his father, and when the dishes were put away, Mr. Jones, who sat in the kitchen smoking, heard his wife and the child in a front room, chatting cheerily. The lonesome father smoked his pipe and recalled his youth. The boy's voice brought back his own shrill treble, and he coughed nervously. After Mrs. Jones had put the lad to bed, and was in the pantry arranging for breakfast, the father knocked the ashes from his briar into the stove, and, humming an old tune, went to the boy's bedroom door. He paused awkwardly on the threshold. The boy turned his face toward the wall. The action cut the father to the quick. He walked to the bed and bent over the child, touching a father's rough-bearded face to the soft cheek. He found the soft hand--with a father's large hand--under the sheet, and he held the little hand tightly as he said:

"Well, Harold"--there he paused for a second. But he continued, "Do you think you'd a-licked that boy--if--if--I hadn't a-come?"

Then the two laughed, and a little throb of joyous pain tingled in their throats--such as only boys may feel.

A RECENT CONFEDERATE VICTORY

A LITTLE DREAM-BOY

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
And wake up a little man lying forlorn,
Asleep where his life wanders out of the morn.

Little Boy Blue, blow a merry, sweet note,
Over the pool where the white lilies float,--
Fill out the sails of a little toy boat.

Blow on my dream of a little boy there,--
Blow thro' his little bark-whistle, and snare
Your breath in a tangle of curly brown hair.

Blow and O blow from your fairy land far,
Blow while my little boy wears a tin star,

And rides a stick-horse to a little boy's war.

Blow for the brave man my dream-boy would be,
Blow back his tears when he wakes up to see
His knight errant gone and instead--only me.

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
Blow for a little boy lying forlorn,
Asleep where his life wanders out of the morn.

[Illustration]

A RECENT CONFEDERATE VICTORY

In a small town, every man who has been in the community long enough to become thoroughly known to the townsmen has a place in the human mosaic; that place seldom changes. Occasionally a man is a year in finding his place. The town of Willow Creek located Calhoun Perkins in two days. Wednesday he arrived in town with his son, whom he called "Bud;" Thursday night it was reported that he had been fishing the second time. That settled it. After that the boasting of Perkins about his family in Tennessee and his assertion that he expected to go into business only made the men laugh when Perkins left a group of them. They were not interested in Perkins by the following Saturday; and Monday every man in the town felt that his judgment of a man who would go fishing every day had been handsomely vindicated, when it was learned that Perkins had served in the Confederate army. When Perkins had been in the town three years, the anecdotes illustrating his shiftlessness multiplied, and his name was a synonym for that trait of character known in the vernacular as "no-'count." In the third spring, after a winter's tussle with rheumatism, Perkins died. His funeral was of so little importance that none of the corpulent old ladies in black alpaca, holding their handkerchiefs carefully folded in their hands, came panting across the town to attend it. No women came at all. And the Perkins boy stood by stolidly while the dry clods were rumbling upon the pine box in the grave. The boy wished to be alone, and he would not sit on the seat with the driver. He wiped a little moisture from his eyes, and rode to town with his feet hanging out of the back of the wagon that had held the coffin.

[Illustration: _His feet hanging out of the back of the wagon that had held the coffin_.]

When the wagon came to the thick of the town, Bud Perkins quietly slid to the ground, and joined a group of afternoon idlers who were playing marbles on the south side of a livery barn. Here and there in the group a boy said: "H'lo, Bud," when the Perkins boy joined the coterie, but many of the youngsters, being unfamiliar with the etiquette of mourning, were silent, and played on at their game. When the opportunity came the Perkins boy put a marble in the ring without saying a word. He went back to "taws," and "lagged for goes," with the others. He spoke only when he was addressed. A black sense of desolation lowered over him, and he could not join in the ejaculations and responses of the game. His luck was bad, and he lost marble after marble. In an hour, when the sun was still in the south, he withdrew

from the game and sat alone against the barn, drawing figures on the earth with a broken piece of hoop-iron. The boy could not fight off the thought of the empty home waiting for him down by the river. He saw, as he sat there, all the furniture, his father's clothes hanging at the foot of the bed, the stove in disorder; and then he realized that in the whole town not one hand was held out to him. He was a child, yet the heartlessness of it all cut him to the quick. This thought overwhelmed him, again and again, each time with more agonizing force, like an increasing wave, and as one flood washed over him with fiercer passion than the others, the boy rose hurriedly, ran around the barn, and flung himself upon a pile of hay. There he gave way to a storm of sobs. One of the group, who had been watching him more closely than the others, soon withdrew from the game, and going in the opposite direction from that taken by Bud Perkins, came tiptoeing around the haystack.

[Illustration: _His luck was bad_.]

[Illustration: _He withdrew from the game and sat alone against the barn_.]

The paroxysm of sobs had ceased, and Bud was lying face downward as if asleep. He heard the step, but pretended not to hear it. He felt some one pressing the hay beside him. He knew who it was, and the two boys lay upon the hay without speaking. The Perkins boy turned his head away from the new-comer; but try as he would, Bud could not keep from sniffing. In a few moments the other boy tried to roll the Perkins boy over. It was a vain attempt. Then the sobbing began anew. But it was a short attack, and, at length, the other boy said: "Bu-ud?" Again he said, "Bu-ud?" There came no response. "O, Bud--I got somethin' to tell you!" The sniffing continued, and the other boy kept on pleading. "Ah, Bud, come on; I got somethin' real good," he said. Silence answered. The teasing went on: "Say, Bud, I won back all your marbles." That was repeated twice. Then a hand went over toward the other boy. He filled it with marbles, and it went back. Another silence was followed by a rustle of hay, and a dirty face turned over, and a voice said through a pathetic, apologetic smile: "This old nicked glassey ain't mine." The two heads nestled together, and four eyes gazed at the blue sky and the white clouds for a long time. It was the Perkins boy who spoke: "Say, Piggy, I bet you'd cry, too, if you was me."

Piggy wormed his arm under the hay around the Perkins boy's neck, as he asked, "What you goin' to do to-night, Bud?"

"I dunno. Why?" replied Bud.

"Well, I'm comin' out to stay all night. They're goin' to have a party at our house, and ma said I could."

Bud drew himself up slowly; then threw himself with a quick spring on top of Piggy, and the two began to wrestle like kittens in the hay.

Even while Piggy Pennington and Bud Perkins were sitting at dusk on the back-porch steps of the Pennington house, eating turkey-wings which Mrs. Pennington had given to them, and devouring ham sandwiches which Piggy had taken from the big platterful in the pantry, looking the hired girl boldly in the face as he did it, even then the preparations for the Pennington entertainment were progressing

indoors. The parlor, the sitting-room, and the dining-room, which had been decorated during the warm afternoon with borrowed palms and with roses from the neighbor's vines, were being ventilated. Windows were rising, and doors opening. The velvety air of May was fluttering everywhere. And there was so much life in it, that when Mrs. Pennington saw the two boys pass out of the alley gate, she saw the Perkins boy grab her son's hat and run away whooping, while Piggy followed, throwing clods at his companion's legs and feet. She thought, as she turned to her turkey-slicing, that the Perkins child was not taking his father's death "very hard." But she did not know that the boyish whoop was the only thing that saved him from sobbing, as he left the home where he saw such a contrast to his own. How could a woman carrying the responsibilities of the social honor of the Methodist church in Willow Creek have time to use her second sight?

[Illustration: _As she turned to her turkey-slicing_.]

The guests at the Pennington house that evening divided the honors equally between the new preacher, for whom the party was made, and Miss Morgan, whose last niece had married and left her but two days before. Most of the guests had met the new preacher; but none of them--save one or two of her intimate friends--could know how the lonely little old woman was faring in the cottage whence one by one her adopted birds had flown. They called her "little Miss Morgan" in the town, and the story of her life of devotion to her brothers' and sisters' children was familiar to every one about her. For ten years she had lived in Willow Creek caring for her brothers' orphans. She came to the community from the East, and found what she brought--culture, friends, and kindness at every turn. The children whom she had cared for had grown up, filed through the town's real estate college, and then mating had left the little spinster alone.

[Illustration: _The new preacher, for whom the party was made_.]

At the Penningtons' that evening she was cheerful enough--so cheerful, indeed, in her little bird-like way, that many of those who talked with her fancied that the resourceful little body was beyond the reach of petty grief. The modest, almost girlish smile beamed through the wrinkles of fifty autumns as brightly that evening at the Penningtons' as the town had ever seen it. From her place in a high-backed chair in the corner, Miss Morgan, in her shy, self-deprecatory way, shed her faint benediction about her as she had done for a decade. There was a sweetness in Miss Morgan's manner that made the old men gallant to her in a boyish way; and the wives, who loved her, were proud of their husbands' chivalry. During the evening at the Penningtons' the conversation found much of its inspiration in the Memorial Day services on the morrow and in anecdotes about the thriftlessness of Calhoun Perkins. Memorial Day was one of the holidays which Miss Morgan kept in her heart. Then she decorated each year a lover's grave--a grave she had never seen. The day had been sacred in her heart to the memory of a spring night, and the moon and the lilacs and the blue uniform of a soldier. Upon other days she waved this memory away with a gay little sigh, and would have none of it. But on Memorial Day she bade the vision come into her heart and bide a while.

But she did not open the door there at the party. They said to one another, going home that night: "Well, I don't see's she minds it a bit. Isn't that pluck for you--not lonesome, not grumpy--just the same little body she was when we first saw her. Well--I know one thing--I

couldn't do it."

As for Miss Morgan, while she was walking home that night, she was thinking of the women of her age whom she had just left; the romance seemed to be gone completely from their lives, their faces seemed a trifle hard to her, and she was wondering if life would have gone so with her if there had been no Shiloh.

The town clock in the schoolhouse was tolling eleven, as Miss Morgan turned the key in the front door. The night was starry and inviting, and as her house stood among the trees, somewhat back from the street, Miss Morgan did not feel afraid to sit in a porch chair, refreshing herself, before going indoors. The wind brought the odor of the lilacs from the bush at the house corner, and the woman sat drinking in the fragrance. She saw a pair of lovers strolling by, who did not observe her. She could hear the murmur of their voices; she did not try to catch their words. She sat silently dreaming and wondering. Again and again her eyes went to the stars in a vain questioning, and her lips moved. Maybe she was asking "where," maybe she was asking "why." As the moments slipped by, the years fell away from her. She had carried her little romance in her heart unsullied by reality. To-night the talk of Memorial Day had brought it all back, and the thrill of other days returned with the odor of the lilacs. She yielded to a vague, crazy notion, and in an impulsive, girlish run she went to the corner of the porch and broke a sprig from the lilac-tree.

Then with a short sigh, that had just the hint of a smile in it, she took the lilac sprig into the house. Perhaps she fancied that no one would see the flowers but she. Maybe the oppressive stillness of the empty house burdened her. Certainly something was heavy upon her, for there was no smile in the sigh that came deeply from her heart, as she locked the door. It must have seemed lonely for Miss Morgan, coming from the crowded parlor, and the questions that her friends asked about her plans may have followed her. Perhaps it was the answer to these questions that kept her awake. She sat by her window and went over and over again the question, what should she do. The wedding that had so recently livened the cottage kept coming to the little old woman's mind, and with it came the bride. When the other children had gone away, Miss Morgan let them go with her blessing, and was glad of their good fortunes. But this last child to go had been Miss Morgan's pet. As the lonely spinster sat there she recalled how the child had been moulded by her; how she had fancied the child's heart was hers, cherishing in it the ideals, the sentiment, the tendernesses that the older heart had held sacred for a lifetime. Miss Morgan recalled how she and the girl had mingled their tears over the first long dress that their hands made, knowing, each of them, that it meant the coming of the parting. As she looked into the awful vistas of the stars, the woman knew that she was one of God's creatures, all alone--without one soul that she might even signal to.

[Illustration: _The first long dress_.]

The word "alone" came to her so strangely that she repeated it in a whisper. Its sound touched some string within her bosom, and she put her head upon the open window sill and wept, sobbing the word "alone" until sleep soothed her.

The morning sunlight helped Miss Morgan to put aside the problems of the night; she hummed an old war tune as she went about her work, but

it did not lift the silence from the house. The rooms that a few days before had been vocal with life, were so dead that the clock ticking in the parlor might be heard in the kitchen. The canary's cheerful song echoed shrilly through the silent place. Miss Morgan said to him, "Dickey, Dickey, for gracious sake, keep still--you'll drive me wild." But her voice only increased the bird's vehemence, and the throbbing in her ears brought on a headache. When she put a paper over the cage, the clock annoyed her. She was irritated by a passing boy whistling "The Girl I Left Behind Me" with all his might, but sadly off the key. She went to the window and saw Bud Perkins.

[Illustration: "_Dickey, Dickey, for gracious sake, keep still_."]

She did not know that the child had just arisen from a cheering breakfast at the Penningtons'--even if she knew how much a hearty breakfast cheers up any boy. But the spectacle of the orphan facing the world so bravely moved Miss Morgan. She felt a sudden wave of pity, and with it came the conviction of guilt--that she had been selfish while the boy was suffering. She had heard at the Penningtons' that the county would probably take charge of him; but she recalled what she had heard in its full meaning to the child only when she saw him turn the corner, going toward the centre of the town. There was a feeling of keen joy in her heart as she realized that she was not useless in the world, and she went about her morning's work with the lightest heart in all Willow Creek beating in her breast.

Bud Perkins had seen but two Memorial Days in Kansas--and upon each of these days he and his father had gone fishing. The boy knew it was a soldiers' holiday, and from Piggy Pennington Bud had found out what were the purposes of the day. He knew that his father had been a soldier--a soldier on the wrong side. But he did not know that graves of Confederate soldiers were not included in the day's sacrament.

"Mornin', Captain," said Bud to a slight, gray-haired old man, stooping over a basket of flowers in a vacant store-room in the main street of the town.

When the man replied kindly the boy took heart to say: "You must be kind o' runnin' things here, I guess."

"I'm in charge of the flowers, Bud, just for to-day," replied Captain Meyers, who did not wish to seem as vain-glorious as he was.

"Goin' to put flowers on all the soldiers' graves--are you?" queried Bud. The elder replied that the Post aimed to do so.

"Did you know my dad was a soldier?" was the boy's next question.

[Illustration: "_Did you know my dad was a soldier_?"]

The captain's heart was pricked when he saw what was in Bud's mind. The captain knew what the next query would be. He was a gentle man and kind. So, looking about to see if any comrades of a sterner sect than he were in hearing before replying, he said: "You mustn't feel bad now, Buddie, but it's only them on the Union side--whose graves we decorate to-day. I wouldn't mind, if I was you." Captain Meyers was not a diplomat, and he said the words poorly.

In an instant the boy's eyes filled with tears. They dried in anger

before they reached his flushed cheek. He clinched his hands, turned, and walked hotly out of the room. In the door he paused, whirled around, and cried,--

"Yank! Yank! Rick-stick-stank!
High ball, low ball, dirty-faced Yank!"

[Illustration: _During the next two hours the boy wandered on the prairie_.]

Then he ran wildly down the street to escape the infuriated mob which he believed would pursue him. The knowledge that he was cut off from the day's festivities made him wince with pain as he ran. Not until he came out upon the road across the prairie did he stop--breathless, worn out, crying. During the next two hours the boy wandered on the prairie and in the woods gathering wild flowers. By the time the exercises in the Willow Creek opera house were finished and the procession was formed, Bud Perkins had a heaping armful of field blossoms. He was coming over the hill to the cemetery when he heard the band strike up the "Dead March" down in the village. His impulse was to run away. He checked himself and walked across the place, past the shafts and monuments, toward his father's grave under the hill furthest from the town. In the middle of the cemetery the boy stopped. His eyes were caught by a marble lamb over a child's grave. The inscription he read was "Mary Pennington, aged two years, three months, and ten days." The date line upon the stone, told of a year that had passed before the Perkins boy was born. He gazed at it a moment, and put there a handful of his choicest flowers. Looking up he saw some early visitor to the silent place stepping from behind a monument. Bud had scattered his flowers before he saw that he was being watched; so he pretended to hunt for stones to throw. He gathered several, and peppered them at shafts and at birds.

[Illustration: "_Mary Pennington, aged two years, three months, and ten days_"]

Bud Perkins walked to the freshly-made mound where his father lay, and scattered his posies over it. The village "cornet band" was coming nearer and nearer to the hill. The boy curbed a temptation to leave. He walked lazily about the grave until the Memorial Day procession had entered the big iron gate a hundred yards away. Calhoun Perkins's grave could not be seen from the plot where the townspeople had gathered. The boy sat down with his back to the crowd. He did not know how near the people were to him. He felt that they were staring down, perhaps laughing, at him. So he tried to assume a careless air. He picked up clods and tossed them at adjacent objects. Tiring of this, he chewed the grass stems, and sucked the nectar from the corolla of wild honeysuckles. But this did not keep the lump out of his throat, and it did not subdue the turmoil of sorrow in his heart at the thought that his father was scorned in the town. Once his small frame shook with a strangled sob, but immediately afterward he threw an unusually big clod at a post near by. He had been hearing voices and footsteps on the brow of the hill for several minutes. Occasionally he picked out a familiar voice, and once he heard Mealy Jones call his name. He did not answer, but a woman standing a little further up the hill asked Mealy, "Who is it, Harold?" "Bud," said the youngster.

"Bud who?" asked the woman's voice.

The Perkins boy heard the dialogue. He was sitting down, throwing clods into the air, and catching them as they fell, and this appeared to be an engrossing task.

"Bud Perkins. He's settin' down by his pa's grave," replied the boy on the hill. The child by the fresh mound pictured himself as the other boy saw him, and his eyes brimmed over with tears. He seemed so desolate.

"Why don't you go to him?" insisted the woman, coming nearer.

"Oh, Miss Morgan," said the boy whom she addressed, lowering his voice, but not lowering it sufficiently, "Miss Morgan, you don't know him."

Just then Bud was startled by a footstep at his side. He looked up and saw Piggy Pennington, who had a big bunch of roses in his hands, and who, seeing the stained face of his friend, said in embarrassed confusion: "Ma sent 'em." Piggy put the roses by the new pine head-board, and lay down--lying across his companion's feet.

"Get off me," said Bud, when he had treated himself to a long, trembling sniff, after a painful silence. "I ain't no sidewalk."

When Piggy went to get his flying hat, he said under his breath to Bud, "Wipe your face, quick; some one's comin'." Then he stood awkwardly at Bud's back and shielded him. Piggy spoke first to the little woman, now only a few paces away.

[Illustration: Piggy went to get his flying hat.]

"H'lo, Miss Morgan; lookin' for old Tom? He's buried off to the right yonder."

"No, my dear. I want to speak to Henry Perkins," replied the woman, beaming the kindest of smiles into the guardsman's face. He stepped from the line between Miss Morgan and the Perkins boy, not sure that the intruder would find a welcome. Bud was glaring steadfastly at the earth, between his hands and knees. Piggy said, "Bu-ud?"

"Whut," was the response.

"Miss Morgan wants to talk with you," replied Piggy.

"What's she want?" inquired the Perkins boy, with his head still between his knees.

Miss Morgan had been coming nearer and nearer to him as the dialogue had progressed. She was standing in front of Bud when he added, "I ain't done nothin'."

Miss Morgan bent down and touched his head with her hands. Piggy was shaking his head warningly at her with much earnestness. He feared that such a feminine proceeding would anger his comrade. When Miss Morgan sat upon the ground beside Bud and took one of his hands, stroking it without the boy's resisting, Piggy Pennington was dumb with wonder. He could not hear the gentle breaking of the agonizing lump in the child's throat. Even little Miss Morgan could not see the tears that had burst over the brims of the orphan's eyes. His face was

averted. She stroked his hand, and snuggled closer to him. Then she heard a faint whimper, and her heart could stand the strain no longer; she leaned upon the child's shoulder, and mourned with him. The Pennington boy did not comprehend it all; but as he looked politely away from his friends, he felt the moisture in his eyes. He wiped it away quickly, glancing to see if his weakness had been detected. The woman recovered in a few moments, and arose with the boy's hand gripping hers warmly. He had felt her tears through his thin clothing, and was conquered.

[Illustration: _She stroked his hand and snuggled closer to him_.]

"Come on, Henry; we're going now," said Miss Morgan, and drew the lad up with her hand.

"Whur to?" asked Bud, who knew the answer instinctively.

"Home," replied the little woman, who knew that the boy knew, and who was sure that he had consented. "Our home--yours and mine."

The boy arose, still holding her hand, and looked toward the grave with the flowers strewn over it. He gripped her hand tightly--so tightly that it pained her--and sobbed, as he faced away from her: "O pop!"

Then they walked on in silence, till they came up with Piggy, who had gone a few steps ahead. It was Bud who spoke first. He said: "You don't live far from Piggy's, do you, Miss Morgan?"

And Piggy Pennington pointed his finger at Bud's dripping eyes and grinned, while Miss Morgan smiled happily at the clouds.

[Illustration: _Miss Morgan smiled happily at the clouds_.]

"WHILE THE EVIL DAYS COME NOT"

THE RHYME OF MIGNONETTE

When dandelions fleck the green,
And plum-blooms scent the evening breeze,
And robin's songs throb through the trees;
And when the year is raw thirteen,
And Spring's a gawky hoyden yet,
The season mirrors in its mien
And in its tom-boy etiquette,
Maid Mignonette, my Mignonette.

When bare-feet lisp along the path,
And boys and jays go whistling by,
And girls and thrushes coyly cry
Their fine joys through the aftermath--
Then laid ghosts know their amulet
Which fickle siren mem'ry hath;
So laughing comes that sad coquette,
Comes Mignonette,--my Mignonette.

The wild rose is a conjurer,
It charms the heavy years away,
Unshoes my feet and bids them stray
O'er playgrounds where our temples were.
To some pale star I owe a debt
For harboring the soul of her
With whom I learned love's alphabet--
With Mignonette, my Mignonette.

"While the Evil Days come not"

We duck through the court, reminded a
bit by our feelings of our first love, who hadn't
the cleanest of faces, or the nicest of manners;
but she takes her station in our memory because
we were boys then, and the golden halo
of youth is upon her.--_George Meredith_.

What little things turn great events! Tragedies swing on such inconsequential hinges. It is so exasperating to look back over the path of a calamity and see how easily it might have been averted! If one man in the little town of Lawrence a generation ago had eaten two pieces of pie-plant pie instead of three for supper, the night of a certain party caucus, he would have attended that caucus and another set of delegates would have gone to the County convention, another would have been sent to the State Convention, another Governor of Kansas would have been nominated and elected, and he would have chosen another United States Senator, who would have voted for, instead of against, the impeachment of a President of the United States, and the history of the civilized world would have been an entirely different affair from the one now in use. Similarly, if Winfield Hancock Pennington, of the town of Boyville, had slipped his shoes off in the second block from his home, instead of slipping them off in the first block, on his way to school, a great shadow that settled over his life might have been lifted. For if he had not been sitting exactly where he sat on the curbing of the street, on that bright, beautiful Monday morning in September, removing his shoes and stockings, he would have found no garter snake to kill; and not having killed the snake, he could not have brought it to school on a stick; and not having brought it to school on a stick, he could not have chased the little girls around the yard with it before the teacher came. And if he had not been doing that, he would not have conceived the chivalrous notion that he might gain the esteem of his Heart's Desire by frightening her with a snake. And if Winfield Hancock Pennington had not made his Heart's Desire angry--without giving her a chance to cool off--she would not have invited Harold Jones to sit and sing with her during the opening hour. But probably all that happened had to happen in the course of things; so speculation is idle. But when it did happen, it seemed to be a hopeless case. Young Mr. Pennington had lived through the day, a week before, when the teacher changed his seat so that he could not see his Heart's Desire smile; but he knew that she was sorry with him, and that helped a little. But when he saw Harold Jones singing from the same book with his Heart's Desire, he tried in vain to catch the fragment of a smile from her. Instead of a smile, he found her threatening to make a face if he persisted. Piggy seemed to

be buried in an avalanche of woe. Then it was that he saw what a small thing had started the avalanche of calamity thundering down upon him, and he smarted with remorse. In his anguish he tried to sing alto, and made a peculiar rasping sound that tore a reproof for him off the teacher's nerves.

[Illustration: _Chased the little girls around the yard with it_.]

[Illustration: _She would not have invited Harold Jones to sit and sing with her during the opening hour_.]

From the hour of the Jones boy's triumph, he and Winfield Hancock Pennington--familiarily known as "Piggy"--became boon companions. A grown-up outsider might have wondered at such a friendship, for Harold Jones was a pale, thin youth, with a squeaky voice. His skimmed-milk eyes popped out over a waste of freckles which blurred his features and literally weighted down a weak, loosely-wired jaw and kept an astonished mouth opened for hours at a time. Piggy, on the other hand, was a sturdy, chunky, blue-eyed boy, who had fought his way up to glory in the school, and who had run and jumped, and tumbled and dived, and bantered himself into the right to be King of Boyville. Chummery between the two boys seemed impossible, yet it was one of the things which every school expects in a certain crisis. When the affair is reversed, the two little girls go about breathing undying hatred for one another. But a boy begins to consume his rival with politeness, to seek him out from all other beings on earth, to study his tastes and cater to his humors. And so, while the comradeship between Piggy Pennington and Mealy Jones was built on ashes, its growth was beautiful to see.

[Illustration: _Harold Jones_]

[Illustration: _To study his tastes_.]

[Illustration: ... _the comradeship ... was beautiful to see_]

In all their hours of close communion neither boy mentioned to the other the name of the little girl in the red shawl and the paint-brush pig-tails whose fitful fancy had brought on all his trouble. In some mysterious way each managed to shower her with picture cards, to compass her about with oranges, to embower her desk with flowers; but it was all done in stealth, and she who was the object of this devotion rewarded it openly and--alas for the vanity of her sex--impartially. All the school watched the battle of the hearts eagerly. The big boys, who usually know as little about the social transactions beneath them as the teacher knows, felt an inkling of the situation. The red-headed Pratt girl became deeply interested in the affair, though she was never invited to a party in the school's aristocracy. She did not even get an invitation to Bud Perkins's surprise party, where every one who had any social standing was expected. Yet she saw all that went on in the school, and once she all but smiled sympathetically at Piggy, when she met him slipping away from his Heart's Desire's desk, in which he had left a flock of Cupids nestling on a perfumed blotter, and a candy sheep. Mealy Jones would have snubbed the Pratt girl if she had caught him thus, but Piggy gave her a wink that made her his partner. After that hour the Pratt girl became his scout. The next day she blundered. That Friday was burned into Piggy Pennington's memory with a glowing brand.

[Illustration: _The red-headed Pratt girl_.]

The trouble occurred in this way: On the Friday following Piggy's black Monday, the King of Boyville, decided to resort to an heroic measure. In his meditative moments Piggy had made up speeches addressed to his Heart's Desire wherein he had proposed reconciliation at any sacrifice save that of honor. Twice during those four days he had stood by his Heart's Desire during recess, while they had looked out at the play-ground. But the words next to his heart had sputtered and bubbled into nothing on his lips. He could only snap chalk at the young gentlemen in the yard below him, in a preoccupied way, and listen to his Heart's Desire rattle on about the whims of her fractions and the caprices of her spelling-lesson. Friday noon, Winfield Hancock Pennington took a header into the Rubicon. In the deserted school-room, just after the other youngsters had gone to dinner or to play, Piggy, with much wiggling of his toes, with much hard breathing, and with many facial contortions, wrote a note. He gave it to the Pratt girl to deliver. When the first bell was ringing that noon, Piggy was piling up the primary urchins in wiggling, squealing piles at "crack the whip." During the fifteen minutes that followed, he was charging up and down the yard, howling like a Comanche, at "pull-away." But run as he would, yell as he would, and wrestle as he would, Piggy could not escape the picture that rose in his mind of a boy wearing his features and using his body, writing the note that he had written. When dismembered words and phrases from that note came to his mind on the play-ground, the quaver of terror that rose in Piggy's whoop was not dissembled. Sometimes fear froze his vitals, then a flush of self-abasement burned him with its flames. And all the time he knew that the Pratt girl had that note. He almost hoped that an earthquake would swallow her with it before she could deliver it. When Piggy came straggling in, hot, sweaty, and puffing, just as the teacher was tapping the tardy-bell, a wave of peace swept over him. His Heart's Desire was not at her desk. He knew that he had still a few moments' reprieve.

[Illustration: _He could only snap chalk in a preoccupied way and listen to his Heart's Desire_.]

[Illustration: _Piggy was piling up the primary urchins in wiggling, squealing piles_.]

They were singing when his Heart's Desire came in. Piggy's head was tilted back to give his voice full volume as he shouted, "All his jewels, precious jewels, His loved and His own." His eyes were half closed in an ecstasy, and he did not turn his face toward the paint-brush pig-tails, nor give any sign that he knew of their owner's presence. Yet when she passed his desk, his voice did not quaver, nor his eyes blink, nor his countenance redden, as his foot darted out for her to trip over. She tripped purposely, thereby accepting affection's tribute, and he was glad.

To elaborate the tale of how the Pratt girl blundered with Piggy Pennington's note would be depressing. For it holds in its barbed meshes a record of one agonizing second in which Piggy saw the folded paper begin to slip and slide down the incline of his Heart's Desire's desk, whereon the Pratt girl had dropped it; saw the two girls grab for it; heard it crash from the seat to the floor with what seemed to him a deafening roar. Nor is this all that the harrowing tale might disclose. It might dilate upon the horror that wrenched Piggy's spine

as he watched the teacher's finger crook a signal for the note to be brought forward. It would be manifestly cruel and clearly unnecessary to describe the forces which impelled the psychic wave of suggestion that inundated the school--even to the youth of the "B" class, with his head under the desk, looking for a pencil--and gave every demon there gleeful knowledge that the teacher had nabbed a note and would probably read it aloud. It is enough to submit the plain, but painful, statement that, when the teacher tapped her pencil for attention, a red ear, a throbbing red ear, flared out from either side of Piggy Pennington's Fourth Reader, while not far away a pair of pig-tails bristled up with rage and humiliation from a desk where a little girl's head lay buried in her arms. Then the teacher unfolded the crackling paper and read this note:--

FRIEND MARY.--Did you mean anything
by letting Him sing with you. I
dont care if you did but I never don
anything to deserve it, but if you didnt
I am very sorry, will tell you bout it at
the partey. Well that is all I can think
of today, from

Yourse Ever,

WIN PENNINGTON.

P.S. If you still meen what you sed
about roses red and viles blue all right
and so do I. W H P.

[Illustration: _He watched the teacher's finger crook a signal for the note to be brought forward_.]

Piggy waded home through blood that night. The boys could not resist calling out "Friend Mary" or "Hello, Roses Red," though each boy knew that his taunt would bring on a fight. Piggy fought boys who were three classes above him. He whipped groups of boys of assorted sizes from the lower grades; but the fighting took him away from his trouble, and in most cases he honored his combatants. He was little the worse for wear when he chased the last swarm of primary urchins into his father's cow lot, fastened them in, and went at them one by one with a shingle. A child living next door to the Penningtons had brought the news of Piggy's disgrace to the neighborhood, and by supper-time Mrs. Pennington knew the worst. While the son and heir of the house was bringing in his wood and doing his chores about the barn, he felt something in the air about the kitchen which warned him that new tortures awaited him.

[Illustration: ... _fought boys who were three classes above him ... whipped groups of boys of assorted sizes_.]

A boy would rather take a dozen whippings at school than have the story of one of them come home; and Piggy thought with inward trembling that he would rather report even a whipping at home than face his mother in the dishonor which covered him. At supper Mrs. Pennington repeated the legend of the note with great solemnity. When her husband showed signs of laughing, she glared at him. Her son ate rapidly in silence. Over his mother's shoulders Piggy saw the hired girl giggle. The only reply that Mrs. Pennington could get to her

questions was, "Aw, that ain't nothin'," or "Aw, gee whiz, ma, you must think that's somethin'." But she proclaimed, in the presence of the father, the son, and the hired girl, that if she ever caught a boy of hers getting "girl-struck" she would "show him," which, being translated, means much that no dignified young gentleman likes to contemplate. But when the son was out of hearing, Mrs. Pennington told her husband, in the repressed tone which she used when expressing her diplomatic communications, that he would have "to take that boy in hand." Whereupon the father leaned back in his chair and laughed, laughed until he grew red in the face, laughed till the pans in the kitchen rattled, laughed--to use the words of his wife in closing the incident--"like a natural born simpleton."

[Illustration: _Her son ate rapidly in silence_.]

[Illustration: _Over his mother's shoulders Piggy saw the hired girl giggle_.]

Alas for Piggy Pennington--he might affect great pride in his amours when the hired girl teased him; he might put on a brave face and even lure himself into the belief that this arch tormentor saw him only as a gay deceiver; but when the lights were out, Piggy covered his head with the bedclothes, and grew hot and cold by turns, till sleep came and bore him away from his humiliation.

All day Saturday, before the Bud Perkins' surprise party, Piggy Pennington and Mealy Jones were inseparable. And Piggy, who was King of Boyville, came down from his throne and walked humbly beside Mealy, the least of all his courtiers. In fact, since the reading of his note Piggy had become needlessly deferential and considerate of the feelings of his rival.

If the two entered a crowd and played "foot and a half" or "slap and a kick" or "leap-frog," and if Mealy was "it"--and poor Mealy was generally "it" in any game--Piggy did not jump viciously on Mealy's wobbly back, nor did he slap hard, nor kick hard, as he would have slapped and kicked on other days, before he descended from his throne to dwell with the beasts of the field on that fatal Friday. Pride kept Mealy on the rack.

Time and again his little, freckled, milky face hit the moist springy ground as Bud or Abe or Jim bumped into him at their play. He was glad when the day ended and he could go home. For Mealy Jones abhorred the dirt that begrimed his face and soiled his white starched collar. He liked to play in lukewarm water, to slosh in the suds, and to rub his soft little hands whiter and whiter in the foam. His cleanliness pleased his mother, and she boasted of it to the mothers of other boys--mothers of boys with high-water marks just above their shirt collars; of boys who had to be yanked back to the roller-towel after washing to have their ears rubbed; of bad, bad, bad boys who washed their feet in the dew of the grass at night and told their mothers that they had washed them in the tub at the pump; of wicked and sinful boys who killed toads and cried noisily when their warts bled in the hot water; in fact, to the mothers of nearly all the boys in Boyville. And thus it came about that Boyville having Mealy Jones set before it as a model child, contracted a cordial hate for him, and rose against him when he presumed to contest with Piggy for his Heart's Desire. Yet all Boyville loved a fight, and all Boyville goaded the King to wrath, teased him, bantered him, and even pretended to doubt his worth.

Therefore, when Piggy Pennington, the King of Boyville, dressed for the party that night in his Sunday clothes and his Sunday shoes and limped down the sidewalk to the Jones's, where the boys and girls were to meet before descending upon Bud Perkins, there was rancor in the royal heart and maternal hair-oil on the royal head. But a strange throb of glad pain in the pit of the royal stomach came at the thought of the two bright eyes that would soon meet his own. The eyes made him forget his blistering shoes, and a smile at the door divested his mind of the serrated collar upon which his head had been pivoting for five distracted minutes. The last thing of all to go was his pride in the hair-oil, but it fell before a voice that said: "Well, you got here, did you?"

[Illustration: _His cleanliness pleased his mother and she boasted of it to the mothers of other boys_.]

That was all. But it was enough to make Piggy Pennington feel the core of a music-box turning inside him, while outside the company saw the King of Boyville transformed into a very red and very sweaty youth holding madly to the back of his cuffs and chuckling deliriously. In a daze he took off his hat, and put a sack of oranges, his part in the evening's refreshment, on a table in the next room. When he regained consciousness, Piggy noticed that Mealy Jones, who had pranced into the room with much unction, was sitting next to his Heart's Desire. The children were making merry chatter. Piggy took his place on the end of a lounge, and turning his back to the guilty pair, gave an "injin" pinch to Jimmy Sears, with orders to "pass it on."

Indeed, so unconcerned was Piggy in the progress of the affair behind him that he began to shove the line of the boys on the lounge; the shoving grew into a scuffle, and the scuffle into a wrestle, which ended on the front porch. At length Piggy stalked through the room where the girls were sitting, saying, when he returned with his oranges and his hat: "Come on, fellers, everybody's here."

The boys on the porch followed Piggy's example, and in a minute or two they stood huddled at the gate calling at the girls in the house to hurry. When the girls were on the porch, the boys struck out, and the two groups, a respectful distance apart, walked through the town. Mealy Jones was enjoying the triumph of his life, walking proudly between the noisy boys and giggling girls, beside--but why linger over the details of this instance of man's duplicity and woman's worse than weakness!

The young blades of the Court of Boyville waited politely at the gate before the house where Bud Perkins lived with Miss Morgan, his foster mother. When the maidens arrived, all the company went trooping up Miss Morgan's steps. After Piggy had chased Bud from the front door into a closet, from which the host fought his way gallantly into the middle of the parlor floor, the essential preliminaries of the evening's entertainment were over. A little later the games began. First, there was "forfeits." Then came "tin-tin." "Clap in and clap out" followed, and finally, after much protestation from the girls, but at the earnest solicitation of Mealy Jones, "post-office" started. Piggy did not urge, nor protest. He had gone through the games listlessly, occasionally breaking into a spasm of gayety that was clearly hollow, and afterwards sinking into profound indifference. For how could a well-conditioned boy be gay with a heartache under his Sunday shirt and the spectacle before his eyes of a freckled human

cock-sparrow darting round and round the bower of his Heart's Desire? Under such circumstances it was clearly impossible for him to see the eyes that sought his in vain across the turmoil of the room. Indeed, a voice pitched a trifle high to carry well spoke for him to hear, but met deaf ears. A little maid in a black-and-red check which the King of Boyville once preferred to royal purple, even made her way across the throng--undesignedly, he thought, but Piggy basked in the joy of her presence and made no sign to show his pleasure. A little later, in the shuffle of the game, Piggy and his Heart's Desire were far apart. Half an hour passed, but still he did not revive. Mealy Jones called her out in "post-office," and Piggy thought he saw her smile. That was too much. When the dining-room door closed behind the black-and-red checked dress, the pitcher that enclosed his woe broke and the wheel at the cistern of his endurance stopped. Mealy Jones came into the room, and the boy who kept the "post-office" called out, "Piggy Pennington." But the slam of the front door was his answer.

[Illustration: _A little maid in a black-and-red check_.]

Piggy sat on the front porch, and reviewed the entire affair. It began when his Heart's Desire had fluttered into his autograph album with a coy:

"When this you see
Remember me."

[Illustration: _Piggy sat on the front porch, and reviewed the entire affair_.]

[Illustration: _It began when his Heart's Desire had fluttered into his autograph album_.]

He followed the corrugated course of true love, step by step up to its climax, where, a week before, she had given him his choice of her new pack of assorted visiting-cards. He rose at the end of five minutes' sombre meditation, holding the curling gelatine card of his choice in his warm hand. After venting a heavy sigh, he checked a motion to throw away the token of his undoing and put it back into his pocket. While he was plotting dark things against the life and happiness of Mealy Jones, Piggy heard the sound of the merriment within, and a mischievous smile spread over his angry countenance. He tiptoed to the window, and peeped in. He saw his Heart's Desire sitting alone. He cheered up a little, not much--but sufficiently to reach in his pocket for his tick-tack.

Now, it may be clearly proved, if necessary, that the tick-tack was invented by the devil. Any wise man's son knows that every boy between the ages of ten and fourteen carries with him at all times a complete outfit of the mechanical devices on which the devil holds the patent and demands a royalty. So there is nothing really strange in the statement that Piggy Pennington took from his Sunday clothes, beneath a pocketful of Rewards of Merit for regular attendance at Sunday-school--all dated before the Christmas-tree--a spool with notched wheels, a lead pencil, and a bit of fishline. The line wound round the spool. Piggy put the pencil through the hole in the spool, and held the notched rims of the spool against the window pane by pressing on the pencil axle. He gave the cord a quick jerk; a rattle, a wail, and a shriek were successively produced by the notches whirring on the glass. The company within doors screamed. Everyone

knew it was Piggy, but no one ever lived with nerves strong enough to withstand the shock of a tick-tack. At the first shock those in-doors decided to ignore the disturbance. But it occurred twice afterwards, and a third tick-tack at a party is a dare. So the boys took it up. As Piggy ran he forgot his hot, heavy shoes; he felt the night wind on his face and in his hair. He cared nothing for his pursuers; he ran for the gladness that came with running. Now he slackened his pace and let the boys catch up with him, and again he spread the mocking distance between them. He turned down an alley, and eluded the pack.

All the youngsters at the party, even the girls, had scampered out of the house to watch the race. When Piggy vaulted the back-yard fence into Miss Morgan's garden, he heard the pursuers half a block away. He saw, a hundred feet distant, a bevy of girls standing on the sidewalk. And he saw, too, as he came skipping down the lot, something that made him fairly skim over the earth; his Heart's Desire, standing alone, near the porch, in his path, under an apple-tree. The exhilaration of the chase had made him forget his trouble. He was so surefooted in the race that he forgot to be abashed for the moment and came bounding down by the apple-tree. He was full of pride. When he stopped he was the King of Boyville and every inch a king. The king--not Piggy--should be blamed. It was all over in a second--almost before he had stopped. He aimed at her cheek, but he got her ear. That was the first that he knew of it. Piggy seemed to return to life then. In his confusion he felt himself shrivelling up to his normal size--shrivelling and frying. In an instant he was gone, and Piggy Pennington ran into the group of girls on the sidewalk and let them catch him and hold him. The breathless youths went into the house telling their adventures in the race between gasps. But Piggy did not dare to look at his Heart's Desire for as much as five minutes--a long, long time. No one had seen him beneath the apple-tree. He was not afraid of the teasing, but he was afraid of a withering look from his Heart's Desire,--a look that he felt with a parching fear in his throat would throw the universe into an eclipse for him. He observed that she got up and changed her seat to be rid of Mealy Jones. At first Piggy thought that was a good sign, but a moment later he reasoned that the avoidance of Mealy was inspired probably by a loathing for all boys. He dared not seek her eyes, but he mingled noisily in the crowd for a while, and then, on a desperate venture, carelessly snapped a peanut shell and hit his Heart's Desire on the chin. He seemed to be looking a thousand miles away in another direction than that which the missile took. He waited nearly a minute--a long, uncertain minute--for a response.

Then the shell came back; it did not hit him--but it might have done so--that was all he could ask. He snapped shells slyly for a quarter of an hour, and was happy. Once he looked--not exactly looked; perhaps peeked is the better word; took just the tiniest lightning peek out of the tail of his eye, and found a smile waiting for him. At supper, if any one save Piggy had tried to take a chair by his Heart's Desire when the plates came around, there would have been a fight. Mealy Jones knew this, and he knew what Piggy did not know, that it would have been a fight of two against one. So Piggy sat bolt upright in his chair beside the black-and-red checked dress, and talked to the room at large; but he spoke no word to the maiden at his side. She noticed that Piggy kept dropping his knife, and the solicitude of her sex prompted her to ask: "Are your hands cold, Winfield?"

And the instinct of his sex to hide a fault with a falsehood made

Piggy nod his head.

Then she answered: "Cold hands, a warm heart!"

At this important bit of repartee, the King of Boyville so forgot his royal dignity that he let an orange-peel drive at Jimmy Sears, and pretended not to hear her. His only reply was to joggle her arm when she reached for the cake. Piggy was so exuberant and in such high spirits that he put his plate on his chair and made Bud Perkins walk turkey fashion three times around the room. He forgot the disgrace which his note had brought to him in the school; he forgot the pretensions of Mealy Jones; he did not wish to forget the episode of the apple-tree, and for the time Piggy Pennington lived in a most peculiar world, made of hazel eyes and red-ribboned pig-tails, all circling around on a background of black-and-red checked flannel.

[Illustration: _At this important bit of repartee_.]

After that nothing mattered very much. It didn't matter that Piggy's bruised feet began to sting like fire. It didn't matter much if Mealy Jones's mother did come for him with a lantern and break up the party. It didn't matter if Jimmy Sears did call out, "Hello, Roses Red," when the boys reached the bed-room where their hats were; for a voice that Piggy knew cried back from the adjoining room, "You think you're cute, don't you, old smarty?" Nothing in the world could matter then, for had not Piggy Pennington five minutes before handed a card to his Heart's Desire which read:

_If I may not C U home
may I not sit on the fence
and C U go by_?

And had not she taken it, and said merrily, "I'm going to keep this"? What could matter after that open avowal?

And so it came to pass in a little while that the courtly company, headed by the King of Boyville, filed gayly down the path. They walked two by two, and they started on a long, uneven way. But the King of Boyville was full of joy--a kind of joy so strange that wise men may not measure it; a joy so rare that even kings are proud of it.

JAMES SEARS: A NAUGHTY PERSON

LITTLE SISTER'S LULLABY

Zhere, zhere, 'ittul b'o', sistuh 'll wock you to s'leep
Hush-a-bye O, darlene, wock-a-bye, b'o',
An' tell you the stowy about the b'ack sheep--
Wock-a-bye, my 'ittul b'over.
A boy onct said "b'ack sheep, you dot any wool?"
"Uh-huhm," said the lambie, "I dot free bags full."
An' where Murry went w'y the lamb's sure to doe,
They's mowe of zis stowy--I dess I don' know;
But hush-a-bye O, darlene, wock-a-bye b'o',
Wock-a-bye, my 'ittul b'over.

O, mama says buddy tomed stwaight down from Dod;
Hush-a-bye O, uh-huhm, wock-a-bye b'o',
At doctuh mans bwunged him, now is n't zhat odd--
Wock-a-bye, my 'ittul b'over.
For papa says, "doctuhs is thieves so zhey be."
An' thieves tain't det up into Heaven you see:
I dess w'en one comes up an' dets sent below,
He's dot to bwing wif him a baby or so;
Hush-a-bye O, uh-huhm, wock-a-bye b'o',
Wock-a-bye, my 'ittul b'over.

But sistuh loves b'o' anyhow if he's dood,
Hush-a-bye O, sweetie, wock-a-bye b'o',
Better 'n tandy er infalid's food--
Wock-a-bye, sistuh's own b'over.
An' some day when buddy drows up to a man,
W'y sistuh an' him 'ull 'ist harness ol' Fan,
An dwive off to Heaven the fuist zhing you know,
An' bwing ever' baby back what wants to doe.
Zhen hush-a-bye O, sweetie, wock-a-bye b'o',
Wock-a-bye, sistuh's own b'over.

James Sears: A Naughty Person

A naughty person ... walketh with a forward mouth.

He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers;... he deviseth mischief continually;...

Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.--_Proverbs_, vi. 12-15.

It was morning--the cool of the morning. The pigeons were gossiping under the barn eaves. In the apple-tree a robin's song thrilled at intervals, and the jays were chattering incessantly in the cherry-trees by the fence. The dew was still on the grass that lay in the parallelogram of shade made by the Sears' dwelling, and in the twilight of grass-land all the elf-people were whispering and tittering and scampering about in surreptitious revel. The breeze of dawn, tired and worn out, was sinking to a fitful doze in the cottonwood foliage near by. In the lattice of the kitchen porch two butterflies were chasing the sun flecks in and out among the branches of the climbing rose. Even the humble burdock weeds and sunflowers lining the path that led to the gate seemed to be exalted by the breath of the morning air, and not out of harmony with the fine, high chord of ecstasy that was stirring the soul of things. And yet in that hour, James Sears, with a green-checked gingham apron tied about his neck, stood near a rain-barrel, bobbing up and down on a churn-handle. His back ached, and his heart was full of bitterness at the scheme of creation. For it was Saturday morning--his by every law, precedent, or tradition known or reported in the Court of Boyville. But instead of inhaling the joys of the new day, James, whose Courtly name was "Jimmie," looked for yellow granules on the dasher, and promised God if He would let him grow up that his little boy should never have to

churn.

[Illustration: _His heart was full of bitterness_.]

Any boy knows that it is a degrading thing to churn, and he further knows that to wear a green-checked gingham apron is odious beyond description; however, if the disgusting thing is tied under a boy's arms, from whence it may be slipped down over the hips and the knees to the ground, by a certain familiar twist of the body, the case is not absolutely hopeless. But Jimmy Sears's apron strings were tied about his neck; so his despair was black and abysmal. Once in a while Jimmy's bosom became too heavily freighted, and he paused to sigh. He cheered himself up on these occasions by slyly licking the churn-dasher; but the good cheer on the dasher was a stimulant that left him more miserable than it found him. Ever and anon from some remote chamber in the house behind him came the faint, gasping cry of a day-old baby. That cry drowned the cooing of the doves, the song of the robin, and the chirping of the dwellers in the grass; to Jimmy the bleat of the little human lamb sounded like the roar of a lion. He could endure penal servitude on his Saturday, with a patience born of something approaching a philosophy; he could wear a checked gingham apron, even as a saint wears an unbecoming halo; but the arrival of the new baby--the fifth addition to the family in the short period of years covered by Jimmy Sears's memory--brought a bitter pill of wrath and dropped it in the youth's brimful cup of woe. As the minutes dragged wearily along, Jimmy Sears reviewed the story of his thralldom. He thought of how, in his short-dress days, he had been put to rocking a cradle; how in his kilted days, there had been ever a baby's calico dress to consider; how, from his earliest fishing-days, there had been always a tot tagging after him, throwing sticks and stones in the water to scare the fish; and how, now in his swimming and cave-dwelling days, there was a swarm of tow-headed Seareses, a crawler, a creeper, a toddler, a stumbler, and a sneaker to run away from.

[Illustration: _Throwing sticks in the water to scare the fish_.]

[Illustration:
_A crawler,
A creeper,
A toddler,
A stumbler,
and
A sneaker_.]

As the churn-dasher grew heavier, the wrath in Jimmy's cup began to sputter, dissolving into that which in his older sister's heart would have been tears; in Jimmy's heart, it took the form of convulsive sniffing. The boy could hear his sister clattering the breakfast dishes in the kitchen. The thing that ground upon his heart was the firm footfall of Mrs. Jones, a neighbor woman, who was overseeing the affairs of the household. Jimmy could not remember hearing that footstep except in times of what seemed to him to be the family's disgrace. He hated Mrs. Jones because she tried to cool his ire by describing the superior points of the particular new baby that had arrived each time she came upon her errands of neighborly mercy. Just as the yellow granules began to appear in the buttermilk pool on the churn-top, Jimmy heard a step on the gravel walk behind him. The step came nearer; when Jimmy lifted his eyes, they glared into the face of

Harold Jones. Choler cooled into surprise, and surprise exploded into a vapid, grinning "Huh!" which was followed by another "Huh!" that gurgled out into a real laugh as Jimmy greeted the visitor. The Jones boy giggled, and Jimmy found his tongue and asked: "Did you ever churn?" When Harold admitted that he, too, was a slave of the churn, the freemasonry of Boyville was established. A moment later Mealy--Harold's title in the Court--was exemplifying the work. When Mrs. Jones came out of the house to take care of the butter, she saw her son and Jimmy lying on the grass. Half an hour later the boys in the barn heard Mrs. Jones's voice calling,--

[Illustration: _Mrs. Jones came out to take care of the butter_.]

"Harold, O Harold, don't you want to come and look at the baby?" Now James Sears in the twenty-four hours of his new sister's life had not let the fact of her existence form expression on his lips. Much less had he lowered his hostile flag to salute her; but he knew instinctively that Harold Jones was the sort of a boy who would unsex himself by looking at a baby. When Mealy answered, "Yes'm," and trotted down the back-yard path to the kitchen, Jimmy Sears scorned him heartily enough to fancy Mealy in the act of holding the loathsome thing in his arms. Further contumely was beyond Jimmy's imagination.

[Illustration: _The sort of boy who would unsex himself by looking at a baby_.]

[Illustration: _James_.]

When Mealy Jones came back, the barn wherein he had left Jimmy was empty; and only when Mealy had started homeward, and a clod came whizzing down the alley, hitting him under the ear, did Mealy know how Jimmy Sears resented an insult. Mealy looked around; no one was in sight.

Right here the reader should know that Jimmy Sears was not alone in his displeasure. There was mutiny in the Sears household. When the baby came, the four elder of the seven Sears children joined Jimmy in informal, silent sedition. They looked upon the newcomer as an intruder. For all who extended sympathy to the pretender, the insurgents developed a wholesome scorn. This scorn fell most heavily upon kind Mrs. Jones. The Sears children regarded her familiar jocularity with undisguised repugnance; and when Jimmy heard Mrs. Jones tell his little sister Annie that morning that she was no longer the baby, Jimmy's rage at what he considered a fiendish thrust at the innocent and forsaken child passed the bounds of endurance. He hurled a bit of that anger in the clod that hit Mealy Jones, then Jimmy walked doggedly back to the house. He coaxed the little sister from the kitchen, took the child's chubby hand and led her to the barn. There Jimmy nursed his sorrow. He assured the youngster as they sat on the hay that he for one would not desert her, "even if mamma had forgotten her." He hugged the wondering tot until her ribs hurt, and in his lamentations referred to the new baby as "that old thing." The evening before, when Mrs. Jones had marshalled the other Sears children and had taken them into the bedroom to see their new sister, Jimmy was not to be found. None of the older children had looked at the baby. They had turned their heads away deliberately, and had responded in guttural affirmatives when they were asked if it were not a pretty baby. But Jimmy had escaped that humiliation, and since then he had avoided all snares set to lure him to his mother's bed-side. He

sat there in the barn, fuming as he recalled what he had heard while Annie was in his mother's room early that morning.

[Illustration: _Jimmy heard Mrs. Jones tell his little sister Annie that morning that she was no longer the baby_.]

"See little sister's hands. Oh, what pretty hands!" Jimmy had reasoned, and probably correctly, that the pause was filled by the child's big-eyed astonishment. Mrs. Jones continued,--

"Weenty teenty little feets! See little sister's toeses. What little bitsey toeses. Baby touch little sister's toeses."

Jimmy had chafed while he listened; but now that the scene came to him after reflection, he saw how inhuman a thing it was to dupe the child into an affection for her inevitable enemy.

"Does baby love little sister?" continued the voice. "Love nice, pretty little sister! Sweet little sister! Zhere! Zhere! Zhat's right; love little sister!" As he toyed with a wisp of hay, Jimmy Sears's blood froze in his veins at the recollection that his own mother had lent her countenance to this baseness. He knew, and he knew that his mother knew, that the baby would take all the care due to his toddling sister. He saw, from the elevation of the hay-cock on which he and the little one sat, that her throat had been cut in a cowardly manner while she smiled. It seemed deliberately cruel. A lump of pity for the child filled his throat. Still, in his heart, he forgave his mother for her part in the duplicity. He did not feel for her the contempt he felt for Henry Sears, his father; for the boy knew that Henry Sears was actually proud of the family's ignominy. Jimmy blushed at the picture in his mind of his father strutting around town, with his vest pockets full of cigars, and his thumbs in the armpits, bragging of the occurrence that filled the boy with shame. Jimmy felt that secretly his mother did not consider the baby's arrival an occasion for vainglory. He felt that his mother was merely putting a good face upon the misfortune. These reflections kept Jimmy quiet for ten minutes.

[Illustration: _His father strutting around town ... bragging of the occurrence that filled the boy with shame_.]

At the end thereof a calamitous fate took him up and made him its toy. Tragedy is the everlasting piling up of little things. So Jimmy Sears could not know that an evil destiny had come to guide his steps when he started townward, for it came so gently. To meet Piggy Pennington and Bud Perkins and Abe Carpenter coming out of the Pennington yard was not such a dreadful thing. Jimmy had met them a score of times before at that particular gate, with no serious consequences. It was not in the least ominous that the four boys started for the Creek of the Willows, for Jimmy had gone to the Creek times without number in that very company. It did not augur evil for Jimmy Sears that the lot fell to him to go forth and forage a chicken, for the great corn feast of the Black Feet, a savage tribe of four warriors, among whom Jimmy was known as the "Bald Eagle." Perhaps there were signs and warnings in all these things; and then, on the other hand, perhaps Jimmy Sears was so intent upon escaping from the shadow that lowered over his family that he did not read the signs, and so rushed into his misfortunes blindly. These, however, are idle speculations; they are the materials from which sages spin their dry and ethereal webs. But this narrative is concerned only with the facts in the case. Therefore

it is necessary to know only that when Jimmy Sears stooped to pick up his nail-pointed arrow, lying beside a stunned pullet, he heard the sharp nasal "sping" of a rock whirring near his head. Chicken and bow and arrow in hand, he began to run, not looking back.

"Here, here, Jimmy Sears, hold on there!" cried a voice. Jimmy knew the voice. It and the chicken belonged to the same person. So Jimmy quickened his speed. He heard the clattering thump of pursuing feet. It was two hundred yards to the end of the cob-strewn cow lot. The boy fixed his course toward the lowest length of fence. Then he kept his eyes upon the ground. He clenched his teeth and skimmed over the earth. The feathers in his hat--stuck there to satisfy the verities of his assumed Indian character--caught the breeze; so, rather than lose his hat, he grabbed it in the hand that held the chicken. He cleared the fence and plunged into the timber. Looking over his shoulder, he saw a man's form on the top of the fence; the thud of boots on the sod and the crash of branches behind him sent terror through the boy's frame, and he turned towards the creek that flowed sluggishly near by. He took great bounding strides, throwing his head from side to side as he ran. The boy knew the path. It led to a rickety fence--a cattle guard--across the river. Jimmy's heart beat wildly, and the trees danced by him on the sloping path. But he was not "the champeen fence-walker of Willow Creek," late of "Pennington & Carpenter's Circus & Menagerie, price ten pins," without having won his proud place by prowess. He came to the water's edge with sure feet. He knew that he could cross. He had crossed the creek there a score of times. He jumped for the slanting boards with his bare feet, and his heart was glad. The boy was sure that no man would dare to follow him, even if the fence would hold a man's weight. He had scurried up the bank before his pursuer had reached the side Jimmy had leaped from so lightly. He scooted through the underbrush. Again and again did the "champeen fence-walker" smile to himself as he slackened his pace to dodge a volley of rocks, and again and again did James Sears--an exemplary youth for the most part, who knew his Ten Commandments by heart--look exultingly at his pullet. He gloried in his iniquity. Lentulus returning to Capua with victorious legions was not so proud. But there the evil spirit swooped low upon him--the spirit of destruction that always follows pride. Jimmy tripped, and lunged forward; the chicken, the hat, the bow and arrow, and the boy all parted company. Then Jimmy felt a pain--a sharp pain that he recognized too well. He feared to make sure of the extent of his injury. Instinctive knowledge told him he had "stumped" his toe. This knowledge also brought the sense of certainty that his day's pleasure was spoiled. He knew that he would go hobbling along, the last brave in the Indian file. The pain in his foot began to throb as he gathered up his weapons. He walked for a few moments without looking at the wound. He felt the oozing blood, and he bent his body and went along, grunting at every step. Finally coming into a flood of sunlight on the path, he sat on a log and slowly lifted up his foot, twisting his face into an agonized knot. He peeked at his toe at first stealthily; then little by little uncovering it with his nursing hand, he gazed fixedly at the wound. The flesh on the end of the toe was hanging loosely by the skin. It was a full minute before the boy could find courage to press the hanging flesh back to its place. In the mean time the chicken, which lay behind him under the log, had regained its senses, squawked hoarsely twice, and walked into the bushes. When Jimmy's mind turned to his prize, the prize was gone. He had been in the depths as he sat on the log. But the loss of the pullet brought with it a still further depression, and Jimmy forgot all about his impersonation of

the "Bald Eagle." He lost his conceit in the red ochre stripes on his face, and the iridescent feathers in his hat, and the blue-black mud on his nimble feet. For a few moments he was just a sad-eyed boy who saw the hand of the whole world raised against him. The cry of the new baby rang in his ears. The thought of the other boys teasing him about the number of babies at his house frenzied him; and as his bills of wrongs grew longer and longer, Jimmy shook his head defiantly at all the world. For a few hollow moments Jimmy tried to find the straying chicken. He went through the empty form of spitting in his hand, saying, before he came down with his index finger,--

[Illustration: _He jumped for the slanting boards with his bare feet, and his heart was glad_.]

[Illustration: _He sat on a log and slowly lifted up his foot, twisting his face into an agonized knot_.]

"Spit, spit, spy,
Tell me whur my chicken is, er I'll hit ye in the eye."

[Illustration: "_Spit, spit, spy, tell me whur my chicken is, er I'll hit ye in the eye_."]

He threw a stick in the direction the chicken might have taken, but he knew that luck--like all the world--was against him, and he had no heart in the rites that on another day might have brought fortune to him. His stubbed toe was hurting him, and the murmur of a ripple in the stream a few rods below the cattle guard called to him enticingly. As soon as the boy deemed it safe to venture out of the thicket, he hobbled down to the water's edge, and sat for a long time in the shade, with the cooling water laving his bruised feet. He knew that the other boys would miss him, but he did not care. He was enjoying the gloom that was settling down upon him. Slowly, and by almost imperceptible degrees, there rose in his consciousness the conviction of guilt. At the end of an hour, the feeling that he was a thief swept over him, covering his sense of personal grievance like a mantle. For another hour he wrestled with a persistent devil that was tempting him to strangle his scruples; he won. Jimmy Sears had seventeen cents in his cast-iron bank at home--the result of a year's careful saving. He crossed the creek and trudged back to town, and fancied that he was walking in a sanctified road; for he was full of the resolve to go straight to the store of the grocer who owned the chicken, and to offer all his available resources in payment for the wrong he had done. Only the heel of his left foot touched the ground, and he progressed slowly. So the afternoon was old when he turned the corner and trudged into Baker's store. The speech he was going to make, Jimmy had recited to himself over and over. He intended to walk up to the counter and say,--

"I want to pay for that chicken I took, Mr. Baker."

To Jimmy that sounded sufficiently humble, and yet it did not seem completely abject. He fancied the grocer would reply,--

"All right, Jimmy; it will be twenty cents."

To which the boy expected to answer, in a clear, strong voice,--

"Well, Mr. Baker, I have seventeen cents at home; you may have that,

and I will bring in the rest as soon as my mushmelons are ripe."

With that agreement reached, Jimmy saw himself limping out of the store. He harbored a hope that maybe the grocer, pitying the poor, lame boy, would call him back, cancel the debt, and perhaps give him a stick of licorice. Jimmy knew his part by heart. He was sure there would be no halt nor break in this dialogue. But the demon that was torturing his destiny that day probably chuckled as Jimmy crossed the threshold of the grocery store.

The boy that the grocer saw when he looked up from the pickle barrel certainly had a badly freckled face; the grocer thought the boy had bold, mean eyes. The youthful jaw set firmly, and the pain in his foot engraved ugly lines in his face. The button was off one wristband. A long tear down the lower part of his trousers' leg revealed a glimpse of brown, tanned skin. He was not a boy that looked like a creature of dreams and of high resolve. No boy that amounts to much ever does look the part, as the actors say. So when Jimmy Sears--ragged and brazen--stood before the wronged chicken owner, rage flooded the man's bosom. He rushed around the counter end, mumbling at the boy. The instinct of fear crowded all the fine speeches out of Jimmy's head. He backed off, and exclaimed, as he saw the grocer grab a butter paddle,--

"Dern you, don't you touch me; I'll pay for your old chicken. Watch out now!"

Two scale weights slipped involuntarily into Jimmy's hands, and he backed from the counter to the sidewalk. His hands were uplifted as if to throw the weights. The grocer had not come up to the boy who shouted in a burst of fear and anger,--

"I'll pay for your chicken, I say. Now you keep away from me!"

[Illustration: "_I'll pay for your chicken, I say. Now you keep away from me_."]

The grocer hesitated, dismayed for a second by the threatening weights in the boy's hand. But pride urged the man on. He stepped up quickly, and planted a smarting blow on Jimmy's leg. It was well for the grocer that he ducked his head; for when the paddle struck, the boy did not flinch, but let drive one weight after another, and cried before each crash of glass that the flying irons made inside the store, "Yes, you will!" and again, "Yes, you will!"

He forgot the ache in his cramped heel and the burning in his bruised toe as he ran to the middle of the street.

"You old coward, why don't you pick on some one your size?"

The tears were rising to his eyes; he had to run to escape from the tide. Just as he turned, he caught a glimpse of his father joining the gathering crowd. After that his feet grew wings.

A freight train stood on the track in front of the boy, a quarter of a mile away. A mad impulse came to him as he ran, and he yielded to it. A boy with a grievance, or a boy with a sore toe, or a boy with fear at his back, cannot fashion his conduct after the beautiful principles laid down in Mr. Herbert Spencer's "Data of Ethics." So when Jimmy

Sears came to the freight train that blocked his flight, he darted down the track until he was out of sight of any possible pursuers in the street. He clambered breathlessly into a coal car, and snuggled down into a corner inside a little strip of shade, and panted like a hunted rabbit. A sickening pain throbbed up from his toe. The train moved slowly at first, and Jimmy knew that he could not hide from the train men in a coal car. On a banter from Piggy Pennington and Bud Perkins Jimmy had ridden on the brake-beam while the switch engine was pulling freight cars about the railroad yards. He had a vague idea that midway of the train, between two box cars, would be a safe place. When the train began to increase its speed, Jimmy climbed up the side of a cattle car and ran along the roof. He had gone three car-lengths and was about to make his third jump, when he saw the angry face of his father, who appeared on the depot platform. Instinctively the boy darted to the other side of the car-roof. His jump fell short. The father saw his son's head go down, and for an awful minute Henry Sears heard the lumbering train rumble by. In the first second of that minute, the frantic man listened for a scream. He heard none. Then slowly he sank upon a baggage truck. He was helpless. A paralysis of horror was upon him. Car after car jolted along. At last the yellow caboose flashed by him. Half of the longest second Henry Sears ever knew passed before he dared turn his eyes toward the place on the track where his son went down. Then he looked, and saw only the cinder track and the shining rails. But an instant later he heard a familiar whoop, and, staring around, saw Jimmy sitting on a load of wheat that was standing between the railroad tracks. In this the boy had fallen after his sidewise jump had thrown him from the moving train. When Henry Sears saw his son, Jimmy was holding his foot, jiggling it vigorously and roaring, moved half by the hysteria of fright and half by the pain of a fresh laceration of his bruised toe. The boy's face was black with coal-dust and wheat chaff, and tears were striping his features grotesquely. The palsy of terror loosened its steel bands from the father's limbs, and he ran to the wheat-wagon. Jimmy Sears, for all he or his father know, may have floated to the ground from the wagon bed. But a moment later, in a frenzy wherein anger furnished only a sub-conscious motor, and joy pumped wildly at the expanding valves of his blissful heart, Henry Sears took his thirteen-year-old son across his knee, and spanked him in a delirium of ecstasy; spanked him merrily, while a heavenly peace glorified his paternal soul; spanked him, caring not how many times the little body wriggled, and the little voice howled, and the dirty little fingers foiled his big, bony hand as it fell. At the end of the felicitous occasion, the father found his voice,--

"Haven't I told you enough, sir, to keep off the cars? Haven't I? Haven't I? Answer me, sir. Do you hear me? Haven't I?"

And Jimmy Sears knew by that turn of the conversation that the episodes of the stolen chicken and of the broken showcases were forgotten, so he nodded a contrite head. His father returned to earth by giving his son a few casual cuffs, with, "Will you try that again, sir?" and continued,--

"Now, sir, let me see you walk right straight home. And just you let me catch you down here again!"

Jimmy was wise enough to hurry along as fast as his bleeding foot would take him. He saw the advantage of a motion to adjourn without further debate, and the motion prevailed.

An hour later, Jimmy Sears had washed the dirt from the interior of an irregular circumference that touched his ears and his chin and his hair. Until the twilight fell he stayed in the conning-tower in the Penningtons' barn, and watched his home through a crack between two boards. When he saw his father leave the house for town after supper, Jimmy hurried down a lane in sight of his father, yet out of his father's reach. At the close of twilight, Jimmy Sears came up the hard-beaten path that led to his home, through burdock weeds and sunflowers. There was a light in the kitchen, and through the window he could see Mrs. Jones moving about. He observed that the supper dishes were being put away. He saw his eldest sister, with the tea towel in her hands, chatting happily with Mrs. Jones. The spectacle filled him with rage. He felt that the other children had deserted him, and that, in the war against the new baby, they had left him to fight unaided. He met a little brother, who greeted him with,--

[Illustration: _An irregular circumference that touched his ears and his chin and his hair_.]

"Uh-hu, Mr. Jimmy, you just wait till pa gets you!"

A prolonged and scornful "Aw!" was Jimmy's reply to this welcome. On the step of the back porch, his favorite little sister sat playing with the house-cat. She toddled to Jimmy; he let her take his finger, and they went into the kitchen.

"Oh, Jimmy!--where--you--been?" demanded the eldest sister. "Mamma's been asking for you all day. I'd be ashamed if I was you."

The boy did not deign to speak to Mrs. Jones, and kept his back to her when he could. He did not answer his sister's question.

"Got anything here fit to eat?" he asked, as he threw open the cupboard doors. The insult to Mrs. Jones was not accidental. Jimmy supposed that she had cooked the supper. He put two or three plates of food on the table, and drew up a chair, sneering bumptiously, "What's this?" as he dived into each dish.

[Illustration: "_Got anything here fit to eat_?"]

His sister's "Why, Jimmy!" and her warning frowns did not change his course. Mrs. Jones went to the front of the house, diplomatically leaving all the doors open behind her, that Mrs. Sears might hear her son's voice. In a moment the boy caught the faint sound of his mother calling from the distant bedroom, "Jimmy, Jimmy, come here; I want you."

The boy pretended not to hear. She called his name again. "Yes 'm," he answered. When she repeated her request, he filled his mouth with pie, and replied, "I'm a-eatin' now." He slipped a piece of ice down the back of his adoring little sister's dress, who sat near him. When she wept noisily, he laughed under his breath, and spoke aloud to his sister at the dish-pan,--

"What'd you want to take Annie's doll away from her for? Give it back, why don't you?"

[Illustration: "_What'd you want to take Annie's doll away from her

for_?"]

"Why--Jimmy--Sears!" retorted the girl. Then lifting her voice, "Mamma, Jimmy's put ice down--" But the lad pressed the ice against the child's back, pretending to be removing the source of the trouble, and the child's lusty howls drowned the girl's protest. When he heard the bedroom door close to shield his mother from the turmoil, Jimmy knew that he had outwitted Mrs. Jones, so he quelled the disturbance he had caused. When Mrs. Jones returned to the kitchen, the boy was sitting on the porch steps with his little sister, telling her about "raw head and bloody bones," greatly to the child's horror and delight.

Jimmy heard his elder sister inquire, "Did Mamma eat her supper?" He heard Mrs. Jones respond, "Not very much of it; but she will after a while, I guess. She said to leave it in there."

"Couldn't she eat any of that nice chicken Mrs. Pennington sent?"

"No, nor Mrs. Carpenter's lemon jelly."

"Poor mamma!" sighed the girl.

But Jimmy had other reflections. Two minutes later he walked past his mother's open door, and fumbled around in the sitting-room.

"Is that you, Jimmy?" asked his mother.

"Yes 'm," rejoined the boy.

"What are you doing?"

"Lookin' for my other coat."

"Won't you come in and see me, Jimmy? I haven't seen you for two whole days."

"In a minute," returned Jimmy.

Standing awkwardly in the doorway, he asked, "What 'd you want?"

"Come over here, Jimmy," returned the mother. "My poor, neglected boy!" He would not let his eyes find the new baby. He stood stiffly on one foot, and gave his mother his hand. She drew him down and kissed his cheek, while he pecked at her lips. As Jimmy rose, his mother smiled.

[Illustration: _She drew him down and kissed his cheek while he pecked at her lips_.]

"Are you hungry, Jimmy?"

The boy nodded a vociferous affirmative. Being a boy, one of the lowest orders of human creatures in point of intuitions, Jimmy could not know that his mother understood the rankle in her son's heart. Nor could he divine that she kept the supper dainties as peace offerings.

"Won't you have some of my supper?"

"Don't you want it?" returned the boy, to justify his greed.

"No, Jimmy; I'm not hungry. I kept it all for you."

While her son was sitting on the floor, eating off the tray on the chair by the bed, his mother's hand was in his hair, stroking it lovingly. His sister and the other children looked in and saw him. Jimmy knew they were whispering "Hoggy!" but he did not heed them. His mother avoided mentioning the new baby to him; she made him tell her about his sore toe, and in return she told him how lonely she had been without him.

As his stomach filled, his heart overflowed,--a common coincidence even with older and better boys than Jimmy, and the tears came to his eyes. At last, when the plate was cleared, he rose, and went to the place where the new-comer lay. He bent over the little puff in the bedclothes, and grinned sheepishly as he lifted the cover from the sleeping baby's face. He looked at the red features a moment curiously, and said in his loud, husky, boyish voice,--

"Hullo there, Miss Sears; how are you this evenin'?"

Then he pinched his mother's arm and walked out of the room, his soul at peace.

[Illustration]

MUCH POMP AND SEVERAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Back of Pennington's barn, which was the royal castle of the Court of Boyville, ran a hollow. In the hollow grew a gnarly box-elder tree. This tree was the courtiers' hunting-lodge. In the crotches of the rugged branches Piggy Pennington, Abe Carpenter, Jimmy Sears, Bud Perkins, and Mealy Jones were wont to rest of a summer afternoon, recounting the morning's adventures in the royal tourney of the marble-ring, planning for the morrow's chase, meditating upon the evil approach of the fall school term, and following such sedentary pursuits as to any member of the court seemed right and proper. One afternoon late in August the tree was alive with its arboreal aristocracy. Abe Carpenter sat on the lowest branch, plaiting a four-strand, square-braided "quirt"; Jimmy Sears was holding the ends. Piggy was casually skinning cats, hanging by his legs, or chinning on an almost horizontal limb, as he took his part in the lagging talk. Hidden by the foliage in the thick of the tree, in a three-pronged seat, Bud Perkins reclined, his features drawn into a painful grimace, as his right hand passed to and fro before his mouth, rhythmically twanging the tongue of a Jew's-harp, upon which he was playing "To My Sweet Sunny South Take Me Home." He breathed heavily and irregularly. His eyes were on the big white clouds in the blue sky, and his heart was filled with the poetry of lonesomeness that sometimes comes to boys in pensive moods. For the days when he had lived with his father, a nomad of the creeks that flowed by half a score of waterways into the Mississippi, were upon the far horizon of his consciousness, and the memory of those days made him as sad as any memory ever can make a healthy, care-free boy. He played "Dixie," partly because it was his

dead father's favorite tune, and partly because, being sprightly, it kept down his melancholy. Later he took out a new mouth-organ, which his foster mother had given to him, and to satisfy his boyish idea of justice played "We shall Meet, but We shall Miss Him," because it was Miss Morgan's favorite. While he played the Jew's-harp his tree friends flung ribald remarks at him. But when Bud began to waver his hand for a tremulo upon the mouth-organ as he played "Marsa's in de Col', Col' Groun'," a peace fell upon the company, and they sat quietly and heard his repertoire,—"Ol' Shadey," "May, Dearest May," "Lilly Dale," "Dey Stole My Chile Away," "Ol' Nicodemus," "Sleeping, I Dream, Love," and "Her Bright Smile." He was a Southern boy--a bird of passage caught in the North--and his music had that sweet, soothing note that cheered the men who fought under the Stars and Bars.

Into this scene rushed Mealy Jones, pell mell, hat in hand, breathless, bringing war's alarms. "Fellers, fellers," screamed Mealy, half a block away, "it's a-comin' here! It's goin' to be here in two weeks. The man's puttin' up the boards now, and you can get a job passin' bills."

An instant later the tree was deserted, and five boys were running as fast as their legs would carry them toward the thick of the town. They stopped at the new pine bill-board, and did not leave the man with the paste bucket until they had seen "Zazell" flying out of the cannon's mouth, the iron-jawed woman performing her marvels, the red-mouthed rhinoceros with the bleeding native impaled upon its horn and the fleeing hunters near by, "the largest elephant in captivity," carrying the ten-thousand dollar beauty, the acrobats whirling through space, James Robinson turning handsprings on his dapple-gray steed, and, last and most ravishing of all, little Willie Sells in pink tights on his three charging Shetland ponies, whose breakneck course in the picture followed one whichever way he turned. When these glories had been pasted upon the wall and had been discussed to the point of cynicism, the Court of Boyville reluctantly adjourned to get in the night wood and dream of a wilderness of monkeys.

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

During the two weeks after the appearance of the glad tidings on the bill-boards, the boys of Willow Creek spent many hours in strange habiliments, making grotesque imitations of the spectacles upon the boards. Piggy Pennington rolled his trousers far above his knees for tights, and galloped his father's fat delivery horse up and down the alley, riding sideways, standing, and backwards, with much vainglory. To simulate the motley of the tight-rope-walking clown, Jimmy Sears wore the calico lining of his clothes outside, when he was in the royal castle beyond his mother's ken. Mealy donned carpet slippers in Pennington's barn, and wore long pink-and-white striped stockings of a suspiciously feminine appearance, fastened to his abbreviated shirt waist with stocking-suspenders, hated of all boys. Abe Carpenter, in a bathing-trunk, did shudder-breeding trapeze tricks, and Bud Perkins, who nightly rubbed himself limber in oil made by hanging a bottle of angle-worms in the sun to fry, wore his red calico base-ball clothes, and went through keg-hoops in a dozen different ways. In the streets of the town the youngsters appeared disguised as ordinary boys. They revelled in the pictured visions of the circus, but were sceptical about the literal fulfilment of some of the promises made on the

bills. Certain things advertised were eliminated from reasonable expectation: for instance, the boys all knew that the giraffe would not be discovered eating off the top of a cocoanut-tree; nor would the monkeys play a brass band; and they knew that they would not see the "Human Fly" walk on the ceiling at the "concert." For no boy has ever saved enough money to buy a ticket to the "concert." Nevertheless, they gloated over the pictures of the herd of giraffes and the monkey-band and the graceful "Human Fly" walking upside down "defying the laws of gravitation;" and they considered no future, however pleasant, after the day and date on the bills. Thus the golden day approached, looming larger and larger upon the horizon as it came. In the interim, how many a druggist bought his own bottles the third and fourth time, how many a junk-dealer paid for his own iron, how many bags of carpet rags went to the ragman, the world will never know.

[Illustration: _Piggy Pennington ... galloped his father's fat delivery horse up and down the alley_.]

[Illustration: _Oil made by hanging a bottle of angle-worms in the sun to fry_.]

[Illustration: _How many bags of carpet rags went to the ragman_.]

Now, among children of a larger growth, in festive times hostile demonstrations cease; animosities are buried; but in Boyville a North-ender is a North-ender, a South-ender is a South-ender, and a meeting of the two is a fight. Boyville knows no times of truce. It asks nor offers quarter. When warring clans come together, be it workday, holiday, or even circus day, there is a clatter of clods, a patter of feet, and retreating hoots of defiance. And because the circus bill-boards were frequented by boys of all kiths and clans, clashes occurred frequently, and Bud Perkins, who was the fighter of the South End, had many a call to arms. Indeed, the approaching circus unloosed the dogs of war rather than nestled the dove of peace. For Bud Perkins, in a moment of pride, issued an ukase which forbade all North End boys to look at a certain bill-board near his home. This ukase and his strict enforcement of it made him the target of North End wrath. Little Miss Morgan, his foster-mother, who had adopted him at the death of his father the summer before the circus bills were posted, could not understand how the lad managed to lose so many buttons, nor how he kept tearing his clothes. She ascribed these things to his antecedents and to his deficient training. She did not know that Bud, whom she called Henry, and whose music on the mouth-organ seemed to come from a shy and gentle soul, was the Terror of the South End. Her guileless mind held no place for the important fact that North End boys generally travelled by her door in pairs for safety. Such is the blindness of women. Cupid probably got his defective vision from his mother's side of the house.

The last half of the last week before circus day seemed a century to Bud and his friends. Friday and Saturday crept by, and Mealy Jones was the only boy at Sunday-school who knew the Golden Text, for an inflammatory rumor that the circus was unloading from the side-track at the depot swept over the boys' side of the Sunday-school room, and consumed all knowledge of the fifth chapter of Acts, the day's lesson. After Sunday-school the boys broke for the circus grounds. There they feasted their gluttonous eyes upon the canvas-covered chariots, and the elephants, and the camels, and the spotted ponies, passing from the cars to the tents. The unfamiliar noises, the sight of the rising

"sea of canvas," the touch of mysterious wagons containing so many wonders, and the intoxicating smell that comes only with much canvas, many animals, and the unpacking of Pandora's box, stuffed the boys' senses until they viewed with utter stoicism the passing dinner hour and the prospect of finding only cold mashed potatoes and the necks and backs of chickens in the cupboards. They even affected indifference to parental scoldings, and lingered about the enchanting spot until the shadows fell eastward and the day was old.

When a boy gets on his good behavior he tempts Providence. And the Providence of boys is frail and prone to yield. So when Bud Perkins, who was burning with a desire to please Miss Morgan the day before the circus, went to church that Sunday night, any one can see that he was provoking Providence in an unusual and cruel manner. Bud did not sit with Miss Morgan, but lounged into the church, and took a back seat. Three North End boys came in and sat on the same bench. Then Jimmy Sears shuffled past the North Enders, and sat beside Bud. After which the inevitable happened. It kept happening. They "passed it on," and passed it back again; first a pinch, then a chug, then a cuff, then a kick under the bench. Heads craned toward the boys occasionally, and there came an awful moment when Bud Perkins found himself looking brazenly into the eyes of the preacher, who had paused to glare at the boys in the midst of his sermon. The faces of the entire congregation seemed to turn upon Bud automatically. A cherub-like expression of conscious innocence and impenetrable unconcern beamed through Bud Perkins's features. The same expression rested upon the countenances of the four other malefactors. At the end of the third second Jimmy Sears put his hand to his mouth and snorted between his fingers. And four young men looked down their noses. In the hush, Brother Baker--a tiptoeing Nemesis--stalked the full length of the church toward the culprits. When he took his seat beside the boys the preacher continued his discourse. Brother Baker's unctuousness angered Bud Perkins. He felt the implication that his conduct was bad, and his sense of guilt spurred his temper. Satan put a pin in Bud's hand. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Satan moved the boy's arm on the back of the pew, around Jimmy Sears. Then an imp pushed Bud's hand as he jabbed the pin into the back of a North Ender. The boy from the North End let out a yowl of pain. Bud was not quick enough. Brother Baker saw the pin; two hundred devout Methodists saw him clamp his fingers on Bud Perkins's ear, and march him down the length of the church and set him beside Miss Morgan. It was a sickening moment. The North End grinned as one boy under its skin, and was exceeding glad. So agonizing was it for Bud that he forgot to imagine what a triumph it was for the North End--and further anguish is impossible for a boy.

[Illustration: _Brother Baker--a tiptoeing Nemesis_.]

Miss Morgan and Bud Perkins left the church with the congregation. Bud dreaded the moment when they would leave the crowd and turn into their side street. When they did turn, Bud was lagging a step or two behind. A boy's troubles are always the fault of the other boy. The North End boy's responsibility in the matter was so clear--to Bud--that, when he went to justify himself to Miss Morgan, he was surprised and hurt at what he considered her feminine blindness to the fact. After she had passed her sentence she asked: "Do you really think you deserve to go, Henry?"

The blow stunned the boy. He saw the visions of two weeks burst like bubbles, and he whimpered: "I dunno." But in his heart he did know

that to deny a boy the joy of seeing Willie Sells on his three Shetland ponies, for nothing in the world but showing a North-ender his place, was a piece of injustice of the kind for which men and nations go to war. At breakfast Bud kept his eyes on his plate. His face wore the resigned look of a martyr. Miss Morgan was studiously gracious. He dropped leaden monosyllables into the cheery flow of her conversation, and after breakfast put in his time at the woodshed.

At eight o'clock that morning the town of Willow Creek was in the thrall of the circus. Country wagons were passing on every side street. Delivery carts were rattling about with unusual alacrity. By half-past nine dressed-up children were flitting along the side streets hurrying their seniors. On the main thoroughfare flags were flying, and the streams of strangers that had been flowing into town were eddying at the street corners. The balloon-vender wormed his way through the buzzing crowd, leaving his wares in a red and blue trail behind him. The bark of the fakir rasped the tightening nerves of the town. Everywhere was hubbub; everywhere was the dusty, heated air of the festival; everywhere were men and women ready for the marvel that had come out of the great world, bringing pomp and circumstance in its gilded train; everywhere in Willow Creek the spirit which put the blue sash about the country girl's waist and the flag in her beau's hat ran riot, save at the home of Miss Morgan. There the bees hummed lazily over the old-fashioned flower garden; there the cantankerous jays jabbered in the cottonwoods; there the muffled noises of the town festival came as from afar; there Miss Morgan puttered about her morning's work, trying vainly to croon a gospel hymn; and there Bud Perkins, prone upon the sitting-room sofa, made parallelograms and squares and diamonds with the dots and lines on the ceiling paper. When the throb of the drum and the blare of the brass had set the heart of the town to dancing, some wave of the ecstasy seeped through the lilac bushes and into the quiet house. The boy on the sofa started up suddenly, checked himself ostentatiously, walked to the bird cage, and began to play with the canary. The wave carried the little spinster to the window. The circus had a homestead in human hearts before John Wesley staked his claim, and even so good a Methodist as Miss Morgan could not be deaf to the scream of the calliope nor the tinkle of cymbals.

[Illustration: _Dressed-up children were flitting along the side streets, hurrying their seniors_.]

[Illustration: _The Balloon-Vender wormed his way through the buzzing crowd, leaving his wares in a red and blue trail behind him_.]

[Illustration: _The Blue Sash about the country girl's waist and the flag in her Beau's hat_.]

To emphasize his desolation, Bud left the room, and sat down by a tree in the yard, with his back to the kitchen door and window. There Miss Morgan saw him playing mumble-peg in a desultory fashion. When the courtiers of Boyville came home from the parade they found him; and because he sat playing a silent, sullen, solitary game, and responded to their banter only with melancholy grunts, they knew that the worst had befallen him. Much confab followed, in which the pronoun "she" and "her" were spoken. Otherwise Miss Morgan was unidentified. For the conversation ran thus, over and over:--

"You ask her."

"Naw, I've done ast 'er."

"'T won't do no good for me to ast 'er. She don't like me."

"I ain't 'fraid to ast 'er."

"Well, then, why don't you?"

"Why don't _you_?"

"Let's all ast 'er."

"S'pose she will, Bud?"

"I dunno."

Then Piggy and Abe and Jimmy and Mealy came trapesing up to Miss Morgan's kitchen door. Bud sat by the tree twirling his knife at his game. Piggy, being the spokesman, stood in the doorway. "Miss Morgan," he said, as he slapped his leg with his hat.

"Well, Winfield?" replied the little woman, divining his mission, and hardening her heart against his purpose.

"Miss Morgan," he repeated, and then coaxed sheepishly, "can't Bud go to the show with us, Miss Morgan?"

"I'm afraid not to-day," smiled back Miss Morgan, as she went about her work. A whisper from the doorstep prompted Piggy to "ask her why;" whereat Piggy echoed: "Why can't he, Miss Morgan?"

"Henry misbehaved in church last night, and we've agreed that he shall stay home from the circus."

Piggy advanced a step or two inside the door, laughing diplomatically: "O--no, Miss Morgan; don't you think he's agreed. He's just dyin' to go."

Miss Morgan smiled, but did not join in Piggy's hilarity--a bad sign. Piggy tried again: "They got six elephants, and one's a trick elephant. You'd die a-laughin' if you saw him." And Piggy went into a spasm of laughter.

[Illustration: "_One's a trick elephant. You'd die a-laughing if you saw him_."]

But it left Miss Morgan high and dry upon the island of her determination.

Piggy prepared for an heroic measure, and stepped over to the kitchen table, leaning upon it as he pleaded: "This is the last circus this year, Miss Morgan, and it's an awful good one. Can't he go just this once?"

[Illustration: "_It's an awful good one. Can't he go just this once_?"]

The debate lasted ten minutes, and at the end four boys walked slowly,

with much manifestation of feeling, back to the tree where the fifth sat. There was woe and lamentation after the manner of boy-kind. When the boys left the yard it seemed to Miss Morgan that she could not look from her work without seeing the lonesome figure of Bud. In the afternoon the patter of feet by her house grew slower, and then ceased. Occasionally a belated wayfarer sped by. The music of the circus band outside of the tent came to Miss Morgan's ears on gusts of wind, and died away as the wind ebbed. She dropped the dish-cloth three times in five minutes, and washed her cup and saucer twice. She struggled bravely in the Slough of Despond for awhile, and then turned back with Pliable.

"Henry," she said, as the boy walked past her carrying peppergrass to the bird, "Henry, what made you act so last night?"

The boy dropped his head and answered: "I dunno."

"But, Henry, didn't you know it was wrong?"

"I dunno."

"Why did you stick that little boy with the pin?"

"Well--well--" he gasped, preparing for a defence. "Well--he pinched me first."

"Yes, Henry, but don't you know that it's wrong to do those things in church? Don't you see how bad it was?"

"I was just a-playin', Miss Morgan; I didn't mean to."

Bud did not dare to trust his instinctive reading of the signs. He went on impulsively: "I wanted him to quit, but he just kept right on, and Brother Baker didn't touch him."

The wind brought the staccato music of the circus band to the foster-mother's ears. The music completed her moral decay, for she was thinking, if Brother Baker would only look after his own children as carefully as he looked after those of other people, the world would be better. Then she said: "Now, Henry, if I let you go, just this once--now just this once, mind you--will you promise never to do anything like that again?"

Blackness dropped from the boy's spirit, and by main strength he strangled a desire to yell. The desire revived when he reached the alley, and he ran whooping to the circus grounds.

There is a law of crystallization among boys which enables molecules of the same gang to meet in whatever agglomeration they may be thrown. So ten minutes after Bud Perkins left home he found Piggy and Jimmy and old Abe and Mealy in the menagerie tent. Whereupon the South End was able to present a bristling front to the North End--a front which even the pleatings of the lute in the circus band could not break. But the boys knew that the band playing in the circus tent meant that the performance in the ring was about to begin. So they cut short an interesting dialogue with a keeper, concerning the elephant that remembered the man who gave her tobacco ten years ago, and tried to kill him the week before the show came to Willow Creek. But when the pageant in the ring unfolded its tinselled splendor in the Grand

Entry, Bud Perkins left earth and walked upon clouds of glory. His high-strung nerves quivered with delight as the ring disclosed its treasures--Willie Sells on his spotted ponies, James Robinson on his dapple gray, the "8 funny clowns--count them 8," the Japanese jugglers and tumblers, the bespangled women on the rings, the dancing ponies, and the performing dogs. The climax of his joy came when Zazell, "the queen of the air," was shot from her cannon to the trapeze. Bud had decided, days before the circus, that this feature would please him most. Zazell's performance was somewhat tame, but immediately thereafter a really startling thing happened. A clown holding the trick mule called to the boys near Bud, who nudged him into the clown's attention. The clown, drawing from the wide pantaloons a dollar, pantomimed to Bud. He held it up for the boy and all the spectators to see. Alternately he pointed to the trick mule and to the coin, coaxing and questioning by signs, as he did so. It took perhaps a minute for Bud's embarrassment to wear off. Then two motives impelled him to act. He didn't propose to let the North-enders see his embarrassment, and he saw that he might earn the dollar for Miss Morgan's missionary box, thus mitigating the disgrace he had brought upon her in church. This inspiration literally flashed over Bud, and before he knew it, he was standing in the ring, with his head cocked upon one side to indicate his utter indifference to everything in the world. Of course it was a stupendous pretence. For under his pretty starched shirt, which Miss Morgan had forced on him in the hurry of departure, his heart was beating like a little windmill in a gale. As Bud bestrode the donkey the cheers of the throng rose, but above the tumult he could hear the North End jeering him. He could hear the words the North-enders spoke, even their "ho-o-oho-os," and their "nyayh-nyayh-nyayahs," and their "look--at--old--pretty--boy's," and their "watch-him-hit-the-roof's," and their "get-a-basket's," and similar remarks less desirable for publication. As the donkey cantered off, Bud felt sure he could keep his seat. Once the animal bucked. Bud did not fall. The donkey ran, and stopped quickly. Bud held on. Then the donkey's feet twinkled--it seemed to Bud in the very top of the tent--and Bud slid off the animal's neck to the ring. The clown brought the boy his hat, and stood over him as he rose. Bud laughed stupidly into the chalked face of the clown, who handed Bud a dollar, remarking in a low voice, "Well, son, you're a daisy. They generally drop the first kick."

[Illustration]

[Illustration: "_Well, son, you're a daisy. They generally drop the first kick_."]

What passed in the ring as Bud left it, bedraggled and dusty, did not interest him. He brushed himself as he went. The band was playing madly, and the young woman in the stiff skirts was standing by her horse ready to mount. The crowd did not stop laughing; Bud inclined his head to dust his knickerbockers, and then in a tragic instant he saw what was convulsing the multitude with laughter. The outer seam of the right leg of his velveteen breeches was gone, and a brown leg was winking in and out from the flapping garment as he walked. Wildly he gathered the parted garment, and it seemed to him that he never would cover the ground between the ring and the benches. In the course of several aeons--which the other boys measured by fleeting minutes--the wave of shame that covered Bud subsided. Pins bound up the wounds in his clothes. He drew a natural breath, and was able to join the mob which howled down the man who announced the concert.

After that the inexorable minutes flew by until the performance ended. In the menagerie tent Bud and his friends looked thirstily upon the cool, pink "schooners" of lemonade, and finally, when they had spent a few blissful moments with the monkeys and had enjoyed a last, long, lingering look at the elephants, they dragged themselves unwillingly away into the commonplace of sunshine and trees and blue sky. Only the romantic touch of the side-show banners and the wonder of the gilded wagons assured them that their memories of the passing hour were not empty dreams.

The boys were standing enraptured before the picture of the fat woman upon the swaying canvas. Bud had drifted away from them to glut his eyes upon the picture of the snakes writhing around the charmer. The North-enders had been following Bud at a respectful distance, waiting for the opportunity which his separation from his clan gave to them. They were enforced by a country boy of great reputed prowess in battle. Bud did not know his danger until they pounced upon him. In an instant the fight was raging. Over the guy ropes it went, under the ticket wagon, into the thick of the lemonade stands. And when Piggy and Abe and Jimmy had joined it, they trailed the track of the storm by torn hats, bruised, battle-scarred boys, and the wreckage incident to an enlivening occasion. When his comrades found Bud, the argument had narrowed down to Bud and the boy from the country, the other wranglers having dropped out for heavy repairs. The fight, which had been started to avenge ancient wrongs, particularly the wrongs of the bill-board, only added new wrongs to the list. The country boy was striking wildly, and trying to clinch his antagonist, when the town marshal--the bogie-man of all boys--stopped the fight. But of course no town marshal can come into the thick of a discussion in Boyville and know much of the merits of the question. So when the marshal of Willow Creek saw Bud Perkins putting the finishing touches of a good trouncing on a strange boy, and also saw Bill Pennington's boy, and Henry Sears's boy, and Mrs. Carpenter's boy, and old man Jones's boy dancing around in high glee at the performance, he quietly gathered in the boys he knew, and let the stranger go.

[Illustration: _The other 'wranglers ... dropped out for heavy repair_.]

Now no boy likes to be marched down the main street of his town with the callous finger of the marshal under his shirt-band. The spectacle operates distinctly against the peace and dignity of Boyville for months thereafter. For passing youths who forget there is a morrow jibe at the culprits and thus plant the seeds of dissensions which bloom in fights. It was a sweaty, red-faced crew that the marshal dumped into Pennington's grocery with, "Here, Bill, I found your boy and these young demons fightin' down 't the circus ground, and I took 'em in charge. You 'tend to 'em, will you?"

Mr. Pennington's glance at his son showed that Piggy was unharmed. A swift survey of the others gave each, save Bud, a bill of health. But when Mr. Pennington's eyes fell on Bud, he leaned on a show-case and laughed till he shook all over; for Bud, with a rimless hat upon a towelled head, with a face scratched till it looked like a railroad map, with a torn shirt that exposed a dirty shoulder and a freckled back, with trousers so badly shattered that two hands could hardly hold them together,--as Mr. Pennington expressed it, Bud looked like a second-hand boy. The simile pleased Pennington so that he renewed his

laughter, and paid no heed to the chatter of the pack clamoring to tell all in one breath, the history of the incident that had led to Bud's dilapidation. Also they were drawing gloomy pictures of the appearance of his assailants, after the custom of boys in such cases. Because his son was not involved in the calamity, Piggy's father was not moved deeply by the story of the raid of the North-enders and their downfall. So he put the young gentlemen of the Court of Boyville into the back room of his grocery store, where coal-oil and molasses barrels and hams and bacon and black shadows of many mysterious things were gathered. He gave the royal party a cheese knife and a watermelon, and bade them be merry, a bidding which set the hearts of Piggy and Abe and Jimmy and Mealy to dancing, while Bud's heart, which had been sinking lower and lower into a quagmire of dread, beat on numbly and did not join the joy. As the time for going home approached, Bud shivered in his soul at the thought of meeting Miss Morgan. Not even the watermelon revived him, and when a watermelon will not help a boy his extremity is dire. Still he laughed and chatted with apparent merriment, but he knew how hollow was his laughter and what mockery was in his cheer. When the melon was eaten business took its regular order.

[Illustration: _When Mr. Pennington's eyes fell on Bud, he leaned on a show-case and laughed till he shook all over_.]

"Say, Bud, how you goin' to get home?" asked Abe.

Bud grinned as he looked at his rags.

"Gee," said Mealy, "I'm glad it ain't me."

"Aw, shucks," returned Bud, and he thought of the stricken Ananias in the Sunday-school lesson leaf as he spoke; "run right through like I always do. What I got to be 'fraid of?"

"Yes, Mr. Bud, you can laugh, but you know you'll catch it when you get home."

This shaft from Jimmy Sears put in words the terror in Bud's heart. But he replied: "I'll bet you I don't."

Bud's instinct piloted him by a circuitous route up the alley to the kitchen door. Miss Morgan sat on the front porch, waiting for the boy to return before serving supper. He stood helplessly in the kitchen for a minute, with a weight of indecision upon him. He feared to go to the front porch, where Miss Morgan was. He feared to stay in the kitchen. But when he saw the empty wood-box a light seemed to dawn. Instinct guided him to the woodpile, and the law of self-preservation filled his arms with wood, and instinct carried him to the kitchen wood-box time and again, and laid the wood in the box as gently as if it had been glass and as softly as if it had been velvet. Not until the pile had grown far above the wainscoting on the kitchen wall, did a stick crashing to the floor tell Miss Morgan that Bud was in the house.

But there is a destiny that shapes our ends, and just as the falling wood attracted Miss Morgan's attention, it was diverted by a belligerent party at her front gate. This belligerent party was composed of two persons, to wit: one mother from the north end of Willow Creek, irate to the spluttering point, and one boy lagging as

far behind the mother as his short arm would allow him to lag. The mother held the short arm, and was literally dragging her son to Miss Morgan's gate to offer him in evidence as "Exhibit A" in a possible cause of the State of Kansas vs. Henry Perkins. Exhibit A was black and blue as to the eyes, torn as to the shirt, bloody as to the nose, tumbled and dusty as to the hair, and as to the countenance, clearly and unquestionably sheep-faced. The mother opened the bombardment with: "Miss Morgan, I just want you to look at my boy."

[Illustration: "_Miss Morgan, I just want you to look at my boy_."]

Miss Morgan looked in horror, and exclaimed: "Well, for mercy sakes! Where on earth's he been?"

And the leader of the war party returned: "Where's he been? Well, I'll tell you where he's been. And I just want you to know who done this." Here Exhibit A got behind a post. The recital of the details of his catastrophe was humiliating. But the mother continued: "Henry Perkins done this. I don't believe in stirring up neighborhood quarrels and all that, but I've just stood this long enough. My boy can't stick his nose out of the door without that Perkins boy jumpin' on him. If you can't do anything with that Perkins boy, I'll show him there's a law in this land."

Miss Morgan wilted as the speech proceeded. She had voice only to say, "I'm sure there's some mistake;" and then remembering the crash of the wood on the kitchen floor, she called: "Henry, come here!"

As Bud shambled through the house, the spokesman of the belligerents replied: "No, there isn't no mistake either. My boy is a good little boy, and just as peaceable a boy as there is in this town. And because I don't allow him to fight, that Perkins boy picks on him all the time. I've told him to keep out of his way and not to play with Henry Perkins, but he can't be runnin' all over this town to keep--"

And then Exhibit B, with scratched face, tattered raiment, and grimy features, stood in the doorway. The witness for the State looked in dumb amazement at the wreck. Miss Morgan saw Bud, and her temper rose--not at him, but at his adversary. Exhibit A sulkily turned his face from Exhibit B, and Exhibit B seemed to be oblivious of the presence of Exhibit A; for the boys it was a scene too shameful for mutual recognition. Miss Morgan broke the heavy silence with: "Henry, where on earth have you been?"

"Been t' the circus," replied the boy.

"Henry, did you blacken that little boy's eyes, and tear his clothes that way?" inquired Miss Morgan when her wits returned.

"Why--no'm--I didn't. But he was one of four fellers that picked on me comin' home from the circus, and tried to lick me."

"Willie," demanded the head of the attacking posse, "did you pick a fight with that Perkins boy?"

"Oh, no 'm, no 'm! I was just playin' round the tent, me and another boy, and Bud he come up and jumped on us." And then to add verisimilitude to his narrative, he appended: "Him and four other boys."

"Henry," asked Miss Morgan, as she surveyed the debris of Henry's Sunday clothes, and her womanly wrath for the destroyer of them began to boil, "Henry, now tell me honestly, is this little boy telling the truth? Now, don't you story to me, Henry."

"Honest injun, Miss Morgan, I cross my heart and hope to drop dead this minute if I ain't tellin' you the way it was. Him and them North-enders, why they come along and called me names, and he tried to hit me, and I just shoved him away like this," and Henry executed a polite pantomime. "And I was swingin' my arms out to keep 'em all from hittin' me, and he got in the way, and I couldn't help it. And they was all a pickin' on me, and I told 'em all the time I didn't want to fight."

But Exhibit A kept looking at his mother and shaking his head in violent contradiction of Bud, as the story was told.

Miss Morgan asked: "Who scratched your face so, Henry?"

"Him; he's all the time fightin' me."

"No, ma, I didn't. You know I didn't."

Exhibit A and Exhibit B were still back to back. Then Exhibit B responded: "Miss Morgan, you ast him if he didn't cuss and damn me, and say he was goin' to pound me to death if I ever come north of Sixth."

To which the leader of the raiders returned in great scorn: "The very idea! Just listen at that! Why, Miss Morgan, that Perkins boy is the bully of this town. Come on, Willie, your pa will see if there is no law to protect you from such boys as him." Whereupon the war party faced about, and walked down the sidewalk and away.

Miss Morgan and Bud watched the North End woman and her son depart. Miss Morgan turned to Bud, and spoke spiritedly: "Now, Henry, don't ever have anything to do with that kind of trash again. Now, you won't forget, will you, Henry?"

[Illustration: "_Now, Henry, don't ever have anything to do with that kind of trash again_."]

Bud examined his toes carefully, and replied, "No 'm."

In the threshold she put her hand on the boy's shoulder, and continued: "Now, don't you mind about it, Henry. They sha'n't touch you. You come and wash, and we'll have supper."

When a boy has a woman for a champion, if he is wise, he trusts her to any length. So Bud went to the kitchen, picked up the water-bucket, and went to the well, partly to keep from displaying a gathering wave of affection for his foster-mother, and partly to let the magnificence of the wood-box burst upon her in his absence. When he returned, he found Miss Morgan pointing toward the wood-box and beaming upon him. Bud grinned, and fished in his pocket for the coin.

[Illustration: "_Here's a dollar I got for ridin' the trick mule.... I thought it would be nice for the missionary society_."]

"Here's a dollar I got for ridin' the trick mule," he faltered. "I thought it would be nice for the missionary society." That he might check any weak feminine emotions, he turned his attention to the supper-table, and blurted: "Gee, we're goin' to have pie, ain't we? I tell you, I'm mighty pie hungry."

[Illustration: "_Gee, we're going to have pie, ain't we_."]

The glow of Miss Morgan's melted heart shone upon her face. Through a seraphic smile she spoke: "It's apple pie, too, Henry--your kind." As she put the supper upon the table, she asked: "Did you have a good time at the circus, Henry?"

The boy nodded vehemently, and said: "You bet!" and then went on, after a pause, "I guess I tore my pants a little gettin' off of that mule; but I thought you'd like the dollar."

It was the finest speech he could make. "I guess I can mend them, Henry," she answered; and then she asked, with her face in the cupboard, "Sha'n't we try some of the new strawberry preserves, Henry?"

As she was opening the jar she concluded that Henry Perkins was an angel--a conclusion which, in view of the well-known facts, was manifestly absurd.

[Illustration]

"THE HERB CALLED HEARTS-EASE"

Did you hear him? I dare say that boy lives a merrier life and wears more of the herb called hearts-ease in his bosom than he that is clad in silk and velvet.--_From the Observations of "Mr. Great Heart_"

It was dusk in Boyville. The boys at a game of hide-and-seek filled the air with their calls:

"Bushel of wheat, and a
Bushel of rye--
All t' ain't ready
Holler aye.
All in ten feet of my base is caught: All eyes open."

Or

"One--two--three for me."

Or

"All's out's in free."

Among the trees they scampered; into hay-stacks they wormed; over barrels and boxes they wiggled; they huddled under the sunflowers and the horse-weeds. It was a royal game, but as the moon rose it merged

into pull-away. That game flourished for a while and transformed itself by an almost imperceptible evolution into a series of races down the dusty road. But when the moon's silver had marked itself upon the grass, the boys were lying prone on a hay-cock behind the royal castle. They chattered idly, and the murmur of their talk rose on the just-felt breeze that greets the rising moon, like the ripple of waters. But the chatter was only a seeming. For in truth the boys were absorbing the glory of the moonlight. And the undertones of their being were sounding in unison with the gentle music of the hour. Their souls--fresher from God than are the souls of men--were a-quiver with joy, and their lips babbled to hide their ecstasies. In Boyville it is a shameful thing to flaunt the secrets of the heart. As the night deepened, and the shy stars peeped at the bold moon, the boys let their prattle ebb into silence. Long they lay looking upward--with the impulse in their souls that prompted the eternal question that Adam left unanswered, that David cried in passion across his harp, that the wise men of the world have left locked in mystery--the question of the Whence, the Why, and the Whither.

As the moon climbed high into the arc of the Heavens, the company upon the hay-cock dispersed, one by one, till a solitary boy remained.

After he had gazed at the moon awhile a thrill of sheer madness set him to tumbling, head over heels, upon the fresh hay. Life was full of gladness for him, and his throat cramped with a delicious longing for he knew not what. He wondered vaguely if it were not something new and unimaginably good to eat. It was the nearest he could come to a defining of the longing. Of course no one can define it. It is that which quickens the blood of all young creatures--the rosebud, the meadow-lark, the dragon-fly, the colt, the boy and the maiden, bidding them glorify God with the show and the example of their comeliness. The boy rose from the hay and skipped under the trees, over the fantastic figures of the moon-spun carpet. He waved his arms, and there came to his throat a simple song, which he chanted croakingly, lest some one should hear him and laugh. He stopped, and sitting on a fence looked at a great white cloud that was mounting the western sky. His soul was listening to the faraway music from the breakers of the restless rising sea of ambition, and the rush of life and action, that were flooding into the distant rim of his consciousness. The music charmed him. Tears came to his eyes, he knew not why. But we, whom this mighty tide has carried away from that bourne whereon the boy's feet strayed so happily--we know why the far-seeing angels gave him tears.

A dog in some distant farm-yard was baying at the moon. A whining screech owl sent a faint shudder of superstitious fear over the boy. For a long time he sat on the fence absorbing the night sounds--the claque of the frogs, the burring of the crickets, the hum of the water on the mill-dam far down the valley, and the occasional call of some human voice, ringing like a golden bell in the hush of the night. It was after nine and the boy was deep in his trackless reverie. A woman called,--

"Win-nee, Win-nee, oh, Winnie."

The spell upon him was almost too delicious to break; but he roused himself to reply,--

"Yessum. All right."

Then the mother's voice continued: "Now wash your feet, Winnie, and wipe 'em dry; don't come to bed with dirty feet."

Slowly the boy climbed to the earth. He shuffled through dew, but his feet were still too dirty. He stood in the tub of water by the pump, rubbing one foot with the other, and his eyes turned moonward. The thrall of the night caught him again. In a hazy stupor he sat on the kitchen step drying his feet. When he got up, Piggy Pennington gazed for a moment at a star--a pale star which hovered timidly over the chimney of the home which sheltered his Heart's Desire. With the lunacy upon him, he flung to the star a bashful kiss. Then he grinned foolishly and came to himself with a grunt, as he ran up stairs to his room. He was ashamed to face the south breeze that fanned his bed.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COURT OF BOYVILLE

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