

Frank wept with him; but his heart was full, and could not utter a word. He could only point with his finger to the twenty-ninth verse of the first chapter of St. John—'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world'—and pray in his childlike faith, that God would open the heart of Rushton to understand it, and to be comforted. He knew that nothing was impossible with God.

Both the boys were sorry when the bell rang, and Frank was obliged to go.

'You will come again soon?' said Rushton, eagerly.

'Yes, very soon.' And Frank went away with that happy feeling which can only arise from the consciousness of a duty performed at some little self-sacrifice.

But we must not forget in these seasons of exultation, that even when we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants, and have only done that which it was our duty to do. Luke xii, 10.

'I suppose you have given up all thought of a prize,' said Philip Doyle, somewhat impatiently, as he entered.

'Yes,' answered Frank, smiling; 'I have given it up.'

'It appears so indeed. But you are not serious?'

'I am quiet serious; so do not let us say any more about it.'

'I should not have expected it from you of all others,' said Doyle, evidently vexed.

'Leave him alone,' exclaimed Claude Hamilton, laying his hand kindly upon Frank's shoulder. 'None of us will like him the less for not gaining the prize; and I for one,' added he, in a low voice 'shall love him all the more.'

Frank looked up with the tears in his eyes. He felt that Hamilton both understood and approved of his motive, and was grateful for his sympathy and encouragement. And so, day by day, a friendship grew between them which was only to terminate with their lives.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Rushton was brought down stairs for the first time the day that the prizes were distributed, and the school broke up. He still moved with pain and difficulty; and one of the boys overheard the surgeon tell Mr. Campbell, that he was afraid Rushton would feel it as long as he lived.

Philip Doyle again carried off the first prize; and he was not a little proud of his success.

Howard also gained a prize, much to his own astonishment; he could not believe it possible, and actually wept for joy. Most of the boys rejoiced with him, especially Frank and Rushton.

'Who would have thought it?' exclaimed the delighted Howard, as he danced about with his treasure. 'What will my aunt and cousins say? They will never believe it. I can scarcely believe it myself.'

'I always told you,' said Frank, 'that all you wanted was a little more perseverance.'

'If it had not been for you, Frank,' replied Howard, gratefully, 'I should never have gained a prize, or done anything else that was right.'

'O Howard! you must not say that.'

'You know what I mean,' said Howard.

'You led me to the talisman.'

Philip Doyle now approaching to congratulate Howard, and shake hands with Rushton on his once more coming among them.

'Do you not feel very happy?' whispered Howard, pointing to the splendid-looking volumes which Doyle held in his hand.

'Yes, but for one thing—I am disappointed that Frank Netherton has not a prize also.'

'Never think of me,' said Frank; 'I am happier without one.'

'Happier?'

'Well, just as happy. Pray do not think of me.'

Even Mr. Campbell appeared surprised that Frank had given up contending for the prize, but he said nothing on the subject. His school-fellows thought less highly of his talents than they had hitherto done; but a few, among whom was Claude Hamilton and Donaldson, loved him all the better for his kindness. Rushton seemed to have no idea of the sacrifice that had been made on his account. Notwithstanding which, he was very grateful to Frank; and parted from him, when the carriage came to convey him home, with many thanks for all that he had done: but Frank noticed that he appeared to be agitated and undecided, as if he would fain have said something more, but wanted courage.

'Poor Rushton!' exclaimed Howard, as he stood by the window and saw the servants lift him into the carriage, and place him carefully upon the cushions prepared for him.

'How altered he is!' said Herbert. 'I do not mean in appearance only; but have you not observed how gentle and good-natured he has been of late?'

'Yes,' answered Howard. 'He never laughs at me now; or at any one else.'

'God's ways are not our ways,' said Claude

Hamilton. 'He doeth all things well: and what seems at first to be painful and hard to bear, turns out, not unfrequently, a blessing in disguise. But here is Rushton come back again. How white he looks! What can have happened?'

'May I speak to you a moment, sir,' said Rushton, as Mr. Campbell went himself to the carriage, in order to save him the pain of getting out.

'Certainly: But what is the matter Rushton? I am afraid you are suffering a great deal.'

'Not more than I deserve sir. I could not go away without telling you—without—but I would rather, if you please—that is, I think I had better say what I have to say before my school-fellows.'

Mr. Campbell forebore to express the surprise which he could not help feeling, and desired that his pupil might be carried into the school-room.

'Rushton has come back,' said he, turning to the boys, who gathered round with eager curiosity, 'because he has something on his mind which he will feel easier when he has confessed. Is it not so?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Rushton, who was pale and trembling. Donaldson went up to him and took hold of his hand, but he did not utter a word.

'Sit down, Rushton, and take your time,' said Mr. Campbell, observing how much he suffered.

'O sir!' exclaimed the penitent boy, 'do not speak so kindly to me—pray do not. I do not deserve it. You have no idea how wicked I have been.'

With many sobs and self-upbraidings, Rushton proceeded to confess everything; how he had stolen the peaches, and purposely left the pencil-case where it was found, in order that Frank might be suspected. He did not attempt to excuse himself, but appeared to be deeply conscious of his own sinfulness, and anxious that no suspicion should rest upon others in consequence. When he had finished speaking, Donaldson let go his hand, and in the profound silence that intervened went up to Mr. Campbell, and said in a firm voice, 'I also helped to steal your peaches, sir; and I am very sorry for it now.'

There was not a youthful heart present that did not honor little Donaldson at that moment: and yet more than one wanted courage to follow his example.