

ONE BLOCK AT A TIME.



VERY old friend of mine, one who hardly ever fails me when I go to him saying "Can you give me a good true story?" has just given me the following little anecdote, and as it is a piece of his own bright boyhood, you will read it with interest.

One day when I returned home from school I saw outside our door a large pile of wood blocks. My father was going to build an additional room at the back of the house, adjoining the parlour, and these oak blocks were to form a solid flooring for the new room.

"Shall you have to take in those blocks?" asked Ted Hume, one of my school companions. "I call it a shame if you do! My mother says you do too much at home, and that you don't have time for play. She says play means good health."

"Stop that," I cried, for I knew why; he spoke as he did. It was Saturday afternoon, and we had a little cricket match on, and I was bowler. "If I have to do it, I shall not be very long."

"I would not do it," persisted Ted, "your father ought to hire a man." Something inside me leaped up at this. I saw the pile of blocks getting higher and higher, and by the time Ted had left me, and I was going dejectedly indoors, I felt that I was indeed a very badly used boy, and how fine a thing it was to be Ted.

As if to rebuke my unworthy thoughts, my gentle mother gave me a bright smile as I loafed discontentedly into the kitchen. "Willie, my boy," said she, "the wood has come, so on Monday father will be able to begin the new room."

"I saw it; I couldn't help seeing such an enormous pile as that," I said, with a grunt. I went and looked out of the window, and appeared to be studying the size of the wood-pile.

"How long do you suppose it will take a man to get in all that, mother?" I asked, guiltfully. "Will Trounce do it?"

"No; Trounce will not do it, my son," was my mother's reply.

In my heart I knew why. My father had just begun business for himself by starting a chemical factory, and he now needed all his available capital, so that for some time my mother and he had resolved to live as economically as possible, that it might be the better for us all by and by.

Dinner was now ready, and our dear parents took their places at table with grateful thanks to God for his mercies, and with smiles for my two sisters and myself. My mother was so bright.

"I hope, Willie," said she, when she had

helped my father, "that you have brought three things to table with you?"

"What are the three things, mother?" asked father.

"Gratitude, hunger, and cheerfulness," said dear mother.

But I made no reply. My head was hung sulkily over my plate, and I would not smile at any of the pleasant and cheerful talk around me. I was half-choking over my carefully-prepared meal, and no wonder, for I felt all the time that I was trying to swallow the pile of wood blocks! My father stood in the entry after dinner. He called me.

"Now, my boy," said he, "make up your mind to get in that wood before I return. You have a long, fine afternoon."

"But, father," I grumbled, "I shall get no play, There's a match on this afternoon at four. What shall I do?"

"I have told you what to do, my son," said father, taking no notice of my objection.

I sought out my mother, hoping to find a weak spot in her.

"Mother," I said, dogging her footsteps as she went actively about her duties in the house, "why does not father hire a man to get all that wood in? You should hear what Ted Hume's mother thinks: she says it is too much for a boy to do."

Suddenly I saw a flash of pain cloud my mother's dear face; she turned away, but there were tears in her eyes. I knew she never spared herself for us; ashamed, I hurried out of her presence, and stood before the wood-pile. I took off my jacket, and went round the side of the house to put it in a little arbour there; on my way I passed mother's room, and looking in, saw her kneeling with hands clasped and head bowed.

I rushed out to the pile of blocks, but again the words Ted Hume had spoken came uppermost. Everything looked black. I began to chip the bark off one of the blocks with my penknife, while I whistled my discontent.

"I wish it would take fire!" I said to myself over and over again. I saw my mother coming, and I began to hustle over doing nothing. She spoke; "Willie, my son, had you not better begin to stack the wood at once? It will not take you long, then."

"Mother," I cried, "it is such an immense pile. Just think of doing it all this hot afternoon! I shall be forever at it, and then when it is done I shall be nearly dead."

"Willie," said she, "come with me and look at the wood; I must not have you 'nearly dead,' and if by three o'clock you have not taken in all the logs I will finish it."

"That you shall not!" I exclaimed, stung by her gentle words. "I don't mind doing it, but how I am to do so is the thing."

This was talking nonsense, as I quite well knew.