

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## THE LAST OF THE LUSCOMBS.

BY HELEN PEARSON BARNARD.

XX.—Continued.

With such an enemy no wonder Winn found life unpleasant. The game was always "full" if the stranger's name was proposed. If Calvin led in the spelling match he never chose Winfred; in a hundred petty, tormenting ways he showed his spite. Winfred had many private deliberations on the steps while the rest played. It was from this lonely standpoint that he decided that Calvin Watkins was at the bottom of the coldness of the others.

Kitty Graham was kind, and so were the Willoughbys, but for the reasons already spoken of, he was shunned by most of the scholars.

"I haven't hurt him," said Winfred, over and over, "why should he hate me so?"

Winfred felt it keenly, as we have said before, but he gave no sign in school. It was rare self-control that he was gaining under this discipline. His bright face might suddenly be grave, but that was all. He was growing to be a rare little gentleman, self-possessed and polite under most trying circumstances. This and his reticence about his troubles won the admiration of Mr. Graham.

"Why don't you do something to stop their persecutions?" asked Mrs. Graham, who had a full account of the school doings every day from the loquacious Kitty.

"It is something I cannot interfere with except indirectly," said Master Graham; "Calvin's training has been most unfortunate. It has developed many unpleasant traits of character, but I am confident that young Campbell's good temper will yet overcome him."

For a long time Calvin managed to exclude Winn from the school sports. How Winn longed to join in them, especially in their game of ball! He had watched it so closely that he was sure he could play as well as any of the boys. Besides, he often practised odd times, alone on Moor's Island, taking by turns each of the several positions, while some expert imaginary players did the rest. But these unseen companions were very unsatisfactory. He longed to test his powers with real boys: if they would only give him a chance.

It happened one recess that the players were short of the requisite number. The game was not "full."

"No go, fellows!" was Calvin's elegant comment; "this 'ere game 'll have to be given up."

"Can't we get somebody else?" asked Jack Willoughby. Was it chance? Or did he think of the neglected stranger? Winn's heart leaped as Jack glanced towards where he sat, quietly observant, upon the steps. The rich colour flashed over Winn's speaking face, then left it as suddenly, leaving him quite pale.

Jack saw this. He felt that they were not treating Winn rightly; so braving Calvin's displeasure, he said:

"Let's ask Campbell."

The other boys were silent, but they all glanced towards Winfred.

Calvin's face darkened. "He can't play," he said; "Nobody ever see him handle a ball."

"Good reason why," observed Jack, significantly.

Calvin scowled. "Why didn't some of you fellows ask him, then? Whose fault is it anyway?"

Only Jack had courage to say, "Seems unfair to always give one person the go-by, don't it, fellows? I put it to you, Cal, would you like to be left out in the cold the way Campbell is?"

"Speak for yourself, Willoughby," said Calvin, sullenly. "I aint a goin' to be talked at by nobody."

They were all silent a moment, while Calvin kicked the dust. Then he broke out, "I didn't s'pose this 'ere school was a Charitable Institute to git up games for poorhouse boys! If they stuck themselves in amongst us they've got to take what they can git!"

There was a little murmur among Jack's followers at this; evidently they did not exactly approve of these harsh sentiments.

"We don't know but some of us'll get there yet," said Jack, "and anybody can see that Campbell's a gentleman. I say we ought to ask him. The town school is n't a place to be stuck-up in!"

The Lays of Moorstown were hot politicians: to be "stuck-up" was almost a crime among them. The rights of the people were loudly advocated by Calvin to his own select circle on town-meeting days,—when imitating their elders—they discussed affairs of state.

Jack had touched the right cord. Calvin looked a little less determined. He glanced sideways at the figure on the steps.

"Oh, come on, Calvin: let's ask him and have our game," urged Jack.

Several echoed this.

"I don't see what you want him for," growled Calvin. Then suddenly raising his voice, "Come out here, Campbell, and be *raace*, will ye?"

It was a rough invitation, but, nevertheless, an invitation. Without a word Winn sprang into position and the game began.

It was the duty of the "*raace*" to chase the ball when it was batted. Perhaps other boys have a different term for this position, but that is what they called it in Moorstown.

Nobody liked to be "*raace*." Calvin had given it to young Campbell for that very reason. He also thought that the new-comer would be so awkward in it, that the rest would laugh at him, or get impatient.

But Winn put forth every energy. He was very quick on his feet in chasing the ball, and skillful in catching it before it reached the ground. He astonished them all by his aptitude; and somehow they felt the pleasure the unwonted play gave their lonely companion.

Winfred made his mark as "*raace*," and afterwards was

always chosen in games. The tide of popular feeling in school had turned for our boy. Henceforth he was a power among them. Calvin might persist in bitterness, but Winfred would find and keep friends.

Something else happened that brought Winn before the school in a pleasing light. It was in the spelling match, which was a favourite way of reciting in Moorstown. Even out of school the grown people often had them, winters. This had been hotly contested; the whole school were listening to see who would "*miss*" and drop from the ranks.

Jack Willoughby, who stood next above Winfred, missed a word. It passed to the other side of the room, was misspelt there by somebody who also was obliged to take his seat. Then it came to Winfred.

He spelt it correctly.

"Very good," said Master Graham; "you see the result of Campbell's studiousness, Willoughby?"

Jack turned red. He was not at all fond of his books; fun was much more to his taste; but it was unpleasant to be indirectly compared with another.

Winfred also coloured, hesitated, and then said in his clear ringing voice,—

"I should have spelt the word as Jack did if it had come to me first, Master Graham; I only guessed at the right way."

"Then you had better sit down, too," said Master Graham; but there was a pleasant twinkle in his eye, and all the scholars knew that he thought all the more of Winfred for his frankness.

"I'd a' looked out for number one," said Calvin Watkins afterwards; "you've got to every time or you'll be trod on!" But somehow Campbell, without looking out for number one, was daily growing in favour with everybody.

Of late Winfred had been turning his Saturdays into mor-y. Most of his holiday was his own to spend as he chose. Mrs. Luscomb arranged his chores with this end in view, feeling sure that the boy would make good use of the extra time. She did not wish him to feel that he was under task-masters, but that if his work was done he could have a holiday like the others.

Winn, always thinking of the future, chose to earn something on these days. It began by his doing little jobs for Master Graham. He was so faithful and active that others hired him to weed their gardens or saw wood. People began to like to intrust little jobs to such a manly and respectful boy. He was willing to do anything, from whitewashing a hen-house to sawing oak wood a hot afternoon. As in the game Winn had accepted the part of "*raace*," good-naturedly, so he took any disagreeable job when better could not be found.

"Well, I am beat!" said Miss Bilkins, calling at the Willoughby's, after seeing Winn groom the doctor's horse. "I don't understand how folks can take a stranger right into the bosom of the family, as it were. Now the doctor's old 'n' feeble 'n' keeps ready money loose about the house. How does he know but that pauper might be tempted to commit some awful crime?"

"What pauper!" repeated Jack Willoughby, who chanced to be within hearing.

Jack tried to speak carelessly, but he knew very well who Miss Bilkins meant. There was an ominous expression on his young face.

"Why that Campbell boy. The Luscombs took him out o' the poorhouse, ye know, come from nobody knows where."

"His mother was a real lady, and he's the best boy in school," cried Jack turning red. "Master Graham says Winn'll make his mark yet! I just wish"—Jack was obliged to stop to breathe—"that folks would not always be flinging out about poor Winn. Its too mean for anything."

"Softly, softly," said the minister; "he seems to be a superior boy, Miss Bilkins. I think the people will not regret aiding him in his desire for an education."

"Us boys think he's just splendid," added Jack hotly. "We're going to get him all the jobs he wants, and if anybody starts any story about Campbell we're goin' to the bottom of the matter."

He fairly glared at Miss Bilkins.

"Jack," said his father, "I think your mother wishes some kindlings."

So Jack went out to vent his spite upon the wood, and Miss Bilkins departed.

Later she met Winn laden with packages from the store for Mrs. Luscomb. The boy was amazed at her cordiality.

"Can't ye come and do a little job for me," she asked. "I want my flower-bed 'r' my yard weeded out, 'n' I'd rather you'd do it than anybody else. I alluz said you'd succeed, and I'm glad yer getting on so fine."

Winn did not speculate upon the change in her. As usual, he accepted gratefully any evidence of kindly feeling. He went joyfully forward. He had no time to brood over past slights or disappointments.

Winn went home in high spirits. He had earned seventy cents that Saturday. This he put into Mrs. Luscomb's hands.

"Here's something for our teapot," he said, referring to a certain ancient dish on the top shelf, where she deposited his earnings.

"We'll put it into the bank," she said. "If I can possibly manage I will not use the money for your clothes."

That day she did not receive his earnings with the usual encouraging word; silently she lifted down the teapot and put the money in. When she turned, Winn saw by the old, wretched look upon her face that something had happened.

He was about to question her, but she warned him with uplifted finger. There was a heavy footstep, and Aaron opened the door. He wore the white, quarrelsome look that he had when he had been drinking. He paused there, with an ugly eye on the lady and boy; an eye that said that he would like to quarrel with both. There was an instant of quivering silence. Then something unseen averted the storm of his passion. He turned and went slowly upstairs.

Mrs. Luscomb had striven for the composure that often disarmed him. Now that he was gone, she sank trembling into a chair.

"Don't be afraid," said Winfred; "I wouldn't let him hurt you."

"Hush, hush. Aaron may hear and return," she whispered. "You would be no match for him, my brave boy. If he sleeps, we are safe to-night. If not, it will go hard with us."

## XXI.—HOW CALVIN ESCAPED A WHIPPING.

"If I were you, I should just hate Calvin Watkins!" said Jack Willoughby, one day. "Don't you,—in the bottom of your heart?"

After a moment's thought, Winfred said, "You may think it strange, but I don't. I can't understand myself, but somehow I like Calvin. If he would let me, I think we should be friends. He's real smart."

"You're right, there," replied Jack. "It's awful good in you to say so, too, after the way he's treated you."

Winfred flushed with pleasure. The praise that he received of late was very sweet to him, partly because it had been so tardy in coming.

Life at school had grown very pleasant to him, since he became one of the rest. But something within told him that it was not all goodness that made him take Calvin's hostility so coolly.

"I'm not good, Jack," he said, "but—but, I'd like to be."

Winn spoke gravely. Jack saw that he was deeply moved. The minister's son who had always lived in his happy home, little dreamed what Winn had experienced, and was even now seeing in Mrs. Luscomb's trials! It made him old and thoughtful beyond his years. Often the young heart yearned after a peace that would lift him above the annoyances of every day life.

Winn knew not that he was being gradually prepared to listen to the "still, small voice," that speaks to every person. When Mrs. Luscomb turned to him for comfort, it sometimes seemed as if his words were idle phrases that meant nothing. He trusted and believed in his mother's God, because she had; but now, as he matured, he had an undefined longing after a faith and hope of his own. It often came upon him when praised for his good qualities,—doubtless it saved Winfred from being spoilt by his growing influence.

While the boys talked, Elsie Moor and Kitty Graham passed them, arm in arm, and very confidential. Apparently, Kitty was urging some invitation upon her new friend.

"I should admire to," said Elsie, "but I can't."

"Oh, now, of course you can," pleaded Kitty. "I shall be perfectly miserable if you don't come. How could I be happy a whole evening without you?"

"They are already inseparable," said Winfred in a low tone.

"You cannot imagine how I long to come," said Elsie. "If father was willing, I would,—but he cannot spare me."

"It's a wonder he let her come to our school," said Jack, as they passed on, then suddenly changed the subject, as his eye caught several figures on the ball-ground. "The fellows are going to stay for a game. Let's join them."

There being nothing pressing in the shape of work, Winfred hastened after Jack. Several boys were there, including Calvin Watkins.

"Any fellow as wants to play, come on now, an' be spry, too," said the latter, "there's more here than's needed."

Jack gave Winfred a nudge as Calvin's glance rested forbiddingly on the latter.

"Them as has got any outside chores, or gov'ment lamps or sich to tend, better not stop," pursued Calvin, "for this 'ere game is going to be close contested, and we don't want no backin' out afore it's over."

"Why can't we begin then?" queried Jack, sturdily, "we're only wasting time now."

"We want to start right, fellows," said Calvin; "there aint no use in beginning unless we know every player'll stick. Now, when I begin, I like to end a thing."

No doubt Calvin did like to end such beginnings as these, and fully intended to do so, but unfortunately an obstacle was rapidly approaching in Calvin's rear, one that would effectually interrupt the game,—Calvin's father.

Jack Willoughby saw him, as he appeared in the turn the road, under the old elm. He was almost running, and carried a whip.

"Is n't that your father, Calvin?" asked Jack.

Calvin gave one glance, and then an unmistakable look of terror came over his face.

"He's down on me cause I aint finished the wood,—I forgot it,—what shall I do, boys?"

His comrades looked their sympathy, but were silent. What could they say? Mr. Watkins's hasty temper was proverbial in town, when under its spell he was merciless. Helplessly they looked from Calvin to his parent,—the latter was now very near.

"I sha'n't wait roun' for no lickin's," said Calvin, and took to his heels.

There was a general feeling of relief, for Calvin was a swift runner; but the uselessness of flight was expressed by Winfred, who said,—

"He may get away now, but they'll have to meet some time!"

The result of that meeting could be easily imagined, as Mr. Watkins came up brandishing the whip. His face was actually swollen with anger.

"Where's Cal?"

Nobody replied. Indeed, most of the boys shrank back, as though they meditated flight.

"I'll teach him to quit play, when there's work to do!" He now saw his son's retreating figure, and gave chase. The old church door stood open. Calvin darted in, and up the stairs, Mr. Watkins hotly pursuing, and scolding at every breath.

The boys on the ball-ground were silent, until the two Watkins's had passed out of sight. Then Winn drew a long breath, and asked,—

"Will he really use that whip?"

"Use it?" echoed Jack Willoughby. "You better ask Cal! I rather guess he thinks so!"