

FOR THE CHILDREN

An Honest Decision.

By Elizabeth Price.

IT was Friday afternoon, and Lester brought his weekly report from school. Mother looked sorry when she read it, and Lester stood by, red and uncomfortable, for it was not the sort of report that makes a boy proud and his mother happy. It said, "Department Unsatisfactory," while as for the lessons, there was not a single "Excellent," only "Fair," or at most, "Good."

Mother did not say anything, because she had said on other Friday afternoons all she had to say on the same subject. She only sat looking at the report a long time, while Lester wriggled and twisted.

At last she spoke, very quietly: "It must be stopped, Lester. For more than a month your conduct has been 'Unsatisfactory.' I have reasoned with you and given you chances to do better, and you have abused them. I shall try you once more, and then unless your next report is a very good one—as good as you used to have—my little boy must be punished."

Lester stopped wriggling. That last word awed him. "How?" he

—oh, what had he not meant to accomplish this week! But mother could not—could not keep him away from Westchester! She never could break his heart like that! His feet fairly flew over the ground; this suspense must be ended.

Mother was sewing, as she nearly always was, but she dropped her work, and the hand trembled that she held out for the report. Maybe she had felt the suspense, too. She read the few words, and her eyes filled with tears, and Lester knew what that meant. "It isn't fair!" he burst out. "Teacher didn't mark me fair! I have been good! I don't deserve to stay at home! I didn't do wrong!"

"Wait, Lester—wait, dear," Mother's voice was very gentle. "If you tell me on your honour that this report is unfair, if you really think you deserve to go to Westchester, you may go. You remember what I said a week ago; you know the conditions. I leave it to you to decide."

"Then I'll go all right," said Lester, positively. "I haven't done a thing that ought to keep me away."

"Very well, dear." The busy needle was at work again.

Lester tore outdoors to play noisily with Sport and make himself believe



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asked, swallowing over a lump in his throat.

"You will have to stay away from the sleighing-party one week from tomorrow."

Lester sat down, feeling as if he had suddenly grown too weak to stand.

Mother had folded the report and laid it aside. She picked up her sewing again, and said, "It all depends on you, Lester."

Lester walked away slowly. Not much danger of his forgetting—no, indeed! There should be an "Excellent" over against every item in next Friday's report. He would show what he could do, for once. But miss that sleigh-ride—never!

He thought of nothing else all afternoon, remembered it twelve times on Saturday, six times on Sunday, twice on Monday, once on Tuesday, and next thing he knew it was Friday again, and teacher was handing out reports. His heart came into his mouth as he looked at his. "Conduct Unsatisfactory." "Lessons Fair." Not one "Excellent"—not even a "Very Good." And he had meant

he was having a fine time, while mother folded away the poor little report and waited.

She did not wait in vain. It was bedtime. "I can't go, mother. It wouldn't be honest, and I am honest, if I do act mischievous in school. I did deserve it—teacher was fair. I've whispered and played instead of studying, but I don't think I'll ever forget again. I'm going to be the best boy in the whole world after this." And mother held him close, and said, "I knew my boy could be trusted to tell the truth, and he hasn't disappointed me."

The party rode away the next morning without Lester. He tried to be brave and cheerful, but the ordeal was a hard one, and Lester never forgot it, for it did him much good, in spite of the hardness—or perhaps because of it.

In the evening, when the pleasure-seekers had returned, the little figure crept again to mother's room. "It's been pretty hard," said a queer, choky voice, "but I'm glad!"

—Youth's Companion.



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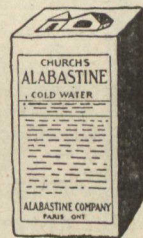


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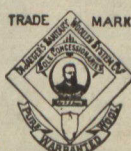
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