

OUR YOUNG FOLKS.

THE FORTUNA'S LAST FREIGHT.

THREE schooners were anchored in a New England seaport, one Sabbath morning. They were laden for Boston, but had been detained by foul weather.

"If it clears a bit, I'll be out o' this!" said Job Kittery, captain of the "Fortuna."

Luke, his deformed son, whose isolated and painful life had brought him very near the Saviour, seemed greatly disturbed at his father's words.

"I hoped you wouldn't start to-day," he said, in a rich, pathetic voice. "I have been listening to the church bells and wishing we could go."

"A man can't wait for the Sabbath when he has bread to earn," replied Job, testily. "You and your mother wouldn't get no clothes to wear to meetin', or meat to give ye strength to get there, if 'twant for your wicked old father!" adding, "I don't see no harm in startin' to-day."

"No good ever comes o' disobeying God," said the boy earnestly. "Whenever you've ventured out on the Sabbath, mother and I have prayed that you might be kept from harm. I know God heard us, for you came back safe. But something will happen if you keep on breakin' the Lord's day."

Job sneered, but his hand shook as he lit his pipe. Luke's upright life and fearless utterances often woke the old man's sleeping conscience.

"Sailors obey only wind and tide," he said gruffly. "I never bothered about Sunday, and look at my success! I own the fastest sailing craft on the coast, a cottage on shore, and buy ye piles o' books. Now what's aboard that head o' yourn?" more kindly, as the boy's lip trembled.

"I was wishing I could take my turn at the ropes; it nearly breaks my heart to think I'll never do a man's work,"—his magnetic voice so pressed with tears that the impulsive old man was forced to wipe his own eyes, but he who created me knows best. When my days are finished here, if I love him he'll give me a home where I shall never be lame and and never be sick. Oh, I shall be so happy, for my back'll be straight there, I know, and I shall see the King in his beauty."

"Don't!" murmured Job, with up-heaving chest, "we want ye here, your mother and I."

It was not often the rough man was thus softened. Luke was emboldened to say, "Dear father, I'll want you there, too. If you were only a Christian, how happy mother and I would be!"

Job mastered some strong inner feeling before he could say, 'I'm willin' you should take comfort, lad; but I'd lose many a trip if I was pious. I can't afford to stay in port when Sunday brings a fair wind; some other fellow'd get the start o' me. I'd been before the mast now, 'stead o' bein' cap'n o' my own ship if I'd been squeamish 'bout Sunday. Now, I start, Sunday or not Sunday, get my freight unloaded and am off with another cargo before other chaps are awake. That's the way to make this 'ere coastin' pay.'" Job chuckled,

and started up to look for signs of fair weather, Luke's appeal forgotten in his eagerness to be on the way again. The boy's only hope now was that the weather would detain them. But towards noon the fog lifted somewhat.

"The wind's shifted a leetle," said Job. "I guess I'll venture."

"Don't start to-day, father," interposed Luke. Job muttered angrily, but the lad still entreated: "I believe evil will come of it if you do."

"It's time you were cured of such notions," said Job, more incensed because the men heard this. "I'll risk Sunday work. So cast off my boys!"

It seemed to Luke that he could not have it so; he touched his father's arm, but was shaken off and told to be silent.

"Gettin' under way, cap'n?" asked one from the next schooner.

"Wal, yes," returned Job. "At any rate, I'll drop down the harbor and see if it's clear 'outside.'"

"Looks thiek outside to me," and the other shook his head. "I think it's comin' on to blow. There hain't a schooner'll venture out to-day!"

"So I think, sir," said the "Fortuna's" mate in an undertone.

"Haul up the anchor, boys," cried Job. "The 'Fortuna' 'll be in Boston to-morrow morning." His heart was bound up in this swift-winged craft. As she glided down the harbor, obeying every turn of the wheel, he told again of the races she had won, the gales she had weathered, the burdens she had carried. He said nothing about turning back when they found it "rough" outside. The mate, who had sailed over many waters, thought it unwise to go on, and the men grumbled sorely.

"We sha'n't make much headway, with this wind, sir," again murmured the mate. "We shall have to tack constantly; the men'll be used up before morning if we try to run for Boston."

But the captain was deaf to all remonstrances. The "Fortuna" kept on into the gathering darkness; the wind howled, the waves ran mountains high, the spray dashed over her decks and upon the deformed boy who clung with both hands to his seat, as the ship rose and fell. For awhile Job seemed in good spirits, boasting that he "had carried her through worse seas." Perhaps he thought he could now, but the Lord of the Sabbath was against him, and he was to find himself powerless. At last a gloom fell upon his spirits, also. He ordered Luke below, where the boy crept into his berth, and lay with clasped hands and softly moving lips. In the fearful odds against them he trusted in God alone.

At eight o'clock the storm came in wind and sleet. Job often had to leave the wheel now to help the tired men execute his rapid orders. Luke ventured to peep out.

"Stay below, lad!" Job shouted, his face set and fierce as if in mortal combat. "You couldn't live in this!"

Job tried to "make for Cape Ann," but the gale drove them out to sea, choked the pumps, and tore away rudder and mainmast. Just as

that fatal Sabbath waned, the captain abandoned the "Fortuna" to her fate, and tottered to the cabin, exhausted and half-crazed, followed by the mate and sailors.

"She's carried her last freight, my boy," said Job, piteously. "We threw it overboard long ago. I can't do anything to save her, or us, from going to the bottom."

"God took your weapons, father," said Luke solemnly. "Didn't you hear his voice in the storm?"

"Don't!" cried Job hoarsely. "I knew it was wrong to start as I did; but I dared your God, Luke. He's dealin' with me now; and you must suffer for my sin," gathering the lad in his brawny arms and weeping over him. "Boys," said he brokenly, "my folly has brought you here. I can't hope for forgiveness from God, or you. If I'd hearkened to my poor poor lad here, we'd been safe in port now. If so be that you can square your last account with God Almighty, do it quickly, for only a miracle can save us now."

Despair was on every face before him; evil faces they were, too, for Job Kittery hired his men from wharves, without any questions.

"I've done nothing but swear against the Almighty," said one breaking the awful silence; "my account can't be squared nohow."

"Pr'aps the cap'n's got something to make a body forget trouble," said the other, recklessly. "I never got ready for this. If I'm to go to the bottom to-night, I'd rather go without knowing it."

Before Job could speak, Luke cried, "Don't talk of drink now! Perhaps God will let us live yet. I know mother's on her knees in the cottage praying for us. God always heard her," added the child, his face shining in the gloom. "And she'll read what the Bible says about those 'that go down to the sea in ships'—we always do stormy Sabbaths." Job groaned. "I can say it by heart," and he repeated a portion of the 107th Psalm.

"Cur'us that 'ere should read so," said the mate breathlessly.

"They cried unto the Lord, and he brought them out of all their distresses," said Luke. "Let us pray!"

The boy's lips were used to prayer. When his wondrous petition had ended, the men were on their knees, too. Even Job Kittery cried to God for mercy. Surely the young Christian and the repentant men in that storm-tossed barque made the "two or three" who have the Master's promise to be in "the midst," for the tempest was calmed, and at daylight the sinking "Fortuna" was seen by a steamship, and all on board were saved. They left the schooner to her fate. Job Kittery's pride had stretched her swift wings on the waters for the last time; she had indeed carried her last freight, and despite his successful ventures on the Lord's day, her captain had the prospect of spending his old age "before the mast."

But Job's bitter lesson was blessed to his conversion, he became a happy Christian. Often to eager listeners, the old sailor tells the story of the Cross, and how he found his peace in believing by means of God's frown on the "Fortuna's" "last freight."