

The Skylark.

The skylark, when the dews of morn  
Hang tremulous on flower and thorn,  
And violets round his nest exhale  
Their fragrance on the early gale,  
To the first sunbeam spreads his wings,  
Buoyant with joy, and soars and sings.

He rests not on the leafy spray  
To warble his exulting lay;  
But high above the morning cloud  
Mounts in triumphant freedom proud,  
And swells when nearest to the sky  
His notes of sweetest ecstasy.

Thus, my Creator! thus the more  
My spirit's wing to thee can soar,  
The more she triumphs to behold  
Thy love in all thy works unfold,  
And bids her hymn of rapture be  
Most glad when rising most to thee!

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WILLIAM BRIGGS,  
Methodist Book and Publishing House, Toronto.

Pleasant Hours:  
A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

Rev. W. H. WITHROW, D.D., Editor.  
TORONTO, FEBRUARY 23, 1895.

WHAT TO READ AND HOW TO READ.

WHAT books should our boys read? That is a wide question. There are quantities of charming books nowadays which are published on purpose for young people, many of which are both delightful and instructive.

come so absorbed in the fierce competition which now characterizes all sorts of business that by the time they are twenty-five they will care for nothing else, and by the time they are fifty they will be in the condition of a poor man whom I once knew, who, broken in health, but with more money than he could use, still dragged himself daily to business and went on making more, because, as he pitifully remarked, he did not know what else to do.

OBEY HIM TO-DAY.

BY A. A. P.

"Now uncle and auntie have gone for their sleigh ride, we can sit down here by the dining-room fire and make New Year's resolutions," said Myrtie Knapp, who, with several of her cousins, was spending the holidays at the Knapp homestead in the country.

"If we make fewer promises, and trust more in the promises God has made, we shall find more of blessing and less of disappointment and failure," said a voice from the depths of an easy chair.

"Dear me, what a nice little preaching," said Ralph, teasingly. "Oh, I am not preaching," replied Alice. "I am reading from my new Hastings' birthday book. I do like a birthday book so much, and this is full of practical, spiritual ideas."

"I wish it was as easy to keep resolutions as to make them," said Ed. "I would promise to do everything that I know I ought to do, without waiting to be told."

"The Lord does not ask us to promise, resolve, covenant, and agree to obey him for months to come; but he asks us to obey him to-day, and to trust him who is able to keep us from falling, for strength for the future."

"That in your new book, too?" "It is; and it applies to us at this moment, for that invitation to the party at the village hotel this evening must be answered."

"If we had already resolved to obey God to-day, we should have to give up that party," said Myrtie.

"Would it not be best to do so?" "There will be stacks of fun," said Ed. "And we might have our frolic there to-night, and begin to-morrow to be good," added Ralph.

"Of what will the frolic consist?" "Oh, dancing and card-playing, no doubt; and eating and drinking."

"To-day is not your best time to turn to God; that time has forever past. It is not the best time you ever have seen, but it is the best time you ever will see, for to-day is God's time."

"Hastings' again?" "Yes; but you know what the Bible says?"

"Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation," said Susie.

"Yes; and 'To-day harden not your hearts.' Supposing we each go away by ourselves for a half-hour and think over the matter of the party, and each write our decision on a bit of paper and drop it into this basket. We will gather here again at ten o'clock, and read and count the votes." And taking a crumb pan and brush, Myrtie proceeded to set the neglected breakfast table in order; and each of the girls quickly set herself to work about the house, while one of the boys replenished the fires, and others went to shovelling snow in the yards.

One by one the slips were written and dropped in the basket, but no word was spoken, until with the house in order and the out-door chores finished, they all came

together again around the cheerful open fireplace as the clock struck.

"To go, or not to go, that is the question?" said Ralph, emptying the contents of the tiny basket in Myrtie's lap.

"And we are all in accord, as I supposed we should be, for the nays have it."

"Good! Now, Sue, please write the most elegant note possible, declining with thanks—the thanks for courtesy."

"Why, there is papa and mamma! What can be the matter?" and they all rushed out upon the porch.

"Oh, nothing serious!" laughed mamma. "Only we found the sleighing so much finer than we expected that we drove around, inviting a party to join us, and came back for you all."

"How fortunate the work is all done up, outdoors and in!"

"And how fortunate that we declined the invitation to that party!"

"I am glad it was done before something better offered," said Ralph. And his father replied:

"It is always safe to do what you know to be right, my boy; and that is a good lesson for you and your cousins to take to yourselves this New Year's Day."

"We put it in this form, uncle," said Alice, but it amounts to the same thing: 'Obey him to-day.'"

A PERSIAN FABLE.—A gourd wound itself round a lofty palm, and in a few weeks climbed to its very top. "How old mayest thou be?" asked the newcomer. "About a hundred years," was the answer. "A hundred years, and no taller! Only look: I have grown as tall as you in fewer days than you can count years." "I know that well," replied the palm. "Every summer of my life a gourd has climbed up round me, as proud as thou art, and as short-lived as thou wilt be."

THE NEEDLE'S EYE.

THERE is, perhaps, no passage of Scripture more difficult of comprehension to the young mind, under the present idea of a needle, than the one, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." When a Sabbath-school scholar, it was, to our mind, impossible for a rich man to enter heaven, and inexplicable why the mere fact that a man is rich should debar him from heaven; especially when the Lord gave Solomon riches and honour, so that in these he exceeded all other kings of the earth, and after Job's afflictions, doubled his possessions, so that he was twice as rich as before, though before he had great riches and possessions, and was the greatest of all the men of the East. The thrift and economy of the industrious and saving servants were approved, while the one who received the one talent was reprovved and punished for his slothfulness and neglect, and the one talent was taken from him, and given to the one who had the ten talents, thus increasing his riches, and making it more difficult for him to enter the kingdom of God. These, to the young and active mind seeking for knowledge and a right understanding of the Scriptures, appear to be inconsistent and irreconcilable with the idea that a rich man cannot enter the kingdom of God; for it is certainly impossible for a camel to go through the eye of any needle of which the ordinary mind of the present age has any conception. But the students of Oriental literature find that there were in the cities of the East, especially in Jerusalem, large gates, in which were small and very low apertures, called, metaphorically, "needle's eyes," just as we talk of windows on ship-board as "bull's eyes." These entrances were too narrow for a camel to pass through them in the ordinary manner, or even if loaded. When a loaded camel had to pass through one of these entrances it knelt down, its load was removed, and then it shuffled through on its knees.

The Wreckers of Sable Island

BY

J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

CHAPTER IV.—"ALONE AMONG STRANGERS"

BEN started as though he had been caught at some crime, and there was a sulky tone in his voice that showed very plainly that he resented the appearance of the questioner, he replied,—

"Only a boy and a dog." The other man drew near and inspected Eric closely. Prince at once sprang to his feet, and taking up his position between the new-comer and his young master, fixed his big eyes upon the former, while his teeth showed threateningly, and a deep growl issued from between them.

It was no wonder that the sagacious man's suspicions were aroused, for surely before had his eyes fallen upon so sinister a specimen of humanity. The man was of frame more than medium height; but his features showed great strength, combined with unusual activity, and one glance was sufficient to mark him out as a man with whom few could cope. His countenance, naturally ugly, had been the playground of the strongest and coarsest passions that degrade humanity, and was rendered still more hideous by the loss of his left eye, which had been gouged out by a drunken méele, and by a frightful scar that ran clear from temple to chin on the right side of his face. Through the remaining eye all the vile nature of the man found expression, and its baleful glare, when fixed full upon one, was simply appalling.

To it, perhaps more than to any other quality, Evil-Eye—for so his comrades appropriately nick-named him—owed his influence among them; for he was, in some sort, regarded as a leader of the band of wreckers which both he and Ben belonged.

Evil-Eye held in his right hand a cutlass whose sheen was already dimmed with numerous stains.

"Well," he growled, pointing at Eric, who was staring at him spell-bound with horror and dread, "that seems to be the last of them. Let's finish him off. We want no tell-tales.—Out of the way, you brute." And he lifted his cutlass as though to strike Prince first.

"Hold!" cried Ben, springing forward and grasping Evil-Eye's arm. "Let the boy alone."

"Let him alone," roared Evil-Eye, with a horrible oath. "That I won't. Let go of me, will you?" And wrenching himself free by a tremendous effort, he swung the cutlass high over his head and rushed upon the defenceless boy, who was too terror-stricken to move or cry out.

But quick as Evil-Eye's movements had been, there was another present whose movements were quicker still. With a short, deep growl like a distant roll of thunder, Prince launched himself full at the ruffian's throat. His aim was unerring, and utterly unprepared for so sudden an onset, the man rolled over upon the sand, the cutlass falling harmlessly from his hand.

Content with having brought him to the ground, Prince did not pursue his advantage further, but stood over the prostrate scoundrel, who made no attempt to move, while he implored Ben to drag the dog off him.

But this Ben seemed in no hurry to do. He evidently enjoyed his associate's sudden defeat, and felt little sympathy for him in his present predicament. Then as he looked from the growling mastiff to his young master, who had almost forgotten his own fear in his admiration for his faithful dog, a happy thought flashed into his mind. His face brightened, and there was a half-smile upon it as, turning to Evil-Eye, who scarce dared to breathe lest those great black jaws, so close to his throat, would close tight upon it, he said:

"Look here, Evil-Eye. I'll take the dog off on one condition. Will you agree?"

"What is that?" groaned Evil-Eye.

"Why, I've taken a fancy to this lad and his dog, and want to keep them for a while anyway. Now, if you'll promise me that you'll let them alone so long as I want them, I'll get the dog off; but if you won't I'll just let you have it out with him."

Evil-Eye did not answer at once. Twisting his head, he looked around to see if any other of his companions were near; but there was not a soul in sight, and the storm was still raging.

"All right, Ben, I'll promise," he said sulkily; and then a crafty gleam came into his baleful eye as he added, "And say, Ben, will you give me half your share of this baby?"