

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## THE LAST OF THE LUSCOMBS.

BY HELEN PARSON BARNARD.

XVI.—Continued.

Winn wondered if Elsie were used to his stern ways, as she tripped along the winding path, put the key into the lock, turned it, and passed into the hut.

While the Captain was attending to his business with the ferryman, Winn explored the bank of the river.

He came suddenly upon a huge hollow tree; this, apparently, was Elsie's playhouse; it was carpeted with moss, and bits of china and acorn cups were disposed on a tiny table, before which several dolls were seated on blocks; a tiny cologne bottle held a bouquet of wild flowers, and a bit of mirror was framed with pigeon vine.

Some children would have thought Elsie's playhouse a meagre affair, because it held no rare and costly toys, but Winn looked upon it with different eyes. It seemed just the thing for a little girl all alone in the wild woods thus to play.

But the Captain was going, and Winn must also leave. Captain Marsh introduced him to the old ferryman as the lad who was "helping the old folks down to the Island."

"And a smart boy, too!" he said, in that aside, that older people often use before children; "I don't know when I've seen a likelier little fellow!"

"That is n't saying much," growled the ferryman, eying Winn coldly. "The modern boy is far below the standard!"

Winn chose to ride with the Captain when they returned. He was eager to know more of the strange man who kept the ferry. There was not much that he could learn, except that he had always lived on the coast, and was at one time one of the "Selectmen" of the town; that was before his wife died; she had been drowned before his eyes, with their children, except Elsie, who was an infant. It was such a shock that it was feared at one time that his reason would go; he sold most of his land, and built him this hut in the woods, where a ferry was needed. He carried people over for a slight toll, and spent his leisure time in reading and instructing Elsie.

The Captain evidently had great respect for the ferryman's learning, for he informed Winn that he "calculated John Moor had read pretty nigh every book that was printed, and they say that he can make as nice a tack in argument as any man in these parts. He generally shows himself town-meeting time, and just lays the law down to them then!"

As they floated down the river with the current, the boatmen singing a monotonous song, Winn wondered if any boy was having a pleasant Saturday.

## XVII.—MISS BILKINS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

The next morning was the Sabbath, and such a Sabbath! One ought to visit Moor's Island to see the glory of a perfect day on the New England coast, when the sunlight illumines earth, sky, and water, all each clothed in Sabbath beauty seems praising its Maker.

As Winn was aloft in the tower the first bell of the church at Moortown rang across the water. It seemed to him as if it told every one to prepare for church. He wished the Luscombs would go; he wondered why they did not.

Upon broaching the subject to Aaron, he was gruffly told that he "calculated he was jest 's good as some o' them folks that sot sech a store by goin' to meetin'." I can read my Bible 'n' pray jest 's well to home as over there!"

"Do you think a person is apt to?" asked Winn.

It was one of his peculiar questions that Mr. Luscomb sometimes found difficult to answer.

"Mebbe not, lad; they haint apt to."

Aaron now took refuge in confession.

"Leastways I haint; I know my shortcomin's better 'n Parson Willoughby does. That's a comfort. There's some so blinded by backslidin' that they don't know they air backsliders."

Aaron leaned on the rail, and looked towards the centre of religious privileges as he talked.

Winn regarded him attentively, but could see no deep conviction on his stolid face to match his confession.

In fact it was with peculiar relish that he added: "N' I haint ashamed to tell on 't nather, I know I'm prone to leave undone the things we'd oughter done, 'n' I'm forever 'n' ever-lasin' a doin' of things what I'd oughter not to do!"

This admission apparently satisfied the old man's dulled conscience, his Sabbath would be spent in extra sleeping and eating.

Finding that he could not be aroused, our restless Winn turned his attention to Mrs. Luscomb.

"Won't you go to church with me in the Lucy?"

Mrs. Luscomb at first said no; but after the boy had wandered off with a listless, disappointed face, she thought it over. She had often complained because Aaron kept her at home; now, when she could go, she had refused! The chief reason dwelt in the good lady's bosom; it was quite out of date, even for a region remote from the fashions, and her cloak, once black, was faded to a nondescript shade of green.

Mrs. Luscomb hastily inspected the ancient equipments.

"If I go, I wish to look respectable. I must stay at home until I get something to wear."

Just then, Winn, who had been looking at the dory, and thinking what a shame it was that it could not be taken out of its covert this day, appeared again.

"Haven't you changed your mind, Mrs. Luscomb?" he added, in the audacious coaxing way that he knew she liked.

"I don't see how you can stay at home, it is such a lovely day, and the bell seems to say 'Come, come!'"

Mrs. Luscomb smiled, hesitated, and then consented.

Winn never dreamed what a sacrifice it was to the fastidious old lady to appear in church after a long absence with a ten-year-old bonnet and cloak. With a little tremble in her

sweet voice, she asked, half playfully, as they walked together towards the landing:

"Are you ashamed of me, Winn?"

Indeed the boy was not, but very proud. In his eyes she was the sweetest and prettiest lady in the church. It seemed to him that other people liked her too, for several spoke to her in the entrance, expressing great pleasure at seeing her among them again, and Winn was introduced in her gentle, dignified way as "the boy who is helping Mr. Luscomb."

The gray-haired minister shook hands with her afterwards, inquired for Mr. Luscomb, and spoke kindly to Winn.

"I hope we shall see you regularly at church," he said to the latter; "you are young and strong, and can come when Mrs. Luscomb cannot. I shall call upon you some fine day at the Lighthouse, for you are now one of my parishioners."

Winn had thought him very wise and stern as he listened in the careless boy fashion to the morning sermon; but when he felt the grasp of his hand, and looked up into his earnest, kind eyes, and heard himself addressed as one of his parishioners, Winn suddenly conceived a great liking for him. Boys like to be talked to as if they knew something, and were of some account, and Parson Willoughby, in treating Winn as he would a man, was pursuing the best course. Winn immediately determined to go every Sabbath when Aaron was "himself."

At noon they wandered, with many others, in the church graveyard, which stretched down over a hillside behind the edifice.

Mrs. Luscomb produced a lauch from an ample pocket, and she and Winn ate as they walked amid the graves. The boy thought this a strange dining-place, but as every body else did the same, and some old ladies were with them, he devoured his lunch and laid up his comments for the future. The ancient dames apparently relished their lunch and gossip. Sometimes the falling tear mingled with a sandwich as they stooped to pluck a flower from the last resting-place of a relative.

Winn read the inscriptions as they walked; he liked those especially that he spelled out from some gray old headstone. One, whose wife was laid there, had put this inscription:—

"Oh, Nancy, you was doomed to die,  
And in this lonely grave to lie!"

Another, erected by children to the memory of their mother, read:—

"Our mother!  
We loved her, but she died!"

"Now, that 'ere 's what I call a real p'oty interment!" observed some one close beside him, as Winn spelled his out. The tone was sharp and disagreeable, and Winn, whose sensitive ear appreciated pleasant voices like Mrs. Luscomb's, rose hastily from his knees. The face matched the voice,—two shrewd, curious eyes blinked at him over an inquisitive nose.

"Land sakes! I thought you was somebody else, — ain't you the boy that come 'long o' Mis' Luscomb?"

Winn said: "Yes."

"I thought so, but you don't favour th' Luscombs in complexion or build. Mebbe yet a remote relative from where they come from, up country?"

Winn said: "No."

"I thought not. Then your name aint Luscomb?"

Winn answered as before.

"I thought not. What is't then?"

"Winifred Campbell."

"I declare!" She munched a seed-cake, and eyed him, not offering to move from the entrance to the narrow passage that Winn had penetrated.

The boy did not like to be besieged thus by a stranger, but was too polite to request her to move. He wished he might cross the lots and join Mrs. Luscomb, who was a little distance off, conversing with a friend.

"I used to know some Campbells. I wonder if you're any relation o' them? Have a seed-cake, or mebbe you're fond o' penny-royal?"

Winn refused this, saying that he had eaten his lunch.

But then a grown boy alluz hez room far more," observed Miss Bilkins, for it was she. "Though I was say Mis' Luscomb wouldn't grudge ye yer stomach full if ye aint a relation."

Winn made no reply, not knowing what to say. He wished Mrs. Luscomb would come, and release him from this woman with the curious eyes.

"Them Campbells was Scotch, 'n' ye aint no brogue, ez I can see,—parents livin'?"

Winn said no.

"Both dead! Dear me, what a dispensation! That's how th' Luscombs got ye. Haint ye got nobody to see that ye aint abused?"

"Do you mean 'gardeens'?" said Winn, using Joe's pronunciation, without knowing the meaning. "No, my mother didn't appoint any."

"Land sakes! then there must a been property!" mused Hepsy Bilkins. "I knowed suthin' was to th' bottom o' this. Folks don't adopt orph'ns far nothin' roun' here! Do hev a cake,—did you go direct to the Lighthouse after the funeral?"

"No," said Winn; then he checked himself as he remembered Aaron's worldly advice. "I went somewhere else for a while."

Winn never could repeat the rest of the conversation. It was so complex and insinuating, but she got him so cornered that to escape a falsehood, he admitted that he came direct "from the poorhouse."

Shortly after Hepsy Bilkins released him, and Winn returned to Mrs. Luscomb. With a sense of relief, he seated himself on the greensward beside her.

Very near, a neat iron fence enclosed a lot, in the centre of which rose a pure white shaft of marble. Its exquisite proportions attracted Winn's eye. There was nothing to be compared to it in the old graveyard. Winn had never seen anything so lovely. He went nearer to read the inscription on the monument. The name "Moor" recalled the "fat in the woods he had visited the day before. Mrs. Luscomb,

whom he asked, said that the drowned wife and children of the ferryman were buried there.

"Does Elsie Moor come to church?" asked Winn.

Mrs. Luscomb thought not; the father had not entered the church since the family had been broken up.

Just then Hepsy Bilkins joined them.

"It's an awful thing to say, but it seems as if John Moor was a feedin' his soul on a grudge agin Providence. Ever sence Mis' Moor 'n' them chillun was taken away, afore his eyes, he's sot agin meetin's 'n' meetin'-houses. 'N' he won't let that gal o' his'n come nuther! Parson Willoughby 'n' the deacons hez laboured with him, but he was sotter 'n' ever in his way. Some folks," added Miss Bilkins, with a contemplative nibble at the penny-royal, "the more you labour with 'em, the sotter they be!" Then, as if this suggested Mr. Luscomb, she added suddenly, "How is your husband?"

Mrs. Luscomb quietly replied that he was well, asking, "Surely Mr. Willoughby does not consider Mr. Moor's case hopeless? The faith and patience of our good minister are equal to even this. Even if John Moor will not listen to him, he can pray for him. If one could only take refuge in that, instead of worrying about our loved ones!"

She seemed to be thinking aloud, but was recalled to herself by Hepsy Bilkins' eager inquiry.

"Did you say John Moor wouldn't listen to the Parson? He didn't darst turn him out of doors, did he,—th' sassy thing?"

Mrs. Luscomb hastened to correct this impression.

"Oh, I'm glad I was mistaken. I alluz thought they ned to keitch it when they went nigh John Moor. I sorter inquired roun' the Parson to see how they made out when they called, but I never can git no satisfaction out o' Parson Willoughby. I hate to see folks so close-mouthed!"

"Come, Winifred," said Mrs. Luscomb. "It is about time for the bell to ring; I think we will go into the church."

Apparently she wished to leave Miss Bilkins, but the latter had an arrow in her quiver, that she had not discharged.

"That 'ere Campbell boy 'n' me hez scraped up quite an acquaintance," with a glance at Winn; "I've took quite a shine to him; nobody'd ever dream he was took out o' th' poorhouse!"

Despite herself, Mrs. Luscomb gasped, and gave Winn a look in which pity and reproach mingled.

"N' it's jest the place for such as he, over on Moor's Island, where there ain't no folks with chillun," she added, with a disagreeable smile. "Folks as was pertic'lar might feel kinder cautious 'bout lettin' their young ones run with him!"

## XVIII.—THE FIRST DAY IN SCHOOL.

"I thought," said Miss Hepsy Bilkins, "that if 't was Sunday night, I'd jest step in and see ye a minute. I don't know as it's any harm to call on the Sabbath if ye don't talk on worldly subjects. I want to know, Master Graham, if you know who's goin to enter yer school to-morrow mornin'?"

Master Graham knew very well, but, as usual was uncommunicative before Miss Bilkins.

"Nobody'd a known if it hed n't ben fur me, she continued. "I was bound to find out what sort of a boy was a goin' to be taken, as it were, right into the bosom of Moortown. Folks sez they believe Master Graham's ben took in dreadful."

"Ah," said Master Graham.

"N' folks sez they haint partic'lar 'bout their young ones bein' put with nobody-knows-who, from some poorhouse, nobody-knows-where! Paupers, Master Graham, ain't jest the comp'ny folks like Square Morey and Deacon Peters wants their chillun to go with."

"What particular pauper does all this refer to?" asked Master Graham.

"Wal, I declare, did n't Mis' Luscomb tell you? That Campbell boy, what's helpin' on 'em over t' the Light, was took from some poorhouse! He told me so himself, when Mis' Luscomb's back was turned. I tackled him right arter church. I tol'd Mis' Luscomb, 'n' she looked as if she'd be glad to hear 't earth open 'n' swallow her up! I thought it was strange, the Luscombs could n't 'a given the job to some o' the town boys, there's so little chance for 'em to earn. Now, there's Cal Watkins, he needs it; 'n' it's a dreadful disappointment to Mr. Watkins that he did n't git it. It's a pity," said the benevolent Miss Bilkins, "that they hed n't a took him!"

"Would you recommend Calvin?" inquired Master Graham.

"Wal, I do know, Miss Bilkins observed. 't ad mebbe be a good thing for him."

"Ah, doubtless!" was Master Graham's emphatic rejoinder.

"Wal, I says to myself, 'there's some reason for this, 'n' I'll find it out!'"

"Was that necessary?" asked Master Graham.

Miss Bilkins hardly knew how to reply to this sudden question. It was one of Master Graham's weapons with his scholars. She let it pass, and asked one herself.

"Did you know the Campbell boy was took from the poorhouse?"

"What feminine curiosity!" said the gentleman smiling.

"Now, I suppose you will not rest until you know."

Miss Bilkins giggled, and called him a "sassy tease," and tried several more questions, without any better success, so she departed.

"She is going straight to the Jones'," said Kitty Graham. "She passed by Mrs. Withington's."

"It would be useless to carry 'er gossip there," observed the master. "I am sorry she has found this out, it will be hard for young Campbell."

Winn little dreamed of the forces at work against him. Mrs. Luscomb knew, and shrank from the possible result of Miss Bilkins' knowledge, but she would say nothing, she could not cloud that beaming face, or put one suspicion into his happy anticipations.

(To be continued.)