

THE LITTLE MISSIONARY.

Papa, does Jesus really know
That long, long miles away,
Thousands of little children live,
Who never read or pray?
Who never heard that Jesus dwells,
Far up above the sky,
Nor that he takes the children home
To heaven when they die?

Our teacher said, and in her eyes
Papa, I saw the tears,
That little boys like Jim and I,
And every one who hears,
If they but love their Saviour well,
And love the children, too,
That they will help them all they can,
And show that they are true.

I can't write very well, papa,
But you can write for me,
And send the little box I saved
For Carlo's Christmas tree;
There's all the money that I have,
But when I've grown a man,
Just tell them I will come to them,
And help them all I can.

On Christmas morn, a little form
Is shrouded and at rest;
And lightly, in one lily hand,
Above the flint breast,
Is held a cross'd and ink-stained note,
Telling God of his plan
To help poor feather boys and girls
When he was grown a man.

For Harry and his letter, came
An angel bright and fair,
"On pinions soft," King Jesus said,
"My little soldier bear.
With golden harp beside the throne,
This little lamb shall stand,
And join in the angels in the songs
Sung in Immanuel's land."

HELEN JOHNSTON.

Whitby, Ont.

THE FOUR MACNICOLS.

BY WILLIAM BLACK.

(Author of "Maclod of Inver," "A Daughter of Heth," "Maiden Violet," etc.)

CHAPTER IV.

FARTHER ENDEAVOR.

That was indeed an anxious time, when the four MacNicoles proceeded to try the net on which they had spent so much forethought and labor.

They had no great expectation of catching fish this evening; their object was, rather, to try whether the ropes would hold, whether the floats were sufficient, and whether Rob's guy-poles would keep the net vertical. So they got into the tailor's boat, and rowed away round the point to a sandy bay, where they had nothing to fear from rocks on this their first experiment.

It was, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, nearly dark—an excellent time for catching saithe, if saithe were about. The net had been carefully placed in the stern of the boat, so that it would run out easily, the rope attached to the guy-pole neatly coiled on the top.

Rob was very silent as his two brothers pulled away at the long oars. He knew what depended on his trial. They had just enough money left to settle with their landlady on the following evening, and Nicol's school-fee had to be paid in advance.

They rowed quietly into this little bay, which, though of a sandy bottom, was pretty deep. Rob had resolved to take the whole responsibility of the experiment on himself. He landed his brothers and his cousin, giving the latter the end of the rope attached to the guy-pole; then he quietly pulled away again from the shore.

When the length of the rope was exhausted, he himself took the guy-pole and gently dropped it over to prevent splashing; and as he did so the net began to pay out.

He pulled slowly, just to see how the thing would work; and it seemed to work very well. The net went out freely, and apparently sank properly; from the top of the guy-pole to the stern of the boat you could see nothing but the line of the floats on the smooth water.

But the net was a small one; soon it would be exhausted; so Rob began to pull round toward the shore again. At the same time Neil, who had had his instructions, began to haul in his end of the net gently, so

that by-and-by, when Rob had run the boat on the beach, and jumped out with his rope in his hand, the line of floats began to form a semicircle that was gradually narrowing and coming nearer the shore.

It was a moment of great excitement, and not a word was spoken. For although this was ostensibly only a trial to see how the net would work, each lad in his secret heart was wondering whether there might not be a haul of fish captured from the mysterious deep; and not one of them—not Rob himself—could tell whether this very considerable weight they were gradually pulling in was the weight of the net merely or the weight of fish, or the weight of seaweed.

The semicircle of the floats came nearer and nearer, all eyes striving to pierce the clear water.

"I hope the rope'll no break," said Rob, anxiously, for the weight was great.

"And it's only sea-weed," said Duncan in a tone of great disappointment.

But Rob's eye had been caught by some odd appearance in the water. It seemed troubled somehow, and more especially near the line of floats.

"Is it?" said he, and he hastily bade Duncan take the rope and haul it gently in. He himself began to take up handfuls of small stones, and fling them into the sea close by the two guy-poles, so that the fish should be frightened back into the net.

And, as the semicircle grew still smaller, it was very obvious that, though there might be seaweed in the net, it was not all seaweed. By this time the guy-poles had been got ashore; they were now hauling at the net itself.

"Quicker now, boys!" Rob called out.

"Man alive, look at that!"

All the space of water now enclosed by the net was seen to be in a state of commotion; the net itself was being violently shaken; here and there a fish leaped into the air.

"Steady, boys! Don't jerk, or ye'll tear the net to bits!" Rob called out, in great excitement.

For behold! when they had hauled this great weight up on the shore with a final swoop, there was something there that almost bewildered them—a living mass of fish floundering about in the wet seaweed, some springing into the air, others flopping out on to the sand, many helplessly entangled in the meshes. It was a wonderful sight, but their astonishment and delight had to give place to action.

"Run for the boat, Nicol!" There's more where they came from!" Rob shouted.

Nicol rushed along to the boat, shoved her out, pulled her along to where his companions were, and backed her, stern in.

They had no bucket; they had to fling the fish into the bottom of the boat. But this business of stripping the nets—shaking out the seaweed and freeing the emmeshed fish—was familiar to them; and they all worked with a will. There was neither a dog-fish nor a conger in all the haul, so they had no fears for their hands.

In less than a quarter of an hour the net was back in the boat, properly arranged, and Rob ready to start again—at a place further along the beach.

They were soon full of eagerness. In fact, they were too eager; and this time they hauled in with such might and main that, just as the guy-poles were nearing the shore, the rope attached to one of them broke. But Rob instantly jumped into the water, seized the pole itself, and hauled it out with him.

Here also, they had a considerable take of fish, but there was a heavy weight of seaweed besides, and one or two rents showed that they had pulled the net over rocks. So they went back to their former ground; and so successful were they, and so eagerly did they work, that, when the coming darkness warned them to return to Erisaig, they had the stern of the boat about a third full of very fairly-sized saithe.

Neil regarded this wonderful treasure of the deep as he labored away at his oar.

"Man! Rob, who could have expected such a lot! And what will ye do with them now? Will ye send them to Glasgow by the *Glenart*? I think Mr. O'Avail would lend us a box or two. Or would ye open them and dry them, and sell them from a burrow?"

"We cannot start two or three trades all at once," said Rob, after a minute or two.

"I think we'll sell them straight off, if the folk are not in bed. Ye'll gang and see,

and I'll count the fish at the slip."
"And what will I say ye will take for them?"

"I think I would ask a sixpence a hundred," said Rob, slowly; for he had been considering that question for the last ten minutes.

At length they got into the slip; and Neil at once proceeded to inform the inhabitants of Erisaig, who were still lounging about in the dusk, that for sixpence a hundred they could have fine, fresh "cuddies." It might be thought that in a place like Erisaig, which was one of the head-quarters of the herring trade, it would be difficult to sell fish of any description. But the fact was that the herring were generally contracted for by the agents of the salesmen, and shipped directly for Glasgow, so that they were but rarely retailed in Erisaig itself; moreover, people accustomed to herring their whole life through preferred variety—a freshly-caught mackerel, or flounder, or what not.

Perhaps, however, it was more curiosity than anything else that brought the neighbors along to the west slip to see what the MacNicoles had been about.

Well, there was a good deal of laughing and jeering, especially on the part of the men (these were idlers; the fishermen were all gone away in the boats); but the women who had to provide for their households, knew when they had a cheap bargain, and the sale of the "cuddies" proceeded briskly.

Indeed, when the people had gone away again, and the four lads were by themselves on the quay, there was not a single "cuddy" left—except a dozen that Rob had put into a can of water, to be given to the grocer in the morning, as part payment for the loan of the ropes.

"What do ye make it altogether?" said Neil to Rob, who was counting the money.

"Three shillings and ninepence!"

"Three shillings and ninepence! Man, that's a lot. Will ye put it in the savings-bank?"

"No, I will not," said Rob. "I'm no satisfied with the net, Neil. We must have better ropes all the way round; and sinkers, too; and whatever money we can spare we must spend on the net. Man, think of this, now, if we were to fall in with a big haul of herring or Johnnie-Dories, and lose them through the breaking of the net, I think ye would jist sit down and grieve."

It was wise counsel, as events showed. For one afternoon, some ten days afterward, they set out as usual. They had been having varying success; but they had earned more than enough to pay their landlady, the tailor, and the schoolmaster; and every farthing beyond these necessary expenses they had spent on the net. They had replaced all the rotten pieces with sound twine; they had got new ropes; they had deepened it, moreover, and added some more sinkers, to help the guy-poles.

Well, on this afternoon, Duncan and Nicol, being the two youngest, were as usual pulling away to one of the small, quiet bays, and Rob was idly looking around him, when he saw something on the surface of the sea at some distance off that excited a sudden interest. It was what the fishermen call "broken water"—a seething produced by a shoal of fish.

"Look, look, Neil!" he cried. "It's either mackerel or herring; will we try 'or them?"

The greatest excitement now prevailed on board. The younger brothers pulled their hardest to make for that rough patch on the water. Rob undid the rope from the guy-pole, and got this last ready to drop overboard.

He knew very well that they ought to have had two boats to execute this manoeuvre, and was there not a chance, if they were to row hard, in a circle, and pick up the other end of the net when they came to it? So Neil took the third oar—two rowing one side and one the other was just what they wanted.

They came nearer and nearer that strange hissing of the water. They kept rather away from it; and Rob quietly dropped the guy-pole over, paying out the net rapidly, so that it should not be dragged after the boat.

Then the three lads pulled hard, and in a circle, so that at last they were sending the bow of the boat straight toward the floating guy-pole. The other guy-pole was near the stern of the boat, the rope made fast to one of the thwart. In a few minutes Rob had caught this first guy-pole; they

were now possessed of the two ends of the net.

But the water had grown suddenly quiet. Had the fish diver and escaped them? There was not the motion of a fin anywhere, and yet the net seemed heavy to haul.

"Rob," said Neil, almost in a whisper, "we've got them!"

"We havena got them," was the reply; "but they're in the net. Man, I wonder if it'll stand out?"

Then it was that the diligent patching and the strong tackle told. The question was not with regard to the strength of the net, it was rather with regard to the strength of the younger lads; for they had succeeded in enclosing a goodly portion of a large shoal of mackerel, and the weight seemed more than they could get into the boat.

But even the strength of the younger ones seemed to grow into the strength of giants when they saw through the clear water a great moving mass like quicksilver. And then the wild excitement of hauling in; the difficulty of it; the danger of the fish escaping, the warning cries of Rob; the clatter made by the mackerel; the possibility of swamping the boat altogether, as all the four were straining their utmost at one side.

It is true that by an awkward tilt at one moment some hundred or two of the mackerel were seen to glide away; but perhaps that rendered it all the more practicable to get into the boat what remained.

When that heaving, sparkling, jinking mass of quicksilver at last was captured—shining all through the brown meshes of the net—the young lads' sat down quite exhausted, wet through and happy.

"Man! Rob, what do you think of that?" said Neil, in amazement.

"What do I think?" said Rob. "I think that if we could get two or three more hauls like that, I would soon buy a share in Coll MacDougall's boat and go after the herring."

They had no more thought that afternoon of "cuddy" fishing after this famous take. Rob and Neil—the younger ones having had their share—rowed back to Erisaig; then Rob left the boat at the slip, and walked up to the office of the fish salesman.

"What will ye give me for mackerel?" he said.

The salesman laughed at him, thinking he had caught a few with rods and flies.

"I'm no buying mackerel," said he, "no by the half-dozen."

"I have half a boat-load," said Rob.

The salesman glanced toward the slip, and saw the tailor's boat pretty low in the water.

"Is that mackerel?"

"Yes, it is mackerel."

"Where were you buying them?"

"I was not buying them anywhere. I caught them myself—my brothers and me."

"I do not believe you."

"I cannot help that, then," said Rob.

"But where had I the money to buy mackerel from any one?"

The salesman glanced at the boat again.

"I'll go down to the slip with you."

So he and Rob together walked down to the slip, and the salesman had a look at the mackerel. Apparently he had arrived at the conclusion that, after all, Rob was not likely to have bought a cargo of mackerel as a commercial speculation.

"Well, I will buy the mackerel from you," he said.

"I will give you half a crown the hundred for them."

"Half a crown!" said Rob. "I will take three and sixpence the hundred for them."

"I will not give it to you. But I will give you three shillings the hundred, and a good price, too."

"Very well, then," said Rob.

So the MacNicoles got altogether two pounds and eight shillings for that load of mackerel; and out of that Rob spent the eight shillings on still farther improving the net; the two pounds going into the savings-bank.

It is to be imagined that after this they kept a pretty sharp lookout for "broken water"; but of course they could not expect to run across a shoal of mackerel every day.

However, as time went on, with bad luck and with good, and by dint of hard and constant work whatever the luck was, the sum in the savings bank slowly increased; and at last Rob succeeded to his companions that he had saved enough to enable him to purchase a share in Coll MacDougall's boat.