

"Ah, lads! you've brought the things, I see; have you got them all right?"

"Yes, sir," said Ned, touching his cap, though he did not look up.

"This hamper looks as if it had been opened," said the Squire; "it is tied up very strangely."

"Is it, sir?" said Ned awkwardly.

The Squire thought the boys did not look very comfortable, so he said,

"Go down and ask cook to give you some dinner, and come up here again for your money."

When the boys were gone, the Squire and his man opened the hamper.

"It is very strangely fastened, James," said the Squire.

"It's been opened, sir, sure enough," returned the man.

Inside the hamper was a note from the friend who had sent it, saying that the grapes were pretty good he hoped, but one bunch he was sure was good, a white bunch, the only one he had. And no white bunch was found!

"Call the boys up," said the Squire. "Where is the bunch of white grapes?" he asked as the boys appeared.

They both looked very frightened, but did not speak. Presently Willie said, "Oh, sir, we did not mean——"

"Mean what?"

"We didn't mean to take them at first; we only meant to peep in."

"Then you opened the hamper?"

"Oh, please sir, forgive us; we'll never do such a thing again," said the boys in great trouble.

"I ought to have you locked up for stealing," said Squire Evans severely.

"Oh, please sir," exclaimed both boys with tears, "please let us go this time, and we'll never do such a thing again."

"But," said Squire Evans, "you have been guilty of theft. This is a sin against God as well as a loss to me. You richly deserve punishment; and although I won't lock you up this time, of course I shall not pay you, and I shall expect you to pay me three shillings for the worth of the grapes. As soon as you earn it you must bring the money to me, and I hope this will be a lesson to you not to steal again. I hope you will seek God's forgiveness also for your sin."

The boys went away very sad, but after that they were very careful not to touch what did not belong to them, and I am told that they both grew up honest men after all.

Boys, beware of the beginnings of sin! The first step, however small, is sure to lead to another more serious still.

"A COVENANT."

"Now, Lord, I give myself to Thee,
I would be wholly Thine;
As Thou hast given Thyself to me,
And Thou art wholly mine;
Oh, take me, seal me as Thine own,
Thine altogether—Thine alone."