

Deception.

Everyone knows the story of the boy and the shark—of the boy, that is, who thought it was fine, fun to swim out into the dangerous waters, and then call out, "Shark, shark!" and then, when men came rowing to his help, he laughed at them, and they found that they had been deceived. And everybody knows its painful result, namely that one day a shark did really come, and the lad cried as before; but those who had been deceived once were not inclined to run the risk of being deceived twice, and so the boy perished—perished a victim to his own wrongdoing.

Now, while this story is well-known, there is another given by Lamartine, which is not so well known, but which conveys a similar idea. It is briefly as follows:

In a certain desert tribe an Arab possessed a horse, whose fame had spread far and wide to other tribes. The owner of this horse was a man whose name was Naher.

In another tribe there was an Arab who coveted this horse greatly. His name was Daher. He offered to Naher great sums of money, then his camels, then his whole wealth, but nothing would tempt Naher to part with his horse.

But Daher was determined to have it, and if he could not get it honestly, he would get it by other means. So he laid a plot and carried it out. He stained his face with the juice of an herb, clothed himself in rags, and so tied up his legs that he looked to others as a lame beggar.

Now Naher had to pass a certain spot, and Daher knew this. Here, therefore, he determined to wait. At length he saw Naher coming along on his beautiful horse, and as soon as he was within hearing, Daher began in a whining tone:

"I am a poor stranger; for three days I have been here, unable to move. I am dying for want of food. Help me, and heaven will reward you."

Naher kindly offered to take him home on his horse, if he would get up, but the rogue cried:

"Good sir, I cannot move."

Then Naher, touched with pity, dismounted, and, after a great effort, lifted the beggar on to his horse. This was just what Daher wanted. He was no sooner on its back than he set it off at a gallop, and looking back at Naher, cried:

"Did you not know me? It is I, Daher!" Then he laughed.

Naher called out to him, and as Daher was certain he could not be followed, he stopped.

Then Naher said, "You have taken my horse, but I must beg of you not to tell any one how you got it."

"Why not," said Daher.

"Because," answered Naher, "some day a man might be really ill and want help, and whoever hears of this will not dare to help him, lest he should be deceived as I have been."

"That is true," said Daher, after a moment's thought, and then he turned and gave back to Naher the horse, saying, "I cannot allow others to suffer in consequence of my deception."

Let me say just this: Be true always, for every untruth works evil, both to the teller of it and to others too.

The Second Call.

"Elsie, come back and shut the door! Elsie!" called her mamma.

Elsie wavered a little, but did not turn about. When she came back, an hour afterwards, her mamma took her by the hand and led her into the library.

"Did not my little daughter hear me call her twice to close the door?" she asked.

Elsie was a truthful child. She coloured and hesitated, then answered stammeringly:

"I wanted Neddy to have his dinner while it was warm. I told Johnny I'd feed Neddy for him if he'd leave the stable door open so I could." Then she added, "And your call sounded so much lower the second time."

"My poor little girl!" said her mamma. "Do you not know that it was because you had run just so much farther away?"

Little Elsie's experience is a common one. The voice in the heart which we name Conscience—that which says, "Do this, because it is right! Avoid that, because it is wrong!"—is as real as the mother's. But the first call is always the loudest! If one does not heed it, it will never again be heard quite so clearly. One will have gone just so much farther away. By and by it will not sound at all. One may even go on quite comfortably yielding to the temptation whose first suggestion filled him with horror.

This is not a new thought, but it is a terribly true one. Dear boys and girls, never dare to wait for the second call of duty! Speak the kind word, do the generous deed, deny yourself for the sake of another—now! Break off the chain of the evil habit, leave the questionable act—now! Obedience is no slavery. Remember the child Samuel in Eli's house, who waited not for the morning light to rise and answer, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth!" Through obedience alone he grew into the prophet and leader of his people. The truth obeyed is the truth that "maketh free!"

A Sensitive Girl.

Helen Gibson was acutely sensitive. Physically susceptible to pain in a high degree, her mental temperament corresponded. She was truly conscientious, and disallowed all morbid feeling, but she was easily wounded, quickly depressed, and strongly influenced by the surrounding atmosphere.

"Mother," she said once, "I can't help feeling hurt, even when I tell myself that the jarring and cutting things are not meant to be so sharp. If I cut myself with a knife, the blood will run, even if I do it purely by accident. Can I help it if the unintentional stab brings the blood?"

"Perhaps not," said the mother, "but be sure to let the wound heal by the first intention," as the surgeons say. Don't dwell on the hurt, nor tear it open to see how it is getting on."

"I won't," said Helen resolutely.

Nevertheless, she brooded over her sensitiveness, and became discouraged and dejected over that.

She was a shy girl, and reluctant to meet strangers, but a school friend persuaded her to make her a visit. When Helen learned to know Agnes Merriam's mother, she straightway loved the gentle woman with all her heart.

One Sunday afternoon when the young girl had not been well enough to attend any service, she was alone for a little while in the library with Mrs. Merriam, each with book in hand. Helen wished within herself that some special message might come to her where she was. As if in answer to the upspringing wish, Mrs. Merriam rose and placed a small open book before her, saying, "This passage from Fenelon is so helpful."

Helen read the extract with pleasure, and then turned to one upon the opposite page. This is what she read:

"God lets a great sensitiveness form a part of some people's natural temperament, in order to train and discipline them; and then, He does not see fit to remove it, but rather to use it for their sanctification. Their part is to enter into His views for them."

"Here is my message, though Mrs. Merriam did not mean it so," said Helen softly. "If God lets it be so, but means to make me stronger by controlling what is hard, I will let Him have His way with me and 'take His view of it.'"

And oh, the comfort that came to her with this resolve.

Go Constantly to Church.

Benjamin Franklin wrote to his daughter, and his words are golden: "Go constantly to church, whoever preaches. The act of devotion in the Common Prayer book is your principal business there, and if properly attended to will do more toward amending the heart than sermons generally can do. For they were composed by men of much greater piety and wisdom than our common composers of sermons can pretend to be, and therefore I wish you would never miss the prayer days; yet I do not mean that you should despise sermons, even of the preachers you dislike, for the discourse is often much better than the man, as sweet and clean waters come through very dirty earth."

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