

THE MESSENGER.

'Why not knock down in earnest?' asked Will.

'What?' said Ed. 'How fresh you are! Jiminy! Don't you know what "knock down" means? It's what car-conductors and lots of other folks do; it's no harm—as long as you're not found out.'

'Do you mean steal?' stammered Ed. 'If you want to call it by such an ugly name.'

'Oh, I couldn't do that!' And Ed's tone expressed unspeakable loathing and disgust.

'Couldn't do that!' said Will, mimicking Ed's tone; how mighty virtuous you are—all of a sudden. What you been doin' all long but stealing—from your mother?'

Ed looked up in shocked dismay.

'That's 'bout the size of it,' said Will, laughing in high glee; 'but don't be so down in the mouth; might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb—see? I know where you can get things right from a store as easy as nothing—just slip them off the counter when no one's looking. I'll show you how it's done. Bless me! What's the matter? What you so red in the face about? Got apoplexy or swallowed your sleeve-button?'

'You got me into this thing,' said Ed, in a great rage; 'you made out that it was all right, no harm, just being smart, an' now you turn round an' call it stealing an' want me to steal in real earnest. I've found you out, Will Adams!'

'Don't say so!' sneered Will; 'found yourself out you mean. You're no baby. You took the whole thing in hunkadory, an' mighty glad you were of a chance to squeeze a cent or two out of your dear ma. You needn't throw the blame on me, and make out that you're a snow-white, just-ready-to-fly-away-to-heaven angel.'

'I'd ought to have scorned the mean thing in the first place. I'd ought to have said, "Get thee behind me, Satan,"' said Ed, excitedly.

'That's good,' said Will, provokingly. 'Satan's shoulders are broad.'

'I'm not excusing myself,' said Ed, humbly.

'Oh, ain't you?'

'I'll go straight home and tell mother.'

'I would! Tell what a great bad boy Will Adams is, and what a sweet little creature you are.'

'I'll tell the truth,' said Ed, scornfully; and with a mock bow he hastily betook himself to his heels.

But truth-telling takes courage sometimes. Ed waited until Edith had gone to bed, and then with his little money-box in his hand he went to his mother's side. Mrs. Walton looked up, and seeing the troubled look in her boy's eyes, laid aside her sewing.

'What is it, dear?' she said.

Ed tried to speak, but a big lump in his throat choked him. Mrs. Walton put her arms about his neck and kissed him, and then Ed broke down utterly.

'I've been so bad, mother,' he sobbed.

Mrs. Walton's face grew very pale, but she replied, encouragingly: 'You remember the old proverb, dear, "A fault confessed is half redressed." Tell mother all about it.'

'This is my Christmas money,' faltered Ed, 'and part of it I didn't get honestly.'

Mrs. Walton was too shocked to speak, and Ed stumbled on:

'Twenty cents of it I—I stole!'

'O my dear boy!' moaned Mrs. Walton. Ed felt as if he had stabbed his mother.

The tale was soon told.

'Here's the twenty cents, mother, it's yours. I wouldn't use it for the world; and a weight seemed suddenly to fall from Ed's shoulders, and he drew a long sigh of relief.

'My! I wouldn't have believed that twenty cents could be so heavy,' Ed declared, with a smile, half gleeful, half rueful. 'Can you ever trust me again, mother?'

Instead of replying, his mother folded him in her arms. Ed did not soon forget that hour. His mother showed him how grave the danger to which he had been exposed—that by just such slight and easy steps in wrong-doing were careers begun which often ended in complete moral ruin.

Ed spent some time the following Sabbath afternoon in committing the words of the Psalm, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.'

'That's got to mean you, Ed Walton,' he said to himself, 'Christmas money or no Christmas money! "Clean hands, clean money, and a clean gift," mother says. You've got to scratch 'round, Sir Edward, pretty lively, too. Mother and Edith shall have nice presents, bought with honest money, mind you!'

'I do believe it's snowing,' Ed ejaculated, a moment later. 'Hurrah! there'll be lots of shovelling to-morrow!'

Ed's was a true prophecy. Not only was there 'lots of shovelling' Monday, but at intervals also during the week. When Saturday night came—the Saturday night preceding Christmas—Ed counted his little store of money, and clapped his hands in an ecstasy of delight.

'Three dollars! If that ain't jolly! I b'lieve the Lord has smiled on me, just as mamma says, since I took to doing right.'

Two radiant beings celebrated Christmas from early dawn until the evening bright and serene.

'I think ever so much more of your present 'cause you earned every cent of it yourself,' Edith declared for the twentieth time and as a final preliminary to saying, 'Good-night.'

'And you made every stitch of that bag for my books, and it's just a beauty,' Ed reciprocated. 'I thought I shouldn't have any sort of a time, and it's been just the nicest Christmas! Glad I said "Merry Christmas" to Will Adams this morning! Didn't he look glum, though!'—Zion's Herald.

A Welcome.

The winds of dark December roar,
The hail beats on the window-pane;
Pile up the fire, throw wide the door
To welcome Christmas back again—
A light on life's dark wintry tide
To brighten every fireside.

It comes with many a glad surprise,
And loving tokens rare and sweet—
Perchance good angels in disguise,
With friends we long had sighed to meet:
And hands and hearts unite again,
After the parting and the pain.

While children of the merry heart,
Are sporting round the Christmas tree,
Amid our smiles a tear may start
For friends afar or o'er the sea;
Or those beyond Time's restless tide,
Who wait us on the other side.

While loving gifts we gladly greet,
'Tis still more blessed to impart.
A Christmas boon with kindness meet,
To some forsaken, lonely heart
At Christmas—Christmas ushered in,
To still the storm of human sin.
—The Christian.'

The Widow Waspey.

(British Workwoman.)

CHAPTER I.—WHO DID IT?

Swiftly the news sped. The cottage in Green Hill Lane was burnt to the ground, and its tenant, the widow Waspey, a lone woman who lived by herself, had not since been seen.

The fire was a mystery; nobody knew anything about it, and the queries were as to how it originated, and whether the late occupant had perished in the flames.

The village folk flocked to the ruins, and wonder and conjecture were at their height. Two boys, though not desirous of courting notice, listened eagerly to all that was said. For some reason or other widow Waspey was no favorite with the boys of West Dutton, with whom and herself there was open and constant war. Acting on this knowledge one present turned to the lads and asked if they knew anything of the fire.

'No,' was the emphatic reply; at the same time the elder of the two, a stout boy of ten, shot an uneasy glance at his companion.

'Who saw her last?' inquired another.

'I did, yesterday.'

The answer came from the younger boy, at sound of whose quavering voice all eyes turned his way.

'Where did you see her, Tim?'

'Going up the lane.'

'This lane?'

Tim nodded, but his face looked whiter than usual, while his friend, with a hurried whisper in his ear, led him away, and soon both boys were tearing down the lane.

This, perhaps, strengthened the suspicion that the boys of West Dutton were responsible for the fire in Green Hill Lane, and rumor changed to certainty when a few days later it became known that Tim, the younger of the two boys already mentioned, had been accused of the deed, and brought before Mr. Stevens, the local magistrate.

But when charged and questioned, though his cheeks were very white and his eyes very large, Tim stoutly denied any knowledge of the fire.

'If you had not a hand in it, perhaps you know who had?' asked the magistrate.

'No, I don't, sir,' answered Tim.

And when further questioned, though he admitted that another boy was with him when he last saw the widow in Green Hill Lane, he would not reveal his name.

'I must know who that boy is,' said Mr. Stevens.

'Please, sir, I can't tell you,' answered Tim, respectfully.

'But you must tell me; I must know his name at once.'

Tim shook his curly head and was silent, and as threats and persuasions alike were useless, and it was imperative that Mr. Stevens should get to the truth of this matter, he remanded Tim, and ordered him to be locked up in the village police station, and brought before him another day.

CHAPTER II.—AN ACCUSER.

'Little Tim in prison; Tim locked up!'

An awed, incredulous look overspread a stout, fair-haired boy's face as he whispered the words to himself.

'What is he locked up for?' he said aloud to his mother.

'Because Mr. Stevens thinks that he and some other boy have had a hand in this fire.' The boy's eyelids lowered over his eyes. 'And he won't say who the other boy is,' added his mother; 'but come, Harry, have your tea; I'm as sorry for little Tim as you are; I believe he's a good little chap, and hasn't done any harm, but I'm not so