

BOYS AND GIRLS

A BRAVE COWARD.

(By Elizabeth Preston Allan.)

'I have no doubt,' said the preacher, closing the lids of the bible and looking down into the eyes of the still and listening people, 'that you all would like to go to heaven when you die. More than that, I have no doubt that most of you expect to go there. Now I want to leave this question with you: How will you feel when you meet your Saviour, if you have not brought one soul to him; if you have not even tried to bring one? Let us pray.'

The Sunday evening congregation emptied itself out into the village street and dispersed quietly to the various homes. Those who lived outside of the village carried lighted lanterns, and the sparks of dim light could be seen moving fitfully about, like will-o'-the-wisps.

One of these country members was Lavalette Holmes, a young daughter of a farmhouse about two miles from town—a good girl; one who was 'much set on church-going,' the neighbors said approvingly. It was too far for her to walk alone at night, and her parents only got out on Sunday morning, but Larry, her uncle's son, lived on the next farm, and was very good-natured about escorting her. Larry did not care for church himself, but he liked well enough to look at the girls, and to exchange 'chaff' with the other fellows.

'I say, Letty, didn't Maria Senseney have on a fine hat, to-night?' Larry exclaimed, as soon as they had unwound themselves a little from the outpouring stream.

Lavalette was silent; she had been trying to make up her mind to speak to Larry about his own salvation, and had almost screwed her courage up to the point of speaking, when this light beginning of conversation on his part baffled and thwarted her.

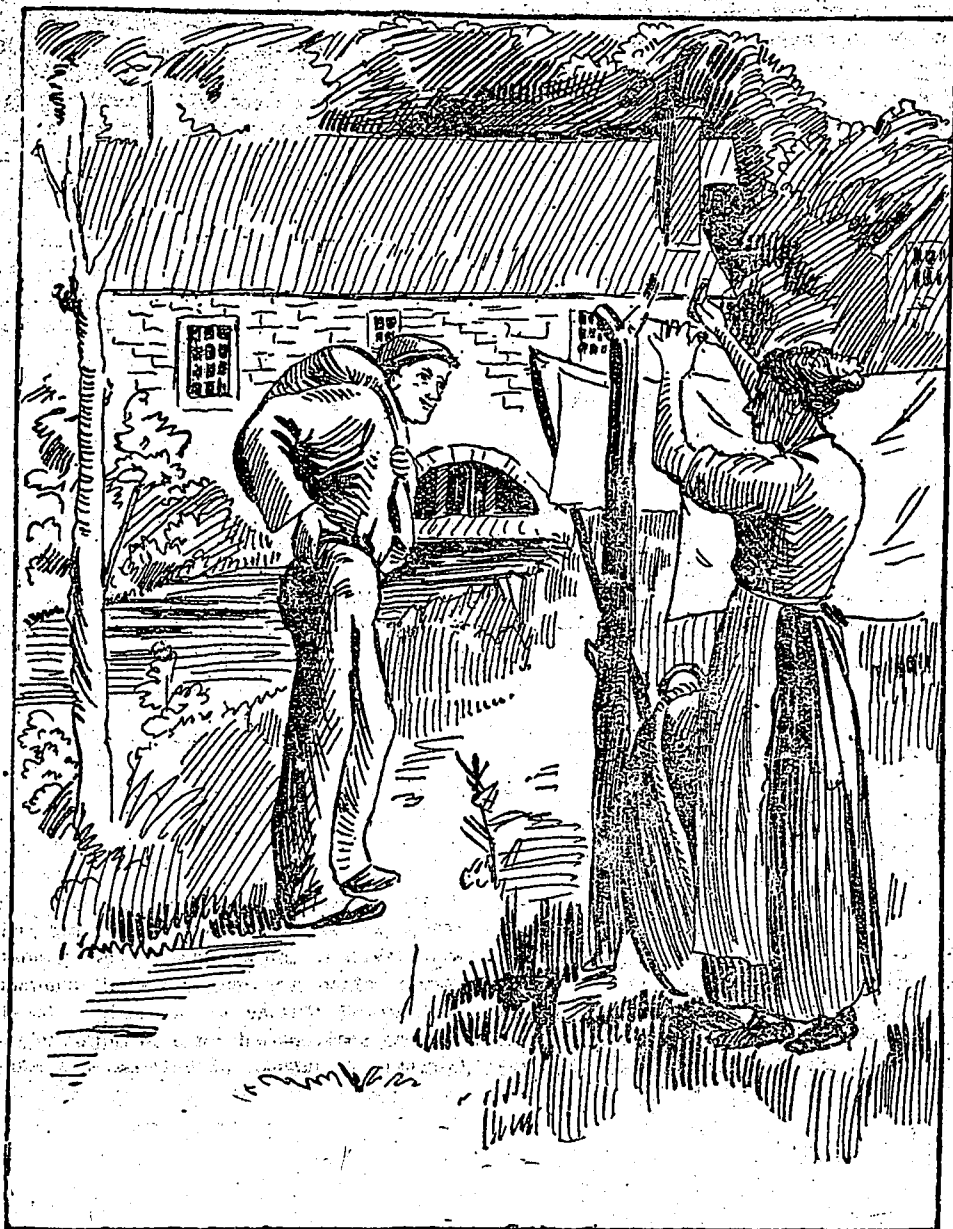
For weeks and months this had been on the girl's conscience; every sermon she heard, every hymn, every prayer, seemed to bring home to her the solemn duty of speaking to this careless young cousin, and yet she never could get herself to overcome the terrible shyness and reluctance she felt in the matter.

A hundred times she had planned ways of speaking to him alone; a hundred times she had thought out little speeches to make to him on the subject, and just as many times the sight of Larry's familiar, merry countenance, the sound of his gay, careless speech, would make her flinch and fail, and defer the speaking.

Sometimes she gave up in despair, saying she could never do it. Sometimes she persuaded herself that it would do more harm than good. Sometimes she cried out resentfully that it was his mother's business, or his father's, or the preacher's, not her's; what was she but an ignorant girl?

But always, as to-night, the strong conviction came back that she was neglecting her Lord's cause; was wounding and grieving him by her cowardly failures to speak this word in his name, and new resolves would be born in her trembled heart.

'I will wait till we get to the gate,' she said to herself now, while Larry waited to hear her opinion of Maria's new hat. 'It don't seem fair to force things on him, when he has taken the trouble to escort me to church.' So Lavalette joined in her cousin's good-humored chat about their neighbors, and the reaction from a mental strain, the brisk walk in the cool night air, Larry's gay



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companionship—all of these things excited her to such liveliness that it was impossible to get back into any frame of mind suited to the words she had meant to utter.

'I am ever so much obliged to you, Larry,' she began, but he interrupted her. 'No; you ain't got any call to be obliged to me,' he said, 'going to church puts you in such a good humor, Let, that you are game company; I don't know when I've laughed so much.'

Poor Lavalette went to bed in the deepest discouragement. 'Oh! what a coward I am,' she groaned, tossing restlessly about in the dark. 'My Saviour faced all those cruel trials, and death itself, for me, and I am afraid to speak a word for him to my own boy cousin! I wonder he doesn't cast me away! And I sat up to-night in church and sang:—

'Ashamed of Jesus! that dear friend,
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!'

with as much feeling as anybody seemed to have, and then just backed right down when the test came.'

She got up and kneeled beside her bed, and wept and prayed; prayed as hardly ever before in her life, with a keen realization that she had done all that her own strength could do, and now help must come from the outside; if she was ever to be anything but a miserable coward, it must be because Jesus would put his spirit within her.

Before she crept back to bed, Lavalette

had made a high resolve—made it not to herself, but to God. 'Blessed Saviour, I promise you,' she said solemnly, 'that the next time I am alone with Larry, I will ask him to come and be saved. I promise!' And, worn out with her struggles and tears the girl fell asleep.

When she awakened the next morning, it was with the awed feeling of one going into battle, but she had no thought of retreat.

It was wash-day at the farmhouse, and Lavalette bent her young back to this weekly drudgery with unusual ardor. There was no thought of seeing Larry that morning, but he might come over after dark for a game of checkers; he often did.

'Carry them sheets down the yard to the end of the lines, Lavalette,' said her mother; 'ther ain't enough sunshine up here under the trees.'

Lavalette picked up the heavy basket and walked off lightly with it; she was very strong. But she suddenly felt as weak as a kitten, for as she flapped the wet sheet over the line, a familiar voice at her elbow sang out:—

'Said Bessie Brooks to Johnny Snooks,
To-morrow will be Monday.'

Lavalette turned hot and then cold, her head swam, her heart beat so fast she could hardly breathe, and her hands and feet seemed turned to ice. But she did not flinch this time. 'Larry,' she said, in a faint, constrained voice, 'I was just thinking of you and wishing that I could say