

Hoeing and Praying.

Said Farmer Jones in a whining tone,
To his good old neighbour Gray,
"I've worn my knees through to the
bone,
But it ain't no use to pray.
"Your corn looks just twice as good as
mine,
Though you don't pretend to be
A shinin' light in the church to shine,
An' tell salvation's free.
"I've prayed to the Lord a thousand
times
For to make that 'ore corn grow ;
An' why you'n beats it so an' climbs
I'd give a deal to know."
Said Farmer Gray to his neighbour Jones,
In his quiet, easy way,
"When prayers get mixed with lazy
bones,
They don't make farmin' pay.
"Your weeds, I notice, are good and tall,
In spite of all your prayers ;
You may pray for corn till the heavens
fall,
If you don't dig up the tares.
"I mix my prayers with a little toil,
Along in every row ;
An' I work this mixture into the soil,
Quite vig'rous with a hoe.
"An' I've discovered though still in sin,
As sure as you are born,
This kind of compost well worked in,
Makes pretty decent corn.
"So while I'm praying I use my hoe,
An' do my level best,
To keep down the weeds along each row,
An' the Lord he does the rest.
"It's well for us to pray, both night an'
morn,
As every farmer knows ;
But the place to pray for thrifty corn,
Is right between the rows.
"You must use your hands while pray-
ing though,
If an answer you would get,
For prayer-worn knees an' a rusty hoe,
Never raised a big crop yet.
"An' so I believe, my good old friend,
If you mean to win the day,
From ploughing, clean to the harvest
end,
You must hoe as well as pray."

"Probable Sons."

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

Milly's little tongue was only too ready to talk of Tom Maxwell. "He helped me to get some holly in the wood yesterday. I have nice talks with him often. He says he is very happy, and this will be the best Christmas he has spent in his life. Uncle, I want to ask you something. I've been thinking of it a great deal to-day, only since I was knocked down this afternoon I've had such a pain in my head I left off thinking. But I've just remembered it now. You see it is really Jesus Christ's birthday to-morrow, and I was thinking I've been getting presents for every one in the house but him. Nurse has been helping me with some of them. I've made nurse a kettle-holder, and cook a needlebook, and I've bought a penknife for Ford, and a tumbler for Sarah, and some handkerchiefs for Maxwell and Mrs. Maxwell, and some woollen gloves for Tommy. And I've nothing—no, nothing for him. If I only knew something he would like."
She paused, and a soft wistfulness came into her eyes. "I was thinking," she went on, "that perhaps I could put my present for him outside the nursery window on the ledge. And then when we are all in bed, and it is very quiet, I expect he will send an angel down to bring it up to him. I think he might do that, because he knows how much I want to give him something. But then I don't know what to give him. Could you tell me, uncle?"
"I think," said Sir Edward gravely, "the only way you can give him a Christmas present is to give something to the poor. He would rather have that. I will give you this to put in the plate to-morrow in church."
And Sir Edward put his hand in his pocket, and rolled a sovereign across the table to his little niece.
But Milly was not satisfied.
"This is your present," she said doubtfully. "What will you give him this Christmas besides? Is money the only thing you can give him, uncle?"
Sir Edward pushed back his chair and

rose from the table. His feelings were almost getting beyond his control. With the one subject that was now always foremost in his thoughts, the child's question rang again in his ears. "Is money the only thing you can give him, uncle?" And like a flash of light came a reply:
"No, I can give myself back to him, my soul and body, that have now been so long in the keeping of his enemy.
After a few minutes' silence, he said, in a strangely quiet voice, "Come, little one, it is bedtime; say 'Good-night,' and run up to nurse!"
Milly came up to him, and as he stood with his back to the fire warming his hands, she took hold of the ends of his coat in her little hands, and, looking up at him, said, "Uncle Edward, you gave me a kiss like a father might have done this afternoon. Would you mind very much giving me another?"
Sir Edward looked down at the sweet little face raised so coaxingly to his, and then took her up in his arms; but after he had given her the desired kiss he said, with some effort,—
"I want you to do something to-night, little one. When you say your prayers, ask that one of God's prodigal sons may be brought back this Christmas time. It is one who wants to return. Will you pray for him?"
"Yes, uncle," replied the child softly. "And will you tell me his name?"
"No, I cannot do that."
Something in his face made his little niece refrain from asking further questions. She left him a moment later, and Sir Edward went to the smoking-room and seated himself in a chair by the fire. The chimes of the village church were ringing out merrily, and presently outside in the avenue a little company of carol singers were singing the sweet old Christmas truths that none can hear untouched.
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."
A sense of the love of God seemed to surround his soul, and this verse came into his mind as he mused:
"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."
Could he not trace in the events of the last few months the hand of a loving Father gently calling his wanderer home? Stricken down himself, placed on a sick bed for reflection, brought to the edge of the valley of the shadow of death, and then tenderly restored to life and health; the gentle voice and life of a little child pleading with him day by day, and that life having so lately been miraculously preserved from a great danger, all this filled his heart with the realization of the mercy and loving-kindness of God; and when again the past came up before him, and the tempter drew near again with the old refrain, "You have wandered too long, you have hardened your heart, and God has shut his ear to your cry!" Sir Edward, by the help and power of the Divine Spirit, was able to look up, and say from the depths of his heart,—
"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."
They were sitting in the study the next afternoon, the child upon his knee, when Sir Edward said suddenly,—
"Do you know that I have received a letter to-day about you?"
"Who from?" asked Milly, with interest.
"From my sister, your aunt, in Australia. I wrote to her when you came, and she wants to have you out there, and bring you up amongst her own children. She says a friend of hers will take charge of you and take you to her next month. I must talk to nurse about it."
The little hands clutched hold of his coat sleeve tightly, but not a word did Milly say. Sir Edward noted a slight quivering of the lips, and a piteous gleam in the soft brown eyes. He waited in silence for a moment, then said cheerfully,—
"Won't you be glad to have a lot of boys and girls to play with, instead of staying here with a lonely old man?"
Still the child said nothing; but suddenly down went the curly head upon his arm, and the tears came thick and fast.
Sir Edward raised the little face to his.—
"We must not have tears on Christmas Day," he said. "What is the matter, don't you want to go?"
I suppose I must," sobbed Milly. "Ford told nurse the day I came that you hated children. I've always been thinking of it, but you have been so kind to me that I thought perhaps he had made a little mistake. Miss Kent didn't want me, and now you don't want me, and perhaps my aunt won't want me when I get there. I wish God wanted

me, but I'm afraid he doesn't. Nurse says she thinks he wants me to work for him when I grow up. I think—I think I'm rather like the little kitten yesterday, that nobody was sorry for when she died. You said there were plenty more kittens, didn't you?"
"I don't think there are plenty of small Millicents in this world," and Sir Edward's voice was husky. "Now listen, little woman, I have been thinking over the matter, and have decided this afternoon to keep you with me. I find I do want you after all, and cannot afford to lose you. Supposing we dry these tears, and talk about something else."
And as the little arms were thrown round his neck, and a face full of smiles and tears like an April shower was lifted to his, the "confirmed old bachelor" took to his heart the little maiden whose very existence had so annoyed and distressed him only a few months before.
"Uncle Edward," she said, a little time after, "do you know if that prodigal son you told me about last night has come back to God?"
Sir Edward was silent for a minute, then very gravely and solemnly he said:
"I think he has, little one. It has been a very happy Christmas Day to him, and you must pray now that he may not be ashamed to own his Lord, who has so mercifully brought him back through the instrumentality of one of his lambs."
THE END.

OUR COZY CORNER.
BY E. ADDIE HEATH.

"Back again to school;
Hear the bells a-ringing!
Feet a-dancing, heads a-whirl,
Shouting boy and shining curl,
Here they come a-singing,
Back again to school."
"Back again to school,
Clear September weather,
Wayside golden-roads a-blow;
Eyes asparkle, cheeks aglow,
Down the grassy ways they go,
Merry mates together,
Back again to school."
You know what Shakespeare says:
"If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work."
So it happens well that the playground is close upon the school-room.
Have you ever heard of the Bluecoat Boys? They are the school-boys of Christ's Hospital, in London. They wear a long, blue gown and leather girdle. When they are at play they tuck their long skirts into their belts.
In the East, where our Saviour was born, the boys all wear long and loose-robed garments, and the girdle, or belt, is very necessary.
In Holman Hunt's beautiful picture, the "Boy Christ" is tightening the buckle of his girdle with his right hand. I mean the picture of the "Boy Christ." He is as real a boy as any of you, though there never was such beauty in any other boy's face as shone in his, because it was a heavenly beauty. Jesus was only twelve years old then, but a writer for young folks, in speaking of this painting, refers to him as tightening his girdle, because, to use our Saviour's own words, "I must be about my Father's business."
Then, this same writer wants to know if all you boys and girls, after coming back from your long vacation, need not, like Jesus, when he was twelve years old, "to tighten your girdle of service, and seek with all your heart to do your Father's will?"
The purpose of the girdle is to keep in place, to hold together. It has a binding power. All you who have put on the girdle of sincerity of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting—and, I trust, there is not one of you who has not done so—will not you ask Jesus to "help you to pull it tight?"
Sometime you boys and girls may cross the ocean and visit Christ's Hospital, where the Bluecoat Boys go to school. I dare say you would find there a great deal to interest you. A good way to prepare for the journey is to read about this school. Find out how it happened to be started in the first place.

WOULD THE CHAIN HOLD.
There is a good story that Dr. Miller tells about the chain that an old blacksmith made. He lived in the heart of a great city, and all day long the people could hear the clanging of his hammer upon the anvil, and they knew that he was forging a chain. Now and then idlers dropped in to watch his work, and as they saw how faithful and patient he was, and how he would never pass over

a link till it was absolutely perfect, they laughed at him and told him he would get over so much more accomplished if he did not take so much pains.
But the old smith only shook his head and kept on doing his best, making every link as strong as if the whole chain depended upon it. At last he died and was laid away in the churchyard, and the great chain which lay in the corner of his shop was put on board a ship. It was coiled up out of the way, and for a long time no one noticed it.
But there came a fierce, wild wind in the winter, when the wind blew a gale, the rain dashed down in torrents, and vivid flashes of lightning darted through the sky. The ship tolled through the waves, and strained and groaned as she obeyed her helm. It took three men at the helm to guide her. They let go her anchor, and the great chain went rattling over the side of the deck into the gloomy waves. At last the anchor touched the bottom, and the chain, made by the old blacksmith, grew as taut and stiff as a bar of iron. Would it hold?
That was the question every one asked as the gale increased. If one link, just one link, was imperfect and weak, they were lost; but the faithful old smith had done his best in each link. Each had been perfect, and this night his work defied the tempest, and when at length the waves were stilled and the sun arose, the vessel with all her precious lives was safe.
What had saved her? The chain, you say. Well, yes; but what was the quality that had been wrought into the chain? Fidelity. Yes; that was it. And don't you see what a parable it is of our daily character-building? Link by link, hour by hour, deed by deed, we fashion it; and when temptation comes it will test our work. One weak spot, and we shall be wrecked by that one imperfect link. But if we have been faithful in all we can withstand temptation and hold fast to the anchor of our souls.—The Lifeboat.

HONEST AND EARNEST.
BY H. T. WILDER.

"Can I wake up de leaves in your front yard, auntee?" asked five-year-old Ralph one autumn afternoon; and when Aunt Sue said, "Yes," Ralph, with his little wheelbarrow and rake, worked busily till dusk. And the happy smile on his face when he received the big ginger cookie, and was called a busy little worker, was good to see.
"Can I haul in your kindling wood and clean the yard all up?" said seven-year-old Ralph, standing at the back door with his small express cart. And Aunt Sue, who had been looking out for a big boy, was only too willing to give the job to her little industrious nephew. And the pennies that went into the bank that night jingled merrily.
"Can I rake your lawn and untie your rose bushes?" asked ten-year-old Ralph one warm spring day; and Aunt Sue, who had learned to know a good workman, consented willingly, and felt that the money paid was well earned.
"If you will haul away all the old rags, bottles, and rubbers stored away in the shed, Ralph," said auntee, two years later, "you may sell them 'on halves,'" and Ralph, delighted to be busy, worked all the forenoon, and the money earned went toward his new shoes.
"Do you want your paths shovelled, sir?" asked Ralph the next winter of Mr. Brown; and Neighbour Brown, who had all along watched the industrious little fellow, consented, knowing the job would be well done. And Ralph's wet mittens closed that night over a bright, new quarter.
"I want a boy, Mrs. Wayne," said Mr. Brown a year later, "to do chores at my office between school hours, and I know Ralph is the one, because he is industrious and honest." And Ralph's business kept him in clothes all winter.
"I want a young man in my office, at my books," said Mr. Brown to Ralph, when he had finished school; "and you, Ralph, have done what has been given you so well that the place is yours, if you wish it." And Ralph's heart was light as he went home that night.
"I want an overseer in the best room of my manufactory," said Mr. Brown as Ralph turned twenty-one, "and, as I have found I can trust you and your industry, will you take the situation?"
"I want a partner in my business, Ralph," said old Mr. Brown some years later. "I am getting on in years, and I need a steady, honest, industrious hand and head to consult with. Will you come to my counting-room and talk it over?"
It is the honest and earnest who get to the top, boys.
Keep on trying.