

Jim could not speak; nor could he touch the coffee his mother had handed him. Alarmed, his father helped him upstairs and made him lie down. How could he bear all this kindness? Yet how could he pain his father by telling him how his disobedience had caused his loss?

'Father,' he groaned, 'was it insured?'

'The building was, yes, fully; not the wheat. But come, come, my dear boy, don't take it so to heart. It might have been much worse. It may be a hard pull this year, but after that it will be all right, please God.'

Over and over again, almost since Jim could remember, his father had spoken just such brave words, as each year had brought him disappointment and loss. And now that fair wheat, on which he had so counted, was gone, and through his untrustworthiness! It might as well—might better—have had mildew or blight or smut, as in other years! And then Jim's thoughts, made keen and clear by his suffering, ran back to the doctor's talk in Sunday School.

'Above all things, boys, if you would be fit for the Master's use, be true! Think the truth, speak the truth, act the truth! No disease is so hateful and deadly as this smut, which blackens the very heart and eats it out.'

On their way back from the fire, the clergyman, the doctor and the schoolmaster held a consultation. All agree that the festival must be held, even though it must be on a smaller scale than had been planned. The doctor's modest little barn was to serve as a hall in place of the spacious one so gaily fitted up yesterday.

There was a little cloud over the group gathered early in the church to arrange the flowers for the service of thanksgiving, not because of their own disappointment but because of their sympathy for Mr. Hawkins. They missed Jim's help too, and his merry companionship. Ruth, coming back just in time for the thanksgiving service, her arms laden with the branch of flowers she had been home for to fill a vacant spot, to her surprise saw Jim coming out of the robing-room and slipping out the side gate. He came upon her suddenly, and started as if he did not want to be seen.

'Oh, Jim, we missed you so,' she said, eagerly, 'are you going for more flowers?'

'No,' answered Jim, in a low voice, 'I can't stand it! I'm going home.'

'Oh, Jim, you must be in the choir. Papa said this morning he thought your father was so brave, because when Mr. Leonard said something about his not being at the service this morning, he said he would surely come—he had so much to be thankful for because his house was safe and you and your mother.'

Jim hesitated. He had pleaded to be left at home, but his father had seemed grieved and said it would pain him very much if he did not take his place in the choir as usual, that Jim had come. In

the robing-room his courage had failed him. Now Ruth's pleading induced him once more to go back, and this time he could not change his mind again for it was time for the choir to march in. But, try as he might, Jim could not sing. The doctor, hearing the strong steady tones of the father's voice in the congregation, and then noting the boy's white face and closed lips, wondered. Surely, the father ought to realize better the loss than could the boy—he had expected to see him excited and elated rather.

'Come, ye thankful people, come, Raise the song of Harvest Home; All is safely gathered in, Ere the winter storm begin.'

'Safely gathered in! Bas; safe all had been till his carelessness and disobedience. Jim was trembling so he could hardly stand.

'All the world is God's own field, Fruit unto His praise to yield: Wheat and tares together sown, Unto joy or sorrow grown: First the blade and then the ear, Then the full corn shall appear: Lord of harvest, grant that we Wholesome grain and pure may be.'

His father's beautiful wheat! all black ashes now! And what was he? 'Wholesome grain and pure?'

Jim sunk down on his seat, and the choir, shocked, could scarcely obey the organist's signal to go on with the hymn, as Mr. Hawkins and the doctor carried the fainting boy out. On the cool lawn he soon came to, but hid his face in his misery, as he saw his father bending over him.

'Do go back, father,' he begged, again and again, 'I shall be all right now.' And his father, perplexed and distressed, took the doctor's advice and returned to the church.

'Jim, my boy, are you ill? Did you hurt yourself, last night?'

Jim's strength was gone. He burst into tears.

'It's worse than that, doctor! I'm not fit to be trusted. I'm like the worst kind of wheat! I burned that barn down, and I've as good as told a lie about it. I can't tell my father!'

Some of the heaviness of the burden had rolled off already. In a few minutes the doctor knew it all. He made Jim go home with him and gave him strict orders to lie still upon the sofa after he had swallowed a mixture the doctor gave him. The doctor then went back to the church.

It was late in the afternoon Jim awoke, to find the doctor quietly reading by his side.

'Ruth!' called the doctor.

Ruth came in tip-toe, and with a smile at Jim, disappeared, to come back in a few minutes with a tempting lunch tray.

'Now, Jim, I want you not to leave a crumb on that tray.'

Jim was really hungry and he obeyed orders pretty well.

'Now,' said the doctor, 'I have something to tell you. Your father knows all about it. He's been here for half an hour, and I told him, as I knew you wished.'

'And did he—was he—stammered Jim.

'He'll tell you,' said the doctor, and made way for Mr. Hawkins, who was just coming in the door.

'Oh, father, I'm so glad you know! I couldn't rest!'

'Thank God you couldn't Jim! If you could, I'd have had a worse loss than the loss of a barn. A barn can be built up again, but it's not so easy to build up a character when the foundation of truth gives way.'

Jim was a little appalled when he found that his father expected him to attend the festival.

'Your mother is very much worried over you, my lad; and though she has one of her worst headaches, I could scarce keep her from coming over here. If she hears you've gone to the festival, she'll be relieved and go to sleep. For her sake and for my sake, Jim, go.'

'Not unless they all know,' said Jim, looking up with pride and love into his father's face. Had boy ever such a father?

'If you wish that, Jim, it's easily done,' said the doctor, who had rejoined; 'I'll send Ruth over with orders to tell the story to the children who are busy fixing up the barn for to-night, and all Brookside will know it in an hour.'

The doctor well knew how Ruth would tell the tale—with none of that eager pleasure that people of little minds and less hearts take in telling something ill of their neighbor. Jim was a favorite; Jim had been talked of all day as a hero, and had won all their sympathy by his fainting spell in church. So when little Ruth wound up her tale: 'Wasn't he brave to tell? Papa says he has a tender heart and a tender conscience, and his father loves him more than ever!' all felt more inclined to make a hero of him than before.

But Jim's conscience was too wide awake for him to imagine himself a hero; he was weak, sinful, and deeply sorry. His punishment was heavy—the seeing his father deeply burdened through his loss.

For the sake of all, Jim tried that night to take the part of leader people expected him to take in the games, and he succeeded fairly well. But he was glad when it was over, and he and his father drove home together, his father's arm about him, as his bright, hopeful words cheered Jim's still heavy heart.

'You do forgive me, father!' he asked, 'and do you believe in me yet?'

'With all my heart. Ah! Jim, over and over again I have to ask the same questions of our Father in heaven, and His answer is always the same—'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'

And from that moment, Jim began to have a truer idea of what the heavenly Father's love is; for every true father on earth is but a faint shadow of that Father of fathers.

MARBLE H. DESPARD.

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