

BOYS AND GIRLS

Dora's Vacation.

(By Cousin Kate.)

(Written Specially for the 'Messenger'.)

Commencement was over in the great college at London, and the students were fast scattering to their homes. Presently a deep hush would fall on the western part of the city, in which the faculty and students played so important a part; and as for the college buildings, they would stand big, bare and barn-like, with the air of a deserted village, until September's tocsin should again rally their bright host of young people.

In the evening of the second day after commencement a small group were sitting on the grass, under the old oak tree in the far corner of the campus. Each was earnestly discussing her plans for vacation. Ethel Brown and Nora Day were the daughters of 'well-to-do' merchants, and were going to have a month at the seaside. Jessie Harwood was going to spend all of her vacation with her grandparents in the country, and Mabel Simpson had joyously told of the long-promised visit to her aunt's in a far western city. For a moment all were silent; they seemed to be waiting the answer of a brown-cheeked girl, who sat in the centre of the group, but as yet had not joined in the conversation.

'Come, Dora,' cried Ethel, 'you have not spoken a word yet; now, do tell us your plans, you always have something far more sensible than any of us.'

'Yes, girls,' began Dora; 'I have a plan that will cover all my holidays; to you it would seem as nothing, but to me the fulfilment of this plan will be unspeakable happiness. I cannot unfold to you my intentions, so you must be content with the information that I am going, in the morning, to my home in Brookdale, there to remain until college opens again.'

As Dora finished speaking, she cast a timid glance at each of her companions, then arose and, without a word, crossed the campus and straight on to her own room, for she wished to avoid any questioning upon the subject. She was a tall, slim girl of nineteen summers, with a pleasant face, dark blue eyes, and a mass of jet black hair that hung in tiny curls about her forehead. Her home was some fifty miles from the city, and she had decided to take the train the following morning and give the home folks a little surprise. As she finished the preparations for her journey, she sat down at the window to collect her wandering thoughts. Her conscience said she ought to have told the girls that she had become a Christian, that she loved her Saviour and meant to serve him always, and that it was her plan to carry that glorious treasure to her parents who had it not. Dora was not a coward, she was not ashamed of the name she had taken; but, like many others who are young in the faith, she had held back for fear of 'what the girls would think of her.'

In the old white farm-house under the shadow of an overhanging hill near Brookdale, the McBerney family were seated at dinner. The table was of the plainest. No silver or elegant china em-

bellished it, the cloth was coarse and the two-tined forks were old and bent.

The father of the household, an old man with a stern face and patriarchal beard, sat at the head of the table; the mother, in a coarse blue calico dress, sat at the opposite end, and poured the tea; while four small children, barefooted and plainly clad, ate with little attention to decorum. In fact, except when Dora was at home, nobody cared how they ate or paid attention to their deportment; the father insisting scrupulously on obedience and truth, two cardinal points in home-training, but caring nothing for what he considered show or airs. Dora's superfine ways, since she had been at college (to which the legacy of an aunt enabled her to go) were distasteful to her plain old father, and as for her mother, who was illiterate, they were the occasion of resentful comment and censure.

'She's plum spiled, Jonathan,' the old lady would say to her husband. 'I wish she had never seen Martha's money. She'll never amount to nothin''.

'Probably she'll go away and teach,' the old man had said. 'Dora's a very good girl, but I don't like her ways any more'n you do. Just box any of the others if you see them imitatin' her after she comes home this time, or jist send 'em to me and I'll fix 'em. Plain, straightforward children are all I want, Jane.'

The meal was almost finished, when a step on the walk caused everyone to pause. In a moment the door was opened and Dora walked in. She tripped joyfully to her mother's side, and wound her arms about her neck in a loving embrace. A look of shame passed over the old man's face when the cool, rosy lips of his daughter were pressed against his cheek, for he thought of the unkind remarks that had just been passed about her fine airs. The children drew back as their sister printed a kiss on each little tanned forehead, and soon after left the house.

After each plate and cup were set in their places and the kitchen put in order, Mrs. McBerney sat down beside her mending basket and Dora went to her own room under the eaves to unpack her trunk and to seek help from her newly-found friend for her coming trial.

From her window she could see her father toiling in the corn-field; she noticed, too, how bent his shoulders and how careworn he was getting. She was very fond of her stern old father. Since leaving the house at noon, Mr. McBerney's thoughts had been continually of Dora; try as he would, he could not get her from his mind, and it troubled him. He thought how different she seemed since her last visit; he remembered, too, the gentle embrace and loving kiss and the sweet way with which she had said, 'How are you, father?' He could not understand it all.

Just at dusk the old man entered the house for the night. He walked straight through the shed and into the kitchen where his wife sat rocking by the window. She pulled a chair close to her own, saying, as she did so:

'Sit down here, Jonathan, the breeze is nice and cool, and you look tired.' After a brief silence, she continued, 'I was just a-wonderin' what had come over our Dora;

she's got some secret or other, her eyes are plum full of it. I wonder—'

'There is sunshine in my soul to-day,
More glorious and bright
Than any earthly sunshine ray,
For Jesus is the light.'

The words came clear and sweet through the open window from the garden.

'Do you 'spose, Janie, that that girl has got some of that religion into her head; and I wonder if she'll be a-scoldin' because we ain't Christians and don't have Bible reading every night like Stillwell's and Jones's and all 'em folks?'

Just at this moment the boys entered, and were on their way to the stairs when Dora met them, holding in her hand a small testament and hymn book.

'Come, boys, don't go to bed just yet; sit down and let us sing something for father and mother first; here is the hymn Miss Benson taught you last summer while she was at Stillwell's.' While singing, Dora noticed what a fine voice Harry (the oldest boy) possessed, and how Jack and Tom seemed to have lost all their shyness and were singing with all their very might.

The singing ended, Dora laid down the hymn book and picked up her Bible. All eyes were at once fixed upon her, but every lip was sealed, and they waited in breathless silence. This was a trying moment for poor Dora. She remembered how hard she thought it had been to confess her Saviour before the great crowd in the city church; but to-night she found it still harder to confess him in her home, where his name was seldom, if ever, heard; but she was a brave girl, and banished all fear from her heart, and turning towards her parents, she said: 'Dear parents, I have become a Christian. I have found the Saviour, and now I ask you please to let me read in your presence a small portion of his Word each night while I am with you.' After a moment's pause, she opened her Bible at the second chapter of Hebrews. She began in a clear, strong voice, that showed no trace of emotion, and read the chapter through.

After it was finished, the boys hurried off to their beds; but the parents did not stir or speak; they seemed to be too deeply moved for words. Dora perceived this, and thinking they were best alone, took a lamp from the shelf, and with a cheery "Good-night," left the room.

Long after the usual hour, the light burned on the table while the old people still sat the window.

'I think, Janie, that we've been two hard on poor Dora; there must be sumthin' in her religion after all, or she wouldn't be doin' what she has this evenin'.'

'Well, we'll see, Jonathan, how she hangs on, for it's my opinion that she'll be dropping it purty soon; but, come, we must be goin' to bed, for it's getting late.'

She arose, and after lowering the window and fastening the doors, she joined her husband on the stair on the way to their room.

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Vacation is almost over, and Dora is preparing for her return to college. She has been faithful in the services at the family altar, which she enriched in her Saviour's name, and ere she leaves her