

WATCH YOUR WORDS.

Keep a watch on your words, my darlings,
For words are wonderful things;
They are sweet, like the bee's fresh honey;
Like the bees, they have terrible stings.
They can bless, like the warm, glad sun-
shine,
And brighten a lonely life;
They can cut, in the strife or anger,
Like an open, two-edged knife.
Let them pass through his lips unchal-
lenged,
If their errand is true and kind;
If they come to support the weary,
To comfort and help the blind.
If a bitter, revengeful spirit
Prompt the words, let them be unsaid;
They may flash through a brain like light-
ning,
Or fall on a heart like lead.
Keep them back if they are cold and cruel,
Under bar, and lock, and seal;
The wounds they make, my darlings,
Are always slow to heal.
May peace guard your lives, and ever
From this time of your early youth,
May the words that you daily utter
Be the beautiful words of truth.

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF THE
FEN COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

HOW EPHRAIM GOODWILL FOUND THE
BOY.

A few words will put the opening in-
cidents of the story before the reader.
On a summer's day in 187, the
Douglas steamboat had just landed her
passengers at Liverpool, and Prince's
Pier was thronged with people. Amongst
them moved a tall, thin man, with long
legs, long neck, long, beaky nose, kindly,
honest eye, hale look, and in age just
past his seventieth birthday. This was
Ephraim Goodwill, a homely, fairly well-
to-do East-countryman, then on his re-
turn from his seaside holiday. He was
weighted with luggage, and a ragged,
shoeless lad, on the look-out for a job,
ran up to him to offer his services. The
lighter of the parcels was put down for
him to carry, but before the boy could
adjust it on his shoulder, a big, ugly
youth came up, and with an oath and a
swinging kick sent him reeling to the
side of the bridge, while he himself
marched off with the baggage—"the good
old rule the simple plan," as a t to the
Mersey-side loafer as the freebooting
ruler." Our tall friend took in the scene
at a glance: in two long strides he got
abreast of the fellow, and wrenched the
parcel from him, and then, catching him
by the ears, he knocked his jail-cropped
head once, twice, three times, against the
iron stanchions of the bridge—"There,
you rascal, one for swearing at the boy,
two for kicking him, and three for steal-
ing his job. Do you want any more?"
If so he did not wait for it, but twisting
his head out of the man's hands, with a
villainous scowl slunk away. The poor
little chap still lay where he had fallen,
and when Ephraim returned with the
kindly summons, "Now, boy, take the
parcel, and come along," there was lifted
up to him a face very different to that
generally seen amongst the class. It was
hungry and dirty: he had been weep-
ing silently over his hurt and disappoint-
ment, and the tear-marks seamed his
cheeks, but this did not hide the bright,
truth-like eye and clear, open brow of the
boy. As the two walked briskly through
the streets the man's heart warmed to his
little friendless companion, and he be-
gan:

"What do they call you?"

"Kit Avon, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Liverpool, sir."

"What do you do for a living?"

"Pick up odd jobs carrying."

"Where did you sleep last night?"

"Dock shed, in an old box."

"Where do your friends live?"

"Aint got none, sir; mother died, and
then father."

After a pause, "Are you in debt, boy?"
"Eh, master?" The question was the
simple outcome of the man's own high
principle, and of the purpose forming in
his mind in regard to the lad, but to the
boy himself it was incomprehensible.
"Eh, Master?"

"I mean, do you owe anybody in Liv-
erpool for your food or your lodging, or
such like things?"

A merry gleam shot from the lad's
eyes as he said, "Not a copper, sir, the
like of me pays as we go; nobbut big
srells lives on tick."

They were now at the station, where
in ordinary course they would have part-
ed, but Ephraim suddenly turned to his
companion and said:

"Would you like to learn a trade, a
good honest one?"

"Hi, master, that I should."

"Well, then, look at me; can you
trust me and will you go with me?"

The lad put his parcel down and gave
a long, eager look into the honest, kindly
old face turned to him, until the look be-
came satisfied and restful, and then he
put his little hands into one of Ephraim's
and said, simply, "Yes, master, I'll go
with you if you'll take me."

So the boy was found.

CHAPTER II.

EPHRAIM'S HOME IN THE GREAT FEN
LAND.

Across England from west to east,
miles inland on the banks of the busy
Mersey: past the thriving towns and
over the sweeping moors of Lancashire;
through the Black Country, green mark-
ed with the tints of summer: eastward
still to the old city where the hum of
modern enterprise mingles with the old-
world chants of the hushed, soothing ca-
thedral life—Peterboro', "The Monastery
of Burgh," twelve centuries ago "The
Golden Borough" of Saxon and Dane.
Here Ephraim had the boy properly
clothed, and then eastward still the trav-
ellers sped to where in the Great Fen
Land stands a small isolated railway sta-
tion built of wood, black in its weather-
proofing of tar, and with the upper storey
overhanging like the quaint old one-leg-
ged windmills now so rare to see. A
patch of garden sloped down to a twelve-
foot sedgy drain, and then on either side
of the station the country stretched miles,
miles away, sea-like in its flatness and its
far-off level horizon. There were long,
straight groves; solitary farmsteads with
willow clump and dark, still pools; cotta-
ges snug under the river banks, windmills
for drainage black and gaunt enough for
Quixote's doughty chivalry; and on
slightly higher ground in the distance
stood a long row of pollard willows. Be-
hind these rose the slender spire of the
village church at Alder-fen, a village built
in a pre-drainage age, when the lowlands
were surrendered to the winter storms
and the gravelly reaches only were habi-
table. This was the destination of the
travellers, and to it they rapidly drove in
Ephraim's homely though well-horsed
vehicle awaiting him at the station. It
was late in the day when he reached this
stage of the journey, and the man's heart
warmed to the old homeland, to him un-
matched in beauty by all that he had
seen elsewhere. "They have a beauty
of their own, those great fens, even now
that they are drained and dyked, fenced
and tilled a beauty as of the sea, of
boundless expanse and freedom: over-
head the arch of heaven spreads more
ample than elsewhere, and the vastness
gives such effects of cloudland, sunrise
and sunset as can be seen nowhere else
in these lands." So wrote Charles
Kingsley in his marvellous prose-poem of
the Fen-land, and, though Ephraim
Goodwill was a man of but plain thoughts,
the poetry of the scene sang in his heart
from earth's thousand forms of beauty
and voices of praise. All apart from the
home glamour, it was a rare sight in that
summer's evening, with the vast prairie-

like stretches of pasture and waving corn;
the long dykes glistening silver-like in
the shadow, or, where they caught the
evening flush, glowing as molten gold,
and over all a sunset where tropical gor-
geousness of color mingled with the paler
tints of our northern clime, their light
together.

As when a soft and purple mist,
Like a vapouring amethyst,
Or an air-dissolved star,
Falls the overflowing sky,
And the plains that silent lie
Undemeath.

"Ah," felt Ephraim, as he trotted
along the bank and took in all the beauty,
"those hill parts are very well in their
way, and to be shut amongst big moun-
tains may do for folks who don't know of
anything better, but the wide Fen for
me."

His home was an ancient holdir such
as may often be met with in the of
England. The house had mass'alls,
and large rambling rooms, and a and it
a garden with moat and high banks and
tall elms. A modern turnpike had been
laid close by it, and the front of the house
looked directly into the village street.
On one side of the quaint old porch there
was nailed a signboard, over which the
sweetest of roses or honeysuckles were
never allowed to climb, for it contained
Ephraim's first and last published work,
and he cherished for it an author's fond-
ness and pride.

Goodwill to all is here intended
New goods well made old things well mended;
Wheelwright and Smith, E. Goodwill still
By good work seeks to gain goodwill.

And so with the kindly, good old man
little Kit Avon found a home where the
better part of his nature opened as
flowers to the summer sunshine: and
after two short years few would have re-
cognized the Liverpool waif in the hand-
some, clever, truthful lad who brightened
Ephraim's home and cheered the old
man's "eventide."

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE BOY HAD BEEN LOST.

On the western borders of the Great
Fen Land there lived ten years ago an
aged, wealthy Christian gentleman named
King. His life had been sadly embitter-
ed by domestic sorrow. Through the
death of his wife he had been left in sole
charge of their only child, a daughter.
At the age of twenty-one she
inherited property independently of her
father, and this drew towards her the
attention of the profligate son of a rich
neighbour. It is the old story: the hand-
some scoundrel won the day in spite of
every effort to save the girl, and after a
secret marriage the two disappeared. Mr.
King grieved much for his daughter, and
never ceased to hope for her return until
the day the tidings came that husband,
wife, and a boy who had been born to
them had all perished in a steamboat ex-
plosion on the Hudson River. The old
man never recovered from the blow, and
within twelve months he sank into the
grave, leaving his property by will to be
divided equally amongst five distant re-
lations. In reality, however, the infor-
mation of the death of the family had
been false, and the facts were that four
years after her ill-advised marriage the
wife died utterly broken-hearted and in
entire ignorance of her father's unlabeled
affection and wish for her return; three
years after this the husband was shot
dead in a New York gambling-hell, and
the boy, who had been told nothing
about his parents' former life beyond that
they had once lived in England, crept one
day on board an English trading vessel
just loosing from the wharf, and hid him-
self from the crew. The ship was far
out at sea before he was discovered, and,
though the treatment he met with was
such as he might have expected, he was
taken on to Liverpool, where, for several
months, he tried to keep himself from
starvation and crime, and where a kindly
Providence led him in the path of old
Ephraim Goodwill.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEN SKATING-MATCH.

November of the year brought a north-
east storm, with a whirling snow, over
the fen, succeeded by many days of keen
frost and cloudless sky. Soon the drains
and water were coated with smooth,
strong ice, and the Fen-men's winter holi-
day began, when male and female, old
men and little children, donned the
"pattens" and joined in the fun. Every
day had its skating race, and the deeds of
the winners were talked of around winter
firesides, alike in cottage and hall, with
the zest and admiration of a Ryde yachts-
man for his boat, or an Arab for the
speed of his horse—how John Gittan did
a mile in 2 min. 25 sec., and Turkey
Smart in 2 min. 2 sec., and their succes-
sors in the championship had carried the
"pattens" against all comers—Norwe-
gians, Dutchmen, Canadians, and all. In
the little village of Alder-fen the topic
was all-absorbing, and when news came
that a popular nobleman who lived near
had offered a prize for a race and had
announced his intention to be present,
the people duly gave themselves up to
the excitement, and moved in crowds to
the place. Amongst the first on the
ground were Ephraim and young Kit
Avon. The race was to come off on the
washes close to Alder-fen, and by this
term the uninitiated should understand
one of several reaches of country about
twenty miles long, and from a quarter to
half-a-mile wide, banked up on each side
to form a reservoir for the surplus high-
land waters until they can be run off to
the sea. Between the banks lie grass
fields, forming in the summer a rich
pasturage, and in the winter, when flood-
ed and frozen over, a rare skating-ground,
smooth as glass, and, except where the
drains cross the land, shallow and safe.
From far and wide came the Fen-men to
the spot where Lord Munvers' prize was
to be struggled for, and the ice was
thronged with people. Round rushed
the skaters in the space marked off for
them, skimming the course with the
speed and grace of swallows. Again the
Fen champion was the winner, and 'a-
midst ringing cheers he received from
Lord Munvers the ten-pound note won
by his morning's work. But the day did
not close without accident. Five hun-
dred yards away a drain crossed the
washes, and as a young girl skated over
the spot the ice broke under her and she
fell through into deep water. Without
speedy help she must have been drown-
ed; but, in less time than this takes to
write, Kit Avon, ready equipped
in his skates, had snatched up a
small coil of rope and was speeding
like a bird over the ice. Score: followed
to help, but before they reached the spot
the lad had swirled one end of the rope
to the drowning girl, and with its help
she had struggled out of the dyke into
the broken ice of the shallow water.
Very proud was old Ephraim of his boy's
deed, and not less so when a servant in
livery came with the message that Lord
Munvers wished to see the boy before he
left the ground. The request was at
once complied with, and they were led
to where his lordship and family were
standing. Amongst the visitors at the
family residence was Miss Esther Arm-
strong—by courtesy Mrs.—an elderly
maiden lady, well connected, not rich,
but of independent means, and much es-
teemed for her worth and benevolence.
In earlier life she had been a trusted
friend of Mr. King and his family, and
had grieved deeply over the rash act of
the daughter. The after events in the
family history she also well knew, and had
made many efforts to find the boy; but
these had completely failed, and she had
long regarded his recovery as hopeless.
She had come with Lord Munvers to the
skating-ground, and now stood in the
circle around him to see the lad whose
courage and quickness had rescued the