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### Nellie's Decision.

BY AMY D'ARCY WETMORE.

"I wonder if it would be cheating to use it?" murmured Nellie Johns to herself one morning, as she held in her hand a faded, torn manuscript which she eagerly scanned.

Now Nellie did not really "wonder," for she knew quite well that it would be anything but upright to copy and give in as her own composition one found by accident in the closet in her room. Only she did so want to avail herself of it. How she despised compositions! She had not the "pen of a ready writer," and here, by a marvelous chance, she had come across the very thing that she needed—an article written upon the subject given that morning by Miss Braxton to the class, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of Country Life." What could she say of such a matter? She knew nothing of the country. Her life until she had come to boarding-school had always been in a large city. How in the world, then, was she to tell what "country advantages or disadvantages" really were?

But here she had in her possession the problem solved. A sketch on this very theme, doubtless written years ago by some predecessor of hers at the school, who had tossed it aside or lost it in the old closet, where it had become wedged behind a drawer, and successive annual cleanings and scrubblings had failed to bring it to light until she, while searching for a lost glove, had unexpectedly discovered it. It was dated 1890, four years ago, and signed "Mary Lawson," a girl who had left school some time before she had entered. She knew, too, that it was the custom to give to each class the same topic to write of in turn, and Mary Lawson, no doubt, had labored, though apparently not in vain, over this very idea. Who would remember it now? Surely no one; besides, she need not copy it verbatim. She would only take the ideas and general style, if she used it.

Why hesitate an instant? And yet Nellie still kept it unopened in her hand, merely glancing again at the title and signature without looking at the work.

Nellie hesitated because she could not forget her mother's teaching about honesty, "Honesty and truth before everything," and it would be either the one or the other to steal some one else's thoughts and pass them off as original? She might easily put temptation out of the way by taking the manuscript to Miss Braxton or by tearing it up, yet Nellie did neither. She could not decide, and the time she had planned for at least beginning her hated task slipped by, and she had accomplished nothing.

The bell rang for the afternoon walk, and still Nellie reached no decision; so she hastily threw off her hat and coat and rushed off to join her dearest friend, Alice Long. This was according to an engagement made since the autumn term had opened, that they were always to walk with each other. They were very intimate, these girls, and confided their secret impressions of the teachers, the scholars and the bill of fare to each other without reserve.

They also had communicated many little affairs of their respective homes, and each felt quite acquainted with the other's parents, brothers, sisters and relatives generally.

But to-day Nellie did not want to tell Alice of her find, or, at least, not just yet, and she was unusually quiet as they tramped along the village street in their school girl procession.

"Nellie," asked Alice at last, after various endeavors to interest her in the hats and boots of the last new scholars, "what makes you so dull? I don't believe 'Country Life' is any nastier to write of than 'Cowper and Young Compared,' that we had to do last week."

"Oh, I don't know," said Nellie vaguely; "but who had our room before I came?"

Alice looked surprised at the irrelevancy of the question, but being an authority at school on these matters, replied:

"Let me think—Sadie and Louise Browne; they were there for three years, and before that one of the old girls, Mary Lawson. She went away, I believe, very suddenly, just before term closed—a brother or some one died, and she went off in a jiffy."

"That accounts for it," thought Nellie; "she had written this composition and hurriedly gone away without using it," but she only asked Alice "if she were clever."

Alice wondered still more at Nellie's interest in this departed scholar, and said she "supposed so, though being a little girl at that time, did not recollect much about it."

"But, Nellie," continued Alice, much more thrilled with the present than the past, "what do you think Sallie Meyers told Mary Dean to-day? You could never guess."

"What was it?" asked Nellie, indifferently, still pondering upon the composition question.

"Why, that after Christmas she was to have ten dollars a week just to spend for trash. Do you believe it? Mary says if it is true she don't wonder there are so many anarchists in the world, and she thinks that her family had better spend the money on the dentist, for Sallie's teeth are awful!" and Alice paused for some exclamation of surprise or commendation from her comendation.

"Nellie, however, only declared that "Mary was more spiteful than ever," and then asked Alice "if she had written her composition."

"I am sure," said Alice, pettishly, "that you are too hateful for anything the day before your composition has to be given in. Why do you worry so. No, I have not begun mine yet. I shall simply dash off a lot of stuff about the disadvantages of not being able to go to lectures or concerts if one lives in the country, and the advantages of always having fresh vegetables, fruit and eggs and rich milk, so it will be a case of mind against matter," added Alice, feeling that she had said something wonderfully clever.

"Alice," queried Nellie, "if you had seen that in a book, would it have been stealing to copy it?"

"I don't know," replied Alice, "and I don't care, though I did not happen to see it. Nellie, you will have softening of the brain if you keep on fretting over the subject. Do let us forget the advantages of 'country life,' and talk over Christmas. Have you decided to give Kate Lewis anything? I think I will give her the calendar Louie Geyson gave me last year. It is as good as new, and I don't want it."

"But a calendar for last year is no use," said Nellie, becoming interested. "Why not give her that souvenir spoon you bought at Chicago if you don't care to spend any money on her?"

"But I want that," exclaimed Alice, whose idea of Christmas gifts seemed to be to get rid of valueless articles.

"Well," asserted Nellie, "I don't know myself what I'll do. If I only had this worry off my mind," and she sighed heavily, much to Alice's disgust, who inwardly voted her friend a bore of the first water that afternoon, for nothing could distract her from the pros and cons of country life, which seemed to swamp everything. But the walk came to an end, and Nellie was as undecided as ever. After tea she sat with the girls in that school room, and tried to study her next day's lessons. Still the question, "Shall I, or shall I not?" forced itself upon her, and she felt sure that tomorrow would find her far from perfect in history, rhetoric or geography, and as for spelling, she really could not get in her head either the rules or exceptions for I's and b's. Bed-time came, and she and Alice went to their room. Alice, fearing at last that Nellie's lack of spirit was the forerunner of grip, small-pox or diphtheria, begged that she might be allowed to tell Miss Braxton and procure some medicine. Nellie only shook her head and mechanically picked up her little Bible to read the few verses she had promised her mother to do every night. She did not even look for her regular place, but opened at random in an absent-minded manner, when her eyes lit upon these words: "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." At once she saw "not through a glass darkly," and the difficulty in her mind was settled absolutely. Plainly she felt that she must renounce the manuscript and depend upon her own brains alone; for it would not be "providing things honest" for her teachers and school-mates to give them another's ideas. The struggle was over.

"Alice," she cried, "I will tell you all about it now why I have been so stupid all afternoon," and opening her top drawer she drew out the precious manuscript, and in a few words told the whole story.

Alice, who was nothing if not sympathetic, grasped promptly the temptation and the victory, and with much enthusiasm over the narrative pronounced Nellie a "true heroine," and together they burnt the old composition. Alice at first suggested that they should use it for curl papers, but a more dramatic instinct asserted itself, and she decided to commit it to the flames, but said that she would tell Miss Braxton and the girls how brave Nellie had been.

Nellie, however, with proper spirit insisted that Alice should say nothing, as she knew all the time that there was but one thing to do, and that that no one should be praised for simply walking in an honest path.

But her reward came in the way that she least expected, for, strange to relate, her composition, though short, was certainly good, and the "Advantages of Country Life" were depicted in such glowing terms that the disadvantages appeared meagre in comparison. But the climax was reached when Miss Braxton said, "The best thing you ever did, Nellie Johns, in the writing line." How glad she felt that she had resisted temptation, and she laughed heartily when the girls asserted that she had given "country property quite a boom," while Alice looked unutterable things in the way of suppressed admiration.—Christian Work.

### Diogenes, Jr., and his Tub.

In the little white mission building, located in the dirtiest and wickedest portion of the city slums, a free supper was in progress. At the long tables sat the mission children, eating as only these ragged, half-starved children of the street can eat.

The door opened, a boy came in, and stood gazing wistfully at the scene before him. A more forlorn bundle of rags I never saw.

"Are you hungry?" I asked.

"Bet yer life!" answered the boy.

The new comer was soon seated at one of the long tables. And eat! How that boy did eat!

The next Sunday found "Joe" in the mission school. Bright-eyed and restless, he sat in his seat, taking a lively interest in everything around him. The opening prayer puzzled him extremely. The others bowed their heads, so Joe bowed his. But the minister prayed with uplifted eyes, and soon Joe glanced aly up to the ceiling. There he spied an open scuttle hole.

"Who is der feller up there that der preacher is a-talkin ter?" asked Joe, in a loud whisper.

But, in spite of the ignorance, rags, and alley slang, Joe proved an earnest pupil, and always meant well, even if his answers were sometimes queer. I remember one day asking the school to tell me something about Zacheus. "He shinned up a sycamore tree," shouted Joe.

After a few weeks I noticed a change in Joe. His face was clean. Even his clothing had begun to improve. Swearing was also a thing of the past. But Joe's slang was as picturesque and varied as ever. One day, a starchy theological student visited our school and was called upon to pray. The neat broadcloth and shining patent leathers caused a buzz of disapproval. And when the young man, after a glance at the somewhat dirty floor, began to pray standing, it was too much. With bright, indignant eyes, Joe sprang from his seat. Leaning forward, he pointed straight at the young man and hissed:

"Hay, mister! Git down on your prayer bones! I say, git down on your prayer bones!"

In the back yard of a grocery, and securely hidden from prying eyes by old boxes and other rubbish, lay an ancient molasses barrel. This was Joe's castle, and here he had slept for several months. Rather cold quarters for a winter night, was it not?

Fortunately, the winter thus far had been mild. But one evening it turned desperately cold and a blizzard set in. I awoke in the night to think of Joe. I determined he must not sleep in his queer bed-chamber again. The next morning, I fought my way through wind and snow to the mission school. But Joe was not there; and with an anxious heart, as soon as my duties were over, I set out to look him up.

The short winter day was already drawing to a close when I reached the place I sought. There what a sight met my eyes! The yard was drifted literally full of snow. Boxes and barrels, rubbish of all kinds had disappeared from sight, and in their place was deep, drifted whiteness. I looked across to where the snow lay highest and deepest.

"Is Joe under there?" I asked myself. "And if there what of him? Perhaps"—and my soul grew sick at the thought—"perhaps he is there—frozen—to death!"

Fortunately, two men with shovels were passing. Quickly we dug our way through the drifts to the barrel. My heart stood still. Within, half hidden in straw and an old piece of canvas, lay two children. Joe and another boy, much smaller than he. The face of the latter was hidden; but he seemed a mere babe, and his curly hair lay in tangled rings all over Joe's face and shoulders. At that moment Joe opened his eyes.

"I say," he cried, at sight of me, "I couldn't git ter the mission ter-day. Me and Tommy started, but de kid cried and we had ter come back here. 'Twas cold a first, you bet; but I put up a board to keep de wind out, an' we hugged up close together, and after a while went to sleep."

The little boy was now awake. He was a handsome little fellow, scarcely five years of age.

We thought best to carry the children to the mission. A rude bunk was soon constructed, and there the children spent the night. The black-eyed boy, poor baby, was to pay dearly for his exposure to wind and snow. Before morning he was very sick, and weeks passed before he was quite strong and well again. He was then adopted by a nice family, and now has a pleasant home.

Who was he? Joe had found him on the street and could tell us little more. But soon we learned that Tommy's parents were dead, and that a poor woman had befriended him. But her husband drank, and one night he had beaten the child and turned him out-of-doors. There Joe had found him, crying bitterly and half-dead with cold.

"Yer said at the mission," exclaimed Joe, "that de Feller up in heaven puts down as done ter him every