

CHILDREN · AND · FORBID · THEM · NOT · TO · COME

PEACE ON EARTH · CANADA · GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN

SUPPER · LITTLE · UNTIL · ME ·

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THE LITTLE TRUANT.

LITTLE MARY, instead of going to school one morning, went down to the shore to see the fishermen bring their fish to the land. She was too late, however, for the fish was in the market before she reached the water side. So she sat down on the pebbly beach of B., gazing on the bright blue waves as they came dancing out on the shore, then slowly returned to the great deep with that murmuring sound which no tongue shall define.

When she had sat almost as long as she thought necessary in order to carry out the deceit she had been contemplating, and was preparing to take her departure, two boys passed her who had been helping to land and sort the mackerel. They stood and looked at her, for they were neighbors' children.

"Mary," said one of them, "we are going to have a row on the water; will you go with us?"

"No, I cannot; it is nearly dinner-time—at least it will be by the time I get home."

"Nonsense! You will be home as soon as we shall, and we shall be home by dinner-time; besides, you know, you are playing truant, so you may as well have a little pleasure as not."

A burning blush suffused Mary's cheek, and the words she had stifled so long at last found utterance, "I wish I had not come!"

"But you are come, so enjoy yourself and don't be silly, it is of no use; besides, you have the time to spend."

"Come, Tom, don't stop talking there or we shall have no time for a row," called out Harry.

So Tom took hold of Mary's hand, and she was led unresistingly to the pier steps, where they all got into a little cobbie, and they soon towed themselves far out on the glittering sea.

For some time all went on well, the boys rowing and singing, Mary with her hands in the water trying to catch the jelly-fish as they floated past, and the waves rocking them with a gentle motion. Heedless of all but pleasure, they did not see that clouds had gathered all round them, that land was nearly out of sight, and the sea looked dark and frowning, and sullen waves dashed against their little boat. The breeze blew stronger, and the younger boy got tired. The other one would not let him rest, for he said it would take them an hour to return. But it was more than the poor boy could do without rest; he tried and tried again, and the oar dropped out of his hand, and a strong wave carried it far from his reach. What was now to be done?



They had no spare oar. In vain they looked round for help; it were useless to cry out, for there were none to hear. In vain they tried to row themselves back with one oar; a fresh breeze was blowing from the land, and every wave grew stronger and heavier, threatening every moment to overwhelm them.

"O how I wish I had not come!" was Mary's bitter lamentation.

The younger boy looked up into the now overcast heavens, then sent a longing look across the heaving waters to his happy home, where, perhaps, his mother sat wondering he came not; then, muttering a few words inaudibly between his close-set teeth, he resigned himself to his fate, and a death-like paleness stole over his features, which told of the struggle within. The other boy was older and stronger, and struggled with all his might against the force of waters, working with all the strength of his youth and the energy kindled by excitement and the fear of death. He, too, saw his father's fire-side and his sisters waiting for him; he saw his mother's agonized look when told that her son was drowned, that he had gone on the water unknown to any one. Again he worked with frantic zeal; it was of no avail—the breeze from the land was

stronger than his strength. For one moment he held his oar to wipe the large drops of perspiration from his brow, and take one long last look of that dear land. He felt how willingly he would give all he possessed could he but tread its firm and solid surface. He scanned the waters round and bent a listening ear, seeking for relief, but it came not; then he seized the oar with renewed energy, determined, if possible, to reach the land. He stood in the boat with his back to the shore, the wind sweeping along with a moaning sound, then playfully lifting his dark, heavy curls to whisper in his ear, as he thought, "Thou wilt never see thy home nor its inmates again."

And so it proved. A heavy, swelling wave came rolling and foaming along, lifting their little boat on its snowy crest, then hurling it down in the hollow between the waves which rose on either side like floating walls. On came another higher and whiter than the first, and ere it reached them burst with a loud noise, whirling their little craft about until it trembled in every part; and following in its wake was a mountain wave riding on with fierce fury, regardless of the children crouching with fear, or their poor little plank of wood which divided for them life and death. On it came with maddening haste; on, on; and the boat, where was it? Gone; and these truant children swept from

their frail hold like so much sea-weed, and tossed up and down in the surging flood as though it would fain play with its victims until they sank, and but one to rise again to tell the mournful tale. The little boy, who gave up in despair, he rose once more to the surface, and was picked up by a fisherman hastening home through the storm. Poor little Harry showed no signs of life, but the fisherman wrapped him in his own rough but warm coat, and soon landing, carried him gently in his arms to a house where every means was used for restoring life to the half-drowned body. It was a long time before the boy opened his eyes, but by the blessing of the good God he did so at last and was carried home to his mother.

There was great joy and great sorrow in the boy's home that afternoon—joy that he was safe, and sorrow that Mary and the elder boy were lost.

Yes, lost! They died in an act of disobedience, and I fear their souls failed to gain admittance into the celestial city. The wicked never enter that holy place, you know. Ill-temper, deceit, falsehood, willfulness, disobedience, and all other sins must be washed from the souls of children by the blood of Jesus before they can go to dwell in the beautiful