

AN OLD MAN'S STORY.



HALF dozen boys were gathered about an old barn under which a defenceless dog had taken refuge from their tormenting attentions.

Some were lying flat on the ground peering under; some were hurling small missiles as far as they would reach, while two others, more enterprising still, were trying to pull up a board in the floor.

Amid their excited shouts of "There he is; I see him!" "Hold on there, I'll fix him!" and kindred exclamations, they did not hear carriage wheels in the soft, dusty road, or see the occupant until a quiet voice said:

"What is it boys?"

One or two slunk away in a shame-faced manner, but two or three others began all together to tell him what their victim was.

"He hain't nobody's dog," said one.

"'Nd we think he's got hydrophoby," said another, while a third added: "He's no 'count dog anyhow, 'nd if we can git him out we're going to tie a stone to his neck 'nd drownd him over in Simmons' pond."

"Has he bitten any of you?" the quiet voice inquired again.

"He sort o' snapped at Wallie's hand, 'nd he'd a bit me if I hadn't been so smart for him," said the largest boy, while "Wallie" examined his dirty fingers with a martyr-like air."

"I suppose you boys were quietly playing somewhere and the dog pitched into you."

There was profound silence for a few moments, when one bright-eyed little fellow said manfully:

"No, mister, he didn't. He was lyin' down by the brew'ry with a bone—jest gnawin' it ye know—'nd we sort o' got to pleggin' 'nd pesterin' him, 'nd 'twas when Wallie snatched the bone that he snapped."

"Have you time to listen to an old man's story?"

Instantly sticks and stones were dropped, though two of the lads tried to put on an indifferent front.

Driving his horse into the shade of the building, the stranger began:

"You boys do not realize it any more than I did when I was a boy, but nevertheless it is true that every day of our lives we write out a page in the book of life; and when one is old they have a great deal of time in which they must look back and read over these pages; and when I saw you tormenting that helpless dog it seemed as if some unseen finger swiftly turned the leaves of my life-book back to a page—a page which I wish to God could be blotted out forever, *but it never can*. No, boys, we may be sorry for things, may get forgiveness for them, may even forget them for a time; but if we do a wrong, it is somehow bound to rise up before us at times when we least expect it. I hold that in this world we never get entirely away from our wrong-doing. But I did not intend to preach you a sermon but tell you a story.

"As a boy I was naturally cruel, I delighted to rob birds' nests, torment cats and dogs and smaller children. As I grew older and helped my father on the farm, I was frequently rebuked for my abuse of the animals, and my mother used to say that if she had her way I would never get a horse to go anywhere. Also, as I grew older, I became fond of hunting, and spent many days with my noble dog Stanley in the woods. I professed to be very good to him, but of a truth 'the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,' and when I think of the whippings and kicks the noble fellow received from me while, as I called it, I was 'training him,' I am amazed to think of the affection he gave to me in return; but the worst was yet to come.

"He had never been a good retriever. You know what that is, of course—a dog that will go anywhere, after you have shot your game, and bring it to you without mussing or tearing it in the least. I had repeatedly beaten Stanley for his failure in this line, though I knew it came from the fact that his former master had whipped him for carrying home dead chickens, or anything like that that he found in the neighborhood during his happy days, true to his retrieving instinct.

One day while shooting ducks, I said to him, "Now, sir, you'll bring me that bird out