



DON'T BE LATE.

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DON'T BE LATE.

“DON'T be late, Mary; I shall call for you at a quarter before nine, and then we shall be in time. Now take care, for governess says you must be suspended if you are ever late again.”

“Well,” replied Mary, “if mother will get me ready, I will be in time for you to-morrow.”

“Get you ready, Mary? you are as big as I am, and I get myself ready. Good bye.” The children parted, for their houses lay in different parts of the village.

When Jane Gray came home, her mother said to her, “Now, Jane, get tea ready before father comes in, you know he does not like waiting; and he's had very hard work this week past, and I want him to tidy the garden, and look after

the pigs to-night. I am going to see aunt Johnson in the village; and if you are a good girl and make haste, I will take you with me. Aunt was very poorly yesterday, so I have made her a cake, which we will take with us."

"Yes, mother; I will hurry."

"I did not say hurry, Jane, but make haste; there is a great difference between being in a hurry and making haste."

She busied herself in setting the tea-things, and soon the tea-table was spread, and the home-made loaf, on a clean trencher, was brought down from the cupboard, for Mrs. Gray never left victuals lying about. All was ready when Harry Gray came in; and he found a comfort in coming to his clean and tidy home. His boy was with him, for it was a half-holiday at the school; and as Gray wished his boy to begin work early, he had taken him into the fields to give him a trial. Jemmy was very proud of this, and began to think he was nearly a man. He had been telling his father, as he came home, what he had read in the morning; and when he came in, said, "Mother, I wish

you would buy some bees, I should very much like to have them; and they will not cost any money to keep; and as to the trouble, I will manage that; and I will do all you want to them. Our book at school has a story about the Habits of Bees, and I shall soon know it all."

Harry sat down. "Mistress," he said, "I am very tired; and master wants me to go and fetch Master Henry. And I have promised to take the light cart this evening and bring his boxes;—do you want anything from the town?"

"No," said his wife; "and it is very provoking, for I want to go to aunt Johnson's, and take her a cake; and I want you to look to the garden; and I promised Jane she should go too: but it must be given up I suppose. I will try and learn a lesson of patience, even from so small a disappointment."

"But," said Jane, "mother, I am sure Jemmy will look to the pigs, and look after baby, and see if she sleeps; and he can do up the garden round the door and window; and I will make haste and get all ready, and then father can take

us in the cart. I should like to see Master Henry; he is so good. Don't you remember what nice fruit he brought me when I was ill with fever last summer? How glad he must be to get home again!"

"Ah! that he will," said her father. "He has got a prize at school, and his father isn't a little proud of him; and well he may be, for he was always a real good boy to those about the Parsonage. I never heard him give a rude word to any of the servants, no, nor yet to any body. But I mustn't stay long; so quick with my tea, and I will put to the horse; and Jemmy, you must stay at home, and if you are a good boy and do the garden nicely, I will give you the bees, although I must give a piece of gold for them. Mistress, you had better come down the lane by the Parsonage; and I will tell master about your going with me. I know he will give me leave to take you, but I don't like to do anything secretly or without his knowing it. It saves a great deal of trouble to speak openly of what you are going to do, when it concerns others."

Jane remembered her lessons for the next day, and put her "excellent book" into her little bag to have it ready by the morning.

Mary Muddle also went home, but not to such a home as Jane Gray's. Nobody was there; the embers (which had cooked the dinner) were in the grate, and the whole of the house was in disorder. She lit the fire, put on the kettle, and then must go and talk with Ann Thompson, who lived in the cottage near her mother's. Ann, like her mother, was a great gossip, and knew everything that went on in the village. She had just heard that they were going to have a fête (as they called it) at Squire Turner's, and the hall was to be full of company, and people were coming from London to beautify the house. Mary stayed to listen—time was passing—many minutes passed away—the clock struck six.

"Oh!" Mary said, "I must see how the kettle gets on; I can't think where mother can be."

"I'll tell you, Mary," said Ann Thompson; "she's gone up the lane, all

in a hurry; she's sure to be late; she had to meet the errand-cart at the top of the lane, to get a parcel from her old mistress, and she did not start until it was just the time, and went all in a hurry."

Mary went back to the house; the fire had burned hollow, the water was only just warm; she saw that the fire must be remade, and was hoping her father might be delayed on his road home when she heard him at the garden-gate. The fire was scarcely lit, and Mary was blowing the wood; the bellows were broken, and it was too late last market-day to call for them—her mother had stayed talking too long with a friend.

"Mary, how is this?" said her father. "Where's mother?"

"She's gone to meet the errand-cart; and I fancy," said Mary, "she's late. Ann Thompson says it was just the time for it to pass when she started, and then she had to be at the top of the long lane."

"Well, it's no use, I'm always saying, Don't be too late, but it's just the same. We are not like others; you are never ready for school, and your mother does

not get to church until the lessons are read. Make haste, Mary, make haste; I am very cold, for I have walked fast, and the cold house chills me."

Mary was very sorry she had talked to Ann Thompson, and resolved, if left at home any more, she would do all her work, and not go to a neighbour's and hear what did not concern her.

Her father sat down, vexed, that, after a hard day's work, there was no wife to welcome him home, no fire ready, no warm room. He worked in the farm adjoining the Parsonage grounds, and could not help comparing his home with Master Gray's. "That woman is a crown to her husband, anyhow," thought he, "and so will his little girl be some day. Mary, try and do as Jenny Gray does; you always see her neat and clean, and useful at home."

"I do all I can to copy her," said Mary. "I like her very much; and she is so very kind; she is monitor of my class, and has saved me from punishment many a time. But now, father, governess says if I am late any more, she will

suspend me; and I can never get in the school any more without going to Mr. Alban; and I should then be in disgrace, and I should not like to go to the Parsonage in disgrace. Miss Alban has been very kind to me; and it would seem so ungrateful. I hope I shan't be late again."

Ann Thompson was right. Mrs. Muddle's hurry was of no use. She got to the top of the lane, and looked right and left, no cart was to be seen; there was no choice but to go about a quarter of a mile back, to see if the cart had passed the gate. She found that it had gone through about the same time that she left home, and her only chance of getting the parcel was to follow the cart to the town. She walked along, and wished often she had not been quite so late, and overtook the cart just as it was entering the town.

"Any parcel for me?" said she to Job Sikes.

"Yes; and I expected you would be at the top of the lane."

"Why did not you wait for me?" said

she, angrily. "You must always be so very exact; and that it is has made me walk four long miles."

"Ah! mistress, if I was not exact, see how many would wait for me," said Job. "There's the parcel, carriage-paid; no offence in that, mistress, I hope."

Mrs. Muddle was not very pleased; she saw Job knew her failing, and did not like his sport at her expense. But Job was a punctual man; in his business and his religious duties none ever missed him from church, or from his place at the proper time. And Job gave of his little to the club and to the coal fund, for the winter; and often did a neighbourly act in giving the old folks a lift, as he termed it, in his cart. Everybody knew Job Sikes.

Mrs. Muddle was soon tired of the bundle, and stayed at one of her neighbours to have a little tea and to rest. But she could not be satisfied with resting a short time; her neighbour's daughter, Sally, was home from service, and she must listen to all her tales. The clock struck eight, and in reality it was past,

for country clocks go slower than town clocks. "What will my husband say? I quite forgot him. I hope Mary has made tea; but I dare say she's been talking to Ann Thompson; it is so strange she will go there and gossip. But it's all Job Sikes' fault; I quite hate his cart, it is so regular. He's like a parish clock." She hastily took up her parcel, and, as she said Good bye, muttered also, "What will my husband say? He always says, Don't be late." She went on, not in the best of humours; and the parcel grew heavier as she was more out of temper and tired. She said in a pet, "Here am I dragging this thing along;" and in her temper she threw it down, as if the parcel were in fault. To her dismay she saw the cover stained, and soon something began to drip through. "Well, I am to be unfortunate, I think," she muttered to herself. "First, Sikes was too early; and now I've done some mischief, I know." Her mistress had put some wine in a stone bottle, and wrapped it carefully round, little thinking her parcel would receive such rough usage, and her

wine be spilled. She again took up the parcel, and was soon at home.

“Well,” said her husband, “mistress, where have you been? I’d quite given you up for lost; here, it’s past nine o’clock.”

“I’ve been to meet Job Sikes’ cart; but he will be so regular and exact, that I could not get in time, and I had to walk nearly to town.”

“Am I not always saying to you, and yet it’s no use, ‘Mistress, don’t be late?’ You are ruining our character in the village.”

“There, there, hold your tongue,” said Mrs. Muddle, pettishly; “my mistress has sent me a parcel, but, worse luck, there’s something broke.”

Her husband sat still and poured out some tea for his wife, while she hastily opened the parcel, and finding the fragments of the bottle, and the stained clothes, she said, “Well, who would have thought any lady could have been so silly as to put wine into a parcel!”

Her husband saw the fragments, and perceiving they were part of a thick bottle, asked what had happened. “Oh,”

said she, "the parcel was heavy, and I was tired; so I threw it on the ground. I did not think anything would break." "Who," said he, "would have thought any woman would be *too late* for a kind friend's present, and then in an ill-temper throw her gift on the ground? Come," said he, "it is bed time. I must be out at five o'clock. Mary, mind you are not late."

He went to bed, tired and troubled; for he saw but little prospect before him, unless things mended. Next morning when he arose, as he left the room, he awoke his wife, and cautioned her not to forget to call Mary at seven o'clock, and to get breakfast over by eight. She promised; but tired by the overnight's fatigue, she slept until she counted eight, when the clock struck. She did not mean to sleep, but lay dozing; when, immediately as she thought, but really more than half an hour after, Jane Gray knocked at the door. She heard the loud knock, and asked who was there.

"Jenny Gray," was the answer. "And I am come for Mary to go to school."

"Why, it's only eight o'clock!"

“It was half-past when I left home,” said Jane. “Is Mary ready?”

“Mary, Mary,” called her mother. “Get up, you lazy girl.” And in a hurry she put on a few clothes, and called out, “Do, Jane, wait for Mary.”

“No,” she said, “I cannot; ‘*monitors must be at the class ten minutes before nine,*’ is our rule; and I must not lose my monitorship, for I could not benefit Mary.”

“Get along with you,” said Mrs. Muddle; “you only want to get into favour. I know your cunning ways, Jane.”

But Jane was not cunning. She thought of the words in the Catechism—“submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors, and masters.” Governess is my teacher, and Mr. Alban is my spiritual pastor; and therefore I hope it is not cunning to obey them. Jane was reflecting on this as she went to school. She felt very sorry that Mrs. Muddle thought her cunning; and with a very heavy heart took her place at the head of her class, thinking more of poor Mary than of herself. After prayers, it

was again her task to give Mary's name as late.

"I shall certainly suspend your friend, Jane." And no entreaty could avail to save Mary; for the governess said rightly, "I never threaten extreme measures without resolving to put them into execution."

At a quarter after nine Mary was present, and, crying bitterly, begged to be admitted. The governess very properly refused; and said, "I must make an example of you, because you are the oldest, and, to-day, the only offender. The rules of the school must be kept." She then gave her the suspension-ticket to take to her mother.

Mary excused herself, because she could not wake; and her mother said all this happened because of Job Sikes and his errand-cart being so vastly exact. And while excusing herself, she did not fail to tell her child she was a lazy thing; and to say, if she had not been late before, this would not have happened. "You won't mind your father; he's always saying, Don't be late." How very quick-

sighted we are of others' faults; how slow to see the same fault in ourselves!

"What will your father say?" asked the angry mother, in a reproachful tone.

"I don't know," sobbed Mary: "I was not in fault this time; I did not wake, I slept so sound."

Nothing more passed during the day. Mary tried to make amends for her fault; she put the rooms nicely in order. At night her father returned, and found Mary suspended from school.

"Well, mistress," he said, "you must see to this. I know what Mr. Alban will say: Muddle, you are late at church; your girl's late at school; you are late at club; and, if he says true, he'll say your house is the most untidy in the village."

"I don't know about that," said his wife, sharply; a little angry from his last remark.

"But I do, mistress. And if it were not that Mr. Alban is so kind, I would face him; but I could not, with truth, deny every word he must say. Now you know he goes out at ten o'clock; Don't be late, and I shall forget all

about the parcel if you get Mary back to school."

She promised very fairly; but poor Muddle was forced to doubt her. Nine o'clock came, Mary was ready; and although very sorry to have to go to the Parsonage, yet full of hope that she should again get into the school. Mrs. Thompson came in and said, "I want to see you very particularly; just step into my cottage." Mrs. Muddle could not resist. She went; and it was, as usual, some story of her neighbours; this time the more interesting, because nearly, as they thought, concerning the great people, as they called the Turners.

They were in full enjoyment of their talk when Mary came running in. "Mother," she said, "I'm sure we shall be late."

"Get along," said her mother; "it's all on your account I've to go. I shan't come yet."

Presently it struck ten, and it was too late to see the Rector. And how very unlucky, the next day was market-day! Again it was, What will my husband say? and her remonstrance with herself

was, How angry he will be. "But," she said, "who would have thought, Mrs. Thompson, it was so late? Our little bit of chat did not seem five minutes—now did it? but it's my bad luck; I really meant to go."

So she did, if it interfered not with gossip. But she never did her duty religiously; what she did, was because she was forced by shame, or by her husband's many remonstrances. She did not use her religion, but kept it locked up with her prayer-book for Sunday use. She did not think that her religion required daily use and practice to keep it alive. She knew better how to judge others than herself; and forgot how many sins of the tongue she committed in talking of her neighbours. It was not bad luck, but dilatory habits and a love of talking made her always late. Mrs. Thompson, who intended to be very kind, was really her greatest enemy, for she was always ready for a gossip; and poor Mrs. Muddle knew she was always glad to see her, or, indeed, anybody to talk to. And now she had to finish the story of the great

folks, and how altered things were now-a-days. And then it came at last to the school; and Mrs. Thompson had heard that Miss Alban had said that some day Jane Gray might be their governess. And both agreed Jane must be a cunning child so to keep in favour with the gentlefolks. "But I must say," said Mrs. Thompson, "all the Grays are kind-hearted, but a little proud."

While her mother was at Mrs. Thompson's, and time was still passing rapidly, Mary was trying to copy Jenny Gray. She had got all ready for dinner, and a very clean room, when it was time to put on the pot with potatoes, some of which were to be for the pig her father was fattening to sell at market. In trying to lift the pot, she slipt, and it fell on her leg, spraining her ankle. She called loudly to her mother, but it was of no use; and as she could not raise herself, she only sat and moaned.

Presently Mrs. Thompson said, "Well, I must see about dinner."

"And so must I," said Mrs. Muddle; "and send Mary with something to father."

“ Oh! my lads shall take your husband's dinner,” said Mrs. Thompson; “ they are going by next field with their father's.”

She went home, and heard poor Mary moaning. She listened for a moment, and then hurried on, calling, “ Mary, what is the matter? what have you done?”

“ Mother, I have slipped with the great pot; and my leg feels as if it was broke.”

Mrs. Muddle went off for the doctor, and Mrs. Thompson came to sit with Mary until her mother came back. In the evening, Muddle returned, as usual, from work, and found his house in confusion. The doctor had been, and pronounced that there was no fracture, but a very bad sprain.

“ What's all this about?” said he, as he saw Mary in her crib on pillows. “ How did this happen?”

“ I left her to clean,” said Mrs. Muddle; “ and she will do all as Jane's mother does, and have it so very nice; and won't mind me, but says you told her to copy Jane, and do as Jane did. Well, and she went to lift the kettle, as I suppose, and it fell on her leg. I only just went

to talk with Mrs. Thompson, because she came and asked me; and who would have thought this would have happened?"

"Ah!" he said, "I told her to copy Jane, but I forgot there was not another Jane's mother to look over her, and help her. But how is it she did not go to school; won't Mr. Alban admit her? I can't think he will be so hard with a poor child. He always was kind, and—"

"I did not go," said his wife, looking rather ashamed.

"Did not go!" repeated her husband. "And why not?"

"Mrs. Thompson came, as I told you, to ask to speak to me; and while I talked to her it was too late."

"As usual," he said. "Too late; and I am always cautioning you, Don't be late. It's no use speaking."

He sat down, scarce knowing what to do; very angry with his wife, and very sorry for his child. About eight o'clock in the evening he was sitting half asleep, his wife washing a few things that ought to have been done early in the day. Mary was asleep, the pain having slightly

decreased, and she was dreaming of school, and every now and then starting as if in pain. A gentle knock announced Mr. Alban.

“Come in,” said Muddle, angrily; “come in.”

Mr. Alban went in. “I am very sorry to hear of Mary’s accident, and am come down to see if I can do anything for her. I suppose the doctor has been.”

“It’s very kind of you to come out to-night; I didn’t think it was you, Sir. This is a bad job, a very bad job for me, Sir, I do assure you. I was hoping that I should get the better of my difficulties this harvest, and lay up something against the winter. The loss of our poor child, last year, you know, pulled us back a great deal, Sir; but I think I could bear this misfortune patiently, and see in it the will of Providence, if it were not all through carelessness and being too late.”

“Do not mistrust Providence,” said Mr. Alban: “though it may be another’s fault, yet out of this evil God may bring much good to you. But how did it happen?”

“Why, Sir, Mary has been very late; and the day before yesterday she was sent home with a suspension-ticket, and I told her mother not to be late, but to come to you; and after that she must talk to Mrs. Thompson, and let the time go by, and then this happened.”

“Gray told me he had heard you were in trouble, and therefore I came to see you. We will not disturb Mary to-night; my sister will come to-morrow and see what she can do for her, and how we can amuse and teach her during her illness, which will be, I fear, long.”

“Did Gray tell you? That was very kind, Sir. He has no business to like me, I never did anything for him; and sometimes in my heart I envied his prosperity; but he is a real good man—no outside show, but pure religion. He keeps away from all bad society, and teaches his children to pray, and to be kind to everything. You wouldn't see one of them even hurt a dumb animal, much more a Christian, Sir.”

“I am glad you think so well of Gray. But how is it you are not as well off?”

you earn more, have a good master, your wife has nice presents from her old mistress, and I never hear of your going to public-houses, or being unsteady."

"Ah, Sir; you don't quite understand a poor man's house—the secrets at home. A wife, Sir, a good wife, is the mainstay of a working man's family. 'Tisn't what is earned, but what is spent, and how things are managed. Gray buys everything, and has two more children than I have—and, while I have many presents, I am still the poorest man. My wife isn't a bad wife; but she's fond of talk, and likes going into my neighbour Thompson's, who is a very good friend, and well disposed woman, but a real injury to me."

"Now," said Mr. Alban, "let us forget your wife's faults; I will try and persuade her to mend; and perhaps this severe lesson may yet be useful."

Muddle called his wife. She came slowly, and did not like meeting the Rector, for she was sure her husband had told him the cause of the accident. Mr. Alban spoke kindly to her, and said he was sorry for her child's illness; and his

kindness had much more effect than any blame could have. She said it was her fault, and she was sorry; and it was a hard thing for her husband, harder than for herself, because he had worked early and late to get things straight.

“Well, mistress,” he said, “never mind, we must try and do better. And would you, Sir,” he said to Mr. Alban, “would you, Sir, speak to master to let me have the cottage down in the fields? it’s more alone, but then it’s a nice quiet place.”

“Do, Sir,” added his wife; “we don’t seem as if we could be happy here.”

Mr. Alban bade them good night, and hastened home.

Muddle got the cottage; and, profiting by the Rector’s good advice, both he and his wife worked much harder than formerly. Mary kept things very nice at home; and people did not fail to notice that the Muddles were now early at church and more regular people. Winter came, and Mary could not yet get very far; so Jane Gray came to see her, and spend her holidays. One day she said, “Jane, I am so glad I hurt my leg.”

“Why, Mary?” said Jane.

“Because,” she said, “ever since, father says prayers with us every night out of the Prayer Book, and we all say the Confession together. He heard Mr. Alban say one day, he liked Prayer-book prayers better than any other, except our Lord’s, and that, Jane, was our Saviour’s prayer, which he told us to use.”

“I know,” said Jane. “Well, what other prayers do you say?”

“The collect for the day, and the prayer for all conditions of men; and we end with the Lord’s Prayer, which we all repeat together; and then father says ‘The Grace.’ But on Sundays we go to church; father takes me, you know, and he reads to us from a book about our Lord’s being on earth; and it explains the Testament to us, so that, with that and Mr. Alban’s sermons, I can understand a little more of my Bible.”

Jane was very glad she saw Mary was improved, and could hardly understand how it was; but the new house had done wonders: so she told her mother. But her mother said, “Not the new house

alone ; trials do much in making us understand ourselves. Mary's mother does now, Jane, from a religious motive, what she did formerly by constraint ; and you may see how much better it is done, when done from a good motive. They are, I hope, very much changed ; but time will show whether it is a permanent change. Meantime, Jane, do not forget to learn from their example, that, by God's grace, bad habits may be conquered—not only being late at school, but anger, and pride ; and we are always in danger from these enemies."

"Mother," said Jane, "what a trial it will be for Mary when she comes to school. She is coming on Monday, again. But I am sure, mother, she knows more than she did. Miss Alban has taught her to knit, and she sews very nicely."

Mary came back to school, and was never late ; and Jane also continued to improve, so that she was now monitor of the first class. And Mr. Alban hoped to bring her up at a training-school, where she would be fitted for a schoolmistress.

Mrs. Thompson, having no companion,

talks to herself; and having learned to knit, plies fingers and tongue with equal rapidity.

But John Muddle is a very much better and a happier man. Regularity at home has made him punctual at work. Another child in his family brought no increase of want. He seems always to have enough. And Job Sikes always finds Mrs. Muddle waiting for her parcel. The last time he saw her, he said, "Well, you are punctual; Job Sikes' cart is nothing to you. I'm to say, your mistress will see Mary next week, if you can spare her, to spend a few days. You are to let her write, and say when holidays begin. Good bye, Mrs. Muddle;" and as he drove off, he said to himself, She's not the Muddle she was, that's sure certain.

"Mistress," said Muddle, one day, "I hope Jane and our girl will continue friends; although Mary is going to service, they won't be far off. I owe many thanks to the Grays, more than I can say. It was Gray first made me see how a poor man might be religious, and yet make no noise about it. And he's done me many a

quiet good turn. And he it was who told Mr. Alban our troubles, in his good neighbourly way. He's a real friend."

"He is," said his wife.

"And so is Miss Alban. I thought that Mary's illness would have been our ruin; and now, by God's blessing, we owe no man anything, and the children are growing up to be useful and a comfort to us. I can see now God's good providence in sending us trials, for I hope it has mended our hearts. I used to be sadly put out; but, wife, I never have to say now—and that's a comfort—Don't be late."

THE END.

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