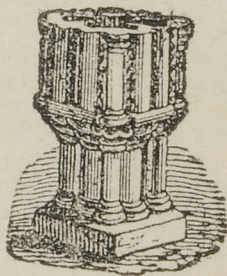


The Apple-Tree.



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The Apple-Tree.

Two little boys, Tom and Billy Turner, were coming home from school one fine evening in autumn. The school was in the town, but their father and mother lived out of the town. They had to go through a lane, and

over several fields, and then into the high road, and then through the turnpike and the street, before they got to the school.

Tom was a nimble, black-eyed little boy, always looking about him; and Billy was a little pale, shy boy, who seemed never much at his ease till he got safe home to his mother's house. So, though they walked home together, it was in a different manner. When they got into the street, Tom cried out, "O, look ye there, Billy; there is a great dog lying asleep under a baker's cart, with harness like a horse."

The dog growled as he spoke, and Billy jumped aside, and said, "I dare say he will bite. Do come along."

"No; but stop a moment. Look here at the tarts in the shop-window."

And Tom put his face close to the pane, as if he could eat the nice tarts with his eyes. Billy pulled him by the pinafore, and said, "Never mind; we shall be late. Mother will want

us to drive up the geese from the green."

So they got through the streets, and through the turnpike, and trotted along the high footpath by the roadside. Billy was glad when he got out of the street, where he always felt afraid of every body and every thing. But Tom liked seeing what was going on there: all he could amuse himself with on the road was picking the haws in the hedge and eating them—for Tom's fault was greediness; he could not help tasting every thing he saw; and now he was eating the birds' food from the hedge, having nothing else at hand.

They went over the fields; and as Billy ran along the path after his brother, Tom said,

"I say, Billy, did you look into Farmer Mills's orchard yesterday, as we came by? They have gathered all the apples but a few on one tree near the road."

“ Yes, I saw them. I suppose they forgot them.”

“ How nice they looked! — quite yellow all over but one side, and that was all red. I would give something for one of those apples. Are not you dry, Billy?”

Billy felt a little uneasy at what would come next; he said,

“ Yes, but we shall have a sup of milk when we come home. Make haste, Tom, come along.” And he got on first, and walked quicker.

Tommy laughed, and said,

“ What are you afraid of now? Farmer Mills’s bull? He is not in the lane to-night: stop, look there — that’s the tree, and there are the apples: look through this little hole in the hedge; it is just big enough to creep through. I suppose somebody has been through after the apples: there are not so many as there were. Oh, how nice they look! now the sun shines on them! why,

you are afraid to look. Will you stop one minute, while I get one for you and for me?"

Then Billy looked almost as much frightened as on the day when Farmer Mills's bull ran down the lane. He pulled Tom by the arm, and said,

"O pray, Tommy, pray don't. It is all one with stealing, you know; pray don't."

Tom laughed, and said,

"You little simpleton, it is like gleaning; it is only what is left."

"No, no; you know if Farmer Mills saw us how you would feel."

Billy thought, too, of what he had been taught about the eighth commandment. He knew and remembered Who it is that sees whatever we do, and has forbidden us to steal; he knew that when he felt tempted to do any thing wrong, he ought to fly from temptation. He pulled his brother on, and said, "Pray don't; you know it is wicked. Recollect

what we have been taught about stealing."

Tom's conscience told him Billy was right, so he walked on a little way; but as he let his thoughts run on the apples, instead of trying to think on something harmless, the temptation was too strong for him. He said, "Sit down under the hedge, Billy; and I will come to you presently."

Billy could not ask him what he was going to do: he sat down, feeling very unhappy and frightened. He thought Tom would never come back. He thought, if Farmer Mills should be in the orchard! He could hardly keep from crying.

Presently Tom came back, looking rather red, and munching an apple. His pocket stuck out under his pinafore with something round; it was too large for a ball; Billy wished it had been nothing else. Tom came up to his brother, and held out an apple to him.

“You cannot think how good they are; I have another in my pocket: here, make haste.”

“O, no, no,” Billy answered, turning away, that he might not see the apple, “I must go home;” and he set off, and ran till he got to the hedge at the back of the garden. “They will ask me what is the matter, and I can’t tell of Tom. I’ll go and fetch up the geese at once.”

“Billy,” said his mother, “where’s Tom? After no mischief, I hope.”

“He is coming presently. I am going to the long green after the geese—shall I?” And off he went, fearing to be asked questions.

In the meantime Tom walked slowly down the lane, and turned aside into a field, to eat his apples under the hedge. The first apple had been very good, the next he did not enjoy so much; he thought more of the wrong act he had been guilty of. He must eat all his apples, for fear they should be found in his pocket.

When he got to the last, he could not get on with it; he had stuffed more than enough already — enough to make his head ache; and his conscience became more and more troublesome to him. He put the remains of the last apple down to the very bottom of his pocket, and walked down the lane. He thought how happy and light-hearted he was when he came home the evening before, and what fun he and Billy had driving home the geese; how Billy used to be half afraid of the gander; and how he used to laugh at his cowardice! Then he thought,

“But Billy is afraid of doing wrong, too.” And his conscience was like a sharp knife just then, and told him that it would be well for him if he had the same fear.

Billy's was a right kind of fear; he not only feared being punished, but he feared to offend Him Who has said, “Thou shalt not steal.”

When Tom came in to his supper,

he could not get a bit down his throat; he had been stuffing enough already. Billy eat his supper, and was afraid to look in his brother's face. They did not chatter together as they used to do. Their father said,

“ I cannot tell what is come to those two lads;” and soon after they asked to go to bed. They did not say much to each other that night, nor the next morning. Tom's conscience still reproached him, and Billy was unhappy for his brother.

They set out to school as usual. Tom hung his head, and crept along by the orchard-hedge, as if he was afraid to look up. He was glad when he got through the fields and into the high-road. After a minute or two he started; for he heard somebody halloo on the other side of the hedge. He set off without looking back, and ran as hard as he could, till he had nearly reached the turnpike; then he sat down on the edge of the high

footpath, and waited for Billy: he wondered that he had not run too. When Billy came up he was laughing, and said,

“ It was a boy who hallooed, to make us start. I was only frightened just at first. When he saw me, he laughed, and I laughed too.”

Tom wondered that Billy should be bolder than he was. It was his bad conscience that made a coward of him. As they sat a minute or two to rest, he said,

“ I'll tell you what, Billy,—I wish I had not taken those apples. I cannot get it out of my head now. But they looked so nice! How was it you could help taking some too?”

“ Why I thought of something that hindered me. Don't you know when we were questioned last month in the school for prizes? Do you remember our class had the commandments to answer? and the clergyman, you know, questioned us about the eighth. He said we should never take the least

thing that did not belong to us. Robbing orchards, he said, was a thing that boys were tempted to, and we should remember in the apple-season; and a great deal more that I forget. Don't you remember about the orchards?"

"Yes, I know—I do."

"And don't you remember, Tom, what mother said, when they talked of Jem Hall being taken up for sheep-stealing? She told us it would break her heart if either of us turned out thieves. She told us to remember that."

"Ay, but those things never come into my head at the right time: you can always think of them. Will you tell me about it at the right time, Bill?"

Bill promised he would. He laid hold of his brother's hand as they passed through the turnpike, and Tom did not look once at the gingerbread-shops. I believe he had never passed them without looking

before ; but he was vexed at his own greediness just then, which had caused him so much trouble.

In the evening they set off home as usual : school, and dinner, and play, had put all these thoughts out of his head. As they went along the hot dusty road he thought of the orchard and the few apples left on the tree, and the thought was as tempting as ever. How much more so when they got into the lane, and close to the orchard-hedge ! Tom stopped ; he looked through the gap in the hedge, and then it was all over with him. He looked to see if Billy was there ; for he was half ashamed to do wrong before him ; and he was glad not to see him.

They had met a man driving sheep just before ; some of them had turned in at an open gate, and the man had asked Billy to help him to turn them out.

When he had done this, he ran on as fast as he could ; but it was too

late; Tom was through the hedge, and was climbing up into the tree.

Billy could not get through the gap, being not so strong and active as his brother. He ran to the gate, and a large fierce dog sprang towards him, barking angrily. He knew Farmer Mills's mastiff, which used to be chained up in the farm-yard; he had been put there to guard the apples. Billy stepped back, and the dog drew back too. Then he wanted to call out to his brother, "Come back;" but that might bring somebody out of the farm-house. He could not bear to do nothing; he knew it was right to face the danger; so he ran forwards, his knees shaking, and his teeth chattering. When he got near the dog, he found he was chained with a long chain to a great tree, so he went on in safety; and now he was at the foot of the tree, he cried out,

"Come away, Tom; do remember! Oh, throw away that apple!"

Tom was stuffing one into his pocket under his pinafore.

“What do you make such a noise for?” was his answer, as he slipped down the tree. Billy set off, and ran as hard as he could, and Tommy after him; for they both heard voices, and they knew the barking of the great dog had given notice of what had been done. They ran, and ran, till they got home; and then they went to fetch home the geese, not laughing and talking as usual, as you may suppose.

After they had shut the geese up in their house, they were going in to their supper, but they heard a strange noise within. Tom turned red, and Billy white. Billy took hold of Tom's hand, and they stood at the door, which was a little bit open. Sure enough, as they both had guessed, it was Farmer Mills.

“I know well enough, Turner, it was one of your little chaps: we saw

two little fellows in pinafores, but only one in the tree: they made off this way, and there's no other boys down this way that I know of. I don't believe you or your wife would encourage thieving; but I must make an example of the boy: there is no end to pilfering in this parish."

"Do call the boys in, Turner," said their mother, with a sigh. She knew Tom's habit of greediness, and feared what it might have led him to.

Turner, who was angry that any body belonging to him should be accused of such a thing, pulled them in by the shoulders.

"Search their pockets—that's the way," said the farmer. Turner put his hand down into Billy's pockets, who stood trembling: there was nothing in either. Then he turned Tom round, and said, "Let us see what there is here."

So he put in his hand, and first he brought out a long piece of string: there was no harm in that. Next

came out some smooth round pebbles, which Tom called marbles: that was all very well. "Now for the other pocket." First, out came a piece of gingerbread: I hope he came honestly by that, but nobody stopped to inquire, for at the next dip his father pulled out a piece of half-eaten apple, with some of the red and yellow peel still on it.

"Now, my lad," said the farmer, "will you say that is not one of my apples?"

Tom burst into a loud fit of crying, and said, "O, pray forgive me! Pray! pray! } 'll never do so again."

"And did you take any, Bill?" said his father.

"No, no, father," said Tom, "he wouldn't; he told me not to; no, no fault of his."

Poor Billy began to cry as much as Tom, and held his brother tight by the hand.

"Tom must have the stick; it's the only way to cure him," said his

father ; and he went to look for his stick.

“ Well, I leave him to you, Turner,” said the farmer ; “ you’ll do what is right, I believe.”

And he went off, rather glad, I think, not to have to beat Tom himself.

“ Take Billy away, mother,” said his father ; “ the boy is too soft-hearted to see his brother flogged.”

Mrs. Turner said nothing to prevent Tom’s being punished ; she knew it was for his good ; but she unfastened Billy’s hand from his brother’s pinafore. Poor Billy cried very much when his father took Tom into the garden, and beat him severely for his fault.

“ I must make you remember it, Tom,” he said, “ or you will come to some bad end, and cast it in my face some day.”

Tom cried piteously, as you may suppose—so loud, that old dame Foster, who lived in a little hut down

the lane, came hobbling out towards the cottage, and stood looking over the hedge. She saw Mr. Evans, the clergyman, coming towards her.

“O, sir,” said she, “do you see how Turner is beating that poor boy?”

“Yes; he has done something wrong, I suppose.”

“Oh, only taking an apple or two out of Farmer Mills’s orchard. I saw the farmer come to the cottage quite savage about it. Do go, sir, and take the poor child’s part: it’s a shame to beat him so.”

“No, dame,” said Mr. Evans, “it is no shame; Turner knows his boy has done wrong, and he remembers the saying of Solomon, about sparing the rod. He is doing his duty, and the boy will thank him for it some day.”

“Ah, sir, what you say is true, no doubt; but I never could beat a child of mine in cold blood. When one is in a passion, to be sure”—

“ And that is the mistake people make,” said Mr. Evans. “ If the child sees you are in a passion, it does no good. Turner’s boy knows his father beats him because he thinks it his duty, and he will respect his father the more.”

Indeed that night’s beating was a really good thing for Tom. He and Billy went up to bed together ; their mother followed them as they clambered up the steep staircase to their little room. She bade them kneel down to say their prayers, and remember what had happened when they said, “ lead us not into temptation.” She told Tom to ask forgiveness for his sin — to ask forgiveness for Jesus Christ’s sake, as he had been taught. Tom was still sobbing, and could just say, “ I’ll try hard never to do so again, mother.” The little boys said their prayers ; and when they were in bed, Tom lay thinking of these two bad days, and the punishment and dis-

grace. The pleasantest thought was of Billy, and how he had tried to keep him from doing wrong, and how he had grieved for it and for his punishment. He thought,

“I will never laugh at Bill again for being afraid of things, for he is most afraid of doing wrong; he did not mind the great dog, when he wanted to keep me out of mischief.”

After this no more complaint was ever heard of Tom for picking and stealing; and afterwards he said it was chiefly owing to that beating his father gave him, that he remembered good thoughts time enough to keep him out of temptation.

