DIAZ ABBY MORTON

THE WILLIAM HENRY LETTERS

Abby Diaz

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Содержание

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

My dear Young Friends: —

Much to my surprise, I was asked one day if I would be willing to edit the William Henry Letters for publication in a volume.

At first it seemed impossible for me to do anything of the kind; "for," said I, "how can any one edit who is not an editor? Besides, I am not enough used to writing." It was then explained to me that my duties would simply be to collect and arrange the Letters, and furnish any little items concerning William Henry and his home which might interest the reader. It was also hinted, in the mildest manner possible, that I was not chosen for this office on account of my talents, or my learning, or my skill in writing; but wholly because of my intimate acquaintance with the two families at Summer Sweeting place, – for I have at times lived close by them for weeks together, and have taken tea quite often both at Grandmother's and at Aunt Phebe's.

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After a brief consideration of the proposal, I agreed to

undertake the task; at the same time wishing a more experienced editor could have been found.

My acquaintance with the families commenced just about the time of William Henry's going to school, and in rather a curious way.

I was then (and am now) much interested in the Freedmen. While serving in the Army of the Potomac, I had seen a good deal of them, and was connected with a hospital in Washington at the time when they were pouring into that city, hungry and sick, and half-naked. I belonged to several Freedmen's Societies, and had just then pledged myself to beg a barrelful of old clothing to send South.

But this I found was, for an unmarried man, having few acquaintances in the town, a very rash promise. I had no idea that one barrel could hold so much. The pile of articles collected seemed to me immense. I wondered what I should do with them all. But when packed away there was room left for certainly a third as many more; and I had searched thoroughly the few garrets in which right of search was allowed me. Even in those, I could only glean after other barrel-fillers. A great many garrets yielded up their treasures during the war; for "Old clo'! old clo'!" was the cry then all over the North.

Now, as I was sitting one afternoon by my barrel, wishing it were full, it happened that I looked down into the street, and saw there my *unknown friend*, waiting patiently in his empty cart. This *unknown friend* was a tall, high-shouldered man, who drove

in, occasionally, with vegetables. There were others who came in with vegetables also, and oftener than he; but this one I had particularly noticed, partly because of his bright, good-humored face, and partly because his horse had always a flower, or a sprig of something green, stuck in the harness.

At first I had only glanced at him now and then in the crowd. Then I found myself watching for his blue cart, and next I began to wonder where he came from, and what kind of people his folks were. He joked with the grocery-men, threw apples at the little ragged street children, and coaxed along his old horse in a sort of friendly way that was quite amusing. And though I had never spoken a word to him, nor he to me, I called him my unknown friend, for a sight of him always did me good.

It was a bony old gray horse that he drove, with a long neck poking way ahead; and the man was a farmer-like man, and wore farmer-like clothes; but he had a pleasant, twinkling eye, and the horse, as I said before, was seldom without a flower or bit of green stuck behind his ear or somewhere else about the harness.

And often, when the town was hot and dusty, and business people were mean, I would say to myself, as my friend drove past on his way home, How I should like to ride out with him, no matter where, if 't is only where they have flowers and green things growing in the garden!

On this particular afternoon, as I have said, I observed my friend sitting quietly in his cart, "bound out," as the fishermen say, – sitting becalmed, waiting for something ahead to get

started.

It happened that I was just then feeling very sensibly the heat and confinement of the town, and was more than usually weary of business ways and business people; actually pining for the balmy air of pine woods and the breath of flowery fields. And perhaps, thought I, my friend may live among warm-hearted country folk, who will be delighted to give to my poor contrabands, and whose garrets no barrelman has yet explored!

So, giving a second look, and seeing that he still sat there, patiently awaiting his turn, I ran down, without stopping to think more about it, and asked if I might ride out with him.

"O yes. Jump in! jump in!" said he, in the pleasantest manner possible; then he offered me his cushion, and began to double up an empty bag for himself.

"No, no. Give me the bag," said I; and folding it, I laid it on the board, just to take off the edge of the jolting a little. And my seat seemed a charming one, after having been perched up on an office-stool so long.

That cushion of his took my eye at once. It looked as if it came out of a rocking-chair. The covering was of black cloth, worked in a very old-fashioned way, with pinks and tulips. The colors were faded, but it had a homespun, comfortable, countrified look; in fact, the first glance at that queer old cushion assured me that I was going to exactly the right place.

Presently we got started, and certainly I never had a better ride, nor one with a pleasanter companion. He asked me all

sorts of funny questions about electricity, and oxygen, and flying-machines, and the telegraph, and the moon and stars.

"Now you are a learned man, I suppose," said he; "and I want you to tell me how that golden-rod gets its yellow out of black ground." I said I was not a learned man at all, and I didn't believe learned men themselves could tell how it got its yellow, and the asters their purple, and the succory its blue, and the everlasting its white, all out of the same black ground. He said he was pretty sure his wife couldn't boil up a kettleful and color either of those colors from them.

So we went talking on. He asked me where I'd been stopping, and what I did for a living. And I told him what I did for a living, and all about soldier life, and the contrabands, and about my barrel. Our road led through woods part of the way, and I drew in long breaths of woody air. He told me a funny woodchuck story, and had a good deal to say about wood-lots, – how some rich men formerly owned great tracts, but becoming poor were forced to sell; and how, when pines were cut off, oaks grew up in their place. And among other things he told me that a hardhack would turn into a huckleberry-bush. I said that seemed like a miracle. He was going on to tell me about one that he had watched, but just then we turned into a pleasant, shady lane.

We hadn't gone far down this shady lane before we heard a loud screaming behind us, and looking round saw a small boy caught fast in the bushes by the skirt of his frock.

"Do you see that little boy?" I asked.

"O yes, I see him," he said, laughing. "Hullo, Tommy! what you staying there for?"

The boy kept on crying.

"What you waiting for?" he called out again, just as if he couldn't see that the bushes would not let the child stir.

We found out afterwards that little Tommy had hid there to jump out and scare his father, but got caught by the briers. I went to untangle him, – his clothes had several rents, – and was going to put him in the cart; but he would get in "his own self," he said. Then he stopped crying, and wanted to drive. His father said, "No, not till we get through the bars."

Then Tommy began again. And at last he said, half crying and half talking, "When I'm – the – father, and you 'm – the – ittle Tommy – you can't – drive – my – horse!"

His father laughed and said: "Well, when I'm the little Tommy, I'll brush the snarls off my face – so, and throw them under the wheels – so, and let 'em get run over!"

This made Tommy laugh, and very soon after we came to the bars.

I looked ahead and saw a neat white house, not very large, with green blinds and a piazza, where flowering plants were climbing. There was a garden on one side and an orchard on the other. Just across the garden stood an old, brown, unpainted house. There were tall apple-trees growing near it, that looked about a hundred years old. My friend, Uncle Jacob, – I've heard him called Uncle Jacob so much since that I really don't know how

to put a Mister to his name, – said those were Summer Sweeting trees, that had pretty nigh done bearing. He said there used to be Summer Sweeting trees growing all about there; and that when he took part of the place, and built him a house, he cut down the ones on his land, and set out Baldwins and Tallmans and Porters; but his mother kept her's for the good they had done, and for the sake of what few apples they did bear, to give away to the children.

The houses had their backs towards me, and I was glad of that, for I always like back doors better than front ones.

Uncle Jacob whistled, and I saw a blind fly open, and a handkerchief wave from an upper window, where two girls were sitting. Uncle Jacob's wife stepped to the door and waved a sunbonnet, and then stepped back again.

"Here, Tommy," said Uncle Jacob, "you carry in the magazine to Lucy Maria, and here's Matilda's gum-arabic. I don't see where Towser is."

I jumped out, and said I guessed I would keep on; for I began to feel bashful about seeing so many women-folks.

"Where you going to keep on to?" Uncle Jacob asked. "This road don't go any farther."

I said I would walk across the fields to the next village and find a hotel.

"O no," said he, "stay here. Grandmother'll be glad enough to hear about the contrabands. She'll knit stockings, and pick up a good deal about the house to send off. And I want to ask much

as five hundred questions more about matters and things myself. Come, stay. Yes, we'll give you a good supper, a first-rate supper. Don't be afraid. My wife'll – There! I forgot her errand, now! But if you – Whoa! whoa! Georgiana, take this pattern in to your Aunt Phebe, and tell her I forgot to see if I could match it; but I don't believe the man had any like it."

Georgiana was a nice little girl that just then came running across the garden, – William Henry's sister, as I learned afterwards.

Just then Aunt Phebe stepped to the door again.

"Here are two hungry travellers," said Uncle Jacob, "and one of us is bashful."

"Well," said Aunt Phebe, very cheerily, "if anybody is hungry, this is just the right place. How do you do, sir? Come right in. We live so out of the way we 're always glad of company. Father, can't you introduce your friend?"

"Well – no – I can't," said he. "But I guess he's brother to the President!"

I said my name was Fry.

Aunt Phebe said her father had a cousin that married a *Fry*, and asked what my mother's maiden name was. I told her my mother was a *Young*, and that I was named for my father and mother both, —*Silas Young Fry*.

I heard a tittering overhead, behind a pair of blinds, where I guessed some girls were peeping through. And afterwards, when I was sitting on the piazza, I heard one tell another, not thinking

I was within hearing, that a young fry had come to supper.

When we all sat round the table the girls seemed full of tickle, which they tried to hide, – and one of them asked me, – I think it was Hannah Jane, – with a very sober face, —

"Mr. Fry, will you take some fried fish?"

I laughed and said, "No, I never take anything *fried*."

Then we all laughed together, and so got acquainted very pleasantly; for I have observed that a little ripple of fun sets people nearer together than a whole ocean of calm conversation.

After supper Uncle Jacob read the paper aloud, while the girls washed up the dishes. All were eager to hear; and I found they kept the run of affairs quite as well as townspeople. When there was too much rattling of dishes for Uncle Jacob to be heard, and the girls lost some important item, he was always willing to read it over. Little Tommy was rolled up in a shawl and set down in the rocking-chair (that cushion did come out of it) while his mother mended his clothes. This was the way he usually got punished for tearing them. He was done up in a shawl, arms and all, and kept in the rocking-chair while the clothes were being mended, and he was obliged to remain pretty quiet, or the chair would tip. Aunt Phebe said Tommy was so careless, something must be done, and keeping him still was the worst punishment he could have.

When the girls finished their dishes and took out their sewing, and were going to light the large lamp, their mother said that we mustn't think of settling ourselves for the evening. She said we must all go in to grandmother's, for she'd be dreadful lonely,

missing Billy so.

Then Aunt Phebe told me how her nephew, Billy, a ten-year old boy, had gone away to school only the day before, and how they all missed him.

"Isn't he pretty young to go away to school?" I asked.

"That's what I told his father," said she.

"His father sent him away to keep him," said Uncle Jacob. "Grandmother was spoiling him."

"Ruining the boy with kindness?" said Lucy Maria.

"Well," said Aunt Phebe, "I suppose 't was so. I know 't was so. But we did hate to have Billy go!"

Uncle Jacob then took me across the garden, and introduced me to Mr. Carver, the father of William Henry, and to Grandmother, – old Mrs. Carver, as the neighbors called her.

She was a smiling, blue-eyed old lady, though with a little bit of an anxious look just between the eyes. I thought there was no doubt about her being a grandmother that would spoil boys.

"Why, there's Towser, now?" said Uncle Jacob. "He didn't come to meet me to-night."

"He's been there, off and on, pretty much all day," said grandmother. "You see what he's got his head on don't you?"

"Billy's old boots!" said Uncle Jacob.

"Yes. He set a good deal by Billy. I haven't put the boots away yet," she said, with a sigh.

"Here, Towser! come here, sir!" cried Uncle Jacob.

Towser was a big, shaggy, clever-looking dog. He got up

slowly, sniffed at my trousers, then walked to Uncle Jacob, then round the room, then to the door, then up stairs and down again, and then back he went and lay down by the boots.

"He misses my grandson," said grandmother to me, trying to smile about it.

The little girl, Georgiana, sat on a cricket, holding a kitten, tying and untying its ribbon. A square of patchwork had fallen on the floor. She stooped to pick it up and dropped her spool. That rolled away towards the door, and kitty jumped for it and soon got the thread in a tangle. The door opened so suddenly that she hopped up about two feet into the air and tumbled head over heels.

It was Lucy Maria who opened the door. The other girls came soon after; and when Tommy was asleep Aunt Phebe came too. We had a very sociable time. I don't call myself a talker, but I didn't mind talking there, they seemed so easy, just like one's own folks. I told grandmother many things about the contrabands, and about Southern life, and Southern people, and about soldier life and battles and rations and making raids, and the Washington hospitals, and how needy the contrabands were, and about my barrel. "Poor creatures!" said she. "I must look up some things for them to-morrow." Aunt Phebe thought there might be a good many things lying about that would be of use to folks who hadn't anything.

"Billy's boots!" cried Hannah Jane.

"Why, yes," said her mother, "no use keeping boots for a

growing boy."

This and other remarks brought us back to William Henry again, and grandmother seemed glad of it. She liked to keep talking about her boy.

"I shall feel very anxious," she said. "I hope he will write soon as he gets there. I told him he'd better write every day, so I could be sure just how he was. For if well one day, he mightn't be the next."

"O grandmother, that's too bad!" said Lucy Maria. "'T is cruel to ask a boy to write every day!"

"I wouldn't worry, mother," said Aunt Phebe. "Billy's always been a well child."

"These strong constitutions," said grandmother, "when they do take anything, 't is apt to go hard with 'em."

"He's taken pretty much everything that can be given to him already," said Aunt Phebe.

"I suppose they'll put clothes enough on his bed," said grandmother. "I can't bear to think of his sleeping cold nights."

"Perhaps they have blankets in that part of the country," said Uncle Jacob.

"But people are not always thoughtful about it," said grandmother. "I really hope he'll take care of himself, and not be climbing up everywhere. Houses and trees were bad enough; but now they have gymnastic poles and everything else, to tempt boys off the ground. O dear! when we think of everything that might happen to boys, 't is a wonder one of them ever lives to

grow up. Isn't there a pond near by?"

"O yes," said Lucy Maria, "Crooked Pond. That's what gives the name to the school, – Crooked Pond School."

"I hope he won't be whipped," said his little sister.

"Whipped!" cried Aunt Phebe, "I should like to see anybody whipping our Billy!"

"O mother, I shouldn't," said Matilda.

"'T isn't an impossible thing," said grandmother. "He's quick. Billy's good-hearted, but he's quick. He might speak up. I gave him a charge how to behave. But then, what's a boy's memory? I don't suppose he'll remember one half the things I told him. I meant to have charged him over again, the last thing, not to stay out in the rain and get wet, where there's nobody to see to his clothes being dried."

"Well," said Uncle Jacob, "if a boy doesn't know enough to go into the house when it rains, he better come home?"

"What I hope is," said Aunt Phebe, "that he'll keep himself looking decent."

"If he does," said Lucy Maria, "then 'twill be the first time. The poor child never seemed to have much luck about keeping spruced up. If anybody here ever saw William Henry with no buttons off and both shoes tied, and no rip anywhere, let 'em raise their hands!"

Everybody laughed. I thought grandmother's eye wandered round the circle, as if half taking it all in earnest, and half hoping some hand would go up. But no hand went up.

"Billy always was hard on his clothes," she said, with a sigh. "If he only keeps well I won't say a word; but there's always danger of boys eating unwholesome things, where there's nobody to deny them."

"Billy's stomach's his own, and he must learn to have the care of it," said Mr. Carver.

Mr. Carver seemed a very quiet, thoughtful man, and of quite a different turn from his brother.

I suggested that boarding-house diet was apt to be plain; and then told grandmother about a nephew of mine, a nice boy, who was rather older than her grandson, who was named after me, and of whom I thought everything. I told her he had been away at school a year, and that he enjoyed himself, and went ahead in his studies, and never had a sick day, and came home with better manners than he had when he went away. As this pleased her, I said everything I could think of about my nephew, including some anecdotes of little Silas, when he was quite small; and she told a few about William Henry, the others helping her out, now and then, with some missing items.

Uncle Jacob said he shouldn't dare to say how many times she'd been frightened almost to death about Billy. Many and many a time she was sure he was lost, or drowned, or run over, or carried off, and would never come back alive; but he always managed to come out straight at last. Uncle Jacob said that if all the worry that was worried in this world were piled up together, 't would make a mountain; but if all of it that needn't

be worried were knocked off, what was left wouldn't be bigger than a huckleberry hill.

Mr. Carver said there was one thing which made him entirely willing to trust William Henry away, and that was, he had always been a boy of principle. "I have watched him pretty closely," said Mr. Carver, "and have noticed that he has a kind of pride about him that will not permit him to lie, or equivocate in any way.

"That's true!" cried Aunt Phebe. "True enough! Billy don't always look fit to be seen, but he isn't deceitful. I'll say that for him!"

"When he went to our school," said Matilda, "and was in the class below me, and there was a fuss among the boys, and all of 'em told it a different way, the teacher used to say she would ask William Henry, and then she could tell just how it happened."

"He couldn't have a better name than that," said Mr. Carver.

Grandmother wiped her eyes, she seemed so gratified that her boy's good qualities were remembered at last.

I am almost certain that an editor should not be so long in telling his story. But I should like to say a little more about that first night, – just a very little more.

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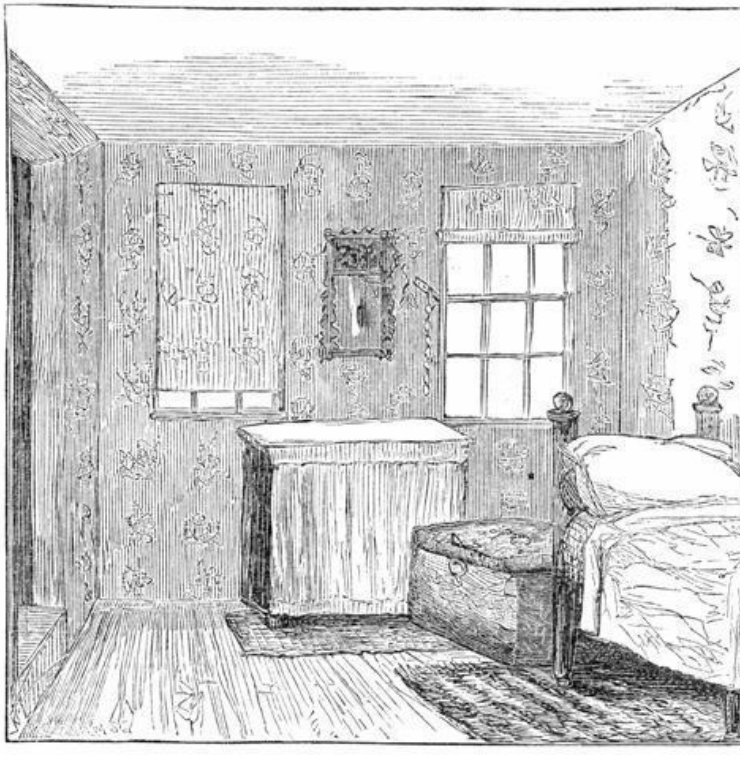
Grandmother wouldn't hear of my going to a hotel. Anybody that had been a soldier, and was doing good, should never go from her house to find a night's lodging. And she might as well have

said, particularly anybody that had a little Silas away at school, for I saw she felt it.

It required very little urging to make me stay; for in all my travels I had never met with a pleasanter set of people. My choice was offered me, whether to lodge in the front chamber, or in the little back chamber where Billy slept. Of course I chose the last; for people's best, front, spare chambers never suit me very well.



Billy's room was a snug little room, low in the walls, and papered with flowery paper. There were two windows, the curtains to which were made of paper like that on the walls. You had to roll them up with your hands, and tie them with a string that went over the top. The room was over the sink-room, and in going into it we stepped one step down. There was no carpet on

the floor, excepting a strip by the bedside and a mat before the table. Grandmother said the table Billy and she made together, so the legs didn't stand quite true. It was covered with calico, and more calico was puckered on round the edge and came down to the floor. That was done, she said, to make a place for his boots and shoes. She thought 't was well for a boy to have a place for his things, even if he did always leave them somewhere else. There was nothing under the table but one rubber boot, with the rubber mostly cut off, and some pieces of new pine, easy to whittle, that Billy had picked up and stowed away there. A narrow looking-glass hung over the table. It had a queer picture at the top, of two Japanese figures. The glass had a little crack in one corner, – cracked by his ball bouncing up when he was trying it. Some green tissue-paper hung around this fracture with a very innocent, ornamental air. Not far from the glass I observed a rusty jack-knife stuck in the wall, close to the window-frame; and on its handle was hanging a string of birds'-eggs. In stepping up to examine these I stumbled against an old hair-covered trunk, quite a large one. The cover seemed a little askew, and not inclined to shut. This trunk was the color of a red cow, and for aught I know was covered with the skin of a red cow. In the middle of the cover the letters W. C. were printed in brass nails, which led me to guess that the trunk had belonged to William Henry's father. Grandmother raised the cover, to see what kept it from shutting, and found 't was a great scraggly piece of sassafras (saxifax) root, which lay on top.

There was everything in that trunk, – everything. Of course I don't mean meeting-houses, or steamboats, or anacondas; but everything a boy would be likely to have. I saw picture papers, leather straps, old pocket-books, a pair of dividers, the hull of a boat, a pair of boot-pullers, a chrysalis, several penholders, a large clam-shell, a few pocket combs, – comb parts gone, – fishing-lines, reels, bobs, sinkers, a bullet-mould, arrows, a bag of marbles, a china egg, a rule, hammers, a red comforter, two odd mittens, "that had lost the mates of 'em," a bird-call, a mask, an empty cologne-bottle, a dime novel, odd cards, – all these, and more, were visible by merely stirring the top layer a little. Also several tangles of twine, twining and intertwining among the mass. Grandmother shook up the things some, – by means of a handle which probably belonged to a hatchet, but the hatchet part was buried, – and I saw that the bottom was covered with marbles, dominos, nails, bottles, slate-pencils, bits of brass clock machinery, and all the innumerable nameless, shapeless things which would be likely to settle down to the bottom of a boy's trunk. Grandmother said she should set it to rights if it weren't for fish-hooks; but anybody's hands going in there would be likely to get fish-hooks stuck into them.

In one end of the trunk was quite a fanciful box. It was nothing but a common pine box, painted black, with "cut out" pictures pasted on it. There were ladies' faces, generals' heads, bugs, horses, butterflies, chairs, ships, birds, and in the centre of the cover, outside, there was a large red rose on its stalk. At

the centre, inside, was a laughing, or rather a grinning face, cut from some comic magazine. In this box was kept some of his more precious treasures, – a little brass anchor, a silver pencil-case, a whole set of dominos, and a ball, very prettily worked, orange-peel pattern, in many colors. This was a present from his teacher. There was also a curious pearl-handled knife, with the blades broken short off. She said he never felt so badly about breaking any knife as when that got broken, for it was one his cousin brought him home from sea. He was keeping it to have new blades put in.

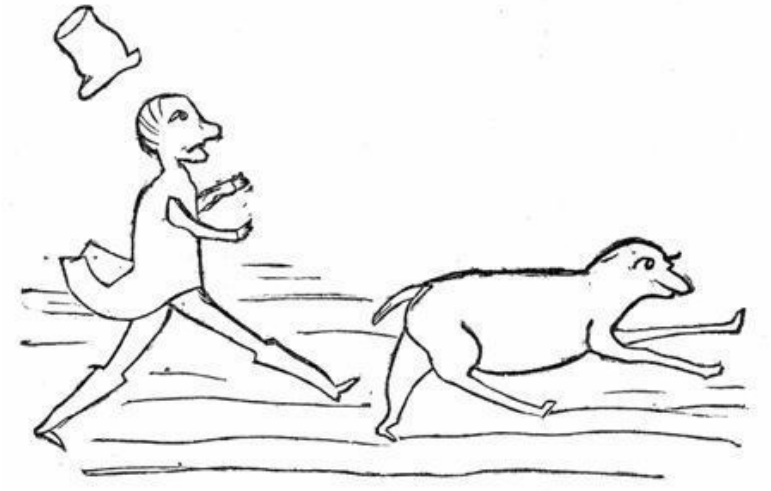
"How much this trunk reminds me of little Silas's bureau-drawer!" I said, taking up an old writing-book. As I spoke several bits of paper fell out and among them were some very funny pictures, done with a lead-pencil and then inked over.

"What are these?" I asked. "Does he draw?"

"Well – not exactly," she answered, – "nothing that can be called drawing. He tries sometimes to copy what he sees."

"I suppose I may look at them," I said, picking up one of the bits of paper. "Pray what is this?"

Grandmother put on her spectacles, and turned the paper round, as if trying to find the up and down of it.



"O, this is Uncle Jacob chasing the calf," said she; "those things that look like elbows are meant for his legs kicking up. And on this piece he's tried to make the old gobbler flying at Georgiana. You see the turkey is as big as she is. But maybe you don't know which the turkey is! That one is the fat man, and that one is the cat and kittens. And that one is a dandy, making a bow. He saw one over at the hotel that he took it from."

She was sitting by the bed, and as she named them, spread them out upon it, one by one, along with some others I have not mentioned, all very comical. When I had finished laughing over them I said, —

"I should like to send these pictures in my barrel. 'T would

give the little sick contrabands something to laugh at."

"Well, I'll tell Billy when he comes," she answered, then gathered them up and smoothed the quilt again.

The bedstead was a low one, without any posts, except that each leg ended at the top with a little round, flat head or knob. The quilt was made of light and dark patchwork. Grandmother told me, lowering her voice, that Billy's mother made that patchwork when she was a little girl just learning to sew; but 't was kept laid away, and about the last work she ever did was to set it together. And 't was her request that Billy should have it on his bed. She said Billy was a very *feeling* boy, though he didn't say much. One time, a couple years ago, she hung that quilt out to blow, and forgot to take it in till after the dew began to fall, so, being a little damp, she put on another one. But next morning she looked in, and there 't was, over him, spread on all skewy!

"Sometimes I think," she added, "that boys have more feeling than we think for!"

"I know they have!" I answered.

A picture of William Henry's mother hung opposite the bed. It was not a very handsome face, nor a pretty face. But it had such an earnest, loving, wistful expression, that I could not help exclaiming, "Beautiful!"

"Yes, she was a beautiful woman. We all loved her. She was just like a daughter to me. Billy doesn't know what he's lost, and 't is well he don't. I try to be a mother to him; but they say," said the tender-hearted old lady, – "they say a grandmother isn't fit to

have the bringing up of a child! Billy has his faults."

"Now if I were a child," I exclaimed, "I should rather you would have the bringing up of me than anybody I know of! And 't is my opinion, from what I hear, that you've done well by Billy. Of course boys are boys, and don't always do us they ought to. Now there's little Silas. He's been a world of trouble first and last. But then boys soon get big enough to be ashamed of all their little bad ways. The biggest part of 'em like good men best, and mean to be good men. And I think Billy's going to grow up a capital fellow! A capital fellow! If a boy's true-hearted he'll come out all right. And your boy is, isn't he?"

"O very!" she said. "Very!"

I was so glad to think, after the old lady had gone down, that I'd said something which, if she kept awake, thinking about the boy, would be a comfort to her.

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Next morning grandmother brought out quite an armful of old clothes. A poor old couple, living near, she said, took most of hers and Mr. Carver's; but what few there were of Billy's that were decent to send I might have. A couple of linen jackets, a Scotch cap, two pairs of thin trousers, not much worn, but outgrown, a small overcoat, several pairs of stockings, and some shoes. And the boots also, and some underclothing, that William Henry might have worn longer, she said, if he were only living at

home, where she could put a stitch in 'em now and then.

Grandmother sighed as she emptied the pockets of crumbles, green apples, reins, bullets, and knotted, gray, balled-up pocket-handkerchiefs. Among the clothes she brought out a funny little uniform, which I had seen hanging up in his room, – one that he had when a soldier, or trainer, as she called it, in a military company, formed near the beginning of the war. It consisted of a blue flannel sack, edged with red braid, red flannel Zouave trousers, and a blue flannel cap, bound with red, and having a square visor. That uniform would fit some little contraband, she said.

"Hadn't you better keep those?" I asked. "Won't he want them?"

"O no," she said. "He's outgrown them. And 't is no use keeping them for moths to get into."

She gave me some picture-books, and two primers, a roll of linen, and quite a good blanket, all of which I received thankfully.

In rolling up the different articles, I saw her eye resting so lovingly on the little uniform, that I said, "Here, grandmother, hadn't you better take back these?"

"O, I guess not," she answered. "I guess you better send them. But," she added a moment after, "perhaps they might as well stay till you send another barrel."

"Just exactly as well," I said. And the old lady seemed as if she had recovered a lost treasure.

Aunt Phebe added a good many valuable articles, so that by

the time Uncle Jacob was ready to start I had collected two immense bundles, and felt almost brave enough to face another barrel. For they all said they would beg from their friends, and save things, and that I must certainly come again.

"For you know," said Aunt Phebe, "'t is a great deal better to hear you tell things than to read about them in the newspapers."

They stood about the door to see us off, and Matilda stroked the old horse, and talked to him as if he understood. She broke off two heads of phlox, red and white, and fastened them in behind his ear. Uncle Jacob told me, as we rode along, that the old horse really expected to be patted and talked to before starting. And indeed I noticed myself that after being dressed up he stepped off with an exceedingly satisfied air, just as I have seen some little girls, – and boys too, for that matter, and occasionally grown people.

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But it is quite time to give you the Letters. There should be more of them, for the correspondence covers a period of about two years. 'T is true that, after the first, William Henry did not write nearly as often. But still there are many missing. Little Tommy cut up some into strings of boys and girls, and at one time when grandmother wasn't very well, and had to hire help, the girl look some to kindle fire with. The old lady said she was sitting up in her arm-chair, by the fireplace one day, when she

saw, in the corner, a piece of paper with writing on it, half burnt up. She poked it out with a yardstick, and 't was one of Billy's letters! Quite a number which were perfect have been omitted. This is because that some coming between were missing; and so, as the children say, there wouldn't be any sense to them. Others contained mostly private matters. Very few were dated. This is, however, of small importance, as the Letters probably will never be brought forward to decide a law case.

THE WILLIAM HENRY LETTERS

The first letter from William Henry which has been preserved seems to have been written a few weeks after entering his school, and when he had begun to get acquainted with the boys. Could the letter itself be made to appear here, with its *very* peculiar handwriting, and with all the other distinctive marks of a boy's first exploit on paper, it would be found even more entertaining than when given in the printed form.

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My dear Grandmother, —

I think the school that I have come to is a very good school. We have dumplings. I've tied up the pills that you gave me in case of feeling bad, in the toe of my cotton stocking that's lost the mate of it. The mince pies they have here are baked without any plums being put into them. So, please, need I say, No, I thank you, ma'am, to 'em when they come round? If they don't agree, shall I take the pills or the drops? Or was it the hot flannels, – and how many?

I've forgot about being shivery. Was it to eat roast onions? No, I guess not. I guess it was a wet band tied round my head. Please write it down, because you told me so many things I

can't remember. How can anybody tell when anybody is sick enough to take things? You can't think what a great, tall man the schoolmaster is. He has got something very long to flog us with, that bends easy, and hurts, – Q. S. So Dorry says. Q. S. is in the abbreviations, and stands for a sufficient quantity. Dorry says the master keeps a paint-pot in his room, and has his whiskers painted black every morning, and his hair too, to make himself look scareful. Dorry is one of the great boys. But Tom Cush is bigger. I don't like Tom Cush.

I have a good many to play with; but I miss you and Towser and all of them very much. How does my sister do? Don't let the cow eat my peach-tree. Dorry Baker he says that peaches don't grow here; but he says the cherries have peach-stones in them. In a month my birthday will be here. How funny 't will seem to be eleven, when I've been ten so long! I don't skip over any button-holes in the morning now; so my jacket comes out even.

Why didn't you tell me I had a red head? But I can run faster than any of them that are no bigger than I am, and some that are. One of the spokes of my umbrella broke itself in two yesterday, because the wind blew so when it rained.

We learn to sing. He says I've a good deal of voice; but I've forgot what the matter is with it. We go up and down the scale, and beat time. The last is the best fun. The other is hard to do. But if I could only get up, I guess 't would be easy to come down. He thinks something ails my ear. I thought he said I hadn't got any at all. What have a feller's ears to do with singing, or with

scaling up and down?

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

P.S. Here's a conundrum Dorry Baker made: In a race, why would the singing-master win? Because "Time flies," and he *beats time*.

I want to see Aunt Phebe, and Aunt Phebe's little Tommy, dreadfully.

W. H.

-

This second letter must have been pleasing to Aunt Phebe, as it shows that William Henry was beginning to have some faint regard for his personal appearance.

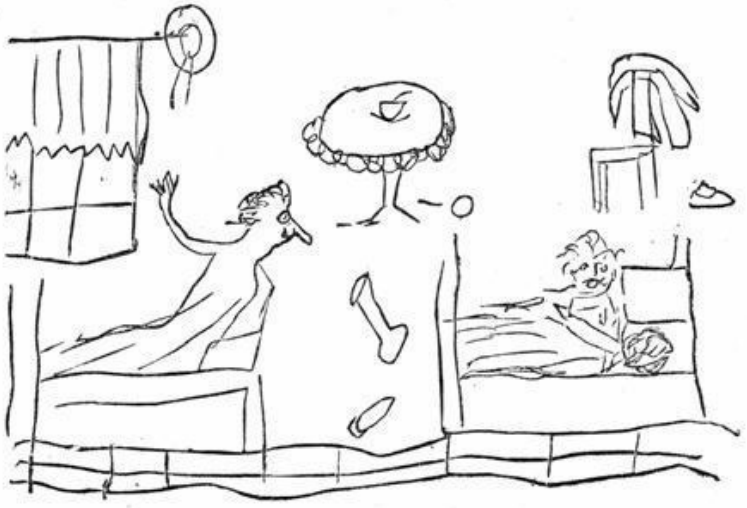
-

My dear Grandmother, —

I've got thirty-two cents left of my spending-money. When shall I begin to wear my new shoes every day? The soap they have here is pink. Has father sold the bossy calf yet? There's a boy here they call Bossy Calf, because he cried for his mother. He has been here three days. He sleeps with me. And every night, after he has laid his head down on the pillow, and the lights are

blown out, I begin to sing, and to scale up and down, so the boys can't hear him cry. Dorry Baker and three more boys sleep in the same room that we two sleep in. When they begin to throw bootjacks at me, to make me stop my noise, it scares him, and he leaves off crying. I want a pair of new boots dreadfully, with red on the tops of them, that I can tuck my trousers into and keep the mud off.

One thing more the boys plague me for besides my head. Freckles. Dorry held up an orange yesterday. "Can you see it?" says he. "To be sure," says I. "Didn't know as you could see through 'em," says he, meaning freckles. Dear grandmother, I have cried once, but not in bed. For fear of their laughing, and of the bootjacks. But away in a good place under the trees. A shaggy dog came along and licked my face. But oh! he did make me remember Towser, and cry all over again. But don't tell, for I should be ashamed. I wish the boys would like me. Freckles come thicker in summer than they do in winter.



Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

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If William Henry's recipe for the prevention of spunkiness were generally adopted, I fancy that many a boy would be seen practising the circus performance here mentioned. It must have been "sure cure!" I well remember the "plaguing" of my school days, and know from experience how hard it is for a boy (or a man) always to keep his temper. The fellows used to make fun of my name. In our quarrels, when there was nothing else left to

say, they would call out, – leaving off the Silas, – "Y Fry? why not bake?" or "boil," or "stew." Of course to such remarks there was no answer.

It is to be regretted that so few of Grandmother's letters were preserved. As Billy here makes known the state of his pocket-book, we may infer that she had been inquiring into his accounts, and perhaps cautioning him against spending too freely.

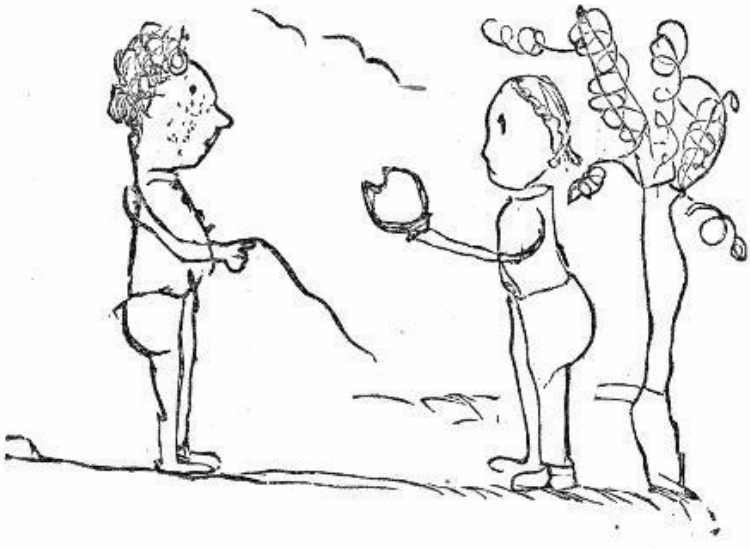
-

My Dear Grandmother, —

I do what you told me. You told me to bite my lips and count ten, before I spoke, when the boys plague me, because I'm a spunky boy. But doing it so much makes my lips sore. So now I go head over heels sometimes, till I'm out of breath. Then I can't say anything.

This is the account you asked me for, of all I've bought this week: —

Slippery elm	1 cent.
Corn-ball	1 cent.
Gum	1 cent.



And I swapped a whip-lash that I found for an orange that only had one suck sucked out of it. The "Two Betseys," they keep very good things to sell. They are two old women that live in a little hut with two rooms to it, and a ladder to go up stairs by, through a hole in the wall. One Betsey, she is lame and keeps still, and sells the things to us sitting down. The other Betsey, she can run, and keeps a yardstick to drive away boys with. For they have apple-trees in their garden. But she never touches a boy, if she does catch him. They have hens and sell eggs.

The boys that sleep in the same room that we do wanted Benjie and me to join together with them to buy a great confectioner's frosted cake, and other things. And when the lamps had been blown out, to keep awake and light them up again, and so have a supper late at night, with the curtains all down and the blinds shut up, when people were in bed, and not let anybody know.

But Benjie hadn't any money. Because his father works hard for his living, – but his uncle pays for his schooling, – and he

wouldn't if he had. And I said I wouldn't do anything so deceitful. And the more they said you must and you shall, the more I said I wouldn't and I shouldn't, and the money should blow up first.

So they called me "Old Stingy" and "Pepper-corn" and "Speckled Potatoes." Said they'd pull my hair if 't weren't for burning their fingers. Dorry was the maddest one. Said he guessed my hair was tired of standing up, and wanted to lie down to rest.

I wish you would please send me a new comb, for the large end of mine has got all but five of the teeth broken out, and the small end can't get through. I can't get it cut because the barber has raised his price. Send quite a stout one.

I have lost two of my pocket-handkerchiefs, and another one went up on Dorry's kite, and blew away.

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

-

My dear Grandmother, —

I did what you told me, when I got wet. I hung my clothes round the kitchen stove on three chairs, but the cooking girl she flung them under the table. So now I go wrinkled, and the boys chase me to smooth out the wrinkles. I've got a good many hard rubs. But I laugh too. That's the best way. Some of the boys play

with me now, and ask me to go round with them. Dorry hasn't yet. Tom Cush plagues the most.

Sometimes the schoolmaster comes out to see us when we are playing ball, or jumping. To-day, when we all clapped Dorry, the schoolmaster clapped too. Somebody told me that he likes boys. Do you believe it?

A cat ran up the spout this morning, and jumped in the window. Dorry was going to choke her, or drown her, for the working-girl said she licked out the inside of a custard-pie. I asked Dorry what he would take to let her go, and he said five cents. So I paid. For she was just like my sister's cat. And just as likely as not somebody's little sister would have cried about it. For she had a ribbon tied round her neck.

The woman that I go to have my buttons sewed on to, is a very good woman. She gave me a cookie with a hole in the middle, and told me to mind and not eat the hole.

Coming back, I met Benjie, and he looked so sober, I offered it to him as quick as I could. But it almost made him cry; because, he said, his mother made her cookies with a hole in the middle.

But when he gets acquainted, he won't be so bashful, and he'll feel better then.

We walked away to a good place under the trees, and he talked about his folks, and his grandmother, and his Aunt Polly, and the two little twins. They've got two cradles just like each other, and they are just as big as each other, and just as old. They creep round on the floor, and when one picks up anything, the other pulls it away. I wish we had some twins. I told him things too.

Kiss yourself for me.

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

P. S. If you send a cake, send quite a large one. I like the kind that Uncle Jacob does. Aunt Phebe knows.

-

My dear Grandmother, —

I was going to tell you about "Gapper Skyblue." "Gapper" means grandpa. He wears all the time blue overalls, faded out, and a jacket like them. That's why they call him "Gapper Skyblue." He's a very poor old man. He saws wood. We found him leaning up against a tree. Benjie and I were together. His hair is all turned white, and his back is bent. He had great patches on his knees. His hat was an old hat that he had given him, and his shoes let in the mud. I wish you would please to be so good as

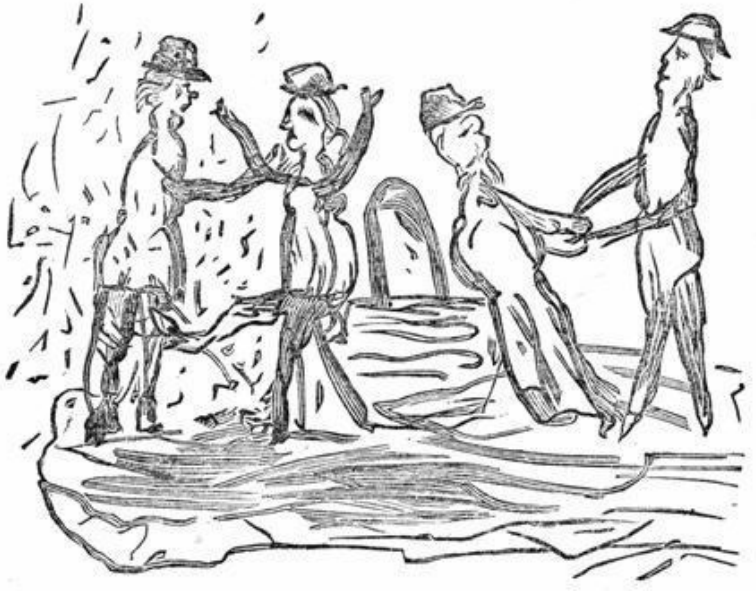
to send me both your old-fashioned india-rubbers, to make balls of, as quick as holes come. Most all the boys have lost their balls. And please to send some shoe-strings next time, for I have to tie mine up all the time now with some white cord that I found, and it gets into hard knots, and I have to stoop my head way down and untie 'em with my teeth, because I cut my thumb whittling, and jammed my fingers in the gate.

Old Gapper Skyblue's nose is pretty long, and he looked so funny leaning up against a tree, that I was just going to laugh. But then I remembered what you said a real gentleman would do. That he would be polite to all people, no matter what clothes they had on, or whether they were rich people or poor people. He had a big basket with two covers to it, and we offered to carry it for him.

He said, "Yes, little boys, if you won't lift up the covers."

We found 't was pretty heavy. And I wondered what was in it, and so did Benjie. The basket was going to "The Two Betseys."

When we had got half-way there, Dorry and Tom Cush came along, and called out: "Hallo! there, you two. What are you lugging off so fast?"



We said we didn't know. They said, "Let's see." We said, "No, you can't see." Then they pushed us. Gapper was a good way behind. I sat down on one cover, and Benjie on the other, to keep them shut up.

Then they pulled us. I swung my arms round, and made the sand fly with my feet, for I was just as mad as anything. Then Tom Cush hit me. So I ran to tell Gapper to make haste. But first picked up a stone to send at Tom Cush. But remembered about the boy that threw a stone and hit a boy, and he died. I mean the boy that was hit. And so dropped the stone down again and ran

like lightning.

"Go it, you pesky little red-headed firebug!" cried Tom Cush.

"Go it, Spunkum! I'll hold your breath," Dorry hollered out.

The dog, the shaggy dog that licked my face when I was lying under the trees, he came along and growled and snapped at them, because they were hurting Benjie. You see Benjie treats him well, and gives him bones. And the master came in sight too. So they were glad to let us alone.

The basket had rabbits in it. Gapper Skyblue wanted to pay us two cents apiece. But we wouldn't take pay. We wouldn't be so mean.

When we were going along to school, Bubby Short came and whispered to me that Tom and Dorry were hiding my bird's eggs in a post-hole. But I got them again. Two broke.

Bubby Short is a nice little fellow. He's about as old as I am, but over a head shorter and quite fat. His cheeks reach way up into his eyes. He's got little black eyes, and little cunning teeth, just as white as the meat of a punkin-seed.

I had to pay twenty cents of that quarter you sent, for breaking a square of glass. But didn't mean to, so please excuse. I haven't much left.

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

P. S. When punkins come, save the seeds – to roast. If you please.

-

My dear Grandmother, —

One of my elbows came through, but the woman sewed it up again. I've used up both balls of my twine. And my white-handled knife, – I guess it went through a hole in my pocket, that I didn't know of till after the knife was lost. My trousers grow pretty short. But she says 't is partly my legs getting long. I'm glad of that. And partly getting 'em wet.

I stubbed my toe against a stump, and tumbled down and scraped a hole through the knee of my oldest pair. For it was very rotten cloth. I guess the hole is too crooked to have her sew it up again. She thinks a mouse ran up the leg, and gnawed that hole my knife went through, to get the crumbles in the pocket. I don't mean when they were on me, but hanging up.

My boat is almost rigged. She says she will hem the sails if I won't leave any more caterpillars in my pockets. I'm getting all kinds of caterpillars to see what kind of butterflies they make.

Yesterday, Dorry and I started from the pond to run and see who would get home first. He went one way, and I went another.

I cut across the Two Betseys' garden. But I don't see how I did so much hurt in just once cutting across. I knew something cracked, – that was the sink-spout I jumped down on, off the fence. There was a board I hit, that had huckleberries spread out on it to dry. They went into the rain-water hogshead. I didn't

know any huckleberries were spread out on that board.

I meant to go between the rows, but guess I stepped on a few beans. My wrist got hurt dreadfully by my getting myself tripped up in a squash-vine. And while I was down there, a bumble-bee stung me on my chin. I stepped on a little chicken, for she ran the way I thought she wasn't going to. I don't remember whether I shut the gate or not. But guess not, for the pig got in, and went to rooting before Lame Betsey saw him, and the other Betsey had gone somewhere.

I got home first, but my wrist ached, and my sting smarted. You forgot to write down what was good for bumble-bee stings. Benjie said his Aunt Polly put damp sand on to stings. So he put a good deal of it on my chin, and it got better, though my wrist kept aching in the night. And I went to school with it aching. But didn't tell anybody but Benjie. Just before school was done, the master said we might put away our books. Then he talked about the Two Betseys, and told how Lame Betsey got lame by saving a little boy's life when the house was on fire. She jumped out of the window with him. And he made us all feel ashamed that we great strong boys should torment two poor women.

Then he told about the damage done the day before by some boy running through their garden, and said five dollars would hardly be enough to pay it. "I don't know what boy it was, but if he is present," says he, "I call upon him to rise."

Then I stood up. I was ashamed, but I stood up. For you told me once this saying: "Even if truth be a loaded cannon walk

straight up to it."

The master ordered me not to go on to the playground for a week, nor be out of the house in play-hours.

From your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

I was very sorry that while in the neighborhood of the Crooked Pond school, a short time since, lack of time prevented my finding out the Two Betseys' shop. These worthy women, as will be seen further on, became William Henry's firm friends.

-

My dear Grandmother, —

Lame Betsey gave me something to put on my wrist that cured it. I went there to ask how much money must be paid. I had sold my football, and my brass sword, and my pocket-book. They told me they should not take any money, but if I would saw some wood for them, and do an errand now and then, they should be very glad. When I told Dorry, he threw up his hat, and called out, "Three cheers for the 'Two Betseys.'" And when his hat came down, he picked it up and passed it round; "for," says he, "we all owe them something." One great boy dropped fifty cents in. And it all came to about four dollars. And Bubby Short carried it to them. But I shall saw some wood for them all the same.

Last evening it was rainy. A good many boys came into our

room, and we sat in a row, and every one said some verses, or told a riddle. These two verses I send for Aunt Phebe's little Tommy to learn. I guess he's done saying "Fishy, fishy in the brook" by this time, Dorry said he got them out of the German.

"When you are rich,
You can ride with a span;
But when you are poor,
You must go as you can.

"Better honest and poor,
And go as you can,
Than rich and a rogue,
And ride with a span."

This riddle was too hard for me to guess. But Aunt Phebe's girls like to guess riddles, and I will send it to them. Mr. Augustus says that a soldier made it in a Rebel prison. Mr. Augustus is a tall boy, that knows a good deal, and wears spectacles, and that's why we call him Mr. Augustus.

RIDDLE

I'm one half a Bible command,
That aye and forever shall stand;
And, throughout our beautiful land,

'T is needed now to foil the traitorous band.

I'm always around, – yet they say
Too often I'm out of the way.
Thereby leading astray;
I'm decked in jewels fine and rich array.

Although from my heart I am stirred,
I can utter but one little word,
And that very seldom is heard;
My elder sister sometimes kept a bird.

Reads the riddle clear to you?
I am very near to you:
Both very near and dear – to you,
Yet kept in chains. Does that seem queer to you?

That about being "stirred from the heart" is all true. So is that about being "*around*." The "Bible command," spoken of at the beginning, is only in three words, or two words joined by "and." This word is the first half. But I mustn't tell you too much.

They are all *dear*. But some kinds are dearer than others.

I wish my father would send me one.

That about the bird is first-rate, though I never saw one of that kind of – I won't say what I mean (Dorry says you mustn't say what you mean when you tell riddles). But maybe you've seen one. They used to have them in old times.

I've launched my boat. She's the biggest one in school. Dorry

broke a bottle upon her, and christened her the "General Grant." The boys gave three cheers when she touched water, and Benjie sent up his new kite. It's a ripper of a kite with a great gilt star on it that's got eight prongs.

My hat blew off, and I had to go in swimming after it. It is quite stiff. The master was walking by, and stopped to see the launching. When he smiles, he looks just as pleasant as anything.

He patted me on my cheek, and says he, "You ought to have called her the 'Flying Billy.'" And then he walked on.

"What does 'Flying Billy' mean?" says I.

"It means you," said Dorry. "And it means that you run fast, and that he likes you. If a boy can run fast, and knows his multiplication-table, and won't lie, he likes him."

But how can such a great man like a small boy?

From your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

P. S. When the boys laugh at me, I laugh too. That's a good way.

P. S. There's a man here that's got nine puppies. If I had some money I could buy one. The boys don't plague me quite so much. I'm sorry you dropped off your spectacles down the well. I suppose they sunk. I've got a sneezing cold.

W. H.

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About the spectacles, I may as well confess that I was the means of their being lost.

One day Uncle Jacob came into the office hastily, and, with a look of distress, said to me very solemnly, —

"Mr. Fry, if you can, I want you to leave everything, and ride out with me!"

"Oh! what is the matter?" I exclaimed.

"Why," said he, "ever since we sent out word about old clothes, they've been coming in so fast the rooms are all filled up, and we don't know where to go!"

He then went on to tell that the notice had spread into all the neighborhoods round about, and that bundles of every description were constantly pouring in. They were left at the back door, front door, side door, dropped on the piazza, and in at the windows. Men riding by tossed them into the yard, and little boys came tugging bundles, bigger than they could lift, or dragged them in roller-carts, or wheeled them in wheelbarrows. He said he found bundles waiting for him at the store, at the post-office, and he could hardly ride along the street without some woman knocking at the window, and holding up one, and beckoning with her forefinger for him to come in after it! Even in the meeting-house somebody took a roll of something from under a shawl and handed him! He would have brought, the parcels, or a part

of them, but there was every kind of a thing sent in, – white vests and flounced lace or muslin gowns, and open-work stockings; and some things were too poor, and some were too nice, and his folks thought Mr. Fry should come out.

So what could I do but go? And, as it happened, I could "leave everything" just as well as not, and was glad to.

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Grandmother received me in the kindest manner, gave me a pair of black yarn stockings, asked about the contrabands, talked about Billy, read me his letters, and, on the whole, seemed much easier in her mind concerning him than when I saw her before.

She was skimming pans of milk. With her permission I watched the skimming, for pans of milk to a city man were a rare sight to see! I was also given some of the cream, and a baked Summer Sweeting to eat with it.

The cream was put into a large yellow bowl, and the bowl set in a six-quart tin pail. It was then ready to be lowered into the well; for, as country people seldom have ice, they use the well as a refrigerator, and it is there they keep their butter, cream, fresh meat, or anything that is likely to spoil.

"Do let me lower it down the well for you," I said; seeing that her hand trembled a little; and besides, I hardly thought it prudent for her to go out, as the grass was damp, there having been quite a sprinkle of rain.

"Well, if you've a mind to take the trouble," she said, as she handed me the pail, at the same time telling me to be particular about putting stones around the bowl, in the bottom, to steady it. She then handed me the line, and cautioned me about hitting another pail, which was already down the well.

Just as I went out Uncle Jacob passed through the gate into the garden, to pick his mother some beans.

"Sha' n't I do that?" he asked.

"O no," said I; "I am very glad to make myself useful."

Little Tommy stood by the well watching me, and I was talking to him and playing with Towser, and by not attending to my business, I must have tied a granny-knot, though I meant to tie a square one; and about half-way down the pail slipped off, and went plump to the bottom.

Little Tommy ran into the house calling out, "Grandmother! Grandmother! that man lost your pail! Mr. Fwy let go of your pail!"

Grandmother came running out and looked down. Her spectacles were tipped up on top of her head; and when she bent over the well-curb they slipped off, just touched the tip of her nose, and were out of sight in a moment.

Uncle Jacob came up laughing and said, "Of course the specs must go down to see where the cream went to!" But Grandmother thought it was no laughing matter.

Mr. Carver and Uncle Jacob had a good many spells of fishing in the well. At last Uncle Jacob was lucky enough to catch the

handle of the pail with his hook, and then he drew the pail up. It was found to be in quite a damaged condition. The water looked creamy for some time. The glasses never came to light. It seemed, therefore, no more than my duty to send Grandmother another pair, which I did soon after in a bright new six-quart pail, wishing with all my heart they were gold-bowed ones. But I could not afford to do more than replace the lost ones.

I will add that the six-quart pail was filled with the best of peaches.

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The next three letters seem to have been sent at one time. Before they reached Grandmother she had worked herself into a perfect fever of anxiety.

Owing to the rabbit affair, of which they contain the whole story, William Henry had not felt like writing, so that, even before his letter was begun, they at the farm were already looking for it to arrive. Then it took a longer time than he expected to finish up his account of the matter; and when at last the letter was sealed and directed, the boy who carried it to the post-office forgot his errand, and it hung in an overcoat pocket several days. No wonder, then, the old lady grew anxious.

I was at the farm at the time they were looking for the letters, and I really tried very hard to be entertaining; but not the funniest story I could tell about the funniest little rollypoly contraband in

the hospital could excite more than a passing smile.

Aunt Phebe gave me my charge before I went in.

"You must be lively," said she. "Be lively! Turn her thoughts off of Billy! That's the way! Though I do feel worried," she added. "'T is a puzzle why we don't have letters. I'm afraid something *is* the matter, or else it seems to me we should. He's been very good about writing. If anything has happened to Billy, I don't know what we should do. 'T would come pretty hard to Grandmother. And I do have my fears! But 't won't do to let her know I worry about him. And you better be very lively! We all have to be!"

I observed that Mr. Carver, although he talked very calmly with his mother, and urged her to rest easy, was after all not so very much at ease himself. He sat by the window apparently reading a newspaper. But it was plain that he only wished Grandmother to think he was reading; for he paid but little attention to the paper, and was constantly looking across the garden to see when Uncle Jacob should get back from the post-office; and the moment Towser barked he folded his paper and went out. Grandmother put on her "out-door" spectacles, and stood at the window. When Mr. Carver returned she glanced rapidly over him with an earnest, beseeching look, which seemed to say that it was not possible but that somewhere about him, in some pocket, or in his hat, or shut up in his hand, there must be a letter.

"The mail was late," Mr. Carver said; "Uncle Jacob couldn't

wait, and had left the boy to fetch it."

Grandmother was setting the table. In her travels to and from the buttery she stopped often to glance up the road, and during meal-time her eyes were constantly turning to the windows.

Presently Aunt Phebe came in.

"The boy didn't bring any letters," said she; "but I've been thinking it over, and for my part I don't think 't is worth while to worry. No news is good news. Bad news travels fast. A thousand things might happen to keep a boy from writing. He might be out of paper, or out of stamps, or out of anything to write about, or might have lessons to learn, or be too full of play, or be kept after school, or might a good many things!"

"You don't suppose," said Grandmother, "that – you don't think – it couldn't be possible, could it, that Billy's been punished and feels ashamed to tell of it?"

"Nonsense!" said Aunt Phebe. "Now don't, Grandmother, I beg of you get started off on that notion! Yesterday 't was the measles. And day before 't was being drowned, and now 't is being punished!"

"'T wouldn't be like William not to tell of it," said Mr. Carver.

"Not a bit like him," said Aunt Phebe.

"No," said Grandmother, "I don't think it would. But you know when anybody gets to thinking, they are apt to think of everything."

I told them there was a possibility of the letter being mis-sent. And that idea reminded me of just such an anxious time we had

once about little Silas. His letter went to a town of the same name in Ohio, and was a long time reaching us. I made haste to tell this to Grandmother, and thought it comforted her a little.

When I left the next morning, Mr. Carver followed me out and asked me to make inquiries in regard to the telegraphic communication with the Crooked Pond School, and to be in readiness to telegraph; for, in case no letter came that day, he should send me word to do so.

But no word arrived, as the next mail brought the following letters, with their amusing illustrations.

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My dear Grandmother, —

I suppose if I should tell you I had had a whipping you would feel sorry. Well, don't feel sorry. I will begin at the beginning.

We can't go out evenings. But last Monday evening one of the teachers said I might go after my overjacket that I took off to play ball, and left hanging over a fence. It was a very light night. I had to go down a long lane to get where it was; and when I got there, it wasn't there. The moon was shining bright as day. Old Gapper Skyblue lives down that lane. He raises rabbits. He keeps them in a hen-house.

Now I will tell you what some of the great boys do sometimes. They steal eggs and roast them. There is a fireplace in Tom Cush's room. Once they roasted a pullet. The owners have

complained so that the master said he would flog the next boy that robbed a hen-house or an orchard, before the whole school.

Now I will go on about my overjacket. While I was looking for it I heard a queer noise in the rabbit-house. So I jumped over. Then a boy popped out of the rabbit-house and ran. I knew him in a minute, for all he ran so fast, – Tom Cush.

Now when he started to run, something dropped out of his hand. I went up to it, and 't was a rabbit, a dead one, just killed; for when I stooped down and felt of it, it was warm. And while I was stooping down, there came a great heavy hand down on my shoulder. It was a man's great heavy hand.

Gapper had set a man there to watch. He hollered into my ears, "Now I've got you!" I hollered, too, for he came sudden, without my hearing.

"You little thief!" says he.

"I didn't kill it," says I.

"You little liar!" says he.

"I'm not a liar," says I.

"I'll take you to the master," says he.

"Take me where you want to," says I.

Then he pulled me along, and kept saying, "Who did, if you didn't? If you didn't, who did?"

And he walked me straight up into the master's room, without so much as giving a knock at the door.

"I've brought you a thief and a liar," says he. Then he told where he found me, and what a bad boy I was. Then he went away, because the master wanted to talk with me all by myself.

Now I didn't want to tell tales of Tom, for it's mean to tell tales. So all I could say was that I didn't do it.

The master looked sorry. Said he was afraid I had begun to go with bad boys. "Didn't I see you walking in the lane with Tom Cush yesterday?" says he. I said I was helping him find his ball.

And so I was.

"If you were with the boys who did this," said he, "or helped about it in any way, that's just as bad."

I said I didn't help them, or go with them.

"How came you there so late?" says he.

"I went after my overjacket," says I.

"And where is your overjacket?" says he.

I said I didn't know. It wasn't there.

Then he said I might go to bed, and he would talk with me again in the morning.

When I got to our room, the boys were sound asleep. I crept into bed as still as a mouse. The moon shone in on me. I thought my eyes would never go to sleep again. I tried to think how much a flogging would hurt. Course, I knew 't wouldn't be like one of your little whippings. I wasn't so very much afraid of the hurt, though. But the name of being whipped, I was afraid of that, and the shame of it. Now I will tell you about the next morning, and how I was waked up.

Your affectionate grandchild,

-

My dear Grandmother, —

I had to leave off and jump up and run to school without stopping to sign my name, for the bell rang. But, now school is

done, I will write another letter to send with that, because you will want to know the end at the same time you do the beginning.

It was little pebbles that waked me up the next morning, – little pebbles dropping down on my face. I looked up to find where they came from, and saw Tom Cush standing in the door. He was throwing them. He made signs that he wanted to tell me something. So I got up. And while I was getting up, I saw my overjacket on the back of a chair. I found out afterwards that Benjie brought it in, and forgot to tell me.

Tom made signs for me to go down stairs with him. He wouldn't let me put my shoes on. He had his in his hand, and I carried mine so. So we went through the long entries in our stocking-feet, and sat down on the doorstep to put our shoes on. Nobody else had got up. The sky was growing red. I never got up so early before, except one Fourth of July, when I didn't go to bed, but only slept some with my head leaned down on a window-seat, and jumped up when I heard a gun go off. Tom carried me to a place a good ways from the house. Our shoes got soaking wet with dew.

Now I will tell you what he said to me.

He asked me if I saw him anywhere the night before. I said I did.

He asked me where I saw him.

I said I saw him coming out of the hen-house, where Gapper Skyblue kept his rabbits. He asked me if I was sure, and I said I was sure.

"And did you tell the master?" says he.

I said, "No."

"Nor the boys?"

"No."

Then he told me he had been turned away from one school on account of his bad actions, and he wouldn't have his father hear of this for anything; and said that, if I wouldn't tell, he would give me a four-bladed knife, and quite a large balloon, and show me how to send her up, and if I was flogged he would give me a good deal more, would give money, – would give two dollars.

"I don't believe he'll whip you," says he, "for he likes you. And if he does, he wouldn't whip a small boy so hard as he would a big one."

I said a little whipping would hurt a little boy just as much as a great whipping would hurt a great boy. But I said I wouldn't be mean enough to tell or to take pay for not telling.

He didn't say much more. And we went towards home then. But before we came to the house, he turned off into another path.

A little while after, I heard somebody walking behind me. I looked round, and there was the master. He'd been watching with a sick man all night.

He asked me where I had been so early. I said I had been taking a walk. He asked who the boy was that had just left me. I said 't was Tom Cush. He asked if I was willing to tell what we had been talking about. I said I would rather not tell.

Says he, "It has a bad look, your being out with that boy so

early, after what happened last night."

Then he asked me where I had found my overjacket. I said, "In my chamber, sir, on a chair-back."

"And how came it there?" says he.

"I don't know, sir," says I.

And, Grandmother, I almost cried; for everything seemed going against me, to make me out a bad boy. I will tell the rest after supper.

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

-

My dear Grandmother, —

Now I will tell you what happened that afternoon.

The school was about half done.

The master gave three loud raps with his ruler.

This made the room very still.

He asked the other teachers to come up to the platform. And they did.

Next, he waved his ruler, and said, "Fold."

And we all folded our arms.

It was so still that we could hear the clock tick.

He told Tom Cush to close the windows and shut the blinds.

Then he talked to us about stealing and telling lies. Said he

didn't like to punish, but it must be done. He said he had reason to believe that the boy whose name he should call out was not honest, that he took other people's things and told lies.

Then he told the story, all that he knew about it, and said he hoped that all concerned in it would have honor enough to speak out and own it.

Nobody said anything.

Then the master said, "William Henry, you may come to the platform."

I went up.

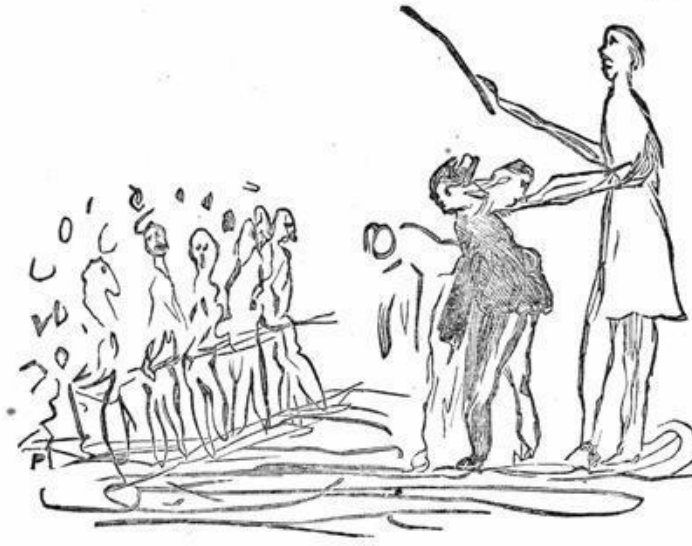
Somebody way in the back part shouted out, "Don't believe it!"

"Silence!" said the master. And he thumped his ruler on the desk.

Then he told me to take off my jacket, and fold it up. And I did.

He told me to hand my collar and ribbon to a teacher. And I did.

Then he laid down his ruler, and took his rod and bent it to see if it was limber. It wasn't exactly a rod. It was the thing I told you about when I first came to this school.



He tried it twice on the desk first.

Then he took hold of my shoulder and turned my back round towards him. He said I had better bend down my head a little, and took hold of the neck of my shirt to keep me steady. I shut my teeth together tight.

At that very minute Bubby Short cried out, "Master! Master! Stop! Don't! He didn't do it! He didn't kill it! I know who! I'll tell! I will! I will! I don't care what Tom Cush does! 'T was Tom Cush killed it!"

The master didn't say one word. But he handed me my jacket.

The boys all clapped and gave three cheers, and he let them.

Then he said to me, whispering, "Is this so, William?" And I said, low, "Yes, sir."

Then he took hold of my hand and led me to my seat. And when I sat down he put his hand on my shoulder just as softly, – it made me remember the way my mother used to before she died, and, says he, "My dear boy," then stopped and began again, "My dear boy," and stopped again. If he'd been a boy I should have thought he was going to cry himself. But of course a man wouldn't. And what should he cry for? It wasn't he that almost had a whipping. At last he told me to come to his room after supper. Then Bubby Short was called up to the platform.

Now I will tell you how Bubby Short found out about it.

He sleeps in a little bed in a little bit of a room that lets out of Tom's. 'T isn't much bigger than a closet. But it is just right for him. That morning when Tom got up so early and threw pebbles at me, Bubby Short had been keeping awake with the toothache. And he heard Tom telling another boy about the rabbit.

He made believe sleep. But once, while Tom was dressing himself, he peeped out from under the bedquilt, with one eye, to see a black-and-blue spot, that Tom said he hit his head against a post and made, when he was running.

But they caught him peeping out, and were dreadful mad because he heard, and said if he told one single word they would flog him. But he says he would have told before, if he had known it had been laid to me.

Wasn't he a nice little fellow to tell?

O, I was so glad when the boys all clapped! And when we were let out, they came and shook hands with Bubby Short and me. Great boys and all. Mr. Augustus, and Dorry, and all. And the master told me how glad he was that he could keep on thinking me to be an honest boy.

Now aren't you glad you didn't feel sorry?

Your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

-

The next time I went down to the farm I was told, of course, all about the foregoing letters, – how they were received, and what effect they produced in the family when they were read. Grandmother, however, gives a happy account of the reception and reading of them in the following reply, which she wrote soon after they were received.

Grandmother's Letter to William Henry, in reply

My dear Little Boy, —

Your poor old grandmother was so glad to get those letters, after such long waiting! My dear child, we were anxious; but now we are pleased. I was afraid you were down with the measles, for they're about. Your aunt Phebe thinks you had 'em when you were a month old; but I know better.

Your father was anxious himself at not hearing; though he didn't show it any. But I could see it plain enough. As soon as he brought the letters in, I set a light in the window to let your aunt Phebe know she was wanted. She came running across the yard, all of a breeze. You know how your aunt Phebe always comes running in.

"What is it?" says she. "Letters from Billy? I mistrusted 't was letters from Billy. In his own handwriting? Must have had 'em pretty light. Measles commonly leave the eyes very bad."

But you know how your aunt Phebe goes running on. Your father came in, and sat down in his rocking-chair, – your mother's chair, dear. Your sister was sewing on her doll's cloak by the little table. She sews remarkably well for a little girl.

"Now, Phebe," says I, "read loud, and do speak every word plain." I put on my glasses, and drew close up, for she does speak her words so fast. I have to look her right in the face.

At the beginning, where you speak about being whipped, your father's rocking-chair stopped stock still. You might have heard a pin drop. Georgianna said, "O dear!" and down dropped the doll's cloak. "Pshaw!" said Aunt Phebe, "'t isn't very likely our Billy's been whipped."

Then she read on and on, and not one of us spoke. Your father kept his arms folded up, and never raised his eyes. I had to look away, towards the last, for I couldn't see through my glasses. Georgianna cried. And, when the end came, we all wiped our eyes.

"Now what's the use," said Aunt Phebe, "for folks to cry before they're hurt?"

"But you almost cried yourself," said Georgianna. "Your voice was different, and your nose is red now." And that was true.

After your sister was in bed, and Aunt Phebe gone, your father says to me: "Grandma, the boy's like his mother." And he took a walk around the place, and then went off to his bedroom without even opening his night's paper. If ever a man set store by his boy, that man is your father. And, O Billy, if you had done anything mean, or disgraced yourself in any way, what a dreadful blow 't would have been to us all!

The measles come with a cough. The first thing is to drive 'em out. Get a nurse. That is, if you catch them. They're a natural sickness, and one sensible old woman is better than half a dozen doctors. Saffron's good to drive 'em out.

Aunt Phebe is knitting you a comforter. As if she hadn't family

enough of her own to do for!

From your loving
Grandmother.

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I think this the proper place to insert the following letter from Dorry Baker to his sister. I am sorry we have so few of Dorry's letters. Two very entertaining ones will be given presently, describing a visit Dorry made to William Henry's home. The two boys, as we shall see, soon after their acquaintance, grew to be remarkably good friends. Mr. Baker, Dorry's father, hearing his son's glowing accounts of William Henry's family, took a little trip to Summer Sweeting place on purpose to see them, and was so well pleased with Grandmother, Mr. Carver, Uncle Jacob, and the rest, as to suggest to his wife that they should buy some land in the vicinity, and turn farmers. He and Grandmother had a very pleasant talk about their boys; and not long after, knowing, I suppose, that it would gratify the old lady, he sent her some of Dorry's letters, that she might have the pleasure of reading for herself what Dorry had written about her Billy, and about Billy's people and Billy's home. Perhaps, too, Mr. Baker was a little bit proud of the smart letters his son could write.

Dorry's Letter to his Sister

Dear Sis, —

If mother's real clever, I want you to ask her something right away. But if it's baking-day, or washing-day, or company's coming off, or preserves going on, or anything's upset down below; or if she's got a headache or a dress-maker, or anything else that's bad, – then wait.

I want you to ask her if I may bring home a boy to spend Saturday. Not a very big boy, – do very well to "Philopene" with you: won't put her out a bit.

If you don't like him at first, you will afterwards. When he first came we used to plague him on account of his looks. He's got a furious head of hair, and freckles. But we don't think at all about his looks now. If anything, we like his looks.

He's just as pleasant and gen'rous, and not a mean thing about him. I don't believe he would tell a lie to save his life. I know he wouldn't. He's always willing to help everybody. And had just as lief give anything away as not. And when he plays, he plays fair. Some boys cheat to make their side beat. You don't catch William Henry at any such mean business. All the boys believe every word he says. Teachers too.

I will tell you how he made me ashamed of myself. Me and some other boys.

One day he had a box come from home. 'T was his birthday.

It was full of good things. Says I to the boys, "Now, maybe, if we hadn't plagued him so, he would give us some of his goodies."

That very afternoon, when we had done playing, and ran up to brush the mud off our trousers, we found a table all spread out with a table-cloth that he had borrowed, and in the middle was a frosted cake with "W. H." on top done in red sugar. And close to that were some oranges, and a dish full of nuts, and as much as a pound of candy, and more figs than that, and four great cakes of maple-sugar, made on his father's land, as big as small johnny-cakes, and another kind of cake. And doughnuts.

"Come, boys," says he, "help yourselves."

But not a boy stirred.

I felt my face a-blushing like everything. O, we were all of us just as ashamed as we could be! We didn't dare go near the table. But he kept inviting us, and at last began to pass them round.

And I tell you the things were tip-top and more too. Such cake! And doughnuts, that his cousin made! And tarts! You must learn how. But I don't believe you ever could. Of course we had manners enough not to take as much as we wanted. I want to tell you some more things about him. But wait till I come. He's most as old as you are, and is always a laughing, the same as you are.

Ask mother what I told you. Take her at her cleverest, and don't eat up all the sweet apples.

From your brother,
Dorry.

P. S. Put some away in meal to mellow. Don't mellow 'em

with your knuckles.

-

Mrs. Baker, I imagine, was not particularly fond of boys. She gave her permission, however, for Dorry to bring a "muddy-shoed" companion home with him, as we see by the following letter from William Henry to his grandmother.

A Letter from William Henry

My dear Grandmother, —

Dorry asked his sister to ask his mother if he might ask me to go home with him. And she said yes; but to wait a week first, because the house was just got ready to have a great party, and she couldn't stand two muddy-shoed boys. May I go?

Tom Cush was sent home; but he didn't go. His father lives in the same town that Dorry does. He has been here to look for him.

I never went to make anybody a visit. I hope you will say yes. I should like to have some money. Everybody tells boys not to spend money; but if they knew how many things boys want, and everything tasted so good, I believe they would spend money themselves. Please write soon.

From your affectionate grandchild,
William Henry.

-

To this short letter Grandmother sent at once the following reply; and in the succeeding letters from William Henry we get a pretty good idea of what sort of people Dorry's folks were, and also hear something about Tom Cush.

Grandmother's Second Letter

My dear Boy, —

Do you have clothes enough on your bed? Ask for an extra blanket. I do hope you will take care of yourself. When the rain beats against the windows, I think, "Now who will see that he stands at the fire and dries himself?" And you're very apt to hoarse up nights. We are willing you should go to see Dorry. Your uncle J. has been past his father's place, and he says there's been a pretty sum of money laid out there. Behave well. Wear your best clothes. Your aunt Phebe has bought a book for her girls that tells them how to behave. It is for boys too, or for anybody. I shall give you a little advice, and mix some of the book in with it.

Never interrupt. Some children are always putting themselves forward when grown people are talking. Put "sir" or "ma'am" to everything you say. Make a bow when introduced. If you don't know how, try it at a looking-glass. Black your shoes, and toe out if you possibly can. I hope you know enough to say "Thank you," and when to say it. Take your hat off, without fail, and step softly, and wipe your feet.

Be sure and have some woman look at you before you start, to see that you are all right. Behave properly at table. The best way will be to watch and see how others do. But don't stare. There is a way of looking without seeming to look. A sideways way.

Anybody with common sense will soon learn how to conduct

properly; and even if you should make a mistake, when trying to do your best, it isn't worth while to feel very much ashamed. *Wrong* actions are the ones to be ashamed of. And let me say now, once for all, never be ashamed because your father is a farmer and works with his hands. Your father's a man to be proud of; he is kind to the poor; he is pleasant in his family; he is honest in his business; he reads high kind of books; he's a kind, noble Christian man; and Dorry's father can't be more than all this, let him own as much property as he may.

I mention this because young folks are apt to think a great deal more of a man that has money.

Your aunt Phebe wants to know if you won't write home from Dorry's, because her Matilda wants a stamp from that post-office. If the colt brings a very good price, you may get a very good answer to your riddle.

From your loving
Grandmother.

P. S. Take your overcoat on your arm. When you come away, bid good by, and say that you have had a good time. If you have had, – not without.

William Henry's Reply

Dear Grandmother, —

I am here. The master let us off yesterday noon, and we got here before supper, and this is Saturday night, and I have minded all the things that you said. I got all ready and went down to the Two Betseys to let some woman look at me, as you wrote. They put on both their spectacles and looked me all over, and picked off some dirt-specks, and made me gallus up one leg of my trousers shorter, and make some bows, and then walk across the room slow.

They thought I looked beautiful, only my hair was too long. Lame Betsey said she used to be the beater for cutting hair, and she tied her apron round my throat, and brought a great pair of shears out, that she used to go a-tailoring with. The Other Betsey, she kept watch to see when both sides looked even.

Lame Betsey tried very hard. First she stood off to look, and then she stood on again. She said her mother used to keep a quart-bowl on purpose to cut her boys' hairs with; she clapped it over their heads, and then clipped all round by it even. The shears were jolly shears, only they couldn't stop themselves easy, and the apron had been where snuff was, and made me sneeze in the wrong place. Says I, "If you'll only take off this apron, I'll jump up and shake myself out even." I'm so glad I'm a boy. Aprons are horrid. So are apron-strings, Dorry says.

They gave me a few peppermints, and said to be sure not to run my head out and get it knocked off in the cars, and not to get out till we stopped going, and to beware of pickpockets.

O, we did have a jolly ride in the cars! Do you think my father would let me be the boy that sells papers in the cars? I wish he would. I didn't see any pickpockets. We got out two miles before

we got there. I mean to the right station. For Dorry wanted to make his sister Maggie think we hadn't come.

We took a short cut through the fields. Not very short. And went through everything. My best clothes too. But I guess 't will all rub off. There were some boggy places.

When we came out at Dorry's house, it was in the back yard. I said to Dorry, "There's your mother on the doorstep. She looks clever."

Dorry said, "She? She's the cook. I'll tell mother of that. No, I won't neither."

I suppose he saw I'd rather he wouldn't. The cook said everybody had gone out. Then Dorry took me into a jolly great room and left me. Three kinds of curtains to every window! What's the use of that? Gilt spots on the paper, and gilt things hanging down from up above. A good many kinds of chairs. I was going to sit down, but they kept sinking in. Everything sinks in here. I tried three, and this made me laugh, for I seemed to myself like the little boy that went to the bears' house and tried their chairs, and their beds, and their bowls of milk. Then I came to a looking-glass big enough for the very biggest bear. I thought I would make some bows before it, as you said. I was afraid I couldn't make a bow and toe out at the same time. Because it is hard to think up and down both at once. While I was trying to, I heard a little noise, I looked round, and – what do you think? Bears? O no. Not bears. A queen and a princess, I thought. All over bright colors and feathers and shiny silks. The queen – that's

Dorry's mother you know, – couldn't think who I was, because they had been to the depot, and thought we hadn't come. So she looked at me hard, and I suppose I was very muddy. And she said, "Were you sent of an errand here?" Before I could make up any answer, Dorry came in. He had some cake, and he passed it round with a very sober face. Then he introduced me, and I made quite a good bow, and said, "Very well, I thank you, ma'am."

I tried to pull my feet behind me, and wished I was sitting down, for she kept looking towards them; and I wanted to sit down on the lounge, but I was afraid 't wouldn't bear. She was quite glad to see Dorry. But didn't hug him very hard. I know why. Because she had those good things on. Dorry's grandmother lives here. She can't bear to hear a door slam. She wears her black silk dress every day. And her best cap too. 'T is a stunner of a cap. White as anything. And a good deal of white strings to it. Everything makes her head ache. I'd a good deal rather have you. When boys come nigh, she puts her hand out to keep them off. This is because she has nerves. Dorry says his mother has 'em sometimes. I like his father. Because he talks to me some. But he's very tired. His office tires him. He isn't a very big man. He doesn't laugh any. If Maggie was a boy she'd be jolly. She'll fly kites, or anything, if her mother isn't looking. Her mother don't seem a bit like Aunt Phebe. I don't believe she could lift a teakettle. Not a real one. When she catches hold of her fork, she sticks her little finger right up in the air. She makes very pretty bows to the company. Sinks way down, almost out of sight. She

gave us a dollar to spend; wasn't she clever? Dorry says she likes him tip-top. If he'll only keep out of the way.

I guess I'd rather live at our house. About every room in this house is too good for a boy. But I tell you they have tip-top things here. Great pictures and silver dishes! Now, I'll tell you what I mean to do when I'm a man. I shall have a great nice house like this, and nice things in it. But the folks shall be like our folks. I shall have horses, and a good many silver dishes. And great pictures, and gilt books for children that come a-visiting. And you shall have a blue easy-chair, and sit down to rest.

Now, maybe you'll say, "But, Billy, Billy, where are you going to get all these fine things?" O you silly grandmother! Don't you remember your own saying that you wrote down? – "What a man wants he can get, if he tries hard enough." Or a boy either, you said. I shall try hard enough. There's more to write about. But I'm sleepy. I would tell you about Tom Cush's father coming here, only my eyes can't keep open. Isn't it funny that when you are sleepy your eyes keep shutting up and your mouth keeps coming open? Please excuse the lines that go crooked. There's another gape! I guess Aunt Phebe will be tired reading all this. I'm on her side. I mean about measles. I'd rather have 'em when I was a month old. I suppose I was a month old once. Don't seem as if 't was the same one I am now. But if I do have 'em, – there I go gaping again, – if I catch 'em, and all the doctors do come, I'll – O dear! There I go again. I do believe I'm asleep – I'll – I'll get some natural-born old woman to drive 'em out, as you said,

and good night.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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