

ABBOTT JOHN CABOT

THE CHILD AT HOME: THE
PRINCIPLES OF FILIAL
DUTY, FAMILIARLY
ILLUSTRATED

John Abbott

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of Filial Duty, Familiarly Illustrated**

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CHAPTER I. RESPONSIBILITY

In large cities there are so many persons guilty of crimes, that it is necessary to have a court sit every day to try those who are accused of breaking the laws. This court is called the Police Court. If you should go into the room where it is held, you would see the constables bringing in one after another of miserable and wicked creatures, and, after stating and proving their crimes, the judge would command them to be led away to prison. They would look so wretched that you would be shocked in seeing them.

One morning a poor woman came into the Police Court in Boston. Her eyes were red with weeping, and she seemed to be borne down with sorrow. Behind her followed two men, leading in her daughter.

"Here, sir," said a man to the judge, "is a girl who conducts so badly that her mother cannot live with her, and she must be sent to the House of Correction."

"My good woman," said the judge, "what is it that your daughter does which renders it so uncomfortable to live with her?"

"Oh, sir," she replied, "it is hard for a mother to accuse her own daughter, and to be the means of sending her to the prison. But she conducts so as to destroy all the peace of my life. She has such a temper, that she sometimes threatens to kill me, and does every thing to make my life wretched."

The unhappy woman could say no more. Her heart seemed bursting with grief, and she wept aloud. The heart of the judge was moved with pity, and the bystanders could hardly refrain from weeping with this afflicted mother. But there stood the hard-hearted girl, unmoved. She looked upon the sorrows of her parent in sullen silence. She was so hardened in sin, that she seemed perfectly insensible to pity or affection. And yet she was miserable. Her countenance showed that passion and malignity filled her heart, and that the fear of the prison, to which she knew she must go, filled her with rage.

The judge turned from the afflicted mother, whose sobs filled the room, and, asking a few questions of the witnesses, who testified to the daughter's ingratitude and cruelty, ordered her to be led away to the House of Correction. The officers of justice took her by the arm, and carried her to her gloomy cell. Her lonely and sorrowing mother went weeping home to her abode of penury and desolation. Her own daughter was the viper which had stung her bosom. Her own child was the wretch who was filling her heart with sorrow.

And while I now write, this guilty daughter is occupying the gloomy cell of the prison, and this widowed mother is in her silent dwelling, in loneliness and grief! Oh, could the child who reads these pages, see that mother and that daughter now, you might form some feeble idea of the consequences of disobedience; you might see how unutterable the sorrow a wicked child may bring upon herself and upon her parents. It is not easy, in this case, to judge which is the most unhappy, the mother or the child. The mother is broken-hearted at home. She is alone and friendless. All her hopes are most cruelly destroyed. She loved her daughter, and hoped that she would live to be her friend and comfort. But instead of that, she became her curse, and is bringing her mother's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave. And then look at the daughter—guilty and abandoned—Oh, who can tell how miserable she must be!

Such is the grief which children may bring upon themselves and their parents. You probably have never thought of this very much I write this book that you may think of it, and that you may, by obedience and affection, make your parents happy, and be happy yourselves.

This wicked girl was once a playful child, innocent and happy. Her mother looked upon her with most ardent love, and hoped that her dear daughter would live to be her companion and friend. At first she ventured to disobey in some trifling thing. She still loved her mother, and would have been struck with horror at the thought of being guilty of crimes which she afterwards committed. But she went on from bad to worse, every day growing more disobedient, until she made her poor mother so miserable that she almost wished to die, and till she became so miserable herself, that life must have been a burden. You think, perhaps, that you never shall be so unkind and wicked as she finally became. But if you begin as she began, by trifling disobedience, and little acts of unkindness, you may soon be as wicked as she, and make your parents as unhappy as is her poor broken-hearted mother.

Persons never become so very wicked all at once. They go on from step to step, in disobedience and ingratitude, till they lose all feeling, and can see their parents weep, and even die in their grief, without a tear.

Perhaps, one pleasant day, this mother sent her little daughter to school. She took her books, and walked along, admiring the beautiful sunshine, and the green and pleasant fields. She stopped one moment to pick a flower, again to chase a butterfly, and again to listen to a little robin, pouring out its clear notes upon the bough of some lofty tree. It seemed so pleasant to be playing in the fields, that she was unwilling to go promptly to school. She thought it would not be very wrong to play a little while. Thus she commenced. The next day she ventured to chase the butterflies farther, and to rove more extensively through the field in search of flowers. And as she played by the pebbles in the clear brook of rippling water, she forgot how fast the time was passing. And when she afterwards hastened to school, and was asked why she was so late, to conceal her fault she was guilty of falsehood, and said that her mother wanted her at home. Thus she advanced, rapidly in crime. Her lessons were neglected. She loved the fields better than her book, and would often spend the whole morning idle, under the shade of some tree, when her mother thought her safe in school. Having thus become a truant and a deceiver, she was prepared for any crimes. Good children would not associate with her, and consequently she had to choose the worst for her companions and her friends. She learned wicked language; she was rude and vulgar in her manners; she indulged ungovernable passion; and at last grew so bad, that when her family afterwards removed to the city, the House of Correction became her ignominious home. And there she is now, guilty and wretched. And her poor mother, in her solitary dwelling, is weeping over her daughter's disgrace. Who can comfort such a mother? Where is there any earthly joy to which she can look?

Children generally do not think how much the happiness of their parents depends upon their conduct. But you now see how very unhappy you can make them. And is there a child who reads this book, who would be willing to be the cause of sorrow to his father and his mother? After all they have done for you, in taking care of you when an infant, in watching over you when sick, in giving you clothes to wear, and food to eat, can you be so ungrateful as to make them unhappy? You have all read the story of the kind man, who found a viper lying upon the ground almost dead with cold. He took it up and placed it in his bosom to warm it, and to save its life. And what did that viper do? He killed his benefactor! Vile, vile reptile! Yes! as soon as he was warm and well, he stung the bosom of his kind preserver, and killed him.

But that child, is a worse viper, who, by his ingratitude, will sting the bosoms of his parents; who, by disobedience and unkindness, will destroy their peace, and thus dreadfully repay them for all their love and care. God will not forget the sins of such a child. His eye will follow you to see your sin, and his arm will reach you to punish. He has said, Honor your father and your mother. And the child who does not do this, must meet with the displeasure of God, and must be for ever shut out from heaven. Oh, how miserable must this wicked girl now be, locked up in the gloomy prison!

But how much more miserable will she be when God calls her to account for all her sins!—when, in the presence of all the angels, the whole of her conduct is brought to light, and God says to her, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" As she goes away from the presence of the Lord, to the gloomy prisons of eternal despair, she will then feel a degree of remorse which I cannot describe to you. It is painful to think of it. Ah, wretched, wretched girl! Little are you aware of the woes you are preparing for yourself. I hope that no child who reads these pages will ever feel these woes.

You have just read that it is in your power to make your parents very unhappy; and you have seen how unhappy one wicked girl made her poor mother. I might tell you many such melancholy stories, all of which would be true. A few years ago there was a boy who began to be disobedient to his parents in little things. But every day he grew worse, more disobedient and wilful, and troublesome. He would run away from school, and thus grew up in ignorance. He associated with bad boys, and learned to swear and to lie, and to steal. He became so bad that his parents could do nothing with him. Every body who knew him, said, "That boy is preparing for the gallows." He was the pest of the neighborhood. At last he ran away from home, without letting his parents know that he was going. He had heard of the sea, and thought it would be a very pleasant thing to be a sailor. But nothing is pleasant to the wicked. When he came to the sea-shore, where there were a large number of ships, it was some time before any one would hire him, because he knew nothing about a ship or the sea. There was no one there who was his friend, or who pitied him, and he sat down and cried bitterly, wishing he was at home again, but ashamed to go back. At last a sea captain came along, and hired him to go on a distant voyage; and as he knew nothing about the rigging of a vessel, he was ordered to do the most servile work on board. He swept the decks and the cabin, and helped the cook, and was the servant of all. He had the poorest food to eat he ever ate in his life. And when night came, and he was so tired that he could hardly stand, he had no soft bed upon which to lie, but could only wrap a blanket around him, and throw himself down any where to get a little sleep. This unhappy boy had acquired so sour a disposition, and was so disobliging, that all the sailors disliked him, and would do every thing they could to tease him. When there was a storm, and he was pale with fear, and the vessel was rocking in the wind, and pitching over the waves, they would make him climb the mast, and laugh to see how terrified he was, as the mast reeled to and fro, and the wind almost blew him into the raging ocean. Often did this poor boy get into some obscure part of the ship, and weep as he thought of the home he had forsaken. He thought of his father and mother, how kind they had been to him, and how unkind and ungrateful he had been to them, and how unhappy he had made them by his misconduct. But these feelings soon wore away. Familiarity with sea life gave him courage, and he became inured to its hardships. Constant intercourse with the most profligate and abandoned, gave strength and inveteracy to his sinful habits; and before the voyage had terminated, he was reckless of danger, and as hardened and unfeeling as the most depraved on board the ship. This boy commenced with disobedience in little things, and grew worse and worse, till he forsook his father and his mother, and was prepared for the abandonment of every virtue, and the commission of any crime. But the eye of God was upon him, following him wherever he went, and marking all his iniquities. An hour of retribution was approaching. It is not necessary for me to trace out to you his continued steps of progress in sin. When on shore, he passed his time in haunts of dissipation. And several years rolled on in this way, he growing more hardened, and his aged parents, in their loneliness, weeping over the ruin of their guilty and wandering son.

One day an armed vessel sailed into one of the principal ports of the United States, accompanied by another, which had been captured. When they arrived at the wharf, it was found that the vessel taken was a pirate. Multitudes flocked down upon the wharf to see the pirates as they should be led off to the prison, there to await their trial. Soon they were brought out of the ship, with their hands fastened with chains, and led through the streets. Ashamed to meet the looks of honest men, and terrified with the certainty of condemnation and execution, they walked along with downcast eyes and trembling limbs. Among the number was seen the unhappy and guilty boy, now grown to be a

young man, whose history we are relating. He was locked up in the dismal dungeon of a prison. The day of trial came. Pale and trembling; he was brought before the judge. He was clearly proved guilty, and sentenced to be hung. Again he was carried back to his prison, there to remain till the hour for his execution should arrive. News was sent to his already broken-hearted parents, that their son had been condemned as a pirate, and was soon to be hung. The tidings was almost too much for them to endure. In an agony of feeling which cannot be described, they wept together. They thought of the hours of their child's infancy, when they watched over him in sickness, and soothed him to sleep. They thought how happy they felt when they saw the innocent smile play upon his childish cheek. They thought of the joy they then anticipated in his opening years, and of the comfort they hoped he would be to them in their declining days. And now to think of him, a hardened criminal, in the murderer's cell!— Oh, it was too much, too much for them to bear. It seemed as though their hearts would burst. Little did they think, when, with so much affection they caressed their infant child, that he would be the curse of their life, embittering all their days, and bringing down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Little did they think, that his first trifling acts of disobedience would lead on to such a career of misery and of crime. But the son was sentenced to die, and the penalty of the law could not be avoided. His own remorse and his parents' tears could be of no avail. Agonizing as it would be to their feelings, they felt that they must go and see their son before he should die.

One morning, a gray-headed man, and an aged and infirm woman, were seen walking along, with faltering footsteps, through the street which led to the prison. It was the heart-broken father and mother of this unnatural child. When they came in sight of the gloomy granite walls and iron-grated windows of this dreary abode, they could hardly proceed, so overwhelming were the feelings which pressed upon their minds. When arrived at the door of the prison, the aged father, supporting upon his arm the weeping and almost fainting mother, told the jailer who they were, and requested permission to see their son. Even the jailer, accustomed as he was to scenes of suffering, could not witness this exhibition of parental grief without being moved to tears. He led the parents through the stone galleries of the prison, till they came to the iron door of the cell in which their son was confined. As he turned the key with all his strength, the heavy bolt flew back, and he opened the door of the cell. Oh, what a sight for a father and a mother to gaze upon! There was just enough light in this gloomy abode to show them their son, sitting in the corner on the stone floor, pale and emaciated, and loaded with chains. The moment the father beheld the pallid features of his long-absent son, he raised his hands in the agony of his feelings, and fell fainting at his feet. The mother burst into loud exclamations of grief, as she clasped her son, guilty and wretched as he was, to her maternal bosom. Oh, who can describe this scene! Who can conceive the anguish which wrung the hearts of these afflicted parents! And it was their own boy, whom they had loved and cherished, who had brought all this wo upon them. I cannot describe to you the scene which ensued. Even the very jailer could not bear it, and he wept aloud. At last he was compelled to tear the parents away; and it was agonizing indeed to leave their son in such a situation, soon to be led to an ignominious death. They would gladly have staid and died with their guilty child. But it was necessary that they should depart; and, the jailer having closed the door and turned the massive bolt, they left the unhappy criminal in his cell. Oh, what would he have given, again to be innocent and free! The parents returned to their home, to weep by day and by night, and to have the image of their guilty son disturbing every moment of peace, and preventing the possibility of joy. The day of execution soon arrived, and their son was led to the gallows, and launched into eternity. And, crimsoned with guilt, he went to the bar of God, there to answer for all the crimes of which he had been guilty, and for all the woes he had caused.

You see, then, how great are your responsibilities as a child. You have thought, perhaps, that you have no power over your parents, and that you are not accountable for the sorrow which your conduct may cause them. Think you that God will hold this child guiltless for all the sorrow he caused his father and his mother? And think you God will hold any child guiltless, who shall, by his misconduct, make his parents unhappy? No. You must answer to God for every thing you do, which gives your

parents pain. And there is no sin greater in the sight of God than that of an ungrateful child, I have shown you, in the two illustrations which you have just read, how much the happiness of your parents depends upon your conduct. Every day you are promoting their joy or their sorrow. And every act of disobedience, or of ingratitude, however trifling it may appear to you, is, in the eyes of your Maker, a sin which cannot pass unnoticed. Do you ask, Why does God consider the ingratitude of children as a sin of peculiar aggravation? I reply, Because you are under peculiar obligation to love and obey your parents. They have loved you when you could not love them. They have taken care of you when you could not reward them. They have passed sleepless nights in listening to your cries, and weary days in watching over you, when you could neither express thanks nor feel grateful. And after they have done all this, is it a small sin for you to disobey them and make them unhappy?

And indeed you can do nothing to make yourself so unhappy as to indulge in disobedience, and to cherish a spirit of ingratitude. You never see such a child happy. Look at him at home, and, instead of being light-hearted and cheerful, he is sullen and morose. He sits down by the fireside in a winter evening, but the evening fireside affords no joy to him. He knows that his parents are grieved at his conduct. He loves nobody, and feels that nobody loves him. There he sits silent and sad, making himself miserable by his own misconduct. The disobedient boy or girl is always unhappy. You know how different the dispositions of children are. Some are always pleasant and obliging, and you love their company. They seem happy when they are with you, and they make you happy. Now you will almost always find, that such children are obedient to their parents. They are happy at home, as well as abroad. God has in almost every case connected enjoyment with duty, and sorrow with sin. But in no case is this connection more intimate, than in the duty which children owe their parents. And to every child who reads this book, I would say, If you wish to be happy, you must be good. Do remember this. Let no temptation induce you for a moment to disobey. The more ardently you love your parents, the more ardently will they love you. But if you are ungrateful and disobedient, childhood will pass away in sorrow; all the virtuous will dislike you, and you will have no friends worth possessing. When you arrive at mature age, and enter upon the active duty of life, you will have acquired those feelings which will deprive you of the affection of your fellow beings, and you will probably go through the world unbeloved and unrespected. Can you be willing so to live?

The following account, written by one who, many years after her mother's death, visited her grave, forcibly describes the feelings which the remembrance of the most trifling act of ingratitude will, under such circumstances, awaken.

"It was thirteen years since my mother's death, when, after a long absence from my native village, I stood beside the sacred mound, beneath which I had seen her buried. Since that mournful period, a great change had come over me. My childish years had passed away, and with them my youthful character. The world was altered too; and as I stood at my mother's grave, I could hardly realize, that I was the same thoughtless, happy creature, whose cheeks she so often kissed in an excess of tenderness. But the varied events of thirteen years had not effaced the remembrance of that mother's smile. It seemed as if I had seen her but yesterday—as the blessed sound of her well-remembered voice was in my ear. The gay dreams of my infancy and childhood were brought back so distinctly to my mind, that, had it not been for one bitter recollection, the tears I shed would have been gentle and refreshing. The circumstance may seem a trifling one, but the thought of it now pains my heart, and I relate it, that those children who have parents to love them may learn to value them as they ought.

"My mother had been ill a long time, and I became so accustomed to her pale face and weak voice, that I was not frightened at them, as children usually are. At first, it is true, I sobbed violently; but when, day after day, I returned from school, and found her the same, I began to believe she would always be spared to me. But they told me she would die.

"One day, when I had lost my place in the class, and had done my work wrong side outward, I came home discouraged and fretful. I went to my mother's chamber. She was paler than usual, but

she met me with the same affectionate smile that always welcomed my return. Alas, when I look back through the lapse of thirteen years, I think my heart must have been stone not to have melted by it. She requested me to go down stairs and bring her a glass of water. I pettishly asked why she did not call a domestic to do it. With a look of mild reproach, which I shall never forget, if I live to be a hundred years old, she said, 'And will not my daughter bring a glass of water for her poor sick mother?'

"I went and brought her the water, but I did not do it kindly. Instead of smiling and kissing her, as I was wont to do, I set the glass down very quickly, and left the room. After playing about a short time, I went to bed without bidding my mother good night. But when alone in my room, in darkness and in silence, I remembered how pale she looked, and how her voice trembled when she said, 'Will not my daughter bring a glass of water for her poor sick mother?' I could not, sleep. I stole into her chamber to ask forgiveness. She had sunk into an easy slumber, and they told me I must not waken her. I did not tell any one what troubled me, but stole back to my bed, resolved to rise early in the morning, and tell her how sorry I was for my conduct.

"The sun was shining brightly when I awoke: and, hurrying on my clothes, I hastened to my mother's chamber. She was dead! She never spoke more—never smiled upon me again and when I touched the hand that used to rest upon my head in blessing, it was so cold that it made me start. I bowed down by her side, and sobbed in the bitterness of my heart. I thought then I might wish to die, and be buried with her, and, old as I now am, I would give worlds, were they mine to give, could my mother but have lived to tell me that she forgave my childish ingratitude. But I cannot call her back; and when I stand by her grave, and whenever I think of her manifold kindness, the memory of that reproachful look she gave me will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder."

And when your mother dies, do you not think that you will feel remorse for every unkind word you have uttered, and for every act of ingratitude? Your beloved parents must soon die. You will probably be led into their darkened chamber, to see them pale and helpless on their dying bed. Oh, how will you feel in that solemn hour! All your past life will come to your mind, and you will think that you would give worlds, if you could blot out the remembrance of past ingratitude. You will think that, if your father or mother should only get well, you would never do any thing to grieve them again. But the hour for them to die must come. You may weep as though your heart would break, but it will not recall the past, and it will not delay their death. They must die; and you will probably gaze upon their cold and lifeless countenances in the coffin. You will follow them to the grave, and see them buried for ever from your sight. Oh, how unhappy you will feel, if you then have to reflect upon your misconduct! The tears you will shed over their graves will be the more bitter, because you will feel that, perhaps, your own misconduct hastened their death.

But perhaps you will die before your parents do. If you go into the grave-yard, you will see the graves of many children. You know that the young are liable to die, as well as the old. And what must be the feelings of the dying child, who knows that he is going to appear before God in judgment, and yet feels conscious that he has been unkind to his parents! Oh, such a child must fear to go into the presence of his Maker. He must know that God will never receive into heaven children who have been so wicked. I have seen many children die. And I have seen some, who had been very amiable and pleasant all their lives, when they came to die, feel grieved that they had not been more careful to make their parents happy. I knew one affectionate little girl, who was loved by all who knew her. She hardly ever did any thing which was displeasing to her parents. But one day she was taken sick. The doctor was called: but she grew worse and worse. Her parents watched over her with anxiety and tears, but still her fever raged, and death drew nearer. At last all hopes of her recovery were over, and it was known that she must die. Then did this little girl, when she felt that she must leave her parents for ever, mourn that she had ever done any thing to give them pain. The most trifling act of disobedience, and the least unkindness of which she had ever been guilty, then came fresh into her mind, and she could not die in peace, till she had called her father and her mother to her bedside, and implored their forgiveness. If so obliging and affectionate a little girl as this felt so deeply in view

of the past, when called upon to die, how agonizing must be the feelings which will crowd upon the heart of the wicked and disobedient child who has filled her parents' heart with sorrow!

But you must also remember, that there is a day of judgment to come. You must appear before God to answer for every thing you have done or thought while in this world. Oh, how will the ungrateful child then feel! Heaven will be before him, in all its beauty and bliss, but he cannot enter.

"Those holy gates for ever bar
Pollution, sin and shame."

He has, by his ingratitude, made a home on earth unhappy, and God will not permit him to destroy the happiness of the homes in heaven.

He will see all the angels in their holiness and their joy, but he cannot be permitted to join that blessed throng. With his ungrateful heart he would but destroy their enjoyment. The frown of God must be upon him, and he must depart to that wretched world where all the wicked are assembled. There he must live in sorrows which have no end. Oh, children, how great are your responsibilities! The happiness of your parents depends upon your conduct. And your ingratitude may fill your lives with sorrow, and your eternity with wo. Will you not, then, read this book with care, and pray that God will aid you to obey its directions, that your homes on earth may be joyful, and that you may be prepared for happier homes beyond the stars?

CHAPTER II. DECEPTION

Probably nearly all who read this book have heard the story of George Washington and his hatchet.

George, when a little boy, had received from his father a hatchet, and he, much pleased with his present, walked around the house trying its keen edge upon every thing which came within his reach. At last he came to a favorite pear-tree of his father's, and began, with great dexterity, to try his skill in felling trees. After hacking upon the bark until he had completely ruined the tree, he became tired, and went into the house. Before long, his father, passing by, beheld his beautiful tree entirely ruined; and, entering the house, he earnestly asked who had been guilty of the destruction. For a moment George trembled and hesitated. He was strongly tempted to deny that he knew any thing about it. But summoning all his courage, he replied, "Father, I cannot tell a lie. I cut it with my hatchet." His father clasped him to his arms, and said, "My dear boy, I would rather lose a thousand trees than have my son a liar."

This little anecdote shows that George Washington, when a boy, was too brave and noble to tell a lie. He had rather be punished than be so mean and degraded as to utter a falsehood. He did wrong to cut the pear-tree, though, perhaps, he did not know the extent of the injury he was doing. But had he denied that he did it, he would have been a cowardly and disgraceful liar. His father would have been ashamed of him, and would never have known when to believe him. If little George Washington had told a lie then, it is by no means improbable that he would have gone on from falsehood to falsehood, till every body would have despised him. And he would thus have become a disgrace to his parents and friends, instead of a blessing to his country and the world. No boy, who has one particle of that noble spirit which George Washington had, will tell a lie. It is one of the most degrading of sins. There is no one who does not regard a liar with contempt. Almost always, when a lie is told, two sins are committed. The first is, the child has done something which he knows to be wrong. And the second is, that he has not courage enough to admit it, and tells a lie to hide his fault. And therefore, when a child tells a lie, you may always know that that child is a coward. George Washington was a brave man. When duty called him, he feared not to meet danger and death. He would march to the mouth of the cannon in the hour of battle; he would ride through the field when bullets were flying in every direction, and strewing the ground with the dead, and not a nerve would tremble. Now, we see that George Washington was brave when a boy, as well as when a man. He scorned to tell a lie, and, like a noble-hearted boy, as he was, he honestly avowed the truth. Every body admires courage, and every body despises cowardice. The liar, whether he be a boy or a man, is looked upon with disgust.

Cases will occur in which you will be strongly tempted to say that which is false. But if you yield to the temptation, how can you help despising yourself? A little girl once came into the house and told her mother something which was very improbable. Those who were sitting in the room with her mother did not believe her, for they did not know the character of the little girl. But the mother replied at once, "I have no doubt that it is true, for I never knew my daughter to tell a lie." Is there not something noble in having such a character as this? Must not that little girl have felt happy in the consciousness of thus possessing her mother's entire confidence? Oh, how different must have been her feelings from those of the child whose word cannot be believed, and who is regarded by every one with suspicion! Shame, shame on the child who has not magnanimity enough to tell the truth.

God will not allow such sins to go unpunished. Even in this world the consequences are generally felt. God has given every person a conscience, which approves that which is right, and condemns that which is wrong. When we do any thing wrong, our consciences punish us for it, and we are unhappy. When we do any thing that is right, the approval of conscience is a reward. Every day you feel the

power of this conscience approving or condemning what you do. Sometimes a person thinks that if he does wrong, and it is not found out, he will escape punishment. But it is not so. He will be punished whether it is found out or not. Conscience will punish him if no one else does.

There was once a boy whose father sent him to ride a few miles upon an errand, and told him particularly not to stop by the way. It was a beautiful and sunny morning in the spring; and as he rode along by the green fields, and heard the singing of the birds as they flew from tree to tree, he felt as light-hearted and as happy as they. After doing his errand, however, as he was returning by the house where two of his friends and playmates lived, he thought he could not resist the temptation just to call a moment to see them. He thought there would be no great harm if he merely stopped a minute or two, and his parents would never know it. Here commenced his sin. He stopped, and was led to remain longer and longer, till he found he had passed two hours in play. Then, with a troubled conscience, he mounted his horse, and set his face towards home. The fields looked as green, and the skies as bright and cloudless, as when he rode along in the morning; but, oh, how different were his feelings! Then he was innocent and happy; now he was guilty and wretched. He tried to feel easy, but he could not; conscience reproached him with his sin. He rode sadly along, thinking what excuse he should make to his parents for his long absence, when he saw his father, at a distance, coming to meet him. His father, fearing that some accident had happened, left home in search of his son. The boy trembled and turned pale as he saw him approaching, and hesitated whether he had better confess the truth at once, and ask forgiveness, or endeavor to hide the crime with a lie. Oh, how much better it would have been for him if he had acknowledged the truth! How much sooner would he have been restored to peace! But one sin almost always leads to another. When this kind father met his son with a smile, the boy said, "Father, I lost the road, and it took me some time to get back again, and that is the reason why I have been gone so long."

His father had never known him to be guilty of falsehood before, and was so happy to find his son safe, that he did not doubt what he said was true. But, oh, how guilty, and ashamed, and wretched, did that boy feel, as he rode along! His peace of mind was destroyed. A heavy weight of conscious guilt pressed upon his heart. The boy went home and repeated the lie to his mother. It is always thus when we turn from the path of duty; we know not how widely we shall wander. Having committed one fault, he told a lie to conceal it, and then added sin to sin, by repeating and persisting in his falsehood. What a change had one short half day produced in the character and the happiness of this child! His parent had not yet detected him in his sin, but he was not, on that account, free from punishment. Conscience was at work, telling him that he was degraded and guilty, His look of innocence and his lightness of heart had left him. He was ashamed to look his father or mother in the face. He tried to appear easy and happy, but he was uneasy and miserable. A heavy load of conscious guilt rested upon him, which destroyed all his peace.

When he retired to bed that night, he feared the dark. It was long before he could quiet his troubled spirit with sleep. And when he awoke in the morning, the consciousness of his guilt had not forsaken him. There it remained fixed deep in his heart, and would allow him no peace. He was guilty, and of course wretched. The first thought which occurred to him, on waking, was the lie of the preceding day. He could not forget it. He was afraid to go into the room where his parents were, lest they should discover, by his appearance, that he had been doing something wrong. And though, as weeks passed away, the acuteness of his feelings in some degree abated, he was all the time disquieted and unhappy. He was continually fearing that something would occur which should lead to his detection.

Thus things went on for several weeks, till, one day, the gentleman at whose house he stopped called at his father's on business. So soon as this boy saw him come into the house, his heart beat violently, and he turned pale with the fear that something would be said that would bring the whole truth to light. The gentleman, after conversing a few moments with his father, turned to the little boy, and said, "Well, how did you get home the other day? My boys had a very pleasant visit from you."

Can you imagine how the boy felt? You could almost have heard his heart beat. The blood rushed into his face, and he could not speak; and he dared not raise his eyes from the floor. The gentleman then turned to his parents, and said, "You must let your son come up again and see my boys. They were quite disappointed when he was there a few weeks ago, for he only staid about two hours, and they hoped he had come to spend the whole day with them." There, the whole truth was out. And how do you suppose that boy felt? He had disobeyed his parents; told a lie to conceal it; had for weeks suffered the pangs of a guilty conscience; and now the whole truth was discovered. He stood before his parents overwhelmed with shame, convicted of disobedience, and mean, degraded falsehood.

This boy was all the time suffering the consequences of his sin. For many days he was enduring the reproaches of conscience, when the knowledge of his crime was confined to his own bosom. How bitterly did he suffer for the few moments of forbidden pleasure he had enjoyed! The way of the transgressor is always hard. Every child who does wrong must, to a greater or less degree, feel the same sorrows. This guilty child, overwhelmed with confusion and disgrace, burst into tears, and implored his parents' forgiveness. But he was told by his parents that he had sinned, not only against them, but against God. The humble child went to God in penitence and in prayer. He made a full confession of all to his parents, and obtained their forgiveness; and it was not till then that peace of mind was restored.

Will not the child who reads this account take warning from it? If you have done wrong, you had better confess it at once. Falsehood will but increase your sin, and aggravate your sorrow. Whenever you are tempted to say that which is untrue, look forward to the consequences. Think how much sorrow, and shame, and sin, you will bring upon yourself. Think of the reproaches of conscience; for you may depend upon it, that those reproaches are not easily borne.

And is it pleasant to have the reputation of a liar? When persons are detected in one falsehood, they cannot be believed when they speak the truth. No person can place any more confidence in them till a long time of penitence has elapsed, in which they have had an opportunity to manifest their amendment. The little boy, whose case we have above alluded to, was sincerely penitent for his sin. He resolved that he never would tell another lie. But since he had deceived his parents once, their confidence in him was necessarily for a time destroyed. They could judge of the reality of his penitence only by his future conduct. One day he was sent to a store to purchase some small articles for his mother. In his haste, he forgot to stop for the few cents of change which he ought to have received. Upon his return home, his mother inquired for the change. He had not thought a word about it before, and very frankly told her, that he had forgotten it entirely. How did his mother know that he was telling the truth? She had just detected him in one lie, and feared that he was now telling her another. "I hope, my dear son," she said, "you are not again deceiving me." The boy was perfectly honest this time, and his parents had never before distrusted his word. It almost broke his heart to be thus suspected, but he felt that it was just, and went to his chamber and wept bitterly. These are the necessary consequences of falsehood. A liar can never be believed. It matters not whether he tells truth or falsehood, no one can trust his word. If you are ever tempted to tell a lie, first ask yourself whether you are willing to have it said that nobody can trust your word. The liar is always known to be such. A person may possibly tell a lie which shall not be detected, but, almost always something happens which brings it to light. The boy who stopped to play when on an errand two miles from his father's house, thought that his falsehood would never be discovered. But he was detected, and overwhelmed with shame.

It is impossible for a person who is in the habit of uttering untruths to escape detection. Your character for truth or falsehood will be known. And what can be more humiliating and degrading than to have the name of a liar? It is so considered in all nations and with all people. It is considered one of the meanest and most cowardly vices of which one can be guilty. The liar is always a coward. He tells lies, because he is afraid to tell the truth.

And how do you suppose the liar must feel when he comes to die? It is a solemn hour. Perhaps many of the children who read this book have never seen a person die. I have seen many. I have seen children of all ages dressed in the shroud and placed in the coffin. I might write pages in describing to you such scenes. One day, I went to see a little girl about ten years of age, who was very sick. When I went into the room, she was lying upon the little cot-bed, her lips parched with fever, and her face pale and emaciated with suffering. Her mother was standing by her bed-side, weeping as though her heart would break. Other friends were standing around, looking in vain for something to do to relieve the little sufferer. I went and took her by the hand, and found that she was dying. She raised her languid eyes to me, but could not speak. Her breathing grew fainter and fainter. Her arms and limbs grew cold. We could only look mournfully on and see the advances of death, without being able to do any thing to stop its progress. At last she ceased to breathe. Her spirit ascended to God to be judged, and her body remained upon the bed, a cold and lifeless corpse. All children are exposed to death; and when you least expect it, you may be called to lie upon a bed of sickness, and go down to the grave. There is nothing to give one joy in such an hour, but a belief that our sins are forgiven, and that we are going to the heavenly home. But how must a child feel in such an hour, when reflecting upon falsehoods which are recorded in God's book of remembrance! Death is terrible to the impenitent sinner; but it is a messenger of love and of mercy to those who are prepared to die. If you have been guilty of a falsehood, you cannot, die in peace till you have repented and obtained forgiveness.

There was a little girl eleven years of age, who died a few months ago. She loved the Savior, and when told that she could not live, was very happy. She said she was happy to die, and go home and be with her Savior and the angels in heaven. But there was one thing, which, for a time, weighed heavily upon her mind. A year or two before she felt interested in religion she had told a lie to her aunt; and she could not die in peace, till she had seen that aunt, confessed her sin, and asked forgiveness. Her aunt was sent for, though she was many miles distant. When her aunt came, the sick little girl, with sorrow for her fault, made confession, and asked forgiveness, "Aunt," said she, "I have prayed to God, and hope that he has forgiven me; and I cannot die in peace till I have obtained your forgiveness." If any child who reads this book is tempted to deceive his parents or his friends, I hope he will remember that he must soon die, and think how he will feel in that solemn hour.

But perhaps you think that the falsehood of which this girl was guilty was one of peculiar aggravation. It was simply this: She was one day playing in the room with several little children, and was making them laugh very loud. Her aunt said, "My dear, you must not make them laugh so loud."

And she replied, "It is not I, aunt, who makes them laugh."

This was the falsehood she uttered. And though her aunt did not know that it was false, the little girl did, and God in heaven did. And when she came to die, though it was a year or two after, her soul was troubled, and the consciousness of her sin destroyed her peace. A lie is, in the sight of God, a dreadful sin, be it ever so trifling in our estimation. When we are just ready to leave the world, and to appear before God in judgment, the convictions of a guilty conscience will press upon the heart like lead.

There are many ways of being guilty of falsehood without uttering the lie direct in words. Whenever you try to deceive your parents, in doing that which you know they disapprove, you do, in reality, tell a lie. Conscience reproves you for falsehood. Once, when I was in company, as the plate of cake was passed round, a little boy, who sat by the side of his mother, took a much larger piece than he knew she would allow him to have. She happened, for the moment, to be looking away, and he broke a small piece off and covered the rest in his lap with his handkerchief. When his mother looked, she saw the small piece, and supposed he had taken no more. He intended to deceive her. His mother has never found out what he did. But God saw him, and frowned upon him, as he committed this sin. And do you not think that the boy has already suffered for it? Must he not feel mean and contemptible whenever he thinks that, merely to get a little bit of cake, he would deceive his kind mother? If that little boy had one particle of honorable or generous feeling remaining in his bosom,

he would feel reproached and unhappy whenever he thought of his meanness. If he was already dead to shame, it would show that he had by previous deceit acquired this character. And can any one love or esteem a child who has become so degraded? And can a child, who is neither beloved nor respected, be happy? No! You may depend upon it, that when you see a person guilty of such deceit, he does in some way or other, even in this world, suffer a severe penalty. A frank and open-hearted child is the only happy child. Deception, however skilfully it may be practised, is disgraceful, and ensures sorrow and contempt. If you would have the approbation of your own conscience, and the approval of friends, never do that which you shall desire to have concealed. Always be open as the day. Be above deceit, and then you will have nothing to fear. There is something delightful in the magnanimity of a perfectly sincere and honest child. No person can look upon such a one without affection. You are sure of friends, and your prospects of earthly usefulness and happiness are bright.

But we must not forget that there is a day of most solemn judgment near at hand. When you die, your body will be wrapped in the shroud, and placed in the coffin, and buried in the grave; and there it will remain and moulder to the dust, while the snows of unnumbered winters, and the tempests of unnumbered summers, shall rest upon the cold earth which covers you. But your spirit will not be there. Far away, beyond the cloudless skies, and blazing suns, and twinkling stars, it will have gone to judgment. How awful must be the scene which will open before you, as you enter the eternal world! You will see the throne of God: how bright, how glorious, will it burst upon your sight! You will see God the Savior seated upon that majestic throne. Angels, in numbers more than can be counted, will fill the universe with their glittering wings, and their rapturous songs. Oh, what a scene to behold! And then you will stand in the presence of this countless throng to answer for every thing you have done while you lived. Every action and every thought of your life will then be fresh in your mind. You know it is written in the Bible, "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." How must the child then feel who has been guilty of falsehood and deception, and has it then all brought to light! No liar can enter the kingdom of heaven. Oh, how dreadful must be the confusion and shame with which the deceitful child will then be overwhelmed! The angels will all see your sin and your disgrace. And do you think they will wish to have a liar enter heaven, to be associated with them? No! They must turn from you with disgust. The Savior will look upon you in his displeasure. Conscience will rend your soul. And you must hear the awful sentence, "Depart from me, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, it is a dreadful thing to practice deceit. It will shut you from heaven. It will confine you in eternal wo. Though you should escape detection as long as you live; though you should die, and your falsehood not be discovered, the time will soon come when it will all be brought to light, and when the whole universe of men and of angels will be witnesses of your shame. If any child who reads this feels condemned for past deception, oh, beware, and do not postpone repentance till the day of judgment shall arrive. Go at once to those whom you have deceived, and make confession, and implore forgiveness. Then go to your Savior, fall upon your knees before him; pray that he will pardon you, and promise to sin no more. If your prayer is offered in sincerity, and your resolution remains unbroken, the Savior will forgive you; and when the trump of the archangel shall summon you to judgment, he will give you a home in heaven. The tear of sincere penitence our kind Saviour is ever ready to accept.

If you are ever tempted to deceive, O, remember, that your deception must soon be known. It is utterly impossible that it should long remain undetected. The moment the day of judgment arrives, your heart will be open to the view of the universe, and every thought will be publicly known. How much safer then is it to be sincere and honest! Strive to preserve your heart free from guile. Then you will have peace of conscience. You will fear no detection. You can lie down at night in peace. You can awake in the morning with joy. Trusting in the Saviour for acceptance, you can die happy. And when the morning of the resurrection dawns upon you, your heart will be filled with a joy which earth's sunniest mornings and brightest skies never could afford. The Saviour will smile upon you. Angels

will welcome you to heaven. You will rove, in inexpressible delight, through the green pastures of that blissful abode. You will lie down by the still waters where there is sweet repose for ever. Oh, what an hour of bliss must that be, when the child, saved from sin and sorrow,

"Has reached the shore
Where tempests never beat nor billows roar!"

CHAPTER III. OBEDIENCE

In the chapters you have now read, I have endeavored to show you how much your own happiness, and that of your parents, depend upon your conduct. And I trust every child who has read thus far, has resolved to do all in his power to promote the happiness of those who have been so kind to him. But you will find that it is a very different thing to resolve to do your duty, from what it is to perform your resolutions when the hour of temptation comes. It requires courage and firmness to do right, when you are surrounded by those who urge you to do wrong. Temptations to do wrong will be continually arising; and, unless you have resolution to brave ridicule, and to refuse solicitation, you will be continually led into trouble. I knew a young man who was ruined entirely, because he had not courage enough to say no. He was, when a boy, very amiable in his disposition, and did not wish to make any person unhappy; but he had no mind of his own, and could be led about by his associates into almost any difficulties, or any sins. If, in a clear moonlight winter evening, his father told him he might go out doors, and slide down the hill for half an hour, he would resolve to be obedient and return home at the time appointed. But if there were other boys there, who should tease him to remain longer he had not the courage to refuse. And thus he would disobey his kind parents because he had not courage to do his duty. He began in this way, and so he continued. One day, a bad boy asked him to go into a store, and drink some brandy. He knew it was wrong, and did not wish to go. But he feared that, if he did not, he would be laughed at; and so he went. Having thus yielded to this temptation, he was less prepared for temptation again. He went to the bottle with one and another, till at last he became intemperate, and would stagger through the streets. He fell into the company of gamblers, because he could not refuse their solicitations. He thus became a gambler himself, and went on from step to step, never having resolution to say no, till he ruined himself, and planted within him the seeds of disease, which hurried him to a premature grave. He died the miserable victim of his own irresolution.

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