

The Little Woodchopper



Mary M. Sherwood

THE LITTLE WOODCHOPPER

One morning, shortly after his father's death, poor young William awakes in the middle of the forest to find himself completely deserted through the trickery of his five heartless brothers. Left alone in the middle of strange surroundings, William turns for help to the One he had come to know as his Saviour en Friend. After two narrow escapes, he and his faithful dog Caesar find a lone cottage on the edge of the woods where they make a remarkable discovery.

This is a touching story illustrating how "His ways are past finding out" (Romans 11:33)

Written for all ages, especially for little kids, between 7-12 years.

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The Little Woodchopper



By Mary M. Sherwood



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"Caesar took his enemy by the throat." (p. 30)

Accident in the Woods

Long ago a woodchopper by the name of Robert H. lived at the border of a large dense forest with his six sons. William, the youngest son, a boy of five, was left to himself, but was very mature for his years of hardships. His mother had died soon after his birth, and his father and brothers, who were much older than he, were engaged in chopping wood in the forest.

The owner of the forest land selected the trees and charged a small fee for the privilege of cutting them. William's father, who was an industrious man, had always made a good living by chopping and selling the wood. When the sons grew up, they were able to handle the ax as well as their father, and prosperity increased yearly in the old log cabin.

Were those who lived there happy? Ah, no — *one* thing was lacking to make this family really happy. The woodchopper was altogether unconcerned about his soul's salvation, and never spoke to his children about God, or ever thought of taking them where they could hear the Word of God. Schools were very poor then,

and few people could read or write; so the sons were allowed to grow up in utter ignorance, their only desire being to earn money and have an easy life.

“What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

This condition of things was so much sadder, since the father in his young years had been shown the way of salvation by his own dear God-fearing mother, and had heard many earnest words from her lips. But for many years he had not thought about the Lord Jesus, the salvation of his soul, or his dear mother’s teachings, till God Himself brought him to think about these things through a serious accident.

One day while he was chopping down a tree it fell unexpectedly to the ground, just in the direction where the old man was standing. Although he quickly stepped aside, one of the strong branches struck him to the ground, injuring him so badly that his sons had to carry him home. William, who was helping his brothers to gather the dry sticks and bind them into bundles, was looking on when the accident happened, and, crying aloud, he followed the

sad procession home. When their father became conscious he complained of intense pain. The older sons bound him up as well as they knew how, and leaving him alone with William, they went back to the woods where they stayed for a week.

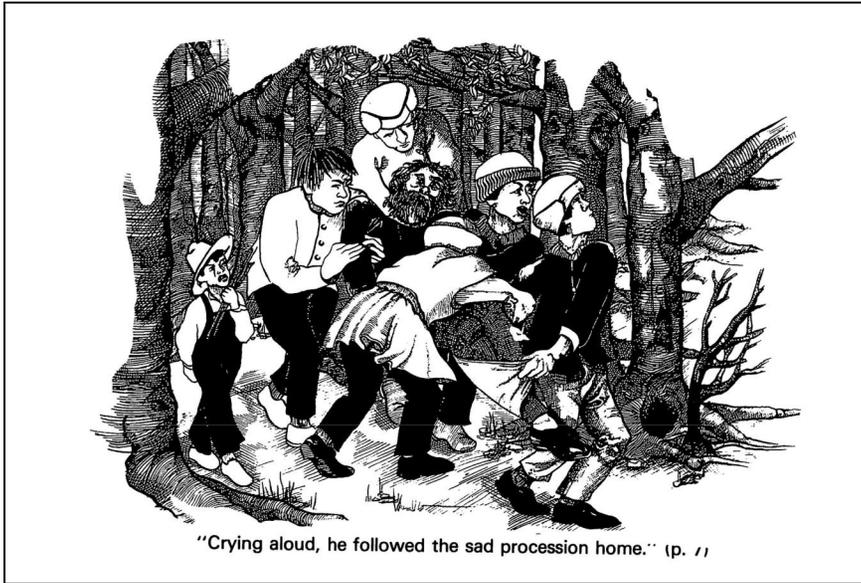
The poor man suffered a great deal, and the thought of death came with great power over his soul. The sins of his whole life seemed to awaken and condemn him. One thing especially troubled him much — the thoughts about his poor mother, whom he had secretly left many years before, and about whom he had never bothered since. What might have become of the poor and lonesome widow? Was she still alive, or had she died of a broken heart, sorrowing over her prodigal son?

“A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (Proverbs 10:1).

These were sad days for the old woodchopper. The troubles of his soul were harder to bear than the pain of his body. With fear, yes, horror, he thought of the dark, never-ending eternity he was going to enter. What his mother had so long before told him came back to his memory in

living power. He knew he was a wicked and lost sinner, who righteously deserved eternal damnation.

Deep sobs constantly came from his burdened heart, and the tears ran down his sunken cheeks in streams. No one was able to speak a word of comfort to him. His elder sons thought only of themselves, and left the sick man to his fate; they even laughed about his soul-troubles and mocked him when he wept.



William, who was now nine years of age, clung to his unfortunate father with a tender love. For hours he would sit at his bedside, and did all

that he was able to do according to his little strength. But he was not able to comfort him in his great distress, as he knew nothing of the Lord Jesus, the only One able to bring comfort at such an hour.

Many weeks passed thus in fear and sorrow. Many times William heard his father sob, "Oh God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

Once in a while William would slip away, and fall on his knees and entreat the Lord for grace and mercy for his dear father.

Then his father began to tell him what he had once heard from his dear mother about the wonderful love of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son. He would tell as well as he could remember — for he had no Bible — the story of the birth of Jesus, His life and His works here on earth, and of His death on the cross. Later he told him of the creation of the world, of Adam and Eve and the fall of man; of Cain and Abel, of the flood, and of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, and of Moses and Joshua. William listened with the closest attention, and the words of his suffering

father made a deep impression on the tender heart of the boy.

By and by a change came over the sick man. The expression of his face became quiet and peaceful; at times a happy smile crept over his haggard face while he would tell of Jesus and His love, and his eyes would beam with joy. William was very happy to see this change in his father, although he did not understand the cause.

“O happy day, that fixed my choice On Thee, my Saviour and my God; Well may this glowing heart rejoice, And tell its raptures all abroad. Happy day; happy day! — When Jesus washed my sins away.”

Forgiven

One day, when the sun was shining brightly, the sick man ventured once more to leave his bed, and father and son sat at the door of the cabin. At their feet was lying the faithful dog, Caesar. The older sons had gone into the forest to shoot game. Before the father's accident, they had done so secretly; but since he was obliged to stay in the house, they went poaching whenever they chose, keeping a good look out, of course, for the game-keeper. The father noticed it with sorrow, but his admonitions and warnings were not heeded. As the two were comfortably seated together, the father began: “Oh, my child, my dear boy! how wrongly I have acted towards you and your brothers when they were young. I have never spoken to them about the Lord Jesus. I never drew their attention to their responsibility towards a holy God, and now I am reaping the fruits of my unfaithfulness. My sons do wickedly, without fear, and my word has no power. They mock me and turn their backs on me, and walk in the paths of sin, but I have deserved all this.”

“These words, which I command thee this day,

shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

A sob arose from the heart of the old man, and the tears were running down his pale cheeks. William noticed it, and asked with deep emotion, “Why have you deserved this, Father?”

“Alas, my dear boy,” said the sick man, while fondly putting his thin hand on his son’s head, “for several reasons. I was a naughty and disobedient boy, and for this alone I deserve to have disobedient children. My mother was a widow who loved the Lord Jesus and feared God. Her little house was on the other side of this forest, several days’ journey from here. I was her only child; she brought me up with great love and tenderness, and early instructed me in the Word of God, but I would not mind her. When I grew older I spent most of my time loitering through the field or forest; at last I drifted into bad company, and committed all kinds of roguish tricks, and to escape the reproof of my mother, I ran away. Since that time I have not seen her, nor heard of her. If I

only had the strength to go to her, and ask her forgiveness; but it is too late, forever too late!” “Is she still alive?” asked William, greatly interested.

“I do not know, my boy,” responded the boy’s father, and again came a heavy sigh over his quivering lips. “I hardly think so; she would be very old now. But even if she still lives, I shall never see her in this world again. My days are numbered. I desire only one thing: if she is still on the earth, that she might know how deeply I have repented of my sins, and that I have found refuge in Jesus, who is now my hope, and who has washed me from all my sins in His own precious blood.”

“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The old man was silent, but after a little while he said, “Alas, my sons, my sons! It is my fault they are so wicked and hardhearted. I have not been a faithful father to them. I have neglected their training, and allowed them to grow up like trees of the forest. I did not instruct them in the Word of God, nor bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Now they despise and mock me, and are deaf to my pleadings, and

harden their hearts against God. Oh God! Thou art just, but terrible are Thy judgments!”

The feeble body of the sick man trembled because of his great emotion. He wept no more, but stared at the ground in agony. William did not know what to say to his sorrowing father. At last he whispered, “Father, could not the Lord Jesus change their hearts? Would He not do so if we asked Him?”

“My dear child, you are right; the Lord can change their hearts. I have often asked Him for this, and I have confidence that He will answer my prayers in His own time. But let us now together ask the Lord for this again.”

Both knelt on the floor of the cabin, and in touching words the sorrowing father prayed for his lost children. Although William did not understand everything his father said, this hour never left his memory all through his life.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

After this talk with his little son, the father did not live many days. William was more attentive than ever in serving his beloved father. He would leave him for only a moment at a time to get water or anything the sick man needed. He

was continually at his bedside, while Caesar was lying at his feet. It seemed as though the faithful animal knew what was going on.

Again and again the old woodchopper would lift his eyes and voice heavenward, and then William would fold his hands too, and join in prayer.

When his father’s last morning began to dawn, he said to William that the Lord had given him the full assurance that his prayers would be answered.

“My sins are forgiven,” he whispered, “and I am going to Jesus, my Lord. He will keep you, my dear boy, and also save your brothers, through His grace. Oh, forget not thy Creator in the days of thy youth, as I have done! Give Him your heart, my child; trust Him fully, and do not forget to pray for your brothers.”

“To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

A Wicked Plan

Towards evening William's brothers came home, bringing a deer with them which they had shot; they also had a jug of brandy. After making a hot fire, they roasted some of the venison which they ate and drank freely of the brandy. They did not look at their dying father, but asked William to eat with them. Nothing could induce the boy to leave his father, and he remained at his bedside till he could keep his eyes open no longer, then fell asleep.

When he awoke early in the morning, his first look was towards his father at his side. He was lying so quietly that William dared not stir for a long time. At last he whispered, "Father!"

There was no answer. While William slept, his father went to sleep, never to waken again on this earth. He had gone to be forever with his Lord.

When the truth of this came to the little fellow, he cast himself on the bed, crying most bitterly. William's crying awakened his brothers who

were sleeping in the next room. They came and looked at their father without one expression of sorrow, and no tears came from their eyes; their hearts were untouched. They conferred together about what to do with the corpse — whether to let it lie a day, or bury it right away. They concluded to bury it the same day, and with the most heartless indifference they made preparations to commit the mortal remains of their father to the grave. After filling it, they put a few grass sods on the top, and went back to the cabin as if nothing had happened.

William remained at the grave, crying and lamenting. He felt so forsaken and lonely. What would become of him now? He could expect nothing good from his brothers, but rather feared the worst. His only friend on earth that never left him, and even now was at his feet, was his faithful dog. Overcome with grief, he threw his arms around Caesar's neck, who, as though he understood the difficulties of his young master, began to whine and lick his face.

But was William really altogether forsaken? Did he not know a truer and mightier Friend

than even his father had been to him? The thought of this Friend in heaven suddenly brought him to himself again, and kneeling down he asked the Lord Jesus in simple childlike manner to help him, and show him what he should do now.

“Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5).

While William had been occupied with his sorrow outdoors, his brothers were busy eating the remnants of their evening meal and emptying the whiskey jug. They were considering together what to do with their youngest brother. He was too young to go with them on their long hunting expeditions, and to leave him at home for days, and often weeks, would not do either. Besides, their hearts were full of hatred towards him because, although so young, he would admonish them at times and plead with them not to go “poaching.” He had told them that poaching was stealing, and that God said, “Thou shalt not steal!” His father had taught him so.

His childlike prayers were very disagreeable to them, because they constantly reminded them of their condition before God. The question with them was how they could most

conveniently rid themselves of the boy. Poor William! His father had been dead only a few hours, and his brothers were already considering how to do away with him.

“We can’t take him along when we go hunting,” said the oldest one; “he would betray us as soon as he got a chance.”

“But what shall we do with him?” asked the second one; “he’d be better off in the grave with his father.”

“Hold on!” broke in the third brother; “He’s our brother, and we must not touch him; not a hair of his head shall we hurt, if I can help it.” “What shall be done with him, then?” growled the eldest.

“I know what we could do,” replied the fourth. “The best way would be to take him a few days’ journey into the forest, and then leave him to his fate. He may then go where he chooses. He won’t find his way back to us very soon.”

“But then we must see to it that Caesar stays in the cabin; otherwise we will have trouble, because William himself can’t drive him off. Besides this, I would advise you to take the boy almost to the other side of the forest, and from there he may be able to find someone to go to.”

“Very well,” said the youngest of the five brothers; “let us take him into the forest. We can take one of the donkeys along and put him on it, so that we may be able to walk fast; when we have gone far enough, we will leave him at night.”

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

After a little more talk back and forth, they concluded to start the wicked plan the next morning. It was now late, and as they decided to be off very early in the morning, they all went to rest. William too, after eating a little, went to bed.

The day had hardly dawned when all was astir in the log cabin. The breakfast was prepared in haste. A sack full of provisions was loaded upon the strongest donkey. William was wakened early and after dressing and washing himself, he stood and looked on, thinking no evil, awaiting the preparations.

When all was ready for the journey the oldest brother took the little one by the hand, ordered

him to put on his hat, and lifted him on the donkey which stood in readiness outside.

“Where are we going?” asked William, who would rather have stayed at home, but he dared not make any objections.

“Into the forest to chop wood and chase deer,” responded one of the brothers with a laugh.

“What! are you going to steal the good forester’s game again? Don’t do it!” begged William, with a sad look. The brothers gave no answer but looked at each other.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Abandoned

Caesar was ready to follow the donkey on which his young master was sitting. Wagging his tail gladly, he waited impatiently for the company to start on the journey. At this moment, one of the brothers came with a strong rope, tied it around the neck of the dog, dragged the unwilling and resisting animal into the cabin, and locked the door.

“Can’t Caesar come along?” asked William.

“No,” replied his eldest brother.

“Then give him some bread and water, so that he won’t starve while we are in the forest,” said the little one.

“Do not mind things which are not your business,” replied the older brother roughly. “We will take care of the dog.”

William said no more, but with difficulty he kept back the rising tears.

At length they began their journey — up hill and downhill — to the right and to the left — and about noon they came to an open space where they stopped and built a fire, then

cooked and ate their dinner. After a few hours they started forward again, and in the evening they came to a large cave, near which a fine spring was bubbling. Here they spent the night; William was so tired that he fell asleep without eating any supper.

The following day they went on their journey through thick forest, the same as the day before. There seemed to be no end to it. As it was getting dark, they came to a place where four paths met. Here they halted and built a fire because of the wolves.

“I don’t understand why you have come so far,” said William timidly. “We must be now many miles away from home.”

“We have come to shoot deer,” replied one of the brothers.

“But not very far from our cabin there is plenty of game. Why have you gone so far?”

“You shall soon know why,” was the short answer, and when he would have asked more questions, he was told to keep quiet. After supper, the brothers soon stretched out on the grass and were fast asleep. William too selected a place near the fire to sleep; but before lying

down he knelt, and folding his hands as his father had taught him, he whispered, "Dear Father, think of me, and take care of me. Thou knowest my father is dead, and my brothers do not love me. I have nobody on earth that loves me, only Caesar, and they have locked him up in the cabin. Oh blessed God, remember me and protect me. I ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen."

After praying, he laid down and soon went to sleep. Then it seemed to him as if someone said to him, "Fear not, I will take care of you."

Sleep in peace, poor boy! the faithful, never slumbering eye of thy mighty and loving Father watches over you.

How it would have frightened him if he had seen his brothers rise cautiously very early in the morning, saddle the donkey and quietly slip away. Their wicked plot had succeeded. Soon they were hidden in the forest and William was alone. Our little friend slept undisturbed till the sun was quite high, throwing its warm rays right into his face. He could not at first remember where he was and how he got to this place, but when he saw the smoking embers at his side, the two days' experience came before

his mind. But where was the donkey which had carried him so faithfully, and where were his brothers?

He jumped up and called his brothers as loudly as he could, but the only answer he received was the echo of his own voice. Suddenly the thought came to him that his brothers might have wickedly forsaken him. He could hardly believe it, but when noon came and nothing could be seen or heard of them, he began to cry bitterly. What should become of him — alone in the great forest among wolves, and perhaps other wild beasts!

"Oh, how wicked you are!" sobbed the little fellow, when he thought of his brothers. "You have brought me here and left me. What would father say if he knew it!"

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Rescue

Thus William mourned for some time, but gradually grew quieter. The thought of Jesus, who saw him and was caring for him, comforted him; and at last he did what all children who are in need or in trouble should do — he knelt down and prayed earnestly to the Lord for His help and protection. After praying, he wondered what he should do. To follow his brothers was impossible, for they had intentionally selected a spot where several paths met, so that he would be at a loss to know which one to choose to follow them. His heart was very heavy, and from time to time he would whisper, “Lord Jesus, help me! I am alone and forsaken; and I am hungry and thirsty. Oh Lord, help me!” and he felt comforted.

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15).

While the poor boy was sitting there, the thought came to him: “Perhaps my brothers have not left me, but have gone hunting and will be back in the evening.” This faint hope gave him courage, and he made up his mind to wait

till night. Meanwhile hunger and thirst made their demands, so he stood up to see if there was anything that had been left in the grass. Much to his pleasure, he found a large piece of bread and a piece of meat; perhaps one of the brothers left it there purposely with a feeling of pity.

With a thankful heart William ate it, and looking around him he saw a creek, clear as crystal, where he satisfied his thirst. Thus God had already answered his prayers and given him a meal in the forest. William was thankful for it, and his confidence in the Lord increased. He believed that God would lead him out of the forest to someone who would direct him to his home and not allow him to die of hunger.

My young reader, are you thankful for the blessings which God gives you from day to day? Remember, God is the sustainer of us all, and every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Do not forget to thank Him for all these blessings, even the smallest, for God loves thankful hearts.

The day was declining; the sun was far in the west and the trees began to cast long shadows. At last the fiery ball disappeared altogether, and the evening twilight set in. The birds ceased

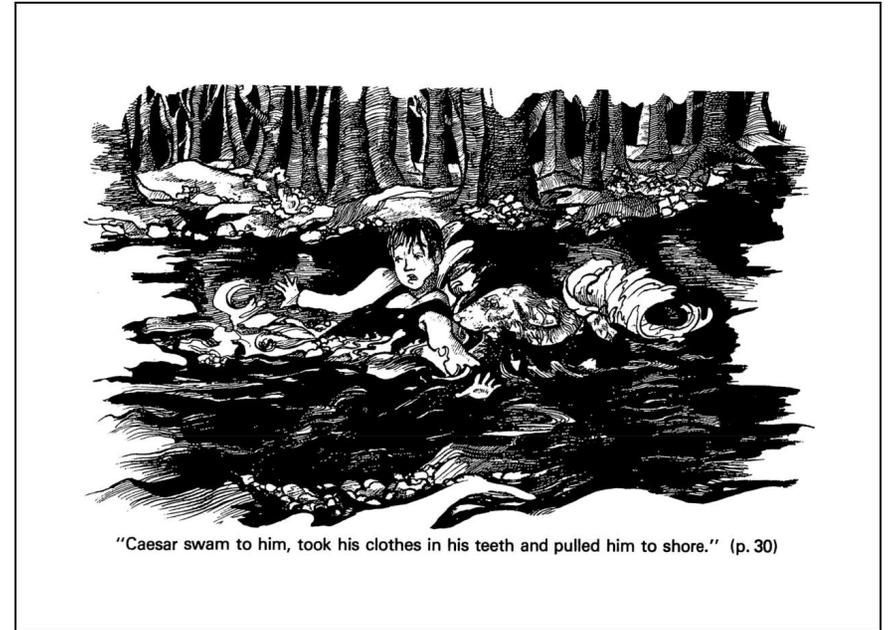
their singing and went to their nests; the owl started her dismal call, and large bats were flying around William. The little fellow lost all courage and had given up the hope that his brothers might return.

“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is” (Jeremiah 17:7).

Having been raised in the forest, he knew he should find some place where the wolves would not get him, so he searched for a suitable tree in which he might spend the night. Most of them were too thick for him, or the first branches were too high for him to reach. At last he found one right near the path which looked safe, and he began to climb it immediately. After reaching a comfortable place, he sat down and tied his left arm to a branch, fearing he might fall asleep and fall down.

Night came on getting darker and darker. The wind started to blow and shook the trees, but this did not frighten him because he was used to its howlings; he had often listened to it at home with a quiet enjoyment. Of course, it was quite different to sit near the warm hearth at home, protected from the storm, than to sit in the branches of a tree swinging to and fro. William was very brave for his age, but one

sound made him afraid; the howl of a wolf in the distance, just like he heard the evening before.



“Caesar swam to him, took his clothes in his teeth and pulled him to shore.” (p. 30)

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee” (Psalm 56:3).

He lifted his eyes upward and from his heart arose a quiet prayer to his Father, which gave him courage. Looking around him, he saw a light in the far distance, which he followed in the direction of the path. The light disappeared for a moment but again he saw it on the same spot. He jumped down from the tree as quickly as possible, for he thought there would be someone where the light was, and ran as fast as

his feet could carry him over the uneven path, fearing to meet the wolf he had heard just a short time before.

After running for a quarter of an hour or so, he reached a point from which he could see the light again, but it seemed larger this time because he was closer to it.

William stood still for a moment to breathe, then he began to run again. Just as the moon came out from under a cloud, he noticed a brook too wide to jump across, but he could not stop to think what he should do, for he heard an animal coming towards him through the underbrush. Just then he stumbled over a root of a tree and fell unconscious, but when he came to himself again, the animal was so close he could feel the warm breath; he expected any moment to feel the sharp teeth in his flesh, but instead of it being a wolf it was a dog, and it began to lick William's cheeks and bark for joy. When William arose, the dog jumped upon him, as he was so glad to see his loved companion once more.

“Caesar, my dear good Caesar,” cried William, and he noticed a piece of the rope with which his brother had tied him in the house three days ago. He wondered how his dog got to him, but

knew the Lord directed it all, and he was so thankful to the Lord for bringing to him his best friend on earth. He soon forgot all his fear, and anxious to get out of the woods started again for the light, Caesar by his side.

He started to wade through the brook, but when he got out into the current, the water was up to his hips; the current threw him over, but good faithful Caesar swam to him, took his clothes in his teeth and pulled him to the shore. Once more William loved and caressed his dog, then went on with his companion by his side.

“I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor” (Psalm 140:12).

The Old Lady

They had almost reached the top of the hill before them when the boy noticed not far away a pair of fiery red spots and at the same time heard the low howl of a wolf. William stood still, but Caesar, who also saw the wolf, put himself in front of his master ready to fight and growled savagely. In a few minutes the wolf gave a powerful leap upon the dog, but Caesar, who was accustomed to fighting with wolves, took his enemy by the throat and both fought desperately. William, who could do nothing, would not leave his faithful dog. He did pray to his heavenly Father, who had already led him in such a remarkable way. Both animals seemed to be of equal strength, till at last Caesar broke out in a victorious barking, and the wolf disappeared in the underbrush.

Caesar then went to William and seemed to say, "Come out of here quickly," so they both ran on as fast as they could for a while. When they reached the top of the second hill, William again saw the light coming from a cabin like his father's and ran on till he reached the fence. Not taking time to look for a gate, he climbed over

the fence, and Caesar bounced over.

William was so glad to be once more at a house, that he knocked loudly and called out, "Open, please open!"

Finally William heard shuffling feet nearing the door, and a voice from within: "Who is there?"

"A poor boy who was lost in the forest," replied William. "The wolves would have torn me to pieces had it not been for the dog."

"Come in," was the welcome sound from within, and at the same time he heard the bolt being moved back. In another moment the door opened with a creaking sound, and the bent figure of an old woman appeared.

"Come in; you and your dog are both welcome."

"In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and His children shall have a place of refuge" (Proverbs 14:26).

As William entered the narrow hallway with Caesar following him, he was met by an old lady with a light blue woolen shawl around her shoulders, and a white cap on her head.

"Step into the room, my boy," she said kindly. "How you must have been frightened in the forest, but now your troubles are over."

William did not have to be told twice, but quickly stepped inside, while the old lady again bolted the creaking door. It was a tidy and cozy room; “just like the old lady herself,” thought William. In an open hearth, such as you may yet find here and there among the old farmhouses, burned a bright light. On the table stood a low oil lamp and near it lay a large open book. It was the Bible, as William found out afterward. He had never seen a Bible until now. Near the warm chimney sat a gray cat and blinked with astonishment at the newcomers. At the other side of the room stood a large bed, covered with pure white linen; close to this was a roomy closet with glass doors, behind which stood a number of plates and cups and shining dishes.

William’s eyes wandered from one object to another. How much better it was here than in the forest! The sudden change from fear and sorrow to rest and safety overwhelmed the little boy, so that he fell sobbing on his knees and thanked God for His wonderful help. Then he turned to his faithful dog and said: “My good and loving Caesar! Where would I be now if you had not followed me? Twice you have saved my life. Had you not come I would have drowned,

or the wolf would have torn me to pieces.”

“The poor committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14).

Kindness

The old lady, who had meanwhile entered the room again, looked at the scene with a touched heart, and when she heard how kindly and thankfully he spoke to his dog, the tears came into her eyes.

“Now, my boy, tell me, had you no other friend in the forest than your dog?”

“No one!” said William sadly.

“All alone in the forest?” continued the kind old lady in sympathetic tone. “Poor child! but you can tell me tomorrow where your home is, and how it happened you got lost in the forest. O!” she said in astonishment and fright when touching the little fellow’s clothes, “you are all wet; how did that happen?”

“I waded through the creek, which crosses the path not far from here.”

“Through that swift stream? How is it possible?”

“I heard the wolf behind me, and so there was nothing left for me but to go through it,” replied the boy, “but I would surely have been drowned had not Caesar pulled me toward the shore.”

While the boy was telling her, the old lady got a woolen blanket out of her closet and began to

strip the poor lad of his wet clothes. She looked at him so pitifully and lovingly that the tears came again to William’s eyes.

“Why do you cry, my boy?” she asked him.

“Because you are so kind and loving to me, and I am so thankful God has led me to you. I was afraid I would never see anyone again. I was alone and so afraid of the wolves.”

“Dry your tears, my child,” said the old lady with much feeling. “You are now safe, and the bad wolves cannot harm you.” With that she kissed him several times on his pale cheeks.

After putting the clothes up to dry and rubbing William’s body thoroughly, she wrapped him in a woolen blanket and had him climb into her bed. After warming a pan of milk on the fire she gave him some, feeding him herself, because his arms were wrapped up in the blanket.

William relished the warm milk, and soon felt his blood begin to circulate again. Satisfied, he fell back against his pillows, saying, “I can’t go to sleep until I have thanked the Lord for His gracious care and protection. This I have been doing since my father was sick. I feel as if I must kiss you, for you are just as kind and loving as my father has been to me.”

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:13).

“But haven’t you a father any more?” inquired the kind lady.

“No!” answered William with a deep sigh. “He died a few days ago. I still have five brothers, but they do not love me. When father was dead — he died in the night while I fell asleep on a chair by his bed — they buried him close to our cabin and took me with them on a donkey into the forest. Two days we marched till we came to a place where four paths met. Last night, while I slept, they left me, and have probably gone home again. When I awoke this morning, I did not know what to do. Then I asked the Lord Jesus to help me; He has helped me and has brought me here. Oh, if I could only stay here; it is so nice here, much nicer than in our cabin at the other side of the forest.”

“Yes, you shall stay here, my child,” she replied, very much touched. “I am all alone and have often desired to have somebody with me. Since my son left me, I have always been alone; and now I am an old woman and have nobody in this world. Yes, stay with me, my boy; we will work together, and thank the Lord together for

His kindness. You must love the Lord very much since you know how gladly He answers the prayers of the young, don’t you?”

“Yes, I love Him; my father told me much about Him, how He came from heaven to die for sinners, and how He loved little children so much and took them up in His arms and blessed them. Oh, it was so nice when father told me such lovely stories, like that of Moses in the little ark, or of Abraham and Isaac, or David and Solomon. He said that all this was in a large book that is called the Bible. We had no Bible, but he said his mother had owned a Bible and had often told him all these nice stories when he was young. But that was many years ago, and for a long time he had not thought of them and did not care for them. My brothers too, did not care for them, and laughed and mocked when father spoke to them of the Lord Jesus.”

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (Psalm 10:4).

The little narrator paused because his eyes became heavy with sleep. But the old lady, whose curiosity had been aroused, desired to know more. She had followed the boy’s talk with the closest attention.

“Tell me a little more about your father, my boy.”

William told in his child-like and truehearted manner all that had happened in the last months and weeks before his father’s death. He did not neglect to tell what his father had said about his young years, what a naughty boy he had been, and how he had run away from his God-fearing mother, a widow. He told further with clearness — for it had made a deep impression on him — how thoroughly his father repented of the sins of his youth, and how he had longed to see his mother once more before his death, and to ask her forgiveness, and how he had become so happy through faith in the Lord Jesus, and had, in peace, gone home to be with Him.

*“In peace let me resign my breath,
And Thy salvation see;
My sins deserved eternal death,
But Jesus died for me.”*

Finding Grandma

While William spoke, the eyes of the old lady opened more and more, and bending over him, she listened to the tale of the little one. When he had finished, she began to tremble violently, so she sat down on the edge of the bed to keep from falling. Was it possible that William’s father...?

Ah, she feared to finish the thought. Her son, too, had left her many years ago, in disobedience and stubbornness, and she never had heard a word; only the heavy sobs, rising from time to time, gave evidence of her inward feelings. William noticed the terrible excitement of the old lady, but did not know what to think of it. At last she asked with trembling voice, “What was your father’s name?”

“Robert H.,” replied the boy.

“Gracious God,” she cried, lifting her eyes heavenward and folding her hands tightly together, “is it possible? Oh, how wonderful! Thy ways are past finding out! Robert H. was my son, my only son! And he died as you have said? Oh, then, my prayers are answered. God be praised! My son has not died in his sins, but

come to himself and returned, like the lost son to the father's house."

"And when he came to himself, he said...I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and unto thee. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-20).

The old lady stopped a moment. The surprise was too great, the excitement too much. William was sitting on the bed and stared speechless at her. She continued again after a while: "And you are the son of Robert H., my boy? Then you are my grandchild and I am your grandmother! Has the Lord sent you, poor child, to me to find a home and that I might have comfort and help in my old days? Oh Lord, how great is Thy kindness. Thy name be praised forever!"

After saying this she took William in her arms and kissed him tenderly. The dear boy did not know what was happening to him. He had experienced so many things, and now, so late at night, this unexpected meeting with his grandmother! He could not comprehend it and could find no words to express his feelings.

When he recovered at last from his amazement, he said, "This is a wonderful day; how good it was my brothers took me into the forest. Otherwise I would not have come here, nor ever found my grandmother. Oh, how good! I thought I had no friend on the earth except Caesar, and now God has led me here!"

Both shed tears of joy together. After the first excitement was over, nature made her demands, and our happy little friend's eyes began to close, and the next minute he was sound asleep. His grandmother did not think of sleeping for a good while; her heart was full of joy and thanksgiving, and all traces of fatigue were gone. She sat down at the table and put her eyeglasses on and read in a low and trembling voice the 103rd Psalm. Yes, the Lord had done great things for her and had satisfied her with good things in her old age. Again and again she would say in a low voice, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm 103:1).

Then she knelt down to thank and praise the God of all grace for His boundless goodness. Oh, her son, who had once caused her so much sorrow and grief, but for whom the mother's heart had reserved the same love, had gone home with faith in his Redeemer, had gone

where she would soon see him again, and, also, the Lord had sent this dear grandchild to her in such a wonderful way.

“How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33).

She would spend her days in loneliness no more; young strength and energy would now take the burdens of labor from her, which had already become too heavy for her shoulders. Bright pictures of a happy future arose before her mind, and she marveled at the kindness and mercy of God. Only one circumstance put a taste of bitterness into her cup of joy, and that was the thought of William’s older brothers. But her faith could trust the grace of God concerning them too; that grace was sufficient even for these wicked and strayed young men.

The morning began to dawn before the happy old lady sought her resting place to get a few hours’ sleep, and the sunbeams had long been shining into the room when the two sleepers awoke. After rising quickly and preparing the breakfast, grandmother began afresh to ask the boy many questions, and the boy went over the past few months again, till it was noon. In the afternoon, grandmother showed William her

goats and chickens and geese, and also the garden in which grew all kinds of vegetables for her own needs. The care of the goats and poultry she put immediately into the boy’s hands, and he did his work with energy and skill.

A new life had begun in the little cabin near the forest. Grandmother, who was already more than seventy years of age, but rather robust, evidently grew young again because of the presence of the child of her only and much loved son. She taught him, as he grew older, how to work the field and garden; at the same time she instructed him in reading and writing and sent him into the next village, where they had a small school.

Several years passed by thus, and William had grown up to be a strong youth walking in the fear of the Lord.

His grandmother dealt with him in much love and tenderness, but also with the proper severity when needed. Quite often she would say: “I have sinned deeply against your father. He was my only child (her husband had died shortly after the son’s birth), and I was too

weak to punish him when he had been disobedient. Yielding to him in a false love, I left his naughty ways unpunished and so God punished me. Now, may God preserve me from making the same mistake with you.”

When William had become big and more thoughtful, he was very, very thankful to his dear grandmother for having trained him thus, and truly every child has cause to be thankful when God has given them faithful parents who bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and who spare not the rod if needed.

“Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:20).

Family Life

Thus one year after another went by in happiness; but no happiness is lasting on this earth. William was to experience this. The first change which brought grief to his heart was the death of his faithful dog. Many years Caesar watched faithfully the old lady's possessions, but finally grew weaker and weaker in spite of the best care from the hands of his young master. The teeth began to fall out and finally he became blind, and one morning William found him dead in his house. He was not able to keep the tears from his eyes, and we can understand it very well. Had not Caesar been faithful to him when he was in great peril and forsaken by his own brothers, and saved his life twice? He dug a grave for him under an old tree in the garden and buried him as he had deserved it.

But this grief was small compared with what was yet before our young friend. The dear old grandmother, who had meanwhile passed her eighty-fifth year, felt more and more the hardships of old age. But she was still quite strong and able to do the lighter work in the

house. All at once she became sick, and a few days afterward she passed away in the arms of her grandson.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15).

“Ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

“Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

The reader can imagine the grief of William. Now he stood a second time in his life all alone. The little cabin and the garden and field were now his, of course; but how lonely and forsaken he felt after putting the mortal remains of the dear old lady into the place of rest in the cemetery of the village! Everywhere he missed the dear grandmother, and could not comfort himself for a long time. For several years he remained single and worked in field and garden. He had little interaction with his neighbors because he found very few like-minded with himself. But at last he felt too lonesome and asked the Lord if it be His will, to give him a God-fearing companion. Not long after he got acquainted with a good girl, who

had not so much in earthly goods, as rather a rich treasure of love and faithfulness, and a heart devoted to the Lord.

William asked her if she would become his wife and live with him in the little cabin near the forest. She consented, and a few months afterward the young woman entered her new home. Who was happier than William? Now he was alone no more; a faithful and God-fearing wife stood now at his side to share with him the joys and sorrows of life.

“Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:30).

The Lord was with the young couple and blessed the labors of their hands. In the course of time He gave them several children too, whom William endeavored to train like his own grandmother had trained him; for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

We could close our story now, but the young readers doubtless would like to hear something about William’s brothers, what became of them, and whether they ever repented of their wicked lives and evil deeds. Gladly we will satisfy your curiosity, so much the more as the grace of God overtook even these great sinners, and thus the many fervent prayers of their father and

grandmother were answered.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Strangers Arrive

We pass over a number of years, during which William and his family lived happily and in quietness in the little cabin. It is a beautiful warm Sunday afternoon. We see William, who has meanwhile become forty years of age, sitting in front of the door of his cabin. Near him sits on a low stool his youngest daughter, reading a book; two boys are running around on the lawn, and the mother, holding in her arms the baby boy, is leisurely walking up and down in the warm sunshine. It is a lovely scene. The house itself looks so pretty and inviting with the bright windows and the fresh vines creeping up on its sides, that one would feel tempted to enter and stay a little. All is breathing rest and peace.

The book the little girl has on her lap is Grandmother’s old Bible. She is just reading a chapter to Father, who is listening in quietness, rejoicing over the blessed words which the young girl is reading with a clear and pleasant voice. A little noise just now is drawing William’s attention, and turning to the side he sees, to his astonishment, five poorly dressed

men come out of the forest in slow and tired steps approaching his cabin. They wore neither shoes nor stockings, and their ragged clothes would hardly cover their body. It was indeed a very sad sight. The men were not young any more; two of them had white hair, and the youngest seemed to be at least fifty years of age. Gradually they came nearer. Upon reaching the garden gate, one of the old ones uncovered his head and asked humbly for a piece of bread. William rose to meet them.

“We are poor people,” said the old man, “and for several days have had no food but berries and roots, which we found in the forest. At night we slept on the bare ground. We are in misery and homeless.”

“I feel sorry for you,” replied William, “for I know from my own experience what it is to spend a day and night in the forest, to be without food and drink, and without a home. When I was a little boy, I too was a day and a night lost in the forest, and doubtless would have been torn to pieces by wolves, had not my faithful dog saved me.”

When William said this, the men looked at each other. He noticed this, but did not know

what it meant, and continued: “You must be very hungry and thirsty if you have been so long a time in the forest. Come in and lie down on the grass; I will bring you something to eat.” So saying, he turned toward the house; but his wife, who had listened to the conversation, had gone in before him. Moved by pity, she had gone to get bread and butter ready. Her husband went down to the cellar to get a large bowl of milk, and the two boys brought the things to the men.

They had followed William’s invitation and were resting on the lawn. When the boys came out, they fell greedily over the edibles and milk. One could see they had not had such a relish for a long time. When they were almost through with the meal, the oldest one stood up and thanked William for his kindness, asking him at the same time if he would not allow them to sleep in the stable.

“We have,” he said, “for several days slept outside and have not had decent sleep. In our young days we did not mind where we would spend the night, but now we are old and weak, and to sleep outside is hard for us.”

“There is hardly room enough for all of you in the stable,” replied William, “but I have a small

barn, in which I keep the hay for my goats. There is room enough in it; you can sleep in the soft hay, and I will give you some blankets to cover yourselves with. Just sit down and eat till you are satisfied.”

“He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again” (Proverbs 19:17).

Arrested

The old man made a low bow and sat down with his comrades. William got his chair and sat near them. After enjoying for a while their hearty appetite, he asked: “Now tell me where you come from, and why you five travel together? What are you intending to do tomorrow and where are you journeying to? You cannot go very far, for some of you look very poorly and seem to be sick.”

The men did not answer immediately. At last one of them commenced, a sigh escaping his lips: “Sir, it is a sad story. We are five brothers, all sons of one father. We were woodchoppers and lived on the other side of the forest about three days’ journey from here. Our father died more than thirty years ago. For a small yearly sum we had the right to gather all the dry wood in the forest and to cut down trees marked by the forester. But a number of years ago we lost the favor of our landlord; they burnt our cabin, took all our possessions and put us in prison. Many years we were kept in a damp dungeon, which undermined our health and strength. When at last released, we were unable to do

hard labor; besides, nobody would give us any work. We were in great need, and in order to keep alive we were compelled to beg. We traveled from place to place, and concluded at last to come to this district where nobody knows us, with the hope to find work and help in our need. In our travel through the great forest we suffered unspeakably, because we are destitute of everything. We have been hungry and frozen, and have at last come this far.”

The man stopped, and William looked from one to the other. A thought arose in his heart. Might not these ragged old men be his brothers, who had once treated him so cruelly? Was it not possible that God had sent them in their misery to him, that he might show them love and return good for evil! To be sure of this, he continued his questioning and asked: “What was the cause of losing the favor of your landlord? Did you do anything wrong?”

It was quite a while before an answer came. Finally the oldest of the men said with a trembling voice: “Yes, sir, it is as you have said. We had been poaching for many years and had killed many deer and other game. They had been suspicious of us for a long time, but could not prove it. At last the whole thing came to

light through a dealer to whom we had sold venison. We were, as my brother already stated, arrested, and, having carried on the poaching so long a time, we were punished severely. At first we were full of anger, but by and by other feelings arose in our hearts. We remembered our father, who had often admonished us, because of our evil doings, and reminded us of the righteousness of God. This righteousness had overtaken us now, we felt; but at the same time, we saw that instead of being angry and rebellious, we had every reason to condemn ourselves and to confess our sins to God. After our release we desired to live honest lives; yes, sir, it was our earnest desire so to do. But nobody would have anything to do with us; not so much as a few hatchets would they loan us, so we had to give up the plan of going back to our old occupation.”

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

“Well,” said William, being moved by deep pity, and in whose heart the conviction was growing stronger that these men before him were his brothers, “haven’t you any relatives in

the neighborhood where you came from? Isn't there anybody who could take care of you?"

"No," responded the elder one, "we are all alone. Our father settled in that district years ago, coming from another place. He was a woodchopper and his name was Robert H."

"And did you not have another younger brother?" asked William, who was hardly able to control himself.

"Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

Identity Revealed

The men looked at each other in fright, and then stared to the ground, but not one said a word. After a pause William jumped up, and going with outstretched arms toward his brothers, said: "Yes, you had yet another younger brother, and I am that brother! You meant to do me harm, as once the sons of Jacob did when they sold their brother Joseph, but God has turned all for good. He has kept me alive and led me in a wonderful way to this place, to my old grandmother, the mother of our father, who at that time still lived, and who brought me up in motherly love and care. She lived here in this little house which is now mine, in which I have now lived many years in peace and quietness. God has given me besides these earthly possessions a faithful wife and dear children. And now you are all welcome here with me! I have enough to keep you till you have gained strength, and are able to make your own living. I forgive you for what you have done to me, and hope that God too will forgive your evil deeds."

"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted,

forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

The five unfortunate men sat there like statues. While William spoke they did not once lift their eyes to him. His words had struck them with terror and shame. So that kind man who stood now before them, meeting them in such a loving manner, was the brother they had once treated so cruelly and shamefully. And this brother, instead of rebuking them sharply for their awful deed, and driving them off his place, had only kind and forgiving words for them, even stretching out his hands to help and save them. Quite a while they sat there without saying anything. At last the eldest one stood up, went to his young brother and fell down on his knees, tears flowing from his eyes. William begged him to stand up.

"Not until I have heard once more from your lips that you will forgive us our terrible sin," he sobbed.

The other brothers began to come, and they too, with many tears, begged forgiveness from their youngest brother. It was a touching scene.

"Yes, I forgive you," said William again and again, for he was deeply touched. "Let the past

be forgotten and come into my arms as my brothers."

Then he lifted his oldest brother from the ground, and embraced him with much feeling, also his other brothers. Then his wife and children, who had until now stood around them, listening to the conversation, came near and shook hands with the strangers, making them feel they were welcome and showing them kindness.

When the storm of emotion had somewhat passed, William and his wife went to the barn to make it as comfortable as could be done under the circumstances, for there was no room in the house for all of them. On the hay, of which there was an abundance, and by the aid of woolen blankets, they made a temporary sleeping place on which the overtired men could sleep, but first William asked them to kneel down with himself and family and thank God for His gracious and wonderful leadings. They all obeyed the request, and William's voice exalted the grace of God which had made the lost ones come to themselves, though through bitter experience. When adding to this the prayer that God might still work in their hearts and give them true repentance, and forgiveness of their sins, then the tears began to flow again from

these melted hearts. With the assurance that the God of all grace would answer his prayer, William returned to his house. I do not need to say that there also he fell on his knees to praise the Lord, who had done above all that he could ask or think, and prayed for blessing to come upon his brothers.

“God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:8-11).

Golden Years

The next morning he began without delay to erect near his own house a plain little cabin for his brothers, they helping him as much as they were able.

In the meantime his wife procured stockings, shirts and underwear; and a tailor was called from the nearby village to make trousers and jumpers for the new arrivals. Until the house was completed they slept in the barn, but had their meals with the family. Regular work could not be thought of as yet, for the poor men were so weakened that they needed care for a good while to come, so that they might regain a little strength.

When the house which, of course, was very plain, was finished, it was fitted out with the most necessary things, as beds, chairs, table, etc. Then William bought axes and hatchets for them, that they might take up their former work again. The brothers returned the love and care of their youngest brother with deep gratitude and respect, showing it too in their quiet ways and diligence. The two oldest of the five brothers were so weakened that there was no

possibility of making their own living, as they suffered most during their long imprisonment and the hardships afterward; they only lived a few years longer, but went home, believing in the virtue of the precious blood of Christ, which had cleansed them from all their sins. To the others also the wonderful and saving power of the grace of God was made known.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

The untiring efforts of their brother William for their salvation were not in vain. One after the other came to the knowledge of their condition before God, lost and ruined, and not long after received living faith in Christ. From this time on, it was their joy to read the Word of God in fellowship with William and his family, and bow their knees before the God of their salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus the fervent prayers of their father and grandmother were answered, and although neither had received the answer in this scene,

yet God did according to their desires in His own good time and way.

William and his wife outlived his brothers many years, and enjoyed the privilege of seeing their children’s children grow up, instructed in the truths of God. William often told his grandchildren the wonderful ways in which God had led him in his childhood, and often cried out with the Apostle: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

Now to the young readers of this narrative — may God in His grace lead you to early seek Jesus and His light, that you may be kept from the paths of sin, and to go through this world with Him, as His possession, to the praise of His glorious name. The Lord is ever rich in grace and mercy toward all that call on Him while it is called *Today!*

“Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

*I will sing of my Redeemer,
And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered,
From the curse to set me free.*

— REFRAIN —

*Sing, O sing of my Redeemer!
With His blood He purchased me;
On the cross He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt and made me free.*

*I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray;
Threw His loving arms around me,
Drew me back into His way.*

*I will tell the wondrous story,
How my lost estate to save,
In His boundless love and mercy,
He the ransom freely gave.*

*I will praise my dear Redeemer,
His triumphant power I'll tell!
How the victory He giveth
Over sin and death and hell.*