GEORGE BAKER

RUNNING TO WASTE

George Baker
Running To Waste

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24172452
Running To Waste The Story of a Tomboy:

Содержание

George M. Baker
Running To Waste
The Story of a Tomboy

CHAPTER I.
STOLEN SWEETS

"Bouncers, Teddy! the roundest and the rosiest. Drop them, quick! My apron's all ready for the darlings."

"It's very well to say drop *them*; but it's just as much as I can do to keep from falling myself. Don't you see I'm holding on with both hands?"

"What a fuss you do make! Come down, and let me try. I never saw a tree yet big enough to scare me."

"Who's scart, Becky Sleeper? I ain't – not by a long chalk. When a feller's holdin' on with both hands, he can't be expected to pick very quick – can he?"

"Wind your arm round that branch over your head. There; now you're all right, Teddy."

"That's so. What a hand you are to contrive! Now look sharp – they're coming!"

Becky Sleeper, in imitation of famed "Humpty Dumpty," sat

upon a wall, where she had no business to be, for the wall was the boundary of Captain Thompson's orchard. But there she sat, her feet dangling, her hair flying, and her hands holding her apron by its corners, intent on catching the apples which her brother was plucking from the tree above her head.

An active, wide-awake little body was the girl who was acting as accessory to the crime – a very common one – of robbing an orchard. Every movement of her sprightly figure belied the family name. Perched upon the wall, that cool October morning, she might have sat as a model for the Spirit of Mischief. A plump, round, rosy face, with a color in the cheeks that rivaled in brightness the coveted fruit above her, blue eyes full of laughter, a pretty mouth, with dissolving views of flashing teeth, teasing smiles, and a tongue never at rest; a queer little pug nose, that had a habit of twitching a mirthful accompaniment to the merriment of eyes and mouth, a profusion of light hair, tossed to and fro by the quick motions of the head, – all these combined to make a head-piece which would have delighted an artist, brightened as it was by a few straggling rays of sunshine, that darted through convenient openings in the mass of foliage above her head.

Miss Becky's costume, however, did not furnish a fitting finish to her face and figure, but, on the contrary, seemed much the worse for wear. A high-neck, blue-check apron showed unmistakable signs of familiarity with grape and berry juices; the rusty brown dress which peeped out beneath it was plentifully "sown with tares," and had a rough fringe at the bottom never

placed there by the dress-maker; a pair of stockings, once white, had the appearance of having recently been dyed in a mud-puddle, and a pair of stringless boots, which completed her attire, were only prevented from dropping off by an elevation of the toes.

With her diminutive figure, her mischievous face, and her eager interest in the apple raid, she might have been taken for a thoughtless, giddy child. No stranger would have dreamed she was a maiden with an undoubted right to affix to her name, age sixteen.

Her companion was a year younger, but greatly her superior in weight and measure, not much taller, but remarkably round at the waist and plentifully supplied with flesh. He lacked the activity of his sister, but was ambitious to emulate her achievements, and to that end panted and puffed with remarkable vigor.

Becky was an adept in all *boyish* sports. She could climb a tree with the activity of a squirrel, ride a horse without saddle or bridle, pull a boat against the swift current of the river, "follow my leader" on the roughest trail, take a hand at base ball, play cricket, and was considered a valuable acquisition to either side in a game of football.

Teddy admired the vigor of his sister, was not jealous of her superior abilities, although he was unlucky in his pursuit of manly sports. He had to be helped up a tree, and very often lay at the foot, when the helper thought he had successfully accomplished his task. Horses generally dropped him when he attempted to

ride; he always “caught crabs” in boats; was a “muffer” at base ball, and in everybody’s way in all sorts of games.

These two were companions in roguery, and were a terror to all respectable people in Cleverly who possessed orchards which they valued highly, or melon patches which they watched with anxious care; for, no matter how high the value, or how strict the watch, this pair of marauders had excellent taste in selection, and managed to appropriate the choicest and best without leave or license.

Cleverly is a very staid, respectable, triangular township on the coast of Maine, its southern, or sea line about six miles in length, forming the base of the triangle, with a small village – Foxtown – at its eastern point, and a somewhat more pretentious town – Geeseville – at its western point. From these two places the division lines ran, one north-east, the other north-west, meeting on Rogue’s River, where a bridge makes the apex of the triangle. The roads, however, do not traverse these boundary lines. There is a straight road from Foxtown to Geeseville, passing over a bridge which spans the river where it empties into the harbor. South of this highway is known as the fore side, and here may be found Captain Thompson’s shipyard, a short, chunky wharf, where occasionally a packet lies, and a blacksmith’s shop.

A few rods west of the river another road breaks from the highway and goes straight north. This is the main street of Cleverly. Climbing a hill from the fore side, the traveller, on entering this street, will find on the left a tailor’s shop, a country

store, the post-office, then a dozen houses, white, attractive, and roomy. On the right, a row of neat and tidy houses, four in number; then a carpenter's shop, the church, a small school-house, a more expansive "academy," several fine dwellings, then a long hill, at the foot of which is a brick-yard, and, a few rods farther, another settlement known as the "Corner." The distance between the fore side and the Corner is about a mile, and between these two points may be found the wealth, culture, and respectability of the township.

There is abundance of thrift, with very little "brag" about Cleverly. Rogue's River turns a paper mill, a woollen mill, and a nail factory. Every season a vessel is launched from the ship-yard, and every winter the academy is well filled with students; every Friday night, winter and summer, the vestry of the church is crowded with an attentive audience, and every Sunday the church is surrounded with horses and vehicles of all sizes, varieties, and conditions; yet the quiet of the place seems never broken. There is much beauty, with little attempt at display, about the town. Trees line the street, vines climb about the houses, shrubs peep out at the palings, and flowers bloom everywhere without any seeming special assistance from the inhabitants.

There is very little change in the Cleverly of to-day from the Cleverly of twenty years ago. Then Captain Thompson's house stood directly opposite the church, a large, square, two-story front, as grand as any in the place. At the rear, a lower building, used as a kitchen, ran out to one still lower, used as a wood-

shed; this, in turn, stretched out to another building, used as a carriage-house, while the barn, of larger proportions, swung at the end of all; so that, approaching it from the side, the structure had the appearance of a kite with a very long tail to it. At the end of the stable was the kitchen garden; beyond that, the orchard, and on the stone wall which separates it from the lane, which in its turn separates the whole place from the woods, patiently sits Miss Becky during this long description.

"Quick, Teddy! Three more will make a dozen; and that's as many as I can hold, they're such whoppers. O, dear! my arms ache now," said Becky, after Teddy had employed more time than seemed necessary in plucking the captain's mammoth Baldwins.

"Don't ache any more than mine do, I guess," grumbled Teddy; "and I'm all cramped up, too. Don't believe I'll ever git down agin."

"O, yes, you will Teddy. You're famous for quick descents, you know. You always come down quicker than you go up; and such graceful somersets as you do make! It's better than the circus, any time, to see you;" and a merry peal of laughter broke from Miss Becky's lips.

"Becky, Becky! don't do that!" cried Teddy; "they'll hear you up at the house. I wouldn't have Cap'n Thompson catch me in this tree for a good deal, I tell you. He's promised me a whaling if he ever catches me on his place."

"Don't be scart, Teddy. He won't catch you this time. I can

see the house, and there is not a soul stirring; and, besides, the cap'n's not at home."

"I tell you, Becky, somebody's comin'. I can feel it in my bones. I'm comin' down;" and Teddy made a frantic effort to free himself from the crotch of the tree, into which he was snugly fitted.

"Not until you make up the dozen, Teddy. Don't be a goose! I haven't watched this tree a week for nothin'. Cap'n Thompson's gone to the ship-yard. I saw him ride off an hour ago on 'Uncle Ned;' and he never gets back till dinner time when he goes there."

"Don't be too sure of that, Tomboy!"

With a slight scream, Becky turned her eyes from the camp of the enemy to the lane. Not ten feet from her stood a white horse, and on his back sat the dreaded enemy – Captain Thompson. A lively trembling of the branches overhead gave evidence that another party was aware of the startling interruption to a projected fruit banquet.

Becky looked at the captain. He had a very red face; he seemed to be in a towering passion, and was, evidently, searching his short, stout body for a tone deep and terrible enough with which to continue the conversation. She looked at him with a smile on her face; but, at the flash of his angry eyes, dropped hers to the apron which contained the proofs of guilt, then stole a glance at her trembling accomplice, straightened her little body, and looked defiantly at the horseman.

"So, Tomboy, I have caught you in the act – have I?" thundered

the captain.

"Yes, cap'n, you certainly have, this time, and no mistake," saucily answered the tomboy. "S'pose we've got to catch it now. What's the penalty? Going to put us in the pound, or lock us up in the barn?"

"Neither, Miss Impudence," thundered the captain. "I'll horsewhip you both. Here, you, Master Ned, come out of that tree, quick! D'ye hear?"

That the delinquent did hear, and that he was inclined to obey, was made manifest by a rustling among the leaves, and the dull thud of a heavy body as it struck the ground, for Master Teddy, terrified at the angry voice of the captain, had let go, and landed in a heap outside the wall.

"Run, Teddy, run! Don't let him catch you!" cried Becky, in excitement, dropping her apron.

The round and rosy spoils, being freed, followed the law of gravitation, and plumped one after another on to the head of the prostrate Teddy, who was groaning and rubbing his elbows, with a very lugubrious face.

"If you stir a step, you imp of mischief, I'll break every bone in your body," cried the captain, hastily dismounting, and approaching Teddy, with a long riding-whip in his hand.

"Don't you touch my brother! Don't you dare to touch my brother!" cried Becky from her perch. "It's a shame to make such a fuss about a few apples!"

"It's a great shame that a girl of your age should be caught

stealing apples," replied the captain.

"'Tain't my fault. We shouldn't have been caught if you'd only staid at the yard."

The captain almost smiled; the audacity of the young depredator's attempt to shift the responsibility of the theft upon him, really tickled him. Nevertheless, he approached Teddy, who, having rubbed himself comfortable, now sat calmly awaiting his fate.

"Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself? Haven't I told you to keep off my place? Haven't I given you sufficient warning? Haven't I promised you a thrashing if I caught you here – hey?" roared the captain.

"Yes, cap'n, you did. But I couldn't help it. I – I – I didn't want the apples; b – b – but I wanted to climb the tree for fun; its such a hard climb, and – and – " stammered Teddy, eyeing the whip.

"Don't lie, you imp. There's my apples all round you. You shall sweat for this, I promise you. Off with your jacket, quick! D'ye hear?"

"Don't strike him, cap'n; please don't. He's not to blame;" and Becky plunged from the wall, and stood between the captain and her brother. "He didn't want the apples – indeed, he didn't. He don't like apples – do you, Teddy?"

Teddy shook his head energetically, with a contemptuous look at the fruit.

"I helped him up the tree, and I'm to blame for it all. You oughtn't to strike a boy for doing all he can to please his sister.

If you must whip somebody, take me."

"Stand out of the way, Tomboy. Your time will come soon enough – never fear." And he pushed her from the path. "Off with that jacket. D'ye hear?"

Teddy coolly unbuttoned his jacket, and threw it on the grass.

"Don't tease him, Becky. I'm not afraid of his whip. If it's any fun for him, let him lay on. I guess I can stand it as long as he can;" and Teddy looked defiantly at his adversary.

Becky ran to her brother, and threw her arms about his neck, to shield him from the whip.

"He shan't strike you, Teddy. It's all my fault. He shan't touch you."

Captain Thompson was an obstinate man. When he made up his mind to the doing of an act, nothing could stand in his way. Perhaps this accounted for the coolness of Teddy in the trying situation in which he was placed, who, remembering his promise, knew it must be fulfilled, and so offered no resistance.

"Don't, Becky. D'ye want to smother a feller? Don't be a ninny. It's got to come. Go home – do."

"I won't. He shall kill me before he strikes you."

Becky's devotion was blighted in an instant, for the angry man seized her by the arm and flung her across the lane. She fell to the ground unhurt, for the grass was thick and soft.

"I'll teach you to meddle. Don't come near me till I've done with him. Mind that."

Becky sprang to her feet, fire flashing from her eyes. She

was as angry now as her tormentor. She picked up a stone, and despite his warning, approached the captain. He should not strike her brother, she looked at the house; no one in sight. Down the lane; no one – yes, there stood Uncle Ned, cropping the grass, unmindful of the group. Ah, the horse! There was a chance yet to save her brother.

"Now, you scamp, I'll teach you to rob orchards!" and the whip was raised.

Spry as a cat, Becky was at the captain's back in an instant. She jumped and caught the whip from his hand, then ran for the horse. The captain quickly turned; but too late. Becky sprang to the saddle, caught up the rein, lashed the horse, turned, and shouted, "Good by, Teddy! Good by, cap'n!" and galloped down the lane.

"Come back, come back, you imp of mischief! Come back, I say," shouted the captain, running after her.

"Some other time, cap'n; can't stop now. Good by;" and the saucy girl turned, waved her hand to the maddened and baffled owner of the Baldwins, plied the whip briskly, and was out of sight.

The captain, with a muttered "Hang it!" – which was the extent of his swearing, for he was a deacon, – followed at as rapid a pace as he could command, leaving Teddy solitary and alone.

The fat boy looked after his persecutor a moment, with a smile upon his face, then rose, picked up his jacket, put it on, buttoned it at the bottom, then coolly picked up the trophies of victory,

tucked them into his jacket and his pockets, crossed the lane, crept through a hedge, and disappeared.

CHAPTER II
FALLEN FORTUNES

"A stern chase is a long chase;" so, leaving Captain Thompson in pursuit of the fugitive, we will take the liberty of passing through his premises to the main street. At the left of the church, opposite his house, another road ran down a steep hill, crossed Rogue's River, by a bridge, ran up another hill, and wound round into the Foxtown road. At the top of the second hill stood a small brown house, by no means attractive in appearance, being destitute of paint, climbing vine, flowers, or other ornamentation. It had not even the virtue of neatness to recommend it. The gate was off its hinges, and lay in the road. A crazy barn close by had a pitch towards the river, as though from sheer weakness it was inclined to lie down for rest, while the scanty patch of cabbages and beets, the potato hills, few and far between, and the rickety bean-poles, all had a starved and neglected appearance.

This was known as the "Sleeper Place," being occupied by Mrs. Sleeper and the young people, Rebecca and Edward, better known as Becky and Teddy. Inside, the house was not much more attractive than the outside. On the lower floor were four rooms, separated by the entry, from which a flight of stairs, hidden by a door, led to the garret above. On one side was a kitchen, with

a door leading into Mrs. Sleeper's bed-room at the back. On the other side was a sitting-room, with a door leading to a bed-room back of that, known as Becky's room. Teddy's quarters were above, under the roof. The house was scantily furnished with old-fashioned furniture and home-made carpets, all of which had seen their best many years before, and now showed veteran scars of long service.

In the kitchen were two females – Mrs. Sleeper and Hulda Prime. Mrs. Sleeper was a small, slender woman, with a face from which much beauty had faded out, a face which bore but one expression at all times – that of anxious expectation. All else had died out five years before. Then she was a bright, cheerful, active wife, merrily singing over her household cares. Now she was waiting, for time to determine whether she was a wife or a widow.

In '49, when the California gold fever attacked so many New England towns, Captain Cyrus Sleeper was returning from the West Indies with a cargo of sugar and molasses, in the new ship "Bounding Billow," the joint property of himself and Captain Paul Thompson. Touching at Havana, he was made acquainted with the startling news of gold discoveries; and, always impetuous, at once turned the bow of his ship towards California.

A year passed, and Captain Thompson also received startling news. His runaway partner had reached California, disposed of his cargo at fabulous prices, and sent the ship home in charge

of his mate, and had started for the mines. To his partner he remitted the whole amount received for his cargo, – enough to build two ships like the Bounding Billow, – one half of which, being his own, was to be held by his partner for the support of his family until his return.

The captain was astounded. The conduct of his partner was so strange, he believed he must have lost his reason, and never expected to hear any intelligence of him again. Mrs. Sleeper also received a message from her eccentric husband, full of glowing descriptions of quick fortunes made in El Dorado, hopes of speedy return, and bright pictures of the high life they would lead when "his ship came in." Since that time nothing had been heard of Captain Cyrus Sleeper or his fortunes.

The ship was fitted for a second voyage to the West Indies, Mrs. Sleeper, by Thompson's advice, going shares with him in the venture. But it proved disastrous. The ship was wrecked on her return, and Mrs. Sleeper found herself obliged to live on a very small income. Of a very romantic nature, her sailor husband always a hero in her eyes, for a little while she had high hopes of his quick return with an ample fortune, and chatted gaily of the good time coming "when her ship came in." But as time passed, and no message came from over the sea, the smile forsook her lips, the brightness her cheek, and the hope-light of her eyes changed to an eager, searching glance, that told of an unquiet mind and an aching, breaking heart.

She went about her household duties, cooked, scrubbed, and

mended, quietly and silently, but took no pride in her home, no comfort in her children. The house soon showed evidences of neglect. The children, without a mother's sympathy and guidance, were rapidly running to waste.

Just when the money began to give out, Hulda Prime "came to help." Hulda was a distant relative of Cyrus Sleeper, by her own showing, as she was a distant relative of almost everybody in Cleverly. She was somewhere between forty and sixty: it was hard telling her age. It could not be told by her hair, for she had none; nor yet by her teeth, for they were false, or her cheeks, for they were always bright, and had a natural color which some people were wicked enough to say was not natural. She was long-favored, long and lean in body, had a very long face, long nose, and a long chin. She wore a "front," with two auburn ringlets dangling at either end, a very tall white cap, carried herself very erect, and had altogether a solemn and serious demeanor. She left a "relative" to come and help "dear Delia in her troubles;" though in what her help consisted was a puzzle which the good people of Cleverly had never been able to solve. She got her living by "helping." She had no money, but she had a large stock of complaints, so many, that they might have been calendared thus: Monday, rheumatism; Tuesday, cancer; Wednesday, dyspepsia; Thursday, heart disease; Friday, lumbago; Saturday, "spine;" Sunday, neuralgia. Or to vary the monotony, she would start off Monday with "cancer," or some other disease; but the week would contain the whole programme. She was very regular in her

habits – of complaining, and was always taken bad just when she might be of assistance.

This day she was crouched by the fire, her head tied up in a towel, her body slowly rocking to and fro. It was her neuralgia day.

Mrs. Sleeper stood at her wash-tub near the window, her hands busy in the suds, her eyes fixed on the distant waters of the bay, her thoughts away with the ship that never came in. So absorbed was she in her "waiting" dream, that she did not see Captain Thompson, who for the last ten minutes had been puffing up the hill in sight of the window; was not aware of his approach until he stood in the kitchen doorway, with both hands braced against the sides, breathing very hard.

"So, so! Pur – pur – purty capers those young ones of yours are cutting up, Delia Sleeper!"

Mrs. Sleeper turned with a start; Aunt Hulda straightened up with a groan.

"Do you mean Rebecca and Edward, captain? Have they been making any trouble?" said Mrs. Sleeper, with the faintest sign of interest in her voice.

"Trouble, trouble!" shouted the captain, so loud that Aunt Hulda gave a groan, and held her head very hard; "did they ever make anything else? Ain't they the pests of the town? Who or what is safe when they are about? I tell you what it is, Delia, I'm a patient man, a very patient man. I've endured this sort of thing just as long as I mean to. I tell you something's got to be

done." And the captain looked very red, very angry, and very determined.

"I'm sure I try to keep the children out of mischief," faltered Mrs. Sleeper.

"No, you don't. That's just what's the matter. You've no control over them. You don't want to control them. You just let them loose in the town, like a couple of wildcats, seeking whom they may devour. What's the consequence? Look at Brown's melon patch! He couldn't find a sound melon there. Look at my orchard! Despoiled by those barbarians! Here's a sample. To-day I caught them at one of my trees, loaded with plunder; caught them in the act!"

"O, captain! you did not punish them!"

"Punish eels! No; they were too sharp for me. One ran off with my horse, and a purty chase I've had for nothing. The other marched away with my fruit. But I will punish them; be sure of that. Now, Delia, this thing must be stopped; it shall be stopped. I'm a man of my word, and when I say a thing's to be done, it is done."

"I'm sure I'm willing to do anything I can to keep them orderly," began Mrs. Sleeper.

"Now what's the use of your talking so? You know you're not willing to do anything of the kind. You're all bound up in your sorrows. You won't think of the matter again when I'm gone – you know you won't. If you cared for their bringing up, you'd have that boy at school, instead of letting him fatten on other

folks's property, and bring that girl up to work, instead of lettin' her go galloping all over creation on other folks's horses. I tell you, Delia Sleeper, you don't know how to bring up young ones!"

The captain, in his warmth, braced himself against the door sills so energetically that they cracked, and a catastrophe, something like that which occurred when Samson played with the pillars of the temple, seemed imminent.

"P'raps she'd better turn 'em over to you, Cap'n Thompson," growled Aunt Hulda; "you're such a grand hand at bringin' up!"

"Hulda Prime, you jest attend to your own affairs. This is none of your business; so shet up!" shouted the more plain than polite captain.

"Shut up!" retorted Aunt Hulda. "Wal, I never! Ain't you gettin' a leetle *obstroperlous*, cap'n? This here's a free country, and nobody's to hinder anybody's freein' their mind to anybody, even if they are a little up in the world. Shut up, indeed!" And Aunt Hulda, in her indignation, rose from her chair, walked round it, and plumped down again in her old position.

"I don't want any of your interference, Hulda Prime."

"I know you don't. But it's enough to make a horse laugh to see you comin' here tellin' about bringin' up young uns! Brought up your Harry well – didn't yer?"

"Hush, Aunt Hulda; don't bring up that matter now," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"Why not?" said Aunt Hulda, whose neuralgia was working her temper up to a high pitch. "When folks come to other folks's

houses to tell 'em how to train up their children, it's high time they looked to home."

"I brought up my son to obey his father in everything, and there wasn't a better boy in the town."

"I want to know! He was dreadful nice when you had him under your thumb, for you was so strict with him he darsn't say his soul was his own; but he made up for it when he got loose. Sech capers! He made a tom-boy of our Becky, and was jest as full of mischief as he could stick."

"No matter about my son, Hulda Prime; he's out of the way now."

"Yes; cos you wanted to put him to a trade after he'd been through the academy. He didn't like that, and started off to get a college education, and you shut the door agin him, and you locked up your money, and vowed he should starve afore you'd help him. But they do say he's been through Harvard College in spite of yer."

"Hulda Prime, you're a meddlin' old woman," roared the captain, thoroughly enraged, "and it's a pity somebody didn't start you off years ago – hangin' round where you ain't wanted."

"I never hung round your house much – did I, cap'n?" cried Aunt Hulda, with a triumphant grin, which evidently started the neuralgic pains, for she sank back with a groan.

While this passage of tongues was going on inside the house, Miss Becky appeared in the road, mounted on Uncle Ned, who looked rather jaded, as though he had been put to a hard

gallop. Flinging herself from his back she entered the door, when the form of Captain Thompson, braced in the kitchen doorway, – which position he had not forsaken even in the height of debate, – met her eyes. Her first thought was to regain the safe companionship of Uncle Ned; but a desire to know what was going on overcame her sense of danger, and she gently lifted the latch of the door which opened to the garret stairs, and stepped inside. The warlike parties in the kitchen covered her retreat with the clamor of their tongues.

"Now, Delia, I want you to listen to reason," continued the captain, turning from the vanquished spinster to the silent woman, who had kept busily at work during the combat. "You're too easy with them children. They want a strong hand to keep them in line. Now you know I'm a good friend to you and yours; and though Cyrus Sleeper treated me rather shabbily – "

"My gracious! hear that man talk!" blurted out Aunt Hulda. "It's no such thing, and you know it. You made more money out of his Californy speculation with that air ship than you ever made afore in your life."

"Will you be quiet, woman?" roared the captain. "I ain't talkin' to you, and don't want any of your meddlin'."

"Aunt Hulda, don't interrupt, please," said Mrs. Sleeper; "let's hear what the captain has to say."

"Then let him talk sense. The idea of Cyrus Sleeper's ever treating anybody shabby! It's ridikerlous!" growled Aunt Hulda, as she returned to her neuralgic nursing.

"The young ones want a strict hand over 'em," continued the captain, when quiet was restored again. "I'm willing to take part charge of them, if you'll let me. They must be sent to school."

"I can't afford it, captain. I couldn't send 'em last year. You know the money's most gone," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"I know its all gone, Delia. What you've been drawing the last year is from my own pocket. But no matter for that. Drinkwater opens the school Monday. I'll send the children there, and pay the bills. It's time something was done for their education; and I'll be a father to them, as they're not likely to have another very soon."

"Don't say that, don't say that! Cyrus will come back – I know he will."

"If he's alive. But don't be too hopeful. There's been a heap of mortality among the miners; and if he's alive, we should have heard from him afore this. Chances are agin him. So you'd better be resigned. Yes, you'd better give him up, put on mourning for a year, and then look round, for the money's gone."

"Give up my husband!" cried Mrs. Sleeper, with energy. "No, no. He will come back; I feel, I know he will. He would never desert me; and if he died, – O, Heaven, no, no! – if he died, he would find some way to send his last words to me. No, no, don't say give him up. I cannot, I cannot!" and the poor woman burst into tears.

"Wal, I never!" cried Aunt Hulda. "Look round, indeed! Why, it's bigamy, rank bigamy!"

"Well, well," said the captain, quickly, anxious to avoid

another battle, "do as you please about that; but let's give the children a good bringing up. They've got to earn their own living, and the sooner they get a little learning the better."

"The children should go to school, captain, I know," said Mrs. Sleeper; "but I'm afraid they will not take kindly to the change."

"I'll make 'em, then. It's time they were broke, and I flatter myself I'm able to bring 'em under control. But make no interference with my plans. Once begun, they must stick to school. It's for their good, you know."

"Very well, captain; I consent; only be easy with them at first."

"O, I'll be easy enough, never fear, if they mind me; if not, they must take the consequences. So, next Monday fix 'em up, and I'll take 'em over, and talk to Drinkwater."

"I'll have them all ready, captain, and thank you for the trouble you're taking," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"Now, mind! no interference from you or Hulda. If there is – "

"Don't fret yourself about me, cap'n. Mercy knows I've trouble enough of my own. I declare, there's that lumbago comin' on agin," groaned Aunt Hulda.

The captain seemed highly delighted at the prospect of a change in the condition of his enemy, and, with a triumphant smile, backed into the entry.

"Hallo! there's my horse, reeking with sweat. Where is that imp of mischief?" thundered the exasperated captain. "If I catch her – "

"Here I am, cap'n. Clear the coast! Ha, ha, ha! Hooray!"

The voice came from the garret. There was a thundering racket on the stairs, a crash against the door, which flew open, and Becky, seated in an old cradle without rockers, burst into the entry. Tired of listening, she had searched the garret for sport, had dragged this old emblem of infancy from its hiding-place to the head of the stairs, seated herself in it, and, regardless of consequences, started for a slide.

It was a reckless act. As the door flew open, the cradle struck the captain's shins, throwing him backwards, and pitching Becky out of the front door on to the grass. The captain scrambled to his feet, furious with pain and choler. Becky regained hers quickly and started for the barn, the captain in hot pursuit. Another stern chase. The captain soon desisted, mounted his horse, and rode away, while Miss Becky perched herself on the rickety fence, and saluted the captain's ears, as he rode down the hill, with the refrain of the well-known song, "O, dear, what can the matter be?"

CHAPTER III.
MRS. THOMPSON'S CROSS

The captain cantered home in no enviable state of mind. His mission had been successful, in as much as he had gained Mrs. Sleeper's consent to his plan for "tying up" her children. Otherwise he felt unhappy regarding the events of the day. There were still stinging pains in his ankles and back to remind him of Miss Becky's exploit, and the shrill, sarcastic voice of Hulda Prime still rang in his ears. That so miserable a creature as he considered her should have dared to criticise his conduct was peculiarly mortifying to his pride. Aunt Hulda had, indeed, spoken boldly. He was, undoubtedly the greatest man in Cleverly. Senior deacon in the church, moderator at town meetings, referee in all disputes, and general adviser of his fellow-townsmen, he was a man to be treated with respect, a man who would brook no interference with his plans, a man whose opinions must not be combatted, and one whom people did not think it safe to thwart. And this poor old hanger-on at people's firesides had dared to criticise a proceeding which others had not the courage to mention in his presence. And he had not the power to punish her. Poor Aunt Hulda was never thought so much of before by a man as she was by the captain during his homeward ride.

Gloomily he rode into the yard, and consigned Uncle Ned

to the care of Phil Hague, his man-of-all-work, who advanced smiling, to meet him, undeterred by the black looks of his master.

"By me sowl, cap'n, dear, it's a fine lather yez given owld Uncle Ned. Is it fur ye've rode?"

"No," shortly replied the captain.

"Is that so? Thin what's the matter wid the baste? Shure he's not looked so wary loike since – since Master Harry – "

"Shut up, you fool!" thundered the captain. "It's your business to take care of him, and not to ask impertinent questions." And he stamped into the house, muttering, "Am I never to hear the last of that boy?"

Phil scratched his head, and looked after the captain.

"Shure there's an aist wind blowin', an' we'll have to be afther scuddin' under bare poles, jist."

Gloomily the captain stalked through the various sections of his establishment, until he reached the front sitting-room, and found himself in the presence of his wife.

Mrs. Thompson was the queen of Cleverly society. The mention of her name in any company was enough to make the most silent tongue suddenly eloquent. She was plump in person and plump in virtues. Her face was just round and full enough to please everybody. No one had such rosy cheeks as Mrs. Thompson, "at her time of life too!" There was the kindliest light in her grey eyes, and the jolliest puckers about her mouth; and the short gray curls that flourished all over her head formed a perfect crown of beauty – nothing else. Cleverly folks were proud

of her, and well they might be. She was everybody's friend. She not only ministered to the wants of the needy, but she sought them out. She was the first at the bedside of the sick, and the last to give them up, for she was as well skilled in domestic medicine as she was in domestic cooking, and superior in both. She was a wondrous helper, for she knew just where to put her hands, and an enchanting talker, for she never spoke ill of anybody. She was a devout sister of the church, promulgating the true religious doctrines of faith, hope, and charity with no sanctimonious face, but purifying and warming with the incense of good deeds and the sunshine of a life cheerful, hopeful, and energetic. She had her cross to bear – who has not? – but she so enveloped it in the luxuriant branches of the tree of usefulness rooted in her own heart, that its burden lay easy on her broad, matronly shoulders.

On the captain's entrance she was seated in a low rocking-chair, darning one of her husband's socks. She looked up, with a smile upon her face.

"Ah, father! back early to-day!"

"Father!" snapped the captain, as he flung himself upon a sofa. "Why will you insist on calling me by that name? Haven't I repeatedly asked you not to?"

"So you have Paul, so you have; and I've repeatedly disobeyed you," cheerfully answered the good woman. "I didn't mean to; but women are so forgetful! I'll be more careful in future, fath – Dear me, there it is again!"

"There, there! what's the use of talking to you? But I won't

have it. I tell you I'm no father. I won't be a father. When that boy took the reins in his own hands, I cut him out of my heart. I'll never, never own him!"

Mrs. Thompson bit her lips. Evidently the cross was bearing down hard upon her. Only an instant, and the smile came back.

"You rode up from the bridge. Been over to Delia's?"

"Yes, I've been over to Delia's. That woman, and that woman's young ones, will drive me crazy."

"Then I wouldn't go over there, if I were you. Let me be your messenger in future."

"No, marm. I've taken this case into my own hands, and I mean to finish it. When Sleeper disappeared, I told you not to go near them, for I knew that you would be just foolish enough to fix them up so comfortably, she would lead an idle life; and I wasn't going to have anything of the kind going on. She's got to come to hard work, and she might as well commence first as last. Its a mystery to me how she's got along so well as she has."

It was no mystery to Mrs. Thompson. She had been forbidden to go, but not to send; and many and heavy had been the burdens her messengers had carried across the river to the little brown house on the hill.

"But I've settled things now," continued the captain. "Next Monday the young ones go to school."

"Next Monday! No, no; don't send them then!" cried Mrs. Thompson, with a shade of alarm in her manner.

"And why not? I'd like to know. Next Monday the term

begins."

"Yes; but – but hadn't you better wait a few days?"

"Wait? wait? I won't wait a moment after the doors open. Next Monday they go, bright and early."

"Just as you say, Paul," said Mrs. Thompson, with a sigh. "How is Delia? looking well?"

"No; she looks bad. Think she might, with that grumbling old crone fastened on to her."

"Old crone! Why, Paul, whom do you mean?"

"Hulda Prime. She's dropped in there to 'help!' Help make her miserable; that's all she'll do. Plaguy old busybody, meddling in other people's affairs! I wish the town was well rid of her."

"She is rather an encumbrance – that's a fact," quietly replied Mrs. Thompson. "But we are never troubled with her."

"She knows better than to come near me," said the captain, with a wise shake of the head. "Why, she had the impudence to taunt me with having turned my own son out of doors!"

"Indeed!" said his wife, hardly able to conceal a smile.

"Yes, she did; and she'd heard that, spite of me, the boy had gone through college. Plague take her!"

"Indeed! Well, Aunt Hulda never picks her words. She is sometimes very aggravating."

"Aggravating! She's insolent. The idea of her daring to talk so to me! O, if there was only a law to shut the mouths of such meddling old tattlers, I'd spend every cent I have but what I'd lock her up where her voice could never be heard!"

The captain, unable longer to keep quiet, here rose, dashed about the room two or three times, then darted out, and his angry tirade died away in the distance as he made his way to the barn.

Mrs Thompson sat quiet a moment, then burst into such a merry peal of laughter that the Canary in the cage above her head was inspired, and burst into a torrent of song. The audacity of Aunt Hulda seemed to affect Mrs. Thompson far less severely than it did her husband, for that was the cause of her mirth.

Had Captain Thompson really been a bad man, his frequent outbursts of passion might have terrified, and his fierce threats have pained her; but a long acquaintance with the defect in his otherwise good disposition had made these stormy passages too familiar to be dreaded. His one defect – Mrs. Thompson's cross – was obstinacy. Give the man his own way, and he was ready for any good act or work: thwart him in the slightest particular, and he was immovable. And so Mrs. Thompson, like a wise woman, never openly arrayed herself against his wishes or opinions. And yet the captain would have been astonished, had he calmly investigated the matter, to find how seldom he really had his own way. This shrewd woman knowing it was useless to combat his stubborn spirit, was continually setting up safety-rods to attract this destructive fluid where it could do no harm; contriving plans for him to combat, herself triumphing in their downfall, while he exulted in his supposed victory.

Miss Becky's career was a case in point. She had been pained to see and hear of the girl's wild, mischievous pranks, and felt

it was time she should be sent to school. She took occasion one day when, in sight of the window, Becky had climbed up the lightning-rod on the church, and seated herself in a window over the door, to call her husband's attention to the fact, with the remark that "such exercise must be excellent for a girl's constitution." The captain fired up at once, denounced such tomboy tricks, and declared the girl should go to school, or he'd know the reason why.

And so thanks to Mrs Thompson, and not her husband, Becky was to be turned from the error of her ways. The captain was a liberal man; his purse was always open to the demands of his wife. She might cover every bed in the parish with comforters, clothe the poor, and feed the hungry, to her heart's content; he would never stop to count the cost. And so she often managed to repair damages his temper had caused, out of his own purse.

But the man's obstinacy had brought one serious disaster, which she found all her woman's wit necessary to repair. It had driven their only child from his home, and made a breach between father and son which might never be healed.

Harry Thompson, at the age of fifteen, was a leader among the boys of Cleverly. He was brave, skilful, and mischievous. He was looked upon as a hero by his playfellows, whom he could incite to the performance of wonderful gymnastic feats, or to the perpetration of boyish tricks hardly as creditable. Among his enthusiastic admirers was Becky Sleeper, then ten years of age, whom, being a special favorite of his, he took pains to

train in all the sports with which he was familiar. He was then attending the school; no interested student, but very quick and apt to learn, standing fair in his class. The next year he was sent to the academy; and a suddenly-acquired taste for learning so fired his ambitious spirit that at the end of the second year he graduated at the head of his class, with the reputation of being a remarkable scholar. Then, hungry for knowledge, he wanted to go to college. But Captain Thompson had already planned a course for his son. He had book-learning enough; he wanted him to be a practical man. He should go into the yard and learn the trade of a ship-carpenter; in time he could be a builder; and then the son could build, and the father would fit out and send his ships abroad.

The son demurred. The father's obstinacy asserted itself; he could not be made to listen to reason; and the matter ended by the boy's proclaiming his determination to go through college, if he had to scrub the floors to get through, and the father's threat that, if he left home, the doors should be closed against his return.

The boy went. The mention of his name was forbidden in his home by the angry father. He had been gone four years, and the captain seemed as insensible to his welfare as he did when he pronounced his dictum.

But the mother, she had not held her peace for four long years without knowledge of her boy. Snugly tucked away among her treasures were weekly records of her son's progress, in his own handwriting – tender, loving epistles, such as make a mother's heart warm and happy, telling of true growth in manhood's

noblest attributes, and showing in every line the blessed power of a mother's influence.

Despite her cross, Mrs. Thompson was a happy woman, and the championship of her son by Aunt Hulda was a power to make her merry; for she knew how her Harry got through college. He didn't scrub the floors to get through. O, no! Captain Thompson's purse paved the way for a more stately march through the halls of learning.

And so, having had her laugh, Mrs. Thompson called, in a loud voice, —

"Silly!"

Silly, somewhere down in the tale of the kite, answered the summons with a shrill "Yes, marm," and in a few minutes entered the room.

Priscilla York was one of Mrs. Thompson's charity patients – a tall, ungainly, awkward girl, whom, from pity, the good woman had taken into her house, with a desire to teach her a few of the rudiments of housekeeping.

Silly was by no means a promising pupil, her "breaking in" requiring the breaking up of many dishes and the exercise of much patience.

She was abrupt and jerking in her motion, except when she walked; then she seemed afraid of damaging carpets, not having been accustomed to them, and walked on tiptoe, which peculiar footfall caused the heels of her slip-shod shoes to drop with a "clap-clap-clap," as she crossed the oil-cloth on the floor of the

dining-room. Her clothes hung loosely on her, and as she entered the room her arms were stuck stiff at her side, her mouth wide open, and her eyes staring as though she expected to hear some dreadful news.

"Silly," said Mrs. Thompson, "get the covered basket."

"Yes, marm," said Silly, and darted for the door.

"Stop, stop, child; I've not finished."

Silly darted back again.

"I want you to get the covered basket, and take some things over to Mrs. Sleeper."

"Yes marm;" and the girl darted for the door a second time.

"Silly, stop this instant! What in the world are you thinking of?"

"The covered basket, marm; it's in the pantry."

"Silly, when I have finished what I want to say, I will tell you to go."

"Then you don't want the covered basket, marm?"

"Get the covered basket, put in it the ham that was left at dinner, a pair of chickens I cooked this morning, a couple of mince pies, and a loaf of bread. Do you understand?"

"Yes marm. Basket, ham, chickens, mince pie, bread," said Silly, briskly.

"Very well. Those are for Mrs. Sleeper, with my compliments."

"Yes marm. Basket and all?"

"Bring back the basket, of course. Now go – "

"Yes, marm;" and Silly made a third dart doorward.

"Stop, stop, Silly!"

"You told me to go when you said go; and I was a going to go."

"That was my mistake, Silly. I want you to go to the pantry, get a bottle of currant wine, a jar of damson preserves, and a box of sardines. Can you find them all?"

"O, yes, marm. Currant wine, damson preserves, sardines."

"Very well. Be careful in handling things. Those are for Aunt Hulda, with my compliments. Make no mistake, and be sure to tell her I sent them. Now, Silly, go."

Silly started at the word "go" so forcibly that she ran plump against the portly form of the captain, who just then entered.

"Hang it!" roared he; "why don't you see where you are going, stupid?"

"Stupid" stopped not to tell the reason why, but darted by the captain: and soon a commotion among the dishes in the pantry made it evident that Silly was "handling things" none to carefully.

"Where's that crazy thing going now?" muttered the captain, as he stalked to the window.

"On one of my errands, Paul; so don't be inquisitive."

Had he dreamed that Aunt Hulda's defence of his boy had turned his wife's sympathies in her direction, and that there was likely to be a shower of goodies poured into the spinster's lap, he might have been inquisitive, instead of shouting at that particular moment, —

"Hang it! there's that boy again! and with my apples, too! He

shan't escape me this time. No, no." And the captain darted from the room, and out into the road, bare-headed.

Teddy Sleeper had waited two hours, in the woods behind the orchard the return of Becky, supposing that, as she was the leader of the expedition, after decoying the captain to a safe distance, she would return to rescue her follower; for Teddy had not sufficient reliance on his own skill to venture either an attack or a retreat. At last, getting weary, he crept out into the lane, and from there into the main street, and started for home. But as he neared the church he was waylaid by a half a dozen of his cronies, just returning from a game of base ball, and, of course, very hungry. Catching sight of the fruit stowed away in Teddy's jacket, they set up a roar of delight, and surrounded him.

"Hooray! Ted's made a haul!"

"Divy's the thing – hey, Ted?"

"O, come, Ted, don't be mean."

"But they ain't mine; they're Becky's," said Teddy, warding off the snatches at his plunder as best he could with his elbows.

"Becky's – are they? Hooray! She won't care. Divy, Ted. She's the best fellow in town."

Teddy had about made up his mind to unbosom himself to his captors, when he caught sight of the bareheaded captain emerging from the door. A shiver ran through him. Hardly a chance for escape now. Nevertheless he darted round the corner at a lively pace, and down the hill. The disappointed boys, not having seen the captain, but supposing Teddy was attempting to

escape from them, set up a yell, and started in pursuit. But Teddy had made a good start, and fear lent unwonted activity to his legs. So, down the hill they went, Teddy ahead, the boys close at his heels, and the captain dashing on behind.

With such a load as he carried, Teddy could not long keep up his gallant pace, and his pursuers rapidly gained upon him. He was almost to the bridge, and there was Becky cheering and clapping her hands. If he could only reach her, he felt he was safe. With a quick impulse, he drew two apples from his bosom, and threw them over his head. The foremost boy stopped suddenly to pick them up. On a down grade, too! The result was appalling. In an instant he was on the ground, with his companions piled upon him. A pitfall in the path of the irate captain. His ponderous body launched itself upon the heap, and great was the fall thereof. Screams, groans, and dirt filled the air as Teddy reached the bridge. The vanquished picked themselves up as best they could, without a thought of further pursuit, while the conquering *heroes* marched up the hill, to make, in some secure retreat, a fair division of the spoils.

CHAPTER IV.
BECKY SLEEPER'S CHARITY

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," was a precept by no means religiously observed at the little brown house on the hill. Mrs. Sleeper had never been a regular attendant at divine service, even in her happiest days, and, since her peculiar misfortune, had almost entirely neglected the church. A part of the day was regularly spent in poring over the letters of her husband, the effect of which was to set her weeping for the balance. The young people, left to their own devices, amused themselves by pitching "quates" behind the house, playing tag in the barn, or by indulgence in other equally indecorous sports endeavored to wear out the long day. Aunt Hulda generally brought forth from their resting-place at the bottom of her trunk "The Family Physician," or "Every Woman her own Doctor," two standard works for the cure of all diseases, and faithfully consulting them for remedies to meet her infirmities, or, from old habit, took the ponderous family Bible into her lap, and in its pages sought consolation, the Book of Job, however, being the portion which really soothed her perturbed spirit.

On the Sunday following the disaster on the hill, the afflicted spinster, in the sitting-room, was groaning over a treatise on cancer, in "The Family Physician," that disease being the order of

the day in her system of complaints. It was near the middle of the afternoon, and Becky, having exhausted the supply of out-door sports, was lying upon the sofa, and, with a very dissatisfied look upon her face, was watching Aunt Hulda. Teddy, who seldom lost sight of his sister, was flattening his nose against the window-pane.

"Aunt Hulda," said Becky, suddenly, "don't you think Sunday is an awful long day?"

"I do, by hokey!" blurted out Teddy. "Can't get up no fun, nor nothin'. I'd like to go a fishin' first rate; but jest as you git a nibble, long comes some the meetin'-house folks, and begin to talk about breakin' the Sabbath. And that jest scares off all the fish."

"And the fishermen, too, Teddy. My sakes, how you did run last Sunday when Deacon Hill caught you fishing down at the fore side!" said Becky, with a laugh.

"Plague take him! he jest marched off with my line and bait, too," growled Teddy. "It's none of his business, anyhow."

"All days are long to a poor, afflicted creeter," groaned Aunt Hulda. "But when I was a girl of your age, I did think Sunday was as long as six week-days beat into one; but then it's the Lord's day, and I s'pose, after all, we can make it long or short, just as we try to do what he wants us to."

"Well, I'd like to know what he wants me to do, for I can't find out any way to make it short. It's just hateful, and I wish there wasn't any such day," replied Becky, turning restlessly about.

"Why, Rebecca Sleeper, how can you talk so? One of the things he wants folks to do is to go to meetin' regular. You ought to know that well enough."

"Does he?" said Becky, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Seems to me, Aunt Hulda, you don't mind very well."

"Lor, child, I'm a poor, afflicted creeter. He don't expect me to do much but bear my troubles patiently; and I'm sure I do that," said Aunt Hulda, forcing a look of resignation into her face.

"Don't think much of goin' to meetin' anyhow," said Teddy. "They always pokes us up in the gallery, and won't let us go to sleep; and if old Fox, the sexton, ketches a feller firin' spitballs, he jest whacks him on the head."

"Then there are other ways to make the day short – readin' the Bible and other good books."

"Yes; 'Family Physician,' I s'pose," said Teddy. "I jest wish I had Robinson Crusoe: that's a first rate one."

"Then a goin' to see sick folks, and carryin' 'em little dainties, is another; and that makes the day short, I tell you," continued Aunt Hulda. "When I was a helpin' Mrs. Lincoln, years and years ago, she used to say to me Sunday afternoons, 'Hulda, don't you want to clap on your bonnet and run over to the widder Starns with the basket?' or, 'Hulda, don't you want to carry this jelly round to Mr. Peters? He's terrible sick.' And I used to go and go, and never feel a bit tired, because it was charitable work; and Sundays used to go quicker than week-days, and I was glad when they come round again. Now there's poor Mr. York, Silly York's

father; poor man, he's most gone with the consumption; now, if you only had a nice little bit of somethin' good to take over to him, you don't know how good you would feel, and how the time would fly! O, dear, if I was only strong and well! But what's the use of talkin'? Here I've got the rheumatics so I can't walk, and the neuralogy so I can't sit still, and I'm afraid there's a cancer comin' on the end of my tongue, and then I can't talk."

Here Aunt Hulda ran out her tongue, and commenced exploring it with her finger to find a small pimple which had made its appearance that day. Becky lay very quiet on the sofa, watching Aunt Hulda, who, after the examination of her tongue, plunged into "The Family Physician" with anxious interest.

"Did she ever delight in doing good?" thought Becky, as she studied Aunt Hulda's face with renewed interest. "Everybody calls her a nuisance, and everybody laughs at her complaints. She take nice things to sick folks, and feel good in doing it! And she says this is the Lord's day – this long, weary day, – and can be made short and pleasant like the other six! Why, she talks like a minister!"

Aunt Hulda was a new being in the girl's eyes. She began to reverence the afflicted spinster. She lay there so quiet that Teddy looked round in astonishment. His sister had been lying perfectly still for fifteen minutes. Such an occurrence startled him.

"Becky, what's the matter? Sick – hey?"

"No, Teddy," replied Becky, startled in turn; "I'm thinking – that's all."

"Don't do it. 'Twill make you sick – see if it don't."

"I guess not, Teddy," replied Becky, jumping up. "I'm going into the kitchen."

Teddy followed her as she left the room.

"Teddy," said Becky, solemnly, after she had softly closed the kitchen door behind them, "I expect we're awful wicked."

"Do you, though?" said Teddy, with staring eyes. "What for?"

"Because Sunday's such a long day. Didn't you hear what Aunt Hulda said? It's the Lord's day, and we can make it short or long, just as we try to do what he wants us to."

"Well, what's he want us to do?"

"To go to church, and not stay at home and pitch quates."

"How are we goin' to church without clo'es? My elbows are all out; so's my knees. They'd send us home quick, I tell you."

"I suppose they would," replied Becky, thoughtfully. "Well, there's one thing we might do – carry something nice to sick folks."

"We ain't got nothin' nice, and don't know any sick folks," replied matter-of-fact Teddy, who failed to see anything time-shortening in Becky's project.

"We know Mr. York, who's got the consumption."

"Well, we might go and catch some fish and take to him – only I've lost my line."

"No; something better than that, Teddy. Now you run and get a basket. I know what to take."

Teddy went into the wood-shed and soon returned with a very

dilapidated basket.

"That will do nicely. Now let's see what we can find to put into it," said Becky, as she opened the door of the cupboard. "Here's a bottle of currant wine; I guess that's good for consumption; we'll take that. And here's a jar of preserves; they always give them to sick folks; we'll take that. And here's a box of sardines. I don't know about that. Well, we'll take it, any way."

"Why, Becky, these things are what Mrs. Thompson sent to Aunt Hulda," said Teddy, a little alarmed at Becky's proceedings.

"So they are;" and Becky wavered a moment. "No matter; she'll send her some more, I guess. Besides, Aunt Hulda won't care, for we're going to do good with them. There's a pair of chickens, too; but I guess they're most too hearty for sick folks. Now let's be off."

With the basket between them, they crept into the wood-shed, from there into a pasture behind the house, crossed that, climbed a fence, and struck into the Foxtown road. The Yorks lived upon this road, a good mile and a half from Mrs. Sleeper's. The basket was a heavy, unwieldy affair, in which the "good things" bounced about in a very unsatisfactory manner; and the couple "changed hands" many times before they reached their destination.

In answer to Becky's knock, the door was opened by Mrs. York, a short, buxom woman with a very pleasant face.

"Becky Sleeper – of all things! What in the world brought you here? and what have you got there?"

"Thought we'd come over and bring something to Mr. York.

He's sick – ain't he?" answered Becky.

"Why, you good little soul! Come right in; my poor man will be dreadful glad to see you."

Becky and Teddy accepted the cordial invitation, and were ushered into the presence of the "poor man." Mr. York was by no means so far gone as people imagined. True, there were about him symptoms of the dread disease which New England makes a specialty; but he was a very lazy man, and took advantage of any slight cold to house himself and be nursed by his wife. Mrs. York was not an idle woman; she washed, ironed, and scrubbed in the neighborhood, when her husband worked at his trade; the moment he "felt bad" she dropped all outside labor, and gave her attention to him, magnifying his troubles by her sympathy, and thus making a "baby" of a man who was strong enough to support his family, had he the inclination. Of course, in this state of affairs, there was no income, and the active charity of Cleverly had a loud call in that direction.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.