ARTHUR TIMOTHY SHAY

WHO ARE HAPPIEST? AND OTHER STORIES

Timothy Arthur

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Who Are Happiest? and Other Stories:

Содержание

T. S. Arthur
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INTRODUCTION

In this volume, the stories are not illustrative of childish experiences. Most of the actors are men and women,—and the trials and temptations to which they are subjected, such as are experienced in mature life. Their object is to fix in the young mind, by familiar illustrations, principles of action for the future. While several of the volumes in this series will be addressed to children as children, others, like this one, will be addressed to them as our future men and women, toward which estate they are rapidly progressing, and in which they will need for their guidance all things good and true that can be stored up in their memories.

WHO ARE HAPPIEST?

"What troubles you, William?" said Mrs. Aiken, speaking in a tone of kind concern to her husband, who sat silent and moody, with his eyes now fixed upon the floor, and now following the forms of his plainly-clad children as they sported, full of health and spirits, about the room.

It was evening, and Mr. Aiken, a man who earned his bread by the sweat of his brow, had, a little while before, returned from his daily labour.

No answer was made to the wife's question. A few minutes went by, and then she spoke again:

"Is any thing wrong with you, William?"

"Nothing more than usual," was replied. "There's always something wrong. The fact is, I'm out of heart."

"William!"

Mrs. Aiken came and stood beside her husband, and laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

The evil spirit of envy and discontent was in the poor man's heart,—this his wife understood right well. She had often before seen him in this frame of mind.

"I'm as good as Freeman; am I not?"

"Yes, and a great deal better, I hope," replied Mrs. Aiken.

"And yet he is rolling in wealth, while I, though compelled to toil early and late, can scarcely keep soul and body together."

"Hush, William! Don't talk so. It does you no good. We have a comfortable home, with food and raiment,—let us therewith be contented and thankful."

"Thankful for this mean hut! Thankful for hard labour, poor fare, and coarse clothing!"

"None are so happy as those who labour; none enjoy better health than they who have only the plainest food. Do you ever go hungry to bed, William?"

"No, of course not."

"Do you or your children shiver in the cold of winter for lack of warm clothing?"

"No; but"–

"William! Do not look past your real comforts in envy of the blessings God has given to others. Depend upon it, we receive all of this world's goods the kind Father above sees best for us to have. With more, we might not be so happy as we are."

"I'll take all that risk," said Mr. Aiken. "Give me plenty of money, and I'll find a way to largely increase the bounds of enjoyment."

"The largest amount of happiness, I believe, is ever to be found in that condition wherein God had placed us."

"Then every poor man should willingly remain poor!"

"I did not say that, William: I think every man should seek earnestly to improve his worldly affairs—yet, be contented with his lot at all times; for, only in contentment is there happiness, and this is a blessing the poor may share equally with the rich.

Indeed, I believe the poor have this blessing in larger store. You, for instance, are a happier man than Mr. Freeman."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"I am, then. Look at his face. Doesn't that tell the story? Would you exchange with him in every respect?"

"No, not in *every* respect. I would like to have his money."

"Ah, William! William!" Mrs. Aiken shook her head. "You are giving place in your heart for the entrance of bad spirits. Try to enjoy, fully, what you have, and you will be a far happier man than Mr. Freeman. Your sleep is sound at night."

"I know. A man who labours as hard as I do, can't help sleeping soundly."

"Then labour is a blessing, if for nothing else. I took home, to-day, a couple of aprons made for Mrs. Freeman. She looked pale and troubled, and I asked her if she were not well."

"'Not very,' she replied. 'I've lost so much rest of late, that I'm almost worn out.'

"I did not ask why this was; but, after remaining silent for a few moments, she said—

"'Mr. Freeman has got himself so excited about business, that he sleeps scarcely three hours in the twenty-four. He cares neither for eating nor drinking; and, if I did not watch him, would scarcely appear abroad in decent apparel. Hardly a day passes that something does not go wrong. Workmen fail in their contracts, prices fall below what he expected them to be, and agents prove unfaithful; in fact, a hundred things occur

to interfere with his expectations, and to cloud his mind with disappointment. We were far happier when we were poor, Mrs. Aiken. There *was* a time when we enjoyed this life. Bright days! —how well are they remembered! Mr. Freeman's income was twelve dollars a week; we lived in two rooms, and I did all our own work. I had fewer wants then than I have ever had since, and was far happier than I ever expect to be again on this side of the grave.'"

Just then a cry was heard in the street.

"Hark!" exclaimed Mr. Aiken.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" The startling sound rose clear and shrill upon the air.

Mr. Aiken sprang to the window and threw it open.

"Mr. Freeman's new building, as I live!"

Mr. Aiken dropped the window, and catching up his hat, hurriedly left the house.

MR. AIKEN'S RETURN FROM THE FIRE.

It was an hour ere he returned. Meanwhile the fire raged furiously, and from her window, where she was safe from harm,

Mrs. Aiken saw the large new factory, which the rich man had just erected, entirely consumed by the fierce, devouring element. All in vain was it that the intrepid firemen wrought almost miracles of daring, in their efforts to save the building. Story after story were successively wrapped in flames, until, at length, over fifty thousand dollars worth of property lay a heap of black and smouldering ruins.

Wet to the skin, and covered with cinders, was Mr. Aiken when he returned to his humble abode, after having worked manfully, in his unselfish efforts to rescue a portion of his neighbour's property from destruction.

"Poor Freeman! I pity him from my very heart!" was his generous, sympathising exclamation, as soon as he met his wife.

"He is insured, is he not?" inquired Mrs. Aiken.

"Partially. But even a full insurance would be a poor compensation for such a loss. In less than two weeks, this new factory, with all its perfect and beautiful machinery, would have been in operation. The price of goods is now high, and Mr. Freeman would have cleared a handsome sum of money on the first season's product of his mill. It is a terrible disappointment for him. I never saw a man so much disturbed."

"Poor man! His sleep will not be so sound as yours, to-night, William."

"Indeed it will not."

"Nor, rich as he is, will he be as happy as you, to-morrow."

"If I were as rich as he is," said Mr. Aiken, "I would not fret

myself to death for this loss. I would, rather, be thankful for the wealth still left in my possession."

Mrs. Aiken shook her head.

"No, William, the same spirit that makes you restless and discontented now, would be with you, no matter how greatly improved might be your external condition. Mr. Freeman was once as poor as you are. Do you think him happier for his riches? Does he enjoy life more? Has wealth brought a greater freedom from care? Has it made his sleep sweeter? Far, very far from it. Riches have but increased the sources of discontent."

"This is not a necessary consequence. If Mr. Freeman turn a blessing into a curse, that is a defect in his particular case."

"And few, in this fallen and evil world, are free from this same defect, William. If wealth were sought for unselfish ends, then it would make its possessor happy. But how few so seek riches! It is here, believe me, that the evil lies."

Mrs. Aiken spoke earnestly, and something of the truth that was in her mind, shed its beams upon the mind of her husband.

"You remember," said she smiling, "the anecdote of the rich man of New York, who asked a person who gave utterance to words of envy towards himself—'Would you,' said he, 'take all the care and anxiety attendant upon the management of my large estates and extensive business operations, merely for your victuals and clothes?' 'No, indeed, I would not,' was the quick answer. '*I get no more*,' said the rich man, gravely. And it was the truth, William. They who get rich in this world, pass up through

incessant toil and anxiety; and, while they *seem* to enjoy all the good things of life, in reality enjoy but little. They get only their victuals and clothes. I have worked for many rich ladies, and I do not remember one who appeared to be happier than I am. And I am mistaken if your experience is not very much like my own."

One evening, a few days after this time, Aiken came home from his work. As he entered the room where his wife and children sat, the former looked up to him with a cheerful smile of welcome, and the latter gathered around him, filling his ears with the music of their happy voices. The father drew an arm around one and another, and, as he sat in their midst, his heart swelled in his bosom, and warmed with a glow of happiness.

Soon the evening meal was served—served by the hands of his wife—the good angel of his humble home. William Aiken, as he looked around upon his smiling children, and their true-hearted, even-tempered, cheerful mother, felt that he had many blessings for which he should be thankful.

"I saw something, a little while ago, that I shall not soon forget," said he, when alone with his wife.

"What was that, William?"

"I had occasion to call at the house of Mr. Elder, on some business, as I came home this evening. Mr. Elder is rich, and I have often envied him; but I shall do so no more. I found him in his sitting-room, alone, walking the floor with a troubled look on his face. He glanced at me with an impatient expression as I entered. I mentioned my business, when he said abruptly and

rudely—

"'I've no time to think of that now.'

"As I was turning away, a door of the room opened, and Mrs. Elder and two children entered.

"'I wish you would send those children up to the nursery,' he exclaimed, in a fretful half-angry voice. 'I'm in no humour to be troubled with them now.'

"The look cast upon their father by those two innocent little children, as their mother pushed them from the room, I shall not soon forget. I remembered, as I left the house, that there had been a large failure in Market street, and that Mr. Elder was said to be the loser by some ten thousand dollars—less than a twentieth part of what he is worth. I am happier than he is to-night, Mary."

"And happier you may ever be, William," returned his wife, "if you but stoop to the humble flowers that spring up along your pathway, and, like the bee, take the honey they contain. God knows what, in external things, is best for us; and he will make either poverty or riches, whichsoever comes, a blessing, if we are humble, patient and contented."

DICK LAWSON, AND THE YOUNG MOCKING-BIRD

"Dick!"

"Sir."

"I want a young mocking-bird. Can't you get me one?"

"I d'no, sir."

"Don't you think you could try?"

"I d'no, sir. P'r'aps I might."

"Well, see if you can't. I'll give you half a dollar for one."

"Will you? Then I'll try."

And off Dick started for the woods, without stopping for any further words on the subject.

The two individuals introduced are a good-natured farmer in easy circumstances, and a bright boy, the son of a poor woman in the neighbourhood.

As Dick Lawson was hurrying away for the woods, his mind all intent upon finding a nest of young mocking-birds, and despoiling it, he met a juvenile companion, named Henry Jones.

"Come, Harry," said he, in an animated voice, "I want you to go with me."

"Where are you going?" asked the friend.

"I am going to look for a mocking-bird's nest."

"What for?"

"To get a young one. Mr. Acres said he would give me half a dollar for a young mocking-bird."

"He did?"

"Yes, he did so!" was the animated reply.

"But don't he know that it's wrong to rob bird's nests!"

"If it had been wrong, Harry, Mr. Acres wouldn't have asked me to get him a bird. He knows what is right and wrong, as well as anybody about here."

"And so does Mr. Milman, our Sunday-school teacher; and he says that it is wicked to rob bird's nests. You know he has told us that a good many times."

"But Mr. Acres knows what is right as well as Mr. Milman, and if it had been wrong, he'd never have asked me to get him a bird. And then, you know, he says he will give me half a dollar for a single one."

"I wouldn't touch a bird's nest for ten dollars," rejoined Henry Jones, warmly.

"I would then," replied Dick, from whose mind the promised reward had, for the time, completely dispelled every tender impression received both from his mother, who had been very careful of her child, and his teacher at the Sunday-school. "But come," he added, "you'll go with me, anyhow."

"Not, if you are going to rob a bird's nest," firmly responded Henry. "It is wicked to do so."

"Wicked! I don't see any thing so very wicked about it. Mr. Acres is a good man, so everybody says, and I know he wouldn't

tell me to do a wicked thing."

"I'm sure it is wicked," persevered Henry Jones, "for isn't it taking the poor little birds from their mother? Don't you think it would be wicked for some great giant to come and carry your little sister away off where you could never find her, and shut her up in a cage, and keep her there all her life?"

"No, but birds are not little children. It's a very different thing. But you needn't talk, Harry; for it's no use. If you'll go along, you shall have half the money I get for the bird—if not, why, I'll go myself and keep the whole of it."

"I wouldn't go with you for a hundred dollars," said Harry half-indignantly, turning away.

"Then I'll go myself," was Dick Lawson's sneering reply, as he sprang forward and hurried off to the woods.

He did not, however, feel very easy in mind, although he attempted first to whistle gayly, and then to sing. The remonstrance of Henry Jones had its effect in calling back previous better feelings, awakened by the precepts of a good mother and the instructions of a judicious Sabbath-school teacher. To oppose these, however, were the direct sanction of Mr. Acres, towards whom he had always been taught to look with respect, and the stimulating hope of a liberal reward. These were powerful incentives—but they could not hush the inward voice of disapprobation, that seemed to speak in a louder and sterner tone with every advancing step. Still, this voice, loud as it was, could not make him pause or hesitate. Onward he pursued his

way, and soon entered the woods and old fields he had fixed in his mind as the scene of his operations.

An hour's diligent search ended in the discovery of a nest, in which were two young ones, with the mother bird feeding them. This sight softened Dick's heart for a moment, but the strong desire, instantly awakened, to possess the prize for which he had been seeking, caused him to drive off the old bird, who commenced fluttering about the spot, uttering cries and showing signs of deep distress. These, although he could not help feeling them, did not cause him to desist. In a few moments he had one of the birds safely in his possession, with which he bounded off in great delight.

"Well, Dick, have you got my bird?" said Mr. Acres, as Dick came puffing and blowing into his presence.

"Yes, indeed!" returned Dick with a broad smile of pleasure, presenting the bird he had abstracted from its warm, soft nest.

"You are a fine smart boy, Dick, and will make a man one of these days!" said Mr. Acres, patting Dick on the head encouragingly. Then, taking the bird, he toyed with it for a while fondly—fed it, and finally placed it in a cage. The promised half-dollar, which was promptly paid to the lad, made him feel rich. As he was about leaving the house of Mr. Acres, the latter called to him:

"Look here, Dick, my fine fellow, don't you want a dog? Here's Rover, the very chap for you."

"May I have Rover?" eagerly asked Dick, his eyes glistening

with delight.

"Yes. I've more dogs now than I want."

"He fights well!" ejaculated Dick, surveying the dog proudly. As he did so, the animal, seeing himself noticed, walked up to Dick, and rubbed himself against the lad familiarly.

"He'll whip any dog in the neighbourhood," said Mr. Acres.

"And you'll give him to me?"

"Oh, yes. I've got too many dogs now."

"Here, Rover! Here, Rover! Here! Here! Here!" cried Dick in an animated tone, starting off. The dog followed quickly, and in a few moments both were out of sight.

"A smart chap that," remarked Mr. Acres to himself, as Dick bounded away. "He'll make something before he dies, I'll warrant."

The possession of the dog and half-dollar, especially the latter, were strongly objected to by Dick's mother.

"How could you, my son, think of robbing a poor bird of her little young ones?" said she seriously and reprovingly.

"But, mother, Mr. Acres wanted me to get him a bird, and of course I could not say 'no.' What would he have thought of me?"

"You never should do wrong for any one."

"But if it had been so very wrong, Mr. Acres never would have asked me to do it, I know," urged Dick.

Mrs. Lawson would have compelled her son to take back the money he had received, if almost any other person in the village but Mr. Acres had been concerned. But he was well off, and

influential; and, moreover, was her landlord; and, though she was behindhand with her rent, he never took the trouble to ask for it. The dog, too, would have been sent back if any one but Mr. Acres had given it to her son. As it was, she contented herself with merely reprimanding Dick for robbing the bird's nest, and enjoining on him not to be guilty of so cruel an act again.

About three days after this event, Dick, accompanied by Rover—now his inseparable companion—met his young friend, Henry Jones, who had with him his father's large house-dog, Bose.

"Whose dog is that?" asked Henry.

"He's mine," replied Dick.

"Yours!"

"Be sure he is."

"Why that is Mr. Acres's Rover."

"Not now he isn't. Mr. Acres gave him to me."

"What did he give him to you for?"

"For getting him a young mocking-bird."

"I thought he promised you half-a-dollar?"

"So he did; and what is more, gave it to me, and Rover into the bargain."

"Well, I wouldn't have robbed a bird's nest for a dozen Rovers," said Henry Jones, warmly.

"Wouldn't you, indeed?" returned Dick, with a sneer.

"No, I would not. It's wicked."

"Oh, you're very pious! But Rover can whip your Bose,

anyhow."

"No, he can't, though," replied Henry quickly, who could not bear to hear his father's faithful and favourite old dog's courage called in question.

"Yes, but he can, ten times a day. There, Rover! There, *sck!—sck!—sketch him*!" At the same time pushing Rover against Bose.

Both dogs growled low, and showed their teeth, but that was all.

"Rover's afraid to touch him!" said Henry, a good deal excited.

"No, he is not, though!" returned Dick, his face glowing with interest; and, lifting up the forefeet of Rover, he threw him full against old Bose, who received the onset with a deep growl and a strong impression of his teeth on Rover.

This brought on the battle. Bose was nine or ten years old, and somewhat worn down by age and hard service, while Rover had numbered but two years, and was full of fire and vigor. Still the victory was not soon decided. During the fight, each of the boys entered into the spirit of the contest almost as much as the dogs. First one would interfere to secure for his favourite the victory, and then the other, until, at last, Dick struck Henry; and then they went at it likewise, and fought nearly as long, and certainly with as much desire to injure each other, as did the dogs themselves. The result was that both Henry and Bose had to yield, and then the parties separated, indulging against each other bitter and angry feelings. But with Dick there was an emotion of cruel delight at having triumphed over his friend. As he was crossing a field, on

his way home, he met Mr. Acres.

"Why, what's the matter with you and Rover?" the farmer asked.

"Rover's had a fight," replied Dick.

"Ah! Who with?"

"Mr. Jones's Bose."

"Well, which whipped?"

"Rover, of course," replied Dick, with a smile of triumph; "and I can make him whip any thing."

"You're a keen chap, Dick," said Mr. Acres, patting the boy on the head, "and are going to make a man one of these days, I see plainly enough. So Rover whipped. I knew there was prime stuff in him."

"There isn't another such a fellow in these 'ere parts," was Dick's proud answer.

"But *you* look a little the worse for wear, as well as Rover. Have you been fighting, too?"

Dick held down his head for a moment, and then looking up into Mr. Acres's face, said—

"Yes, sir," in rather a sheepish way.

"Ah! well, who have you been fighting with?"

"With Harry Jones. He didn't want to give Rover fair play; and once, when he had Bose down, he kicked him."

"And then you kicked him for kicking your dog?"

"Yes, sir."

"That was right. Never permit a friend to be imposed upon.

And after that you had a regular fight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which whipped?"

"I gave him a bloody nose; and shouldn't wonder if he had a black eye into the bargain. And what is more, made him cry 'enough.'"

"That was right. Never fight but in a good cause, and then be sure to whip your man."

"It'll take a smarter boy than Harry Jones to whip me," said Dick proudly.

"And you think Rover can whip any thing about here?"

"Yes, indeed. And I'm going to make him do it, too."

"You'd better not try him against Markland's old Nero."

"He'll whip him in ten minutes."

"I'm not so sure of that. Nero is a great deal bigger and stronger."

"I don't care if he is. I'm learning Rover a trick that'll make him whip a dog twice his size."

"What is that?"

Dick called Rover, and the dog came up to him wagging his tail.

"Give us your paw," said the boy, in a tone of authority.

The dog instantly lifted one of his forefeet, which Dick took in his hand, and began to squeeze gently at first, and then, by degrees, harder and harder, ejaculating all the while, in a quick distinct tone—"Leg him! leg him! leg him!" until the dog, from

first indicating signs of pain, began to whine, and then to yell out as if in agony. At this, Dick dropped the foot, and looked up into the farmer's face.

"Well, Dick, what does all that mean?" asked Mr. Acres.

"I'm learning him to catch hold of the foot," replied the boy.

"The mischief you are!"

"Yes, sir. And when he's fairly up to it, he can whip any dog, if he's as big as an elephant."

"But can you learn him?"

"I made him catch Jones's Bose by the foot this morning, and it would have done your heart good to have heard him yell. If he isn't lame for a month, then I don't know any thing about it."

"There's no fear of you, I see," was Mr. Acres's encouraging reply to this, again patting Dick on the head.

In about two weeks from that time it was pretty well known through the neighbourhood that Dick Lawson had given out that he could make his Rover whip Markland's Nero, a noble animal that had never been matched by any dog around. Markland's son felt his pride in his dog touched at this, and challenged Dick to a battle. The time was set, and the place, a neighbouring field, chosen. Old and young seemed to take an interest in the matter, and when the time arrived, and Dick appeared on the ground with his dog, there were assembled, men and boys, at least one hundred persons, and among the rest, Mr. Acres, who began to feel somewhat drawn towards his protegé Dick.

CRUEL SPORT.

The two dogs were brought forward by the two lads, whose parents knew nothing of the affair, and by pushing them against,

and throwing them upon each other, irritated and angered them until they finally went to work in real earnest, greatly to the delight of the lookers-on. Rover fought bravely, but he was evidently no match for his larger and stronger antagonist, who tore him savagely, while he seemed unable to penetrate Nero's thick yielding skin. The shouts that arose from the group around were all in favour of Nero, who was a general favourite—as he was one of those large, peaceable, benevolent fellows, belieing his name, whom all liked, while there was something of the churl and savage about Rover, that caused him to have but few friends.

The contest had waged about ten minutes, fiercely, and Rover was evidently getting "worsted," when Dick, who had been constantly encouraging his dog, stooped close to his ear, and spoke something in a low, quick, energetic tone.

Instantly Rover crouched down, and darting forward, seized the forepaw of Nero in his mouth, and commenced gnawing it eagerly. The noble animal, thus unexpectedly and basely assailed, found the pain to which he was suddenly subjected so great as to take away all power of resistance. He would not utter a cry, but sat down, and permitted the other dog to gnaw away at his tender foot without a single sign of suffering. As the cry of pain, the dog's "enough," was to terminate the battle, the fine fellow was permitted thus to suffer for several minutes, before the bystanders came forward and pulled Dick Lawson's dog off. Nero would have died before a sound could have been extorted from him.

As Nero had not cried "enough," Bob Markland contended afterwards that his dog had not been whipped, to settle which difference of opinion he and Dick had several hard battles, in which the latter, like his dog, always came off the victor. The upshot of all these contests was, the expulsion of Dick from the Sabbath-school, into which he carried the bickerings engendered through the week. Another reason for his expulsion was the frequency with which he played truant, and of his having, in several instances, enticed other boys away from the school for the same purpose.

Except Mr. Acres, nearly every man, woman and child in the neighbourhood sincerely disliked, and some actually hated Dick Lawson, for there was hardly a family some member of which had not been annoyed by him in one form or another. But Mr. Acres liked the spirit of the lad, as well as his thorough independence in regard to the opinion of others.

This man, who had first thrown temptation into the lad's way, and encouraged him to persevere in a conduct which nearly all condemned, was not a wilfully bad man. By most people he was called a good-hearted, benevolent person. The truth was, he was not a wise man. When young, he had indulged in such amusements as catching young birds, fighting dogs and cocks, and attending horse-races, and all the exciting scenes to which he could get access. But none of these things corrupted him so far as to make him a decidedly bad man in the community. As he grew up, he gradually laid aside his boyish follies; saved up his

money; bought himself a small farm, and, in time, became quite a substantial man, so far as worldly goods were concerned.

Contrasted with himself were several lads whose parents had been exceedingly strict with them, and who had, as they grew up, shaken off the trammels of childhood and youth, run into wild extravagances of conduct, and some into wicked and vicious habits, from which they were never reclaimed. Comparing his own case with theirs, his short-sighted conclusion was that boys ought to be allowed as much freedom as possible, and this was why he encouraged Dick, who was an exceedingly bright lad, in the course he had been so willing to pursue. He knew nothing at all of the different hereditary tendencies to evil that exist in the mind. His observation had never led him to see how two persons, raised in precisely the same manner, would turn out very differently—the one proving a good, and the other a bad citizen. His knowledge of human nature, therefore, never for a moment caused him to suspect, that in encouraging a feeling of cruelty in Dick Lawson, he might be only putting blood upon the tongue of a young lion—that there might be in his mind hereditary tendencies to evil, which encouragement to rob a bird's nest, or to set two dogs to fighting, by one occupying his position and influence, might cause to become so active as to ultimately make him a curse to society.

And such, in a year or two, Dick seemed becoming. He had in that time, although but fourteen years of age, got almost beyond his mother's control. His dog and himself were the terror of

nearly all the dogs and boys in the neighbourhood, for both were surly, quarrelsome, and tyrannical. Even Mr. Acres had found it necessary to forbid him to appear on his premises. Rover having temporarily lamed, time after time, every one of his dogs, and Dick having twice beaten two of his black boys, farm-hands, because of some slight offence. To be revenged on him for this, he robbed a fine apricot-tree of all its fruit, both green and ripe, on the very night before Mr. Acres had promised to send a basket full, the first produced in the neighbourhood that spring, to a friend who was very much esteemed by him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.