

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. "The Good Son." *Juvenile Miscellany* [edited by Lydia M. Child] (January 1829): 217-29.

The Good Son.

Mr. William Smith was a respectable merchant in Boston. He had two children, William and Mary; whom he used, in sport, to call his little King and Queen, after William and Mary, who once reigned in England.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Smith were wise and good people; and though they were very rich, and had but these two children, they were not treated with any improper indulgence, for having but two, Mr. Smith said, he could not afford to spoil them. Mr. Smith was engaged in extensive business; his property was, of course, at risk. After a long run of prosperity, he met with severe losses, and a failure was the consequence. He had so carefully managed his affairs, that he found, by giving up all his property, he could pay all his debts. He did not hesitate. His beautiful house in town— his country-seat— all his furniture— his horses and carriages, and every luxury that had been suitable to his prosperity, was disposed of. He determined again to enter into business; and in order to do this, he found it necessary to go to Europe, to remain for two or three years.

It was decided that Mrs. Smith should, in the mean time, go with her children to a neat cottage in Brookline, where they might live with great economy, till Mr. Smith's return. William had been for a year at one of the best, and of course, most expensive schools in the country; and Mr. Smith deeply regretted the necessity of withdrawing him from it. William's term at school was to expire on the last day of September. Mr. Smith was to sail for Europe on the previous 15th; consequently he did not expect to see his boy again. On the evening of the 14th, he was sitting in his rocking chair, looking in the fire, and seeming very sad, when little Mary took his hand, and said, "Do not let us be so dismal yet, father— you don't go till to-morrow."

"Ah, my dear Mary, you are at a happy age; you cannot realize any evil that will not come till to-morrow."

"But I can realize good, papa, that will not come till a great many to-morrows are past. I am all the time thinking how happy we shall be when you get home again, and we are back in our own house, and Willie is here, and you call us your King and Queen again."

But her father was too melancholy to be cheered even by that sweetest music to a parent's ear— the happy tones of his child's voice; he threw his handkerchief over his face, and remained silent. Little Mary placed her bench beside him, and sat down close to him, took his hand, and laid her smooth, warm cheek on it. After they had continued thus for some minutes, her father seemed to feel her tenderness, he removed the handkerchief from his face, took her on his knee, and kissing her, exclaimed, "Oh, my dear children, if it were not for you I could bear my misfortunes like a man!" At this moment, Mrs. Smith entered the parlor with a letter in her hand, and gave it to her husband. "I cannot read letters now," he said, and threw the packet on the table—"Then I will read it to you," replied his wife. "It is from Mr. Norton; and I believe contains one from William." Mr. Norton was William's teacher, and a particular friend of Mr. Smith. Mrs. Smith read aloud his letter, which was as follows:

“My dear friend, I enclose you a letter from our boy, which I have with difficulty persuaded him to write—like most boys, his tongue moves much more readily than his pen; and besides, I believe on this occasion he felt a little modesty, on the score of being the hero of his own tale—you will perceive that I kept from him as long as I could the news of your misfortune. He is a noble boy, my dear friend; and I am sure you must think the loss of fortune not worth minding, while heaven spares you such a child—you must not take him from me; I shall stand father to him in your absence. It will cost me little to supply all his wants; as freely as I give, so freely would I receive, if my child needed your kindness. William is an honor to my school—I cannot spare him. Never have I known a boy, of ten years of age, make such progress. God grant you a prosperous voyage, and safe return.

Yours very sincerely,

R. Norton

“There, Father, now you really smile, for all you are going tomorrow,” said little Mary.

“I have reason to smile, indeed, my dear child,” replied her father; “but now let us see what William says; poor little god, he is no great letter writer.” Mrs. Smith opened his letter, and taking from it a small roll in a white paper, she laid it on the table and proceeded to read as follows—but before giving the letter, we must beg our readers not to expect an elegant epistle. Writing a letter is a great task to most boys; and William disliked it as much as any child I ever knew. I have seen him sit for half an hour, biting his pen, and knitting his brow, and looking in deep distress, — when if he had only let his pen tell what his tongue would have spoken, he would have written a very agreeable letter, without any trouble. On this occasion however, he had a good deal to say, and the letter was written with much more ease than usual; so that on the whole this is rather a favorable specimen of his composition. But here it is, to speak for itself:

“Dear Father, — I am well, and very happy; and so I hope are Mother and Queen Mary; at least, I am very happy, only when I am thinking about your going so far away; but I have not much time for that, — I have so many lessons to get. When I go to bed I always think of you, and I should then feel very unhappy, but I fall to sleep so quick— I am sure it is not because I may tell you that I get on famously in all my studies, except my Latin, and I do tolerably well in that. I really do try, but it is awful hard; I think Greek would be easier. I am glad Mary is a girl, because she wont have to be plagued with learning Latin. Mr. Norton is very, *very* kind to me; and if you were not my father, I believe I should love him as well as I do you. I felt very bad when I heard you had sold our house and all of the furniture, though I could not think of any thing in particular that I cared much about, but the picture of Burgoyne’s surrender, and my crickets, that we used to call our thrones, and sit upon every evening, each side of Mother, while she told us a story. Oh, what good times we had! As soon as I grow up, I am determined to buy the picture back again, on account of grandfather’s having been at the battle of Saratoga, and having told me all about it.”

It was evident William had proceeded thus far very glibly; but here it appeared he had stopped, — had got his pen mended, — and had started again with more difficulty.

“My dear father, I have been thinking a very long time how I shall ask you to accept some money from me, but Mr. Norton says it in time my letter was finished, — and so I have written it plain out. It seems so strange for me, who have always had presents from you, to give

you any thing. I never knew before how pleasant it was to give; I should think every body would give away all they had to spare. Mr. Norton says I must tell you how I came by my money. It is just two months since he told me you had failed; and explained to me what failing was. I cried a great deal; not because we should not be rich any more, — for I don't care a fig about that; but Mr. Norton told me you were afraid you should not be able to pay your debts, and that I knew was dreadful; for you have talked to me so much about the shame of contracting debts which could not be paid, that I knew how you would feel. It seemed to me that I could bear any thing better than the thought of you having to be ashamed; and so when I went to bed, I lay awake till I hit on my plan— and, the next morning, I asked Mr. Norton if he did not want somebody to do Steve Summer's work in the garden. Steve ran away last week, and went to sea. Mr. Norton said he did; and he did not know where to look for another boy. Then I asked him if he would hire me; Mr. Norton laughed and said he was afraid I could not do the work. 'But, Sir,' says I, 'wont you please to let me try?' 'Why what do you want to work for?' Says he. So I had to tell him that I wanted to help you pay your debts, father— then he stroked my head, and I thought he was going to consent; but he said you have a great many hard lessons to get, William; and all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. 'But, I told him, if it made Jack a dull boy, it should not make one of Will; and besides, I would *call* it my play and that would do just as well; and then he was so kind as to say he would hire me, if I would take my play-time, and would not slight any of my lessons.

From the first, I could weed full as well as Steve; but the hoeing was pretty hard, — and the first week I blistered my hands; but I did not let any body know it, and they soon hardened; and now they are worth something, I can tell you, father. At first, Bob Shaw and Sam Rogers were mad, because I would not go and play with them as usual; and once they called me 'grub-worm,' and made fun of me. Mr. Norton overheard them, and he told them what I was working for, and then they both came to me, and said they were very sorry; and ever since they help me, so that I can get done in time to play a little. They are capital fellows; and I hope their fathers will fail, so I can pay them for it. Mr. Norton says I must tell you that I have fairly earned the ten dollars, — that he should have been obliged to pay it to somebody else, if he had not to me; and he says I must tell you, I am a much neater workman than Steve. I hope you wont think I mean to brag father. It was very lucky for me, that it was summer time, because wages are at the highest then. I wonder people don't always prefer to work in the summer, on that account.

I should like, sir, if you please, that you should pay Mr. Reed's bill out of this money; because he has given me many a ride in his milk-cart, and because of poor little Harry Reed; for you know when he comes from the deaf and dumb asylum, Mr. Reed means to have him learn to paint, if he can afford it; but he says it costs a '*master sight*,' — I suppose he means a large sum of money. Oh! I am very glad now, that the meeting house Harry drew for me was not framed, for then you would have to sell it. I am afraid, my dear father, you wont have time to read this long letter— if you have not, you can take it, and read it on board ship, where, I suppose, you will have plenty of leisure, I did not know that I could write such a long letter. Give my love to dear mother, and queen Mary; and tell Mary that I am very glad she is going to have a garden at Brookline; for now I can advise her about it, and work in it too, — that is, when I am at home. My dear father, I shall try to do my duty, when you are gone; and every morning and every night, I shall pray to God to bless you. I used to forget my prayers sometimes, when I was a little boy; but now I never forget them, — how can I, when I have so much to ask of my Heavenly Father?

After all, it is not so very hard to write a letter, when you have plenty to say. Good Bye, my dear, *dear* father.

Your ever affectionate son,

William Smith, Junior

Postscript. I don't mean that I shall be glad to have the boys' fathers fail; but if they do, I shall be glad to help them.

- W.S., Jr.

It may seem strange to some of our readers, who have never shed any tears but the tears of sorrow, that William's letter should have drawn tears from his father's and mother's eyes; but they will find, by and by, that the happiest feelings they ever have, will make them weep. The first words that Mr. Smith uttered were, "Thank God! – thank God! — My boy is a treasure— worth all— and ten times all that I have lost— I said that if it were not for my children, I could bear my misfortunes like a man— I now feel, that with such children, I can bear any thing." Mrs. Smith said nothing but she laid her head on little Mary's shoulder, who had jumped into her lap while she was reading the letter, and, from her heart, she offered a silent thanksgiving to God, for the virtuous conduct of her boy.

Mr. Smith had paid all his debts when he received William's present, and he determined, at once, that the money should be devoted to Harry Reed's benefit; accordingly, he placed it to his account in the savings bank.

Oh! If children could look into their parents' hearts, and see the sweet emotions, the delightful feelings, their good conduct produces, then, I think, they would be more earnest to improve every opportunity to do well.

In the next number of the Miscellany, we shall give some account of little Mary; and we hope to show, that she deserved her royal title as well as her brother— and to show, moreover, that there are other ways of doing good, than by bestowing money; though the virtuous poor envy the rich, that privilege, more, perhaps, than any other they possess.

Stockbridge.

S.