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THE OAK TREE



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THE ACORNS.



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THE ACORNS.

CHARLES WILMOT, a little boy of *five* years old, was very busy one day at play with some acorns. He filled the tiny cups with water, and bruised the balls with his wooden hammer on a Dutch tile. His father asked him what he was doing. He said, "I am playing at making

medicine, papa. This is how I saw my cousin do ; only he had a large brass basin and hammer.”

“ A pestle and mortar, I suppose.”

“ Yes, that was what he called it. That did better than my Dutch tile and wooden hammer. The bits fly off, and I cannot make them come to powder, to mix with the water.”

“ No ; your acorns are not dry enough to grind to powder, even if you had a pestle and mortar.”

“ Perhaps they would do better if I were to scrape them with my knife.”

“ Well, you can try.”

“ Papa, acorns are not poison, are they? May I eat one?”

You may taste it, if you please; but I do not much think you will like them, they have a bitter taste.”

Charles tried; but soon agreed with his father, that acorns were not half so sweet and nice as nuts.

Then he amused himself a while by playing with them as marbles; but he found that, not being quite round, they did not shoot so well.

His father seeing that he began to tire of his play, said to him, “ Come hither, my boy, I will show you another

use to which you may put your acorns, that will give you pleasure a long time to come. Have you any left that are whole, and not bruised?"

"Yes; here are five very fine ones."

"Well, then, I will give you yon piece of ground on which to plant them. The gardener shall dig it up for you. But are you willing to part with them, and bury them underground?"

"Yes, if you think I had better do so, I am willing."

"My dear boy, I have sometimes tried to make you understand what faith means;

this will help to make it plain to you. You are willing to do something of which you do not quite know the use or advantage, because I advise you to do it. You are willing to part with something that pleases you now, because I have told you that, by so doing, you may have greater pleasure at some future time. You believe what I have said. You trust my word, my judgment, my truth, my kindness. You give me credit for knowing what I tell you. You do not think that I am under a mistake myself. Still less do you think that I wish to mislead or deceive you. You rely

on me for wishing you well, and giving you good advice ; do you not ?”

“ Yes, father, that I do. I am sure you would not tell me wrong if you knew it, and I always find things turn out just as you tell me.”

“ You have *faith* in me, and your faith grows stronger by trial and proof. The longer you have known me, the more willing you become to trust me, in matters of which you cannot at once see the meaning. Besides, you are more ready to believe me, because you have sometimes found yourself mistaken. Is it not so, Charles ?”

“ Yes ; I have thought I could do things which you said I could not—but you knew best ; and I have been afraid that things would hurt me ; but when you told me I might touch them, I tried, and they never did me any harm ; so I ought to mind what you say.”

“ It is a good thing for children when they learn to trust their parents. It is the very means that God appoints for keeping them from harm, and teaching them by degrees to judge for themselves, and to be wise.”

“ Mamma once read to me a story about a little girl whose mother was going to make her

a present, and the little girl wished to have a purple jar, one of those that look so bright and pretty in the shops where they sell medicine. Her mamma told her that it would not please her long, nor be of any real use to her; but still she very much wished her mamma to buy it. At last her mamma said, 'You shall judge for yourself; if you choose it, I will buy it for you.' She did choose it, and had it. But when she had it, it did not give her much pleasure, for it was the stuff inside that made the glass jar look purple, and when that was poured out, all the prettiness was gone,

and it was nothing but a common white jar. Then the little girl was sorry that she did not believe her mother. She wished the jar to be taken back to the shop, and to buy what her mother advised her instead ; but this could not be done : only she learned to be wiser another time, and to believe that her mother knew best ; so she got that good from the purple jar.”

“ Well, that *was* something good—to learn to distrust herself, and trust her parents.”

“ And, papa, I know something that happened to my own self. When the cherry-trees were pruned, I got some

of the pieces that were cut off, and planted them in my garden. You told me they would not grow, because they had no roots. They did not die directly, but the buds came into blossom a little more, and then I thought you had made a mistake, and that I was right. But the blossoms never came to cherries, and soon the branches quite withered and died."

"And so, Charles, you learned to believe what papa told you?"

"Yes, I shall not forget that you were right, and I was wrong."

"Well, my dear boy, and

the blessed God invites our faith. Some things are addressed to us in the Bible which we cannot understand, not because they are untrue or not according to reason, but because we are weak and ignorant. These we must receive upon the word of God. We are sure he cannot be mistaken, and that he would not deceive us.

“Then we are sometimes called to part with things that we very highly prize ; or to engage in duties which we do not exactly like. If we could see how wise the plans of God are, and how much he designs our good in all he requires and

all he commands, we should not have one contrary wish. But as we cannot see, we are called upon to believe and to submit. Will you try to remember this, my dear boy? Whatever is said in the Bible must be true, for God says it. Whatever we may have to lose or to suffer, God orders it, and it must be right.

“But it is time I should begin to reward your confidence, by explaining to you something of my design. Do you know why I advised you to plant your acorns rather than to play with them?”

“Because, I suppose, they will grow to trees. Will they

not, papa? And what sort of trees will they be?"

"Come with me, and I will show you."

Mr. Wilmot then led his son to a part of the grounds where there were some fine full-grown oaks. The leaves began to look brown and yellow, as they do in autumn. This is because they are fading and will soon fall; but the tree looks very rich and beautiful. There were a great many acorns on the ground, like those with which Charles had been so much pleased.

"There, my boy," said the father, "if your acorns are planted in the ground, and

properly taken care of, they will produce trees like these. They are called oaks, and are the finest trees of our forests."

"Oh, papa, were these large trees ever tiny acorns like what I have in my hand?"

"Yes, Charles, indeed they were; and yours, in time, may become as large and useful."

"Useful are they, papa? Of what use?"

"Many uses. More than I can at present recollect or explain to you. But I will tell you a few. You have seen the poor people picking up the acorns, which they use as food for their pigs. The green oak-apples which you saw in

spring are used in making ink, without which your pretty lessons could not be written."

"Do oaks have two kinds of fruit—acorns and apples?"

"No, Charles, the acorn is the fruit of the oak. The oak-apples, as they are called, are formed by insects on the bark of the tree. But as they are useful, and as they are not found of the same kind on the bark of other trees, they are to be reckoned among the useful things that the oak yields. Besides this, several parts of the oak are used in medicine. All these the tree gives while it is growing; but its greatest use and value are when it has

come to its full growth, and is cut down. Then the timber, or large wood of the tree, is used for building houses, ships, and other things that are wanted to be very strong and lasting, and for these purposes the timber of oak is the best that can be had. The bark, or outside tough rind, is used by the tanners. A tanner is one whose business it is to preserve and prepare the skins of animals, and make them into leather for shoes. Leather is used also for harness of horses, for binding books, and many other purposes. The sawdust of oak is used in dyeing or changing the colour

of woollen or other stuffs. From this, which is but little of what you might be told, I think you will allow that the oak is no less useful than it is noble and beautiful.”

“Yes, indeed it is. But I should never have thought that such a large tree could come from a little acorn.”

“Well, remember this, and let it teach you never to make light of trifles, as they may seem. Very small beginnings may come to very great good or very great evil. And the harm or good that we have done by one little action, may be a curse or a blessing in the world long after we have left it.”

“ Well, father, I will plant my acorns, and when they grow to be large trees, I will let the poor children pick up the acorns to feed their pigs—the same as you do—and when the trees are cut down, I will have a little ship built, or a large boat that will hold us all whenever we like to go on the water ; and part of them will do to build a nice little cottage for poor old nurse.” As the little boy said this, his father looked very thoughtful. Charles paused a moment. Then looking up in his father’s face, he asked,—

“ But, papa, how long will it be before the acorns are

become large trees — large enough to be cut down and made use of?”

“A great many years, Charles. Eighty or a hundred, or even longer still.”

The little boy looked sad, and replied, “Then it will not be in poor nurse’s life-time; nor perhaps, father, perhaps not in mine?”

“No, my dear, it will not. The oak grows slowly, and the life of man passes quickly and is soon gone. The same person who plants the seed will not live to see the full-grown tree.”

“But I planted some willow twigs last year, and they

are grown so much! They are twice as long as they were, and my brother's poplars are become quite large trees; and you know, papa, he planted them himself, and he is only twelve years old."

"Many trees grow much more quickly than the oak, but they are not of so much value. The wood will do for many uses, but it is by no means so strong or lasting."

"Then, papa, did not you plant these trees yourself?"

"No, my dear. They were planted by the grandfather of my father. He has been dead more than eighty years."

"But if I shall not live to

use or enjoy the trees, how can they be called mine?"

"True, my child. There is nothing in this world that we can properly call our own. Some things are so fading and short-lived, that they perish almost before we can lay hold of them. They are like the soap bubbles you sometimes blow. They look bright and gay; but when you try to catch them they burst. Other things last long themselves; but we die before they become ripe; we do not live to fulfil our plans. This world was never intended to be our home or our rest. Let this thought sink into your mind, my dear

child. The richest people, who have more of this world than heart could wish, do not find enough to satisfy them, and make them happy ; and even a child, who has least care and sorrow, is pleased rather in thinking of what will be than what is. But whatever we may have or whatever we may enjoy, our life on earth will not last long—and the world itself will not last long enough to supply the wants of the life that never ends. Have you thought, my child, of what can make you happy when you have done with all that this world affords ?”

“ Yes, papa, heaven. That

makes me think of the sermon last Sunday—don't you know?"

"Let me hear if you can repeat the text."

" 'Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance,' "

Heb. x. 34.

"I am glad you remember it. Do you know how we can obtain a portion in that better world?"

"Yes, papa. You told me to learn two texts about it: 'Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life;' and, 'I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come

again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also," John xiv. 6; 2, 3.

"But who are they for whom Jesus prepares a place in heaven?"

"I do not know, papa."

"Think, my dear. Do you suppose he prepares a place in his holy heaven for those who love sin?"

"No, papa; I must love him and serve him here on earth, that I may dwell with him and be happy hereafter in heaven."

"But you are a sinner, Charles. You know you have often sinned against God.

How can you be saved from the anger of God, which your sins have deserved ?”

“ Because Jesus Christ died on the cross to save sinners.”

“ Yes, all sinners, who repent of sin and trust in Christ, and obey him ; but not those who neglect him.”

“ No, papa.”

“ Never forget, then, to pray for the pardon of your sin through the blood of Christ, and pray for the Holy Spirit to help you to love and serve God, and to make you fit for heaven, that better world, where pleasures last for ever.

“ But I have one thing more

to say to you. Though this world cannot make any one happy who has no portion beyond it, the world is full of the mercy and goodness of God. His rich bounty gives us many things that we may enjoy and do good with, and he wishes us to do so. Plant your acorns, my dear child, and please yourself by watching their first appearance, and their rising growth. Do not grieve even at the thought that you will not live to see them fully grown ; but rather be pleased to think that they will do good to others, when you want them no longer.

“ All of us ought to try to

do good in this way. It is no more than just. We owe it to those who went before us. We cannot repay it to them, but we may do our part by taking care to benefit those who come after us. We think with respect and gratitude of those who planted trees, and did many other good things that we enjoy, and we should take care that others may have as much reason to be grateful to us.

“ I will tell you one way in which you may begin to do this. You have learned to read. You cannot repay that benefit to those who taught you ; but you may try to

teach some other person to read also."

"Yes, papa, I should like to do that. My brother Samuel says, he will take me to help him to teach the Sunday scholars when I am a little older."

"Well, try what you can do. We will now return and put the acorns in the ground; and when the place that knows us now knows us no more, may we be in heaven, and for ever with the Lord who died to save us."