

JONCE SMILEY

THE BOY WHO HAD NO FRIENDS

A NEW ENGLAND TALE.
By the Author of "Saudrey."

CHAPTER I.

"Well, I want to man" energetically exclaimed Deacon Abijah Underwood, "if there isn't Peltiah Perkins's brindle cow coming straight an end, like all possessed! And there's that young scapgrace, Jone Smiley, clinging to her back like a monkey in the caravan to the Shetland pony! Why, the little rascal will certainly be thrown and break his dumb neck!"

"Never you fear," said the Deacon's wife, "that's not the way his neck will be broke—and he'll never be drowned neither, I can tell you."

The subject of this pleasant prophecy shot by the Deacon's house on his queer conveyance, to use his own expression, "like a streak of chalk," unimpaired of all the uncharitable predictions which were shouted as he passed, by more than one kind well-wisher. The fact was, he was used to such things, and any other language would have been to him a scrap of the unknown tongue. When Peltiah's cow reached the homestead, Jonathan or as he was usually nicknamed, Jone, slipped off like a cat, and took to his heels with a winning instinct of the danger of Peltiah's cart-whip for he was used to hard knocks, too, as well as to hard words. He was an unlucky little Ishmael, always in disfavor with somebody for cause, and often without cause as, when any mischief was discovered the origin of it was invariably imputed to Jone. If the bars of any body's cow-field were let down, or thrown down by any rattle it was Jone who had the blame; if the wind shook off the parson's fruit, it must have been Jone who pelted down the apples if the cows came home dry, Jone had been surreptitiously milking them; if the legal lookers for eggs made a return non est, Jone had the credit of having been poaching. Was any body's dog lame? Jone had stoned him. Did any body's cat disappear? Jone had certainly drowned her. Shivered glass, swallows on fences, mud on house doors, stolen melons, tricks on travelers, and all and singular the boyish pranks within a ten miles' circuit were as a matter of course, all accredited to that dumb Jone Smiley.

This was decidedly convenient for the old boys in the neighborhood. In vain did poor Jonathan protest his innocence—he was only whipped for lying. In addition to the original count, and if he persisted in his denial he received commonly a blow or two for his hardy and unreasonable impertinence. In refusing to acknowledge what everybody knew must be his work, and poor Jone not unfrequently saw the real culprit among the edified spectators of his castigation. Under such a state of affairs, as other boys could not be expected to feel Jone's aches, and as they found it not at all disagreeable to be whipped by proxy, we are not to wonder that the more Jone was whipped, the more offences multiplied against the peace and good order of the village of Hardscrabble, and the commonwealth of Massachusetts. No matter if he could prove an alibi—that did not mend the case at all. No matter if another boy was caught in the very act of transgression—the real sinner was passed over, and his parent or guardian took the first opportunity to catch and cuff Jone Smiley, for "putting his boy up to such mischief!"

But the little rogue, far from perishing, seemed to have under such discipline. He could scabble out of a horse trough, or creep from under a pump, and shake himself dry sooner than any duck in New England. As to licks, he knew the length and momentum of every leg in the township, and could slide just one inch beyond the reach of the sole of any man's shoe, with almost unerring exactness. He knew whose hand was horny, and whose not, having articularly tasted of every palm in the parish, more than once; and he had a most capital way of defeating the women's wrath, by shocking their knuckles with his elbows, when they tried to rain their up and down blows upon the back of his neck. Broomsticks he could dodge so scientifically that not one whack in twenty landed once upon each him, and he'd rather like the excitement of plugging dodge with all his mettle, and grew a time, almost to consider his position of unenviable distinction, and agreeable pastime, rather than of uncomfortable mishap. He considered those days blanks, at the end of which he was obliged to lie down to sleep without a bruise, or scratch, or other memorial of exciting adventure.

Our hero had few such days in his life. If nobody else cuffed him, his mother's good night was usually rapped upon his knowledge-box, with her knuckles, and this was about the only punishment that Jonathan cared anything about. He could not, as a dutiful son, accidentally kick her ankles, with his heels, or plant his foot upon her toes, as was his wont when other women administered such discipline to him, and his only method, when the maternal blessing visited his ears was to hold his breath, and bear it. This was rather irksome, but he found consolation in inwardly vowing that he would one day be a man, in spite of his mother and all her abettors. He felt that she was cruel, and, except that she fed him, as she did her cat, (only not so kindly), that she was any thing but a parent to him; but he had reason enough, young as he was, to make excuses to himself for her conduct. He knew that she was every day beset with complaints about his unruly and wicked behavior; he knew that when people come in to complain of his alleged misdeeds, even on occasions when he had been peacefully under his mother's eye all day, that she was assured, and that was worse still, convinced, that the only way to do home to escape suspicion, while he did his mischief by stealth, was to say, "let her thump, if it does her any good; she'll be sorry for it one of these days."

At school, poor Jone was always at the "foot of the class," though he actually knew more than any of his mates. There was no kind prompting voice at his ear, when he hesitated; there was no waiting for him to collect his thoughts when a question was put to him—habit had taught the pedagogue to call out "Jonathan," the next almost in the same breath. And in school he was not less the football and scapegrace than he was out, for the merit of all his misdemeanors was as a matter of course, his peculiar perquisite. In the playground, if the agreeable diversion of pelting any one with snow-balls, turf or stones was suggested, Jonathan was the victim; if the ball, in or out, he was avoided, as one of the unfortunates, for he was always out, at matches he lost, his "toys" whether by the rules of the game he won or lost, and "come now that's not fair play," put him down in various ways, whether he was right or wrong. All votes were against him, in short he had no friends.

No friends! We are wrong. There was among the girls a child as much persecuted by her sex, as Jonathan by his, but in a different manner. Poor little Margaret Smith was an orphan, and a charity girl, a child taken from the almshouse, to do double the labor of a well paid domestic, and poor therefore such of the cast-off clothes of the children of the family as could be scraped up to do her appearance any longer. She was sent to school every morning in the year, and the really genteel school of little Jone was moved to assist this sister in her situation, and to assist her when she was in distress of any of her own sex or thro' intolerance. He made her lessons intelligible to her, loaned her books, and clattered with her when her companion ship from their games both were excited by active play, and by that alone and cruel contrast, with the fair half of creation understood so well how to visit upon one another. The little couple were mutual confidants, and while Jonathan honestly confessed his retaliatory misdoings for he did not actually thus indulge to Margaret, she fully denied those of which he was not guilty, and she implicitly believed him. Can we wonder that boy as he was Jone loved his only friend, and he reciprocated the attachment, while as yet neither had had a romance, or spoken of love, except for bread and butter. And little Margaret added to the sympathy in situation and circumstance which knits even older hearts was a child to love. A mild bludge added to the sensitive ear of a young girl, which had this early been schooled into the expression of patient sorrow, and she had natural sympathy for the poor, and she could not but sympathize with the poor, and she was slow to anger, and she was patient beyond her years, and capable of giving her little mate in misfortune excellent advice, and assistance out of school in return for the aid which he continued to give her in her studies.

She was the benefactress of Deacon Abijah Underwood, whose education upon this chapter and she was an unmoved eye witness of Jone's mad prank, and an ear witness of the remarks made upon his approach by her master and mistress. She knew that this frolic would cost poor Jone a taste of discipline if not for the certainty as an additional punishment, a very next complaint which should be made against him, a thing quite likely to occur within the very next half hour for poor Jone's position as sponger, as we have already remarked, kept him in continual demand when village spite required to be visited upon some one.

Deacon Abijah Underwood was a deacon of the old school, and held many offices in the state as well as in the church at Hardscrabble. He was keeper of the village inn and of the village pound, postmaster, head of the overseers of the poor, and town-clerk. With his business of innholder, he united that of "merchant or storekeeper," having on hand articles of all descriptions, from a German shoe to a penny whistle, from a sack of tape to a coat pattern of broadcloth, and a prime assortment of satinetts, and peppercorns, and salt cassimere (three threads to the inch. The reader, if he has any reverence, has doubtless by this time perceived that Deacon Abijah Underwood was the man of his age and his country, so far as the village of Hardscrabble was considered. It was also currently believed in Hardscrabble that Deacon Underwood was a man of no small influence and consequence even in Boston—the political, commercial, and literary Jerusalem of New England, an impression which the Deacon himself was at some little pains to foster, as in Hardscrabble, as well as in her places of more note, a man's executive reputation is a capital asset to his home standing.

The Deacon's bar-room was the court of last appeal in Hardscrabble. The Doctor, the Squire, and even the Parson had striven in vain in former years to set up separate and independent jurisdictions in the distinct parts of their several careers in Hardscrabble, but the Deacon had succeeded at length in reducing them all three. He was in fact, the autocrat, and the others were content at last to hold permitted authority as the heads of the three departments of divinity, law, and physic, subject to the control of Deacon Abijah who confirmed or disapproved of their decisions as his humor dictated. The Deacon's standing force was public opinion, and an irresistible agent in his will it was too for all public opinion must be either primarily issued by him, or by him endorsed, before it could become current, or be received as genuine. They say to Hardscrabble was only another phrase for "the Deacon says"—that is all the "they say" which were admitted as valid. The opinion of the public upon the Parson's sermons, upon the Squire's decisions, upon the Doctor's practice, were only so many reissues of the Deacon's judgment; and to finish the idea of his absolute sway, it is only necessary to add that he was the richest man in the township, perhaps in the county.

When as heretofore related, Jone Smiley made his unceremonious entry into the village of Hardscrabble, on Peltiah Perkins's cow, the Deacon, having heard his wife's opinion that the boy's neck would not be broken by accident, repaired to his bar-room to

settle the public opinion upon the matter, for he well knew that such an event as this must necessarily furnish a subject for confab. Peltiah Perkins soon arrived, with others of the immediate neighbors, and the last high crime and misdemeanor of poor Jone was forthwith entered upon. And the somewhat unusual occurrence of a real traveler, or travelers, added to the interest of the occasion. An emigrant family, on its way to the West, had stopped to give their horse entertainment at the Deacon's pump; and to draw for themselves upon the Deacon's cinder barrel, such a method of patronizing public houses being nothing new in the interior of New England. Bread and cheese for the family, and grain for the horse were drawn from supplies in the wagon.

Peltiah Perkins and all the rest as a matter of course, walked out, and stood round the vehicle with their hands in their pockets, intently examining the wagon, harness, and horse. They shook the wheels to see if the axels were firm and the flinch bolts in good order. Looked at the tires to see if they were tight, and at the buckle holes in the harness, to ascertain whether the length was used for this long journey as for former short trips. The age of the horse was "judged upon," and the family, when the driver was ready to go, made it good to see if they would be likely to stand it, on a long drive. The boys of Peltiah's party of their own accord gathered about, and stood in a semicircle behind their parents, the boys of the Junior being also in their peckles, and their attitudes as nearly resembling their fathers as constant standing on such occasions could make them. The women from the houses of the neighborhood, and standing their eyes on the party, particularly the young girls, were not less busy with the street scene before them.

Margaret, the wisest and the most self-reliant of the girls, forced her way through the wisdom and the influence we are not therefore to wonder that boys sometimes forget their duties of careful management. The Deacon, the Deacon's wife, and a great event to Hardscrabble generally, a greater event to Jone Smiley than particular. He thought that in this "strange invasion domestic matters might be forgotten, and ventured, slightly at first, and as he went on, more boldly, to address the emigrant wagon. For the first few moments he was safe enough. At length Peltiah Perkins, who should have been the spokesman, and the spokesman we are not therefore to wonder that boys sometimes forget their duties of careful management. The Deacon, the Deacon's wife, and a great event to Hardscrabble generally, a greater event to Jone Smiley than particular. 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