

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a misty, mountainous landscape. A winding road is visible through dense greenery in the lower half of the image, leading towards a valley. The upper half is dominated by thick, white mist or smoke rising from the forest, creating a dramatic and atmospheric scene.

G. A. HENTY

***A FINAL
RECKONING:
A TALE
OF BUSH LIFE
IN AUSTRALIA***

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A Final Reckoning: A Tale of Bush Life in Australia

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Preface.

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In this tale I have left the battlefields of history, and have written a story of adventure in Australia, in the early days when the bush rangers and the natives constituted a real and formidable danger to the settlers. I have done this, not with the intention of extending your knowledge, or even of pointing a moral, although the story is not without one; but simply for a change—a change both for you and myself, but frankly, more for myself than for you. You know the old story of the boy who bothered his brains with Euclid, until he came to dream regularly that he was an equilateral triangle enclosed in a circle. Well, I feel that unless I break away sometimes from history, I shall be haunted day and night by visions of men in armour, and soldiers of all ages and times.

If, when I am away on a holiday I come across the ruins of a castle, I find myself at once wondering how it could best have been attacked, and defended. If I stroll down to the Thames, I begin to plan schemes of crossing it in the face of an enemy; and if matters go on, who can say but that I may find myself, some day, arrested on the charge of surreptitiously entering the Tower of London, or effecting an escalade of the keep of Windsor Castle! To avoid such a misfortune—which would entail a total cessation of my stories, for a term of years—I have turned to a new subject, which I can only hope that you will find as interesting, if not as instructive, as the other books which I have written.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: The Broken Window.

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"You are the most troublesome boy in the village, Reuben Whitney, and you will come to a bad end."

The words followed a shower of cuts with the cane. The speaker was an elderly man, the master of the village school of Tipping, near Lewes, in Sussex; and the words were elicited, in no small degree, by the vexation of the speaker at his inability to wring a cry from the boy whom he was striking. He was a lad of some thirteen years of age, with a face naturally bright and intelligent; but at present quivering with anger.

"I don't care if I do," he said defiantly. "It won't be my fault, but yours, and the rest of them."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," the master said, "instead of speaking in that way. You, who learn easier than anyone here, and could always be at the top of your class, if you chose. I had hoped better things of you, Reuben; but it's just the way, it's your bright boys as mostly gets into mischief."

At this moment the door of the school room opened, and a lady with two girls, one of about fourteen and the other eleven years of age, entered.

"What is the matter now?" the lady asked, seeing the schoolmaster, cane in hand, and the boy standing before him.

"Reuben Whitney! What, in trouble again, Reuben? I am afraid you are a very troublesome boy."

"I am not troublesome, ma'm," the boy said sturdily. "That is, I wouldn't be if they would let me alone; but everything that is done bad, they put it down to me."

"But what have you been doing now, Reuben?"

"I have done nothing at all, ma'm; but he's always down on me," and he pointed to the master, "and when they are always down on a fellow, it's no use his trying to do right."

"What has the boy been doing now, Mr. White?" the lady asked.

"Look there, ma'm, at those four windows all smashed, and the squire had all the broken panes mended only a fortnight ago."

"How was it done, Mr. White?"

"By a big stone, ma'm, which caught the frame where they joined, and smashed them all."

"I did not do it, Mrs. Ellison, indeed I didn't."

"Why do you suppose it was Reuben?" Mrs. Ellison asked the master.

"Because I had kept him in, half an hour after the others went home to dinner, for pinching young Jones and making him call out; and he had only just gone out of the gate when I heard the smash; so there is no doubt about it, for all the others must have been in at their dinner at that time."

"I didn't do it, ma'm," the boy repeated. "Directly I got out of the gate, I started off to run home. I hadn't gone not twenty yards when I heard a smash; but I wasn't going for to stop to see what it was. It weren't no business of mine, and that's all I know about it."

"Mamma," the younger of the two girls said eagerly, "what he says is quite true. You know you let me run down

the village with the jelly for Mrs. Thomson's child, and as I was coming down the road I saw a boy come out of the gate of the school and run away; and then I heard a noise of broken glass, and I saw another boy jump over the hedge opposite, and run, too. He came my way and, directly he saw me, he ran to a gate and climbed over."

"Do you know who it was, Kate?" Mrs. Ellison asked.

"Yes, mamma. It was Tom Thorne."

"Is Thomas Thorne here?" Mrs. Ellison asked in a loud voice.

There was a general turning of the heads of the children to the point where a boy, somewhat bigger than the rest, had been apparently studying his lessons with great diligence.

"Come here, Tom Thorne," Mrs. Ellison said.

The boy slouched up with a sullen face.

"You hear what my daughter says, Tom. What have you to say in reply?"

"I didn't throw the stone at the window," the boy replied. "I chucked it at a sparrow, and it weren't my fault if it missed him and broke the window."

"I should say it was your fault, Tom," Mrs. Ellison said sharply—"very much your fault, if you throw a great stone at a bird without taking care to see what it may hit. But that is nothing to your fault in letting another boy be punished for what you did. I shall report the matter to the squire, and he will speak to your father about it. You are a wicked, bad boy.

"Mr. White, I will speak to you outside."

Followed by her daughters, Mrs. Ellison went out; Kate giving a little nod, in reply to the grateful look that Reuben

Whitney cast towards her, and his muttered:

"Thank you, miss."

"Walk on, my dears," Mrs. Ellison said. "I will overtake you, in a minute or two."

"This will not do, Mr. White," she said, when she was alone with the master. "I have told you before that I did not approve of your thrashing so much, and now it is proved that you punish without any sufficient cause, and upon suspicion only. I shall report the case at once to the squire and, unless I am greatly mistaken, you will have to look out for another place."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Ellison, indeed I am; and it is not often I use the cane, now. If it had been anyone else, I might have believed him; but Reuben Whitney is always in mischief."

"No wonder he is in mischief," the lady said severely, "if he is punished, without a hearing, for all the misdeeds of others. Well, I shall leave the matter in the squire's hands; but I am sure he will no more approve than I do of the children being ill treated."

Reuben Whitney was the son of a miller, near Tipping. John Whitney had been considered a well-to-do man, but he had speculated in corn and had got into difficulties; and his body was, one day, found floating in the mill dam. No one knew whether it was the result of intention or accident, but the jury of his neighbours who sat upon the inquest gave him the benefit of the doubt, and brought in a verdict of "accidental death." He was but tenant of the mill and, when all the creditors were satisfied, there were only a few pounds remaining for the widow.

With these she opened a little shop in Tipping, with a miscellaneous collection of tinware and cheap ironmongery; cottons, tapes, and small articles of haberdashery; with toys, sweets, and cakes for the children. The profits were small, but the squire, who had known her husband, charged but a nominal rent for the cottage; and this was more than paid by the fruit trees in the garden, which also supplied her with potatoes and vegetables, so that she managed to support her boy and herself in tolerable comfort.

She herself had been the daughter of a tradesman in Lewes, and many wondered that she did not return to her father, upon her husband's death. But her home had not been a comfortable one, before her marriage; for her father had taken a second wife, and she did not get on well with her stepmother. She thought, therefore, that anything would be better than returning with her boy to a home where, to the mistress at least, she would be most unwelcome.

She had, as a girl, received an education which raised her somewhat above the other villagers of Tipping; and of an evening she was in the habit of helping Reuben with his lessons, and trying to correct the broadness of dialect which he picked up from the other boys. She was an active and bustling woman, managed her little shop well, and kept the garden, with Reuben's assistance, in excellent order.

Mrs. Ellison had, at her first arrival in the village three years before, done much to give her a good start, by ordering that all articles of use for the house, in which she dealt, should be purchased of her; and she highly approved of the energy and independence of the young widow. But lately there had been an estrangement between the squire's

wife and the village shopkeeper. Mrs. Ellison, whose husband owned all the houses in the village, as well as the land surrounding it, was accustomed to speak her mind very freely to the wives of the villagers. She was kindness itself, in cases of illness or distress; and her kitchen supplied soups, jellies, and nourishing food to all who required it; but in return, Mrs. Ellison expected her lectures on waste, untidiness, and mismanagement to be listened to with respect and reverence.

She was, then, at once surprised and displeased when, two or three months before, having spoken sharply to Mrs. Whitney as to the alleged delinquencies of Reuben, she found herself decidedly, though not disrespectfully, replied to.

"The other boys are always set against my Reuben," Mrs. Whitney said, "because he is a stranger in the village, and has no father; and whatever is done, they throw it on to him. The boy is not a bad boy, ma'm—not in any way a bad boy. He may get into mischief, like the rest; but he is not a bit worse than others, not half as bad as some of them, and those who have told you that he is haven't told you the truth."

Mrs. Ellison had not liked it. She was not accustomed to be answered, except by excuses and apologies; and Mrs. Whitney's independent manner of speaking came upon her almost as an act of rebellion, in her own kingdom. She was too fair, however, to withdraw her custom from the shop; but from that time she had not, herself, entered it.

Reuben was a source of anxiety to his mother, but this had no reference to his conduct. She worried over his future.

The receipts from the shop were sufficient for their wants; and indeed the widow was enabled, from time to time, to lay by a pound against bad times; but she did not see what she was to do with the boy. Almost all the other lads of the village, of the same age, were already in the fields; and Mrs. Whitney felt that she could not much longer keep him idle. The question was, what was she to do with him? That he should not go into the fields she was fully determined, and her great wish was to apprentice him to some trade; but as her father had recently died, she did not see how she was to set about it.

That evening, at dinner, Mrs. Ellison told the squire of the scene in the school room.

"White must go," he said, "that is quite evident. I have seen, for some time, that we wanted a younger man, more abreast of the times than White is; but I don't like turning him adrift altogether. He has been here upwards of thirty years. What am I to do with him?"

Mrs. Ellison could make no suggestion; but she, too, disliked the thought of anyone in the village being turned adrift upon the world.

"The very thing!" the squire exclaimed, suddenly. "We will make him clerk. Old Peters has long been past his work. The old man must be seventy-five, if he's a day, and his voice quavers so that it makes the boys laugh. We will pension him off. He can have his cottage rent free, and three or four shillings a week. I don't suppose it will be for many years. As for White, he cannot be much above sixty. He will fill the place very well.

"I am sure the vicar will agree, for he has been speaking to me, about Peters being past his work, for the last five years. What do you say, my dear?"

"I think that will do very well, William," Mrs. Ellison replied, "and will get over the difficulty altogether."

"So you see, wife, for once that boy of Widow Whitney's was not to blame. I told you you took those stories on trust against him too readily. The boy's a bit of a pickle, no doubt; and I very near gave him a thrashing, myself, a fortnight since, for on going up to the seven-acre field, I found him riding bare backed on that young pony I intended for Kate."

"You don't say so, William!" Mrs. Ellison exclaimed, greatly shocked. "I never heard of such an impudent thing. I really wonder you didn't thrash him."

"Well, perhaps I should have done so, my dear; but the fact is, I caught sight of him some time before he saw me, and he was really sitting her so well that I could not find it in my heart to call out. He was really doing me a service. The pony had never been ridden, and was as wild as a wild goat. Thomas is too old, in fact, to break it in, and I should have had to get someone to do it, and pay him two or three pounds for the job.

"It was not the first time the boy had been on her back, I could see. The pony was not quite broken and, just as I came on the scene, was trying its best to get rid of him; but it couldn't do it, and I could see, by the way he rode her about afterwards, that he had got her completely in hand; and a very pretty-going little thing she will turn out."

"But what did you say to him, William? I am sure I should never stop to think whether he was breaking in the pony, or

not, if I saw him riding it about."

"I daresay not, my dear," the squire said, laughing; "but then you see, you have never been a boy; and I have, and can make allowances. Many a pony and horse have I broken in, in my time; and have got on the back of more than one, without my father knowing anything about it."

"Yes, but they were your father's horses, William," Mrs. Ellison persisted. "That makes all the difference."

"I don't suppose it would have made much difference to me," the squire laughed, "at that time. I was too fond of horse flesh, even from a boy, to be particular whose horse it was I got across. However, of course, after waiting till he had done, I gave the young scamp a blowing up."

"Not much of a blowing up, I am sure," Mrs. Ellison said; "and as likely as not, a shilling at the end of it."

"Well, Mary, I must own," the squire said pleasantly, "that a shilling did find its way out of my pocket into his."

"It's too bad of you, William," Mrs. Ellison said indignantly. "Here is this boy, who is notoriously a scapegrace, has the impertinence to ride your horse, and you encourage him in his misdeeds by giving him a shilling."

"Well, my dear, don't you see, I saved two pounds nineteen by the transaction."

"Besides," he added more seriously, "I think the boy has been maligned. I don't fancy he's a bad lad at all. A little mischief and so on, but none the worse for that. Besides, you know, I knew his father; and have sat many a time on horseback chatting to him, at the door of his mill; and drank more than one glass of good ale, which his wife has brought out to me. I am not altogether easy in my conscience about

them. If there had been a subscription got up for the widow at his death, I should have put my name down for twenty pounds; and all that I have done for her is to take eighteen pence a week off that cottage of theirs.

"No, I called the boy to me when he got off, and pretty scared he looked when he saw me. When he came up, I asked him how he dared to ride my horses about, without my leave. Of course he said he was sorry, which meant nothing; and he added, as a sort of excuse, that he used from a child to ride the horses at the mill down to the ford for water; and that his father generally had a young one or two, in that paddock of his by the mill, and he used often to ride them; and seeing the pony one day, galloping about the field and kicking up its heels, he wondered whether he could sit a horse still, and especially whether he could keep on that pony's back. Then he set to, to try.

"The pony flung him several times, at first; and no wonder, as he had no saddle, and only a piece of old rope for a bridle; but he mastered him at last, and he assured me that he had never used the stick, and certainly he had not one when I saw him. I told him, of course, that he knew he ought not to have done it; but that, as he had taken it in hand, he might finish it. I said that I intended to have it broken in for Kate, and that he had best get a bit of sacking and put it on sideways, to accustom the pony to carry a lady. Then I gave him a shilling, and told him I would give him five more, when he could tell me the pony was sufficiently broken and gentle to carry Kate."

Mrs. Ellison shook her head in disapprobation.

"It is of no use, William, my talking to the villagers as to the ways of their boys, if that is the way you counteract my advice."

"But I don't always, my dear," the squire said blandly. "For instance, I shall go round tomorrow morning with my dog whip to Thorne's; and I shall offer him the choice of giving that boy of his the soundest thrashing he ever had, while I stand by to see it, or of going out of his house at the end of the quarter."

"I rather hope he will choose the latter alternative. That beer shop of his is the haunt of all the idle fellows in the village. I have a strong suspicion that he is in league with the poachers, if he doesn't poach himself; and the first opportunity I get of laying my finger upon him, out he goes."

A few days later when Kate Ellison issued from the gate of the house, which lay just at the end of the village, with the basket containing some jelly and medicine for a sick child, she found Reuben Whitney awaiting her. He touched his cap.

"Please, miss, I made bold to come here, to thank you for having cleared me."

"But I couldn't help clearing you, Reuben, for you see, I knew it wasn't you."

"Well, miss, it was very kind, all the same; and I am very much obliged to you."

"But why do you get into scrapes?" the girl said. "If you didn't, you wouldn't be suspected of other things. Mamma said, the other day, you got into more scrapes than any boy in the village; and you look nice, too. Why do you do it?"

"I don't know why I do it, miss," Reuben said shamefacedly. "I suppose it's because I don't go into the fields, like most of the other boys; and haven't got much to do. But there's no great harm in them, miss. They are just larks, nothing worse."

"You don't do really bad things?" the girl asked.

"No, miss, I hope not."

"And you don't tell stories, do you?"

"No, miss, never. If I do anything and I am asked, I always own it. I wouldn't tell a lie to save myself from a licking."

"That's right," the girl said graciously.

She caught somewhat of her mother's manner, from going about with her to the cottages; and it seemed quite natural, to her, to give her advice to this village scapegrace.

"Well, try not to do these sort of things again, Reuben; because I like you, and I don't like to hear people say you are the worst boy in the village, and I don't think you are. Good-bye," and Kate Ellison proceeded on her way.

Reuben smiled as he looked after her. Owing to his memory of his former position at the mill, and to his mother's talk and teaching, Reuben did not entertain the same feeling of respect, mingled with fear, for the squire's family which was felt by the village in general. Instead of being two years younger than himself, the girl had spoken as gravely as if she had been twenty years his senior, and Reuben could not help a smile of amusement.

"She is a dear little lady," he said, as he looked after her; "and it's only natural she should talk like her mother. But Mrs. Ellison means well, too, mother says; and as for the

squire, he is a good fellow. I expected he would have given it to me the other day.

"Well, now I will go up to the pony. One more lesson, and I think a baby might ride it."

As he walked along, he met Tom Thorne. There had been war between them, since the affair of the broken window. Reuben had shown the other no animosity on the subject as, having been cleared, he had felt in no way aggrieved; but Tom Thorne was very sore over it. In the first place, he had been found out; and although Reuben himself had said nothing to him, respecting his conduct in allowing him to be flogged for the offence which he himself had committed, others had not been so reticent, and he had had a hard time of it in the village. Secondly, he had been severely thrashed by his father, in the presence of the squire; the former laying on the lash with a vigour which satisfied Mr. Ellison, the heartiness of the thrashing being due, not to any indignation at the fault, but because the boy's conduct had excited the squire's anger; which Thorne, for many reasons, was anxious to deprecate. He was his landlord, and had the power to turn him out at a quarter's notice; and as there was no possibility of obtaining any other house near, and he was doing by no means a bad trade, he was anxious to keep on good terms with him.

Tom Thorne was sitting on a gate, as Reuben passed.

"You think you be a fine fellow, Reuben, but I will be even with you, some day."

"You can be even with me now," Reuben said, "if you like to get off that gate."

"I bain't afeared of you, Reuben, don't you go to think it; only I ain't going to do any fighting now. Feyther says if I get into any more rows, he will pay me out; so I can't lick you now, but some day I will be even with you."

"That's a good excuse," Reuben said scornfully. "However, I don't want to fight if you don't, only you keep your tongue to yourself. I don't want to say nothing to you, if you don't say nothing to me. You played me a dirty trick the other day, and you got well larrupped for it, so I don't owe you any grudge; but mind you, I don't want any more talk about your getting even with me, for if you do give me any more of it I will fetch you one on the nose, and then you will have a chance of getting even, at once."

Tom Thorne held his tongue, only relieving his feelings by making a grimace after Reuben, as the latter passed on. In the various contests among the boys of the village, Reuben had proved himself so tough an adversary that, although Tom Thorne was heavier and bigger, he did not care about entering upon what would be, at best, a doubtful contest with him.

Contenting himself, therefore, with another muttered, "I will be even with you some day," he strolled home to his father's ale house.

The change at the school was very speedily made. The squire generally carried out his resolutions while they were hot and, on the very day after his conversation with his wife on the subject, he went first to the vicar and arranged for the retirement of the clerk, and the instalment of White in his place; and then went to the school house, and informed the master of his intention. The latter had been expecting

his dismissal, since Mrs. Ellison had spoken to him on the previous day; and the news which the squire gave him was a relief to him. His emoluments, as clerk, would be smaller than those he received as schoolmaster; but while he would not be able to discharge the duties of the latter for very much longer, for he felt the boys were getting too much for him, he would be able to perform the very easy work entailed by the clerkship for many years to come. It was, too, a position not without dignity; and indeed, in the eyes of the village the clerk was a personage of far greater importance than the schoolmaster. He therefore thankfully accepted the offer, and agreed to give up the school as soon as a substitute could be found.

In those days anyone was considered good enough for a village schoolmaster, and the post was generally filled by men who had failed as tradesmen, and in everything else they put their hands to; and whose sole qualification for the office was that they were able to read and write. Instead of advertising, however, in the county paper, the squire wrote to an old college friend, who was now in charge of a London parish, and asked him to choose a man for the post.

"I don't want a chap who will cram all sorts of new notions into the heads of the children," the squire said. "I don't think it would do them any good, or fit them any better for their stations. The boys have got to be farm labourers, and the girls to be their wives; and if they can read really well, and write fairly, it's about as much as they want in the way of learning; but I think that a really earnest sort of man might do them good, otherwise. A schoolmaster, in my mind, should be the clergyman's best assistant. I

don't know, my dear fellow, that I can explain in words more exactly what I mean; but I think you will understand me, and will send down the sort of man I want.

"The cottage is a comfortable one, there's a good bit of garden attached to it, and I don't mind paying a few shillings a week more than I do now, to get the sort of man I want. If he has a wife so much the better. She might teach the girls to sew, which would be, to nine out of ten, a deal more use than reading and writing; and if she could use her needle, and make up dresses and that sort of thing, she might add to their income. Not one woman in five in the village can make her own clothes, and they have to go to a place three miles away to get them done."

A week later the squire received an answer from his friend, saying that he had chosen a man, and his wife, whom he thought would suit.

"The poor fellow was rather a cripple," he said. "He is a wood engraver by trade, but he fell downstairs and hurt his back. The doctor who attended him at the hospital spoke to me about him. He said that he might, under favourable circumstances, get better in time; but that he was delicate, and absolutely needed change of air and a country life. I have seen him several times, and have been much struck with his intelligence. He has been much depressed at being forbidden to work, but has cheered up greatly since I told him of your offer. I have no doubt he will do well."

"I have selected him, not only for that reason, but because his wife is as suitable as he is. She is an admirable young woman, and was a dressmaker before he married her. She has supported them both ever since he was hurt,

months ago. She is delighted at the idea of the change for, although the money will be very much less than he earned at his trade, she has always been afraid of his health giving way; and is convinced that fresh air, and the garden you speak of, will put new life into him."

The squire was not quite satisfied with the letter; but, as he told himself, he could not expect to get a man trained specially as a schoolmaster to accept the post; and at any rate, if the man was not satisfactory his wife was likely to be so. He accordingly ordered his groom to take the light cart and drive over to Lewes, the next day, to meet the coach when it came in; and to bring over the new schoolmaster, his wife, and their belongings.

Mrs. Ellison at once went down to the village, and got a woman to scrub the cottage from top to bottom, and put everything tidy. The furniture went with the house, and had been provided by the squire. Mrs. Ellison went over it, and ordered a few more things to be sent down from the house to make it more comfortable for a married couple and, driving over to Lewes, ordered a carpet, curtains, and a few other little comforts for it.

James Shrewsbury was, upon his arrival, much pleased with his cottage, which contrasted strongly with the room in a crowded street which he had occupied in London; and his wife was still more pleased.

"I am sure we shall be happy and comfortable here, James," she said, "and the air feels so fresh and pure that I am convinced you will soon get strong and well again. What is money to health? I am sure I shall be ten times as happy,

here, as I was when you were earning three or four times as much, in London."

The squire and Mrs. Ellison came down the next morning, at the opening of the school; and after a chat with the new schoolmaster and his wife, the squire accompanied the former into the school room.

"Look here, boys and girls," he said, "Mr. Shrewsbury has come down from London to teach you. He has been ill, and is not very strong. I hope you will give him no trouble, and I can tell you it will be the worse for you, if you do. I am going to look into matters myself; and I shall have a report sent me in, regularly, as to how each of you is getting on, with a special remark as to conduct; and I can tell you, if any of you are troublesome you will find me down at your father's, in no time."

The squire's words had considerable effect, and an unusual quiet reigned in the school, after he had left and the new schoolmaster opened a book.

They soon found that his method of teaching was very different to that which they were accustomed to. There was no shouting or thumping on the desk with the cane, no pulling of ears or cuffing of heads. Everything was explained quietly and clearly; and when they went out of the school, all agreed that the new master was a great improvement on Master White, while the master himself reported to his wife that he had got on better than he had expected.

Chapter 2: The Poisoned Dog.

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The boys soon felt that Mr. Shrewsbury really wished to teach them, and that he was ready to assist those who wanted to get on. In the afternoon the schoolmaster's wife started a sewing class for the girls and, a week or two after he came, the master announced that such of the elder class of boys and girls who chose to come, in the evening, to his cottage could do so for an hour; and that he and the boys would read, by turns, some amusing book while the girls worked. Only Reuben Whitney and two or three others at first availed themselves of the invitation, but these spoke so highly of their evening that the number soon increased. Three quarters of an hour were spent in reading some interesting work of travel or adventure, and then the time was occupied in talking over what they had read, and in explaining anything which they did not understand; and as the evenings were now long and dark, the visits to the schoolmaster soon came to be regarded as a privilege, and proved an incentive to work to those in the lower classes, only those in the first place being admitted to them.

Reuben worked hard all through the winter, and made very rapid progress; the schoolmaster, seeing how eager he was to get on, doing everything in his power to help him forward, and lending him books to study at home. One morning in the spring, the squire looked in at Mrs. Whitney's shop.

"Mrs. Whitney," he said, "I don't know what you are thinking of doing with that boy of yours. Mr. Shrewsbury

gives me an excellent account of him, and says that he is far and away the cleverest and most studious of the boys. I like the lad, and owe him a good turn for having broken in that pony for my daughter; besides, for his father's sake I should like to help him on. Now, in the first place, what are you thinking of doing with him?"

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," Mrs. Whitney said. "I was thinking, when he gets a little older, of apprenticing him to some trade, but he is not fourteen yet."

"The best thing you can do, Mrs. Whitney. Let it be some good trade, where he can use his wits—not a butcher, a baker, or a tailor, or anything of that sort. I should say an upholsterer, or a mill wright, or some trade where his intelligence can help him on. When the time comes I shall be glad to pay his apprentice fees for him, and perhaps, when you tell me what line he has chosen, a word from me to one of the tradesmen in Lewes may be a help. In the meantime, that is not what I have specially come about. Young Finch, who looks to my garden, is going to leave; and if you like, your boy can have the place. My gardener knows his business thoroughly, and the boy can learn under him. I will pay him five shillings a week. It will break him into work a little, and he is getting rather old for the school now. I have spoken to Shrewsbury, and he says that, if the boy is disposed to go on studying in the evening, he will direct his work and help him on."

"Thank you kindly, sir," Mrs. Whitney said. "I think it will just be the thing, for a year or so, before he is apprenticed. He was saying only last night that he was the biggest boy in the school; and though I know he likes learning, he would

like to be helping me, and feels somehow that it isn't right that he should be going on schooling, while all the other boys at his age are doing something. Not that I want him to earn money, for the shop keeps us both; but it's what he thinks about it."

"That's natural enough, Mrs. Whitney, and anything the boy earns with me, you see, you can put by, and it will come in useful to him some day."

Reuben was glad when he heard of the arrangement; for although, as his mother had said, he was fond of school, he yet felt it as a sort of reproach that, while others of his age were earning money, he should be doing nothing. He accepted the offer of the schoolmaster to continue to work at his studies in the evening, and in a week he was installed in Tom Finch's place.

The arrangement was not the squire's original idea, but that of his younger daughter, who felt a sort of proprietary interest in Reuben; partly because her evidence had cleared him of the accusation of breaking the windows, partly because he had broken in the pony for her; so when she heard that the boy was leaving, she had at once asked her father that Reuben should take his place.

"I think he is a good boy, papa," she said; "and if he was clever enough to break in my pony, I am sure he will be clever enough to wheel the wheelbarrow and pull weeds."

"I should think he would, lassie," her father said, laughing, "although it does not exactly follow. Still, if you guarantee that he is a good boy, I will see about it."

"Mamma doesn't think he is a very good boy," Kate said; "but you see, papa, mamma is a woman, and perhaps she

doesn't understand boys and girls as well as I do. I think he's good, and he told me he never told stories."

The squire laughed.

"I don't know what your mamma would say to that, puss; nor whether she would agree that you understand boys and girls better than she does. However, I will take your opinion this time, and give Reuben a chance."

The subject was not mentioned again in Kate's hearing, but she was greatly pleased, one morning, at seeing Reuben at work in the gardens.

"Good morning, Reuben," she said.

"Good morning, miss," he replied, touching his hat.

"I am glad you have come in Tom's place, and I hope you will be good, and not get into scrapes, for I told papa I thought you would not; and you see, if you do, he will turn round and blame me."

"I will try not to get into scrapes, Miss Kate," Reuben said. "I don't do it often, you know, and I don't think there will be much chance of it, here."

Kate nodded and walked on, and Reuben went about his work.

There was, however, much more opportunity for getting into scrapes than Reuben imagined, although the scrapes were not of the kind he had pictured. Being naturally careless, he had not been there a week before, in his eagerness to get home to a particularly interesting book, he forgot to carry out his orders to shut the cucumber frames and, a sharp frost coming on in the night, the plants were all killed; to the immense indignation of the gardener, who reported the fact, with a very serious face, to the squire.

"I am afraid that boy will never do, squire. Such carelessness I never did see, and them plants was going on beautifully."

"Confound the young rascal!" the squire said wrathfully, for he was fond of cucumbers. "I will speak to him myself. This sort of thing will never do."

And accordingly, the squire spoke somewhat sharply to Reuben, who was really sorry for the damage his carelessness had caused; and he not only promised the squire that it should not occur again, but mentally resolved very firmly that it should not. He felt very shamefaced when Kate passed him in the garden, with a serious shake of her head, signifying that she was shocked that he had thus early got into a scrape, and discredited her recommendation.

The lesson was a useful one. Henceforth Reuben paid closer attention to his work, and even the gardener, who regarded boys as his great trial in life, expressed himself satisfied with him.

"Since that affair of the cucumbers I must own, squire," he said a month later, "that he is the best boy I have come across. He attends to what I say and remembers it, and I find I can trust him to do jobs that I have never been able to trust boys with, before. He seems to take an interest in it, and as he is well spoken and civil, he ought to get on and make a good gardener, in time."

"I am glad to hear a good account of him," the squire replied. "He is sharp and intelligent, and will make his way in life, or I am mistaken. His father was an uncommonly clever fellow, though he made a mess of it, just at the end; and I think the boy takes after him."

Among Reuben's other duties was that of feeding and attending to the dogs. These consisted of two setters, a pointer, and a large house dog, who was chained up at the entrance to the stables. Reuben was soon excellent friends with the sporting dogs, but the watchdog, who had probably been teased by Reuben's predecessor, always growled and showed his teeth when he went near him; and Reuben never dared venture within the length of his chain, but pushed the bowl containing his food just within his reach.

One day, he had been sent on an errand to the stables. He forgot the dog and ran close to the kennel. The animal at once sprang out. Reuben made a rush, but he was not quick enough, and the dog caught him by the leg. Reuben shouted, and the coachman ran out and, seizing a fork, struck the dog and compelled him to loose his hold.

"Has he bit you badly, Reuben?"

"Well, he has bit precious hard," Reuben replied. "I think he has nearly taken a piece out of my calf," as, on pulling up his trousers, he showed his leg streaming with blood.

"Put it under the pump, lad. I will pump on it," the coachman said. "He's a bad-tempered brute, and I wonder the squire keeps it."

"The brute ought to be killed," Reuben grumbled angrily. "I have never teased it or worried it, in any way. I wish you had stuck that fork into him, instead of hitting him with it. If you hadn't been within reach, he would have taken the bit out of me. He will kill somebody some day, and it were best to kill him, first."

The gardener pumped for some time on Reuben's leg; and then, going into the kitchen, he got some strips of rag

from the cook and bound it up.

"You had best go home now," he said. "I will tell the gardener, when he comes round, what has happened to you. I doubt you will have to lay up, for a day or two."

As Reuben limped home, he met Tom Thorne walking with another boy.

"Hello, Reuben!" the latter exclaimed. "What's come to you? Yer trousers bee all tore."

"That brute of a house dog at the squire's has had hold of me," Reuben answered. "The savage beast has had a try, a good many times; but this time he got hold, and he has bit me pretty sharp."

Reuben had to keep his leg quiet for three days but, the third evening, he was well enough to go down the village to the schoolhouse. After the lesson was over he walked for some distance up the road, for his leg was very stiff; and he thought it would be a good thing to try and walk it off, as he intended to go to work next morning. On getting up early in the morning, however, he found it was still stiff and sore; but he thought he had better go and try to work for a bit.

"I am glad you are back again," the gardener said, when he saw him, "for there's a lot of work on hand; but I see you are still lame. The coachman tells me it were a nasty bite."

"It's pretty sore still," Reuben replied, "and I don't think I can walk about much; but I thought I might help in some other way."

"Very well," the gardener said. "There are a lot of plants which want shifting into larger pots. You do them, and I will take up the fork and dig up that piece of ground I want to put the young lettuces into."

Reuben worked hard till half-past eight, and then went off to his breakfast. On his return, he was told the squire wished to speak to him.

"It's about that dog, I expect," the gardener remarked. "I suppose you know he were poisoned last night."

"No, I didn't know," Reuben replied; "but it's a precious good job. I wish he had been poisoned before he got his teeth into me."

Reuben, on going round to the back door, was shown into the library, where the squire was sitting. The coachman was with him.

"Now then, Reuben," the squire said, "I want you to tell me the truth about this matter. The coachman told me, three days ago, that you had been bitten by the yard dog, and I made up my mind to get rid of him, on the first opportunity; but I find he was poisoned, yesterday evening."

He stopped as if expecting Reuben to say something; but the boy, having nothing to say, merely replied:

"Yes, sir, so the gardener has told me."

"What do you know about it, Reuben?"

"I don't know anything about it, sir," Reuben replied, opening his eyes.

"Now, look here, lad," the squire said gravely, "I am disposed to think well of you; and although I consider it a serious offence your poisoning the dog, I shall consider it very much worse if you deny it."

"But I didn't poison it, sir," Reuben affirmed. "I never dreamt of such a thing."

The squire set his lips hard together.