



## *The Little Woodman and his Dog*

In former times there lived, on the borders of a very wide forest, a certain woodcutter, named Roger Hardfoot, who had seven sons. I cannot tell you the names of the six elder sons; but the youngest, who was born several years after his brothers, was called William.

The woodcutter's wife died when William was very little, so the care of the boys was left to their father only. He was an industrious man, and gained a very good livelihood by cutting wood in the forest and tying it up in bundles. These he carried, on the backs of asses, to a small town at some distance; and with the money which he sold them for, he brought back such things as he had need of for himself and his family.





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He made his sons also work with him, and, as they were strong lads, the elder ones soon became able to do almost as much as their father. As a result the earnings of the family were very good, and they might have been very happy, had not that one thing been lacking, without which no family can be happy. The woodcutter was so sinful as to neglect to teach his children to serve God, and this was the more wicked, as he had himself been taught the word of God by his mother when he was a little boy.



But the woodcutter neither thought of his Saviour nor of his poor mother's instructions, until God brought him to reflection by a dreadful accident. One day, while he and his sons were cutting down a tree in the forest, the tree fell upon him and he was so dreadfully hurt that he never was able to work any more. His hurt caused a disease which, by slow degrees, brought on his death. But while death was drawing on, he suffered great pain of body, and his mind was filled with many bitter thoughts; all the sins of his past life were set before him by the almighty power of God, particularly his neglect of his mother, who was a widow, and from whom he





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had run away many years before. And now he began to remind his sons of their duty to God, often speaking to them of their Saviour, and of the world to come.

From day to day the poor dying woodman earnestly begged his sons to turn to God; but they mocked at him and would not listen to him. He could now work for them no longer, nor provide for them what they wanted; so they followed their own business and pleasure, hardly taking care to provide their sick father with common food or clothing. One only of all his sons took pity on him and listened to his advice, and waited upon him. This was little William, his youngest child. He was just five years old at the time when the tree fell upon his father and his heart was not yet grown hard, like the hearts of his brothers.

Fathers and mothers, you should lead your children to love God while they are little, and while their hearts are tender. And you, little children, lose no time, but give yourselves up to God, before you become hard and stubborn, like William's brothers.

William was now the only comfort his poor





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father had in this world. When the woodcutter lay sick upon his bed, William sat by his side and watched beside him and was always ready to bring him everything that he wanted. And when his father crept out into the forest, which he sometimes was able to do, in order to take the air, William followed him; and when he sat down, this little boy sat by him; and when he knelt to pray, little William knelt by him and prayed as well as he could.

One day, when the woodman's eldest sons were gone out to steal deer in the forest, the woodman and his little boy sat at the door of their hut; while Cæsar, little William's dog, lay down at their feet. And as they sat together the woodman talked to his little boy:

"Oh, my little child! My only comfort!" he said, "how wicked was I when your brothers were young like you, that I did not try to lead them to God! But that opportunity is past, and I can do nothing for them now. They will not listen to me; they turn against their dying father; and I deserve this treatment at their hands."

"Why do you say that you deserve it, Father?" said William.





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“For many reasons, my dear boy. I was an undutiful son, and for this cause, if there were no other, I deserve to have undutiful children. My mother was a widow, and one who loved God. Her house is in this forest, but three or four long days’ journey from this place. I was her only child. She brought me up with the greatest tenderness, and taught me early the word of God. But when I grew up I became a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God; I ran away from my dear mother, and have never seen or heard of her since.”



“And is she alive?” said little William.



“Oh, my child! I do not know,” said the woodcutter. “But whether she be alive or dead, I shall never see her again in this world. I only wish that she could know how deeply I repent of my sins; and that I have fled at length to the merits of a gracious Redeemer, as my only hope of being saved from everlasting punishment. And oh, my sons! My sons! I pray for my sons in the bitterness of my soul; for as I was formerly a wicked son, so I have since been a wicked father. I neglected to teach my children the word of God while they were little; and now they despise





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me, turning a deaf ear to my instructions, and hardening their hearts against my reproofs.”

“But,” said William, “perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ may change their hearts even now, Father. Let us pray for them.”

“Yes, my child! My comfort! My delight!” said the woodcutter, “We will pray for them. Every day while I live we will pray for them. This is all I can now do for them.”

So William and his father knelt together at the door of the hut, earnestly praying that God would, in his good time, change the hearts of the young men.

The woodcutter did not live long after this conversation had passed between himself and his little son. In a few days he took to his bed, from which he never rose again. William now became more attentive to him than ever; and never left him but to fetch him water, and such things as he asked for. William sat beside him, and Cæsar lay at his feet; and when the woodman was heard to lift up his voice in prayer his little boy prayed with him.

On the morning of the day on which he died he told his little boy that he trusted his prayers





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had been heard, and that his sins were forgiven him for his Saviour's sake. He then prayed earnestly for his elder sons; after which, kissing little William many times, he begged him to remember his Saviour in the days of his youth.

Towards evening William's brothers came in with a deer, which they had killed in the forest, and a cask of brandy which they had bought from some travellers. Making a great fire in the hut, they roasted the venison, and opened their cask of brandy. They took no notice of their poor dying father, though they could not help knowing the state he was in. However, they invited William to come and feast with them; but this kind little boy would not leave his father. He sat beside him till he grew drowsy, and then lying down by him on his bed, fell asleep.

In the morning, when he awoke, he found his father quite dead, and his brothers lying asleep in different parts of the hut. So, kissing his poor father, he sat crying by him till his brothers awoke.

But, not to make this story too long, I must tell you that the young men buried their father, on the day after his death, in a dark corner of





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the forest, not far from the but. And when they had closed up the grave, and covered it with sod, they returned to the hut, leaving William and Cæsar sitting by the grave.

After returning to the hut the young men sat down to enjoy themselves with the remainder of the venison and brandy. And they began to plot mischief against their little brother, whom they hated, because his ways were not like their ways. "We must not keep him with us," said one of them, "lest, when we kill the king's deer, he should tell of our practices."

"But we will not kill him," said another, "lest his blood should rise up against us."

"Let us take him three days' journey into the forest," said a third, "and there suddenly leave him. He will then never come back to tell tales of his brethren."

"But we must take care to tie up Cæsar in the hut," said a fourth, "or we shall find him very troublesome. There will be no getting him away from the child."

"Tomorrow," said the fifth brother, "we will set out. We will take an ass with us to carry the child; and we will go three long days' journey





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into the depths of the forest.”

“But we must carefully conceal our purpose from the child,” said the sixth, “that we may not be troubled with his cries.”

So these wicked young men having settled their horrible plan, got up early the next morning, and preparing one of the strongest of their asses, they took their little brother out of his bed, and, hastily helping him to dress, set him upon the ass.

“Where are we going?” said William, who thought no evil.

“We are going,” answered the elder brother, “three days’ journey to hunt in the forest and you are to go with us.”

“What! Hunt for the king’s deer?” said William.

His brothers made no answer, but looked at each other.

Cæsar was ready to follow the ass on which his little master rode, wagging his tail, and capering about, to show that he was in a hurry to be gone; but one of the brothers came with a cord, which he fastened round the poor dog’s neck, and dragged him into the hut.





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“May not Cæsar go with us?” said William.

“No,” said the elder brother.

“But we shall be away several days. Will you not leave him food to eat?” added William.

“Mind your own business, child,” answered the brother, “we will take care of Cæsar.”

So Cæsar was tied up in the hut, and all the brothers being now ready, they gave the ass a stroke with a stick, and began their journey into the forest.

They first went down a deep, dark path, where the trees were so thick that the light of heaven was almost shut out; then they began to ascend a steep hill, sometimes turning to the right and sometimes to the left.

In this way they went on, as fast as the ass could trot, continuing their journey till noon; when they stopped under a large oak tree to feed the ass, and to take some refreshment themselves, which they had brought in leather bags upon their backs.

After an hour’s rest they began their journey again, and went on till evening; when they came to a cave, in a deep hollow, near which a spring of water gushed out of the rock. At the mouth





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of this cave the brothers lighted a fire, for fear of wild beasts, and having eaten supper, laid themselves down to sleep.

The next day they continued their journey into the depths of the forest, where they saw many deer, which peeped at them from among the undergrowth, and then ran away. At night they slept on a little circle of grass, which they found in an open part of the forest. But one of the brothers was obliged to watch all night, to keep up a large fire, which they had lighted for fear of the wolves, whom they heard all night howling and baying around them.

The next morning they began their last day's journey. The ass was much too tired; but this, however, did not disturb these hard-hearted men. They drove the poor creature forward without mercy, taking little rest, till they came, towards dusk, to a place where four ways met. Here they halted, and having lighted a fire, they sat down to eat and drink.

"We have been travelling three days," said little William. "Are we now at our journey's end?"

"Do you think we are come far enough?" said the elder brother, laughing.





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“I do not know what you are come for, brother,” answered William.

“To steal the king’s deer,” replied the young man.

“But there are deer much nearer our hut than this place; why should you come so far to steal deer?”

“You will know soon enough,” was the only answer they returned.

So after they had eaten their supper they all lay down to sleep; everyone without saying his prayers, except little William, who, though he was much tired, fell upon his knees to pray. He joined his little hands, as he had been taught to do by his poor father, and called upon God, in the name of his Redeemer, to take care of him. “My father is dead,” said he to himself, “and my brothers speak very roughly and unkindly to me. I have no friend in this world to care for me. O my God! Do thou take care of me, for my dear Saviour’s sake.”

When he finished this prayer he lay down by the ass, and was falling asleep, when he fancied he heard these words, - “I will. Be not afraid.” At this he raised up his head and looked about





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to discover the speaker; but his brothers were all asleep about him, except the one who was watching the fire, who sat silently with his elbows upon his knees. Then the little boy thought that these words had been put into his mind by his heavenly Father; so he felt comforted, and lay down again to sleep. Now little William was very much tired, and he slept so soundly that he never heard his brothers move: for these wicked young men, in pursuance of their horrible scheme, got up before break of day, and leading away the ass, quietly departed towards their own house, leaving William in a deep sleep upon the grass.



William continued to sleep, being undisturbed, till the sun was high enough to shine upon him through the upper parts of the trees. Two jackdaws chattering in a branch above his head now awakened him, when he sat up and looked round him. The turf on which he had been sleeping was interspersed with many beautiful flowers; there was the violet, the wood-anemone, and the many-coloured vetch; and birds of various kinds were hopping about, singing and chirping among the trees. It





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was a lovely morning, and the leaves of the trees were scarcely moved by the gentle wind.

William at first could not remember where he was, or how he came into that place. But when he realised that his companions were gone, and that he was left quite alone, he began to cry bitterly, and to call out aloud for his brothers. His voice sounded through the wood, but no answer was returned. His brothers were already many miles away from him.

“Oh, my brothers! My cruel brothers!” said William, “did you bring me here in order to leave me in this place? On my father! My poor father! Could you now see your little boy, how grieved you would be! But you are happy. I hope you cannot see me. God can see me, and he will pity me and take care of me. If the wild beasts should eat my body, my soul will go to heaven. My Saviour will pity me. I am a little sinful boy, but my Saviour came to die for sinners.”

Then little William did what all children should do in trouble; he knelt down and prayed very earnestly for God’s help.

After he had done praying he thought he would try to follow his brothers; but then he





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remembered that, as four ways met in that place, it would be impossible for him to know which way they went. He looked to see if there were any marks of fresh footsteps in any of the roads, but could not find any. He then returned to the place where he had slept and, sitting down on the grass, began to weep bitterly. But not a word of complaint came out of his lips; only from time to time he prayed earnestly for help from heaven; and his prayers were always made in the name of the Saviour.



Sometimes it came into his mind that his brothers were only gone a-hunting, and that they would come back again in the evening; and this made him unwilling to leave the place in which they had left him.



Towards midday, being very hungry and thirsty, he began to look carefully about for any bits or scraps of bread and meat which his brothers might have left on the grass. He found some, which he ate thankfully; and in searching among the bushes he found a little spring of water, of which he drank and was refreshed.

In this way God provided him with a meal in the wilderness, where no man lived. So poor





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little William was very thankful, and his trust in God was made greater by this kindness.

My dear little children, when God sends you smaller blessings, be thankful for them. God loves a thankful disposition. It is a sign of a humble mind: and God loves a humble mind; for it is written in the Bible, God resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble.

And now the time of William's hardest trial came on; but his heavenly father remembered him and had provided a place of comfort for him. But you shall hear how it was.

As evening approached, the wood became more and more gloomy. The birds ceased to sing, and went to rest upon the boughs of the trees; the crickets chirped among the dry leaves; and great bats began to flit about, flapping their heavy wings among the branches above his head. Poor little William began to think how he should spend the night, and where he could be safe from the wild beasts, for he had given up all hopes of his brothers' return. He looked about for a tree into which he might climb, for he was not able to get into a very high one, being but a little boy. After some time he found one, which he





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managed to climb, and among the branches of which he did his best to fix himself firmly. But he feared that he could not keep himself awake all night, though he did not dare to go to sleep, lest he should fall down from the tree.

Soon after this it became dark, and the wind arose and whistled dismally through the woods. But, what was still worse than the wind, he heard the distant howling of a wolf, which made his little heart to beat: so he sat trembling from head to foot. His fear, however, had the right effect: it did not make him cry; but it urged him to pray. He prayed that his heavenly father would be with him in his trouble; and his prayer was made, as before, in the name of that Saviour to whom his father, the poor woodman, had for the last few months of his life taken such pains to lead his young heart.

The tree into which William had climbed was directly facing one of the four ways I before spoke of; and while he was praying, suddenly he noticed a light, as of a candle or fire, which seemed to be at the end of this way or path. This was a sign that some person was near, who perhaps might take pity on him. He did not wait





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a moment, but lifting up his heart in thankfulness to God, he came hastily down from the tree, and ran towards the place where he had seen the light. But being upon the ground, he could see the light no longer; nevertheless, remembering the direction in which it had appeared, he ran that way with all his might; for he was very afraid of wolves. The forest was full of them.

The path he had taken went over very uneven ground, leading him sometimes up hill, and sometimes down. So when he had gone on for about half a mile, and had reached the top of a slope, he saw the light again, which looked nearer and brighter than before. This comforted him greatly; and though he did not stop running, he lifted up his heart in thankfulness to heaven. He lost sight of the light, however, almost immediately, the path just leading him down into a deep valley.

As he was running down into this valley, some clouds rolled away, and he saw the moon. It was not the full moon, but the new moon, which looked like a beautiful silver crescent rising above the woods. By its cheering light he could





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see that a stream of water ran across the bottom of the valley; and this filled him with fear, not knowing how deep or wide the water might be, nor how he should get across it. But he still kept running on towards it, till his little feet began to ache sadly.

And here he had a most dreadful fright for, as he was running on, he heard feet padding after him, like the feet of some wild beast, and panting which he supposed to be that of a wolf. It came nearer and nearer, till at length poor little William was so terrified that he could run no longer, but fell down at his full length upon the ground, believing that the next moment he should be torn to pieces. And now the creature came close up to him, putting his head so near to William's cheek that the frightened child could feel his breath; and presently he felt the tongue of an animal, put out, as he thought, to begin to devour him. But instead of biting or hurting him, the creature began to lick him, and to utter a cry of joy, by which William knew him to be his faithful dog, Cæsar, who had broken the rope that bound him at home, and had come all the way through the forest in search of his little master.

