

CHAPTER IV.

*IN WHICH PETERS AND PERCY HOLD A VERY ODD CON-
VERSATION.*

IT was the morning following the ghost's discomfiture. The students had nearly all deserted the washroom, when a sorry little figure, the picture of misery, came limping down the staircase.

"Oh, Mr. Middleton, I'm awfully sick. I don't know what's the matter with me. Do I look bad, sir?"

"Well, Percy, your face looks the same as usual; but you walk somewhat more stiffly. Where do you feel ill?"

"Oh, most everywhere."

"Did the ghost make you sick?"

"Oh, is that what the poor boy intended to play? I thought he just wanted to make me laugh: he did look so ridiculous! Oh no, indeedy!—I beg your pardon—Oh no, indeed! he didn't scare me one bit."

"But where do you feel pain?"

"My legs are so stiff I can hardly walk. Then my right arm aches dreadfully, and my shoulder-blade is sore, too."

"I know your trouble, Percy," said Mr. Middleton, breaking into a smile of relief. "You played more than usual yesterday, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, indeedy!—I mean yes, sir. I never took so much exercise before in all my life."

"That's it precisely. Your muscles have not been accustomed to such strains. You'll be all right if you keep quiet for a day or two. This morning you are really too stiff to go about at all, so I'm going to allow you a late sleep. You may go back to the dormitory now, and after breakfast I'll send Tom Playfair to awake you."

"Oh, thank you, sir. I'm so tired, I just feel as if I could sleep for a week. Mr. Middleton, do you think I am much like a girl?"

"Well, in some respects you are." The prefect was nigh overcome at this abrupt and singular question.

"Ah! I thought so," said Percy, who seemed in nowise discouraged at this candid answer. "Tom Playfair said the same thing, and he's so honest. Mr. Middleton, do you think it's wrong to act like a girl?"

"The question never occurred to me in exactly that light before," answered Mr. Middleton, highly amused. "Of course, if a person can't help acting like a girl, I can't blame him."

"Well, it's not convenient. I think everybody looks at me as if I were a curiosity. Couldn't you suggest some changes in me, Mr. Middleton, to avoid being stared at? I hate to be stared at; don't you?"

"I am not fond of it, certainly."

The prefect could not but reflect that Percy's long golden hair helped much towards giving him a girlish appearance. Indeed, he was on the point of advising his questioner to rid himself of this

feminine adornment, but he refrained from giving the idea words.

"The poor lad," he reflected, "might find it a bitter trial just now. Probably his mamma and sisters thought much and made much of that head of golden hair, and, Percy, with such memories fresh upon him, might consider its loss desecration. But even if I say nothing at present, the idea will still probably occur to him at some better time."

The prefect's decision was no less kind than judicious. He added aloud:

"Well, Percy, the best advice I can give you is to harden your muscles and strengthen your frame with plenty of out-door exercise. Take Tom Playfair for your guide in these matters, and very, very soon people won't care in the least about staring at you. Now go to bed. Some other time we'll have a longer talk on the same subject."

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Middleton. Good-by, sir;" and with a most unsuccessful attempt at his neat little bow, Percy made his way up to the dormitory.

Mass and studies over, Tom awoke him. After his second sleep, Percy found himself much better, but so stiff withal as to preclude all idea of his taking further exercise, at least for that day.

"As you like reading," said Tom when Percy had finished his breakfast, "I'd advise you to read. Sit down on some bench, and take it easy. I'll come round now and then to see that you're all right."

"You mustn't trouble yourself about me at all, Tom. I'm just as happy as can be when I've a book to my liking. And I've got something splen-

did now—'Dion and the Sibyls.' Mamma says it is, perhaps, the best Catholic novel ever written in the English language."

"Well, read away," said Tom. "I wish I liked reading as well as you. Most books make me weary. I haven't read hardly anything except 'The Miser,' and 'The Poor Gentleman,' and a few short stories." And Tom, almost sighing at his want of taste in literary matters, tripped away to fulfil an engagement at the hand-ball alley, leaving Percy seated contentedly on a bench in the delightful company of his cherished volume.

But he was not long undisturbed. Martin Peters, the accomplice of Richards in the unsuccessful apparition of the night, had puzzled much over Percy's character. He had never met, never imagined such a boy. He had seen Percy blush and tremble in the face of an impudent question, he had noted his alarm at the prospect of vaulting over Tom Playfair, and he had contemplated with no little glee his fear and anxiety on hitting John Donnel with the ball. All these traits had led him to believe that Percy was a coward. Hence he had confidently and jubilantly counted on Percy's going almost into hysterics at the sight of Richards in his spectre-attire. But Percy's laughter and glee upon confronting the spirit had dashed all his theories. Could it be that the girlish lad was not a coward? Impossible! What, then, might be the explanation of his seeming bravery? Perhaps, Peters reflected, he had been forewarned; perhaps, even he had overheard himself and Richards discussing their plans. Peters was a wily lad—

a young Ulysses—and he determined to explore to its depths the mystery of Percy's courage.

"Good-morning, Wynn," he began, seating himself beside the odd Baltimore boy, and trying to smile pleasantly, "you're having a read, I see."

Percy closed his volume.

"Yes; I've a nice book. It's 'Dion and the Sibyls.' Have you read it?"

"No," said Peters.

"Oh, you ought to. It's delicious. Some of the scenes are described so nicely that you would think you were on the spot, witnessing everything yourself. Aren't you fond of fine descriptions?"

"I like them well enough," said Peters, who, as a matter of fact, had never given the subject a moment's thought. "But see here, Wynn, I came to talk about something else. I heard you saw a ghost last night."

Percy broke into a musical laugh.

"Oh dear, no! It was one of the boys who wanted to have a little fun. He *did* make me laugh, and I'm really sorry he got hurt. I'm sure he meant no harm."

"Don't you think he wanted to frighten you?" queried Peters, much astounded at this simple view of the case.

"Surely not," said Percy. "It is extremely cruel and unkind to attempt to scare a person badly, and I don't believe Richards would think of such a thing. He has a kind face. Tom Playfair says boys are just as good as girls. Now girls wouldn't act that way. My sisters never did anything mean, though they used to play jokes on me too. One time, sister Mary, who is the greatest

joker of them all, told me to go to my room and put on my new shoes. When I tried to get them on, I found a pair of gloves, one in each. It was a splendid joke, and we all enjoyed it very much."

Peters was not accustomed to this kind of conversation, nor were his faculties of wit and humor capable of appreciating a joke so innocent. He was disgusted. The boy, he thought, must be a simpleton.

"Well, but weren't you scared last night?"

"No, indeedy!—I mean not at all. Why should I be?"

"Aren't you afraid of ghosts?"

"Oh dear, no!" laughed Percy, throwing back his hair and shaking his head. "Ghosts don't bother people. Why, when I lie awake in my bed at night I never think of ghosts. But I *do* think of angels."

"You do?" said Peters, dubiously.

"Yes, indeedy!" answered Percy, warming to his subject. "And I think there's more sense in it. We know from our religion that we've each a guardian angel. But we don't know for certain that there are any ghosts around us. Besides, I'd rather see an angel than a ghost. There's only one thing would prevent me from wishing to see my angel."

"What's that?" asked the muddled Ulysses, realizing more and more that he was beyond his depth.

"Sin!" exclaimed Percy with great emphasis, "mortal sin! If I were to do anything very bad, then I would fear meeting my angel's face of reproach. But oh, how glad I'd be to see him if I were good! The angels must be very beautiful; don't you think so, sir?"

"Oh, I suppose so," answered Peters, irresolutely.
 "Yes, indeedy!—I mean surely. One of the nicest books I ever read was Father Faber's 'Tales of the Angels.' Did you ever read it?"

"No," said Peters, more and more confounded.

"Oh, you must. I've got it with me in my trunk, and I'll lend it to you. The stories are so sweet. Would you like to read it? It's much better than reading about ghosts. Mamma told me never to think of ugly or disagreeable things after my night prayers, but always of God or the angels. Don't you think that's a splendid idea?"

"Yes, I guess so," Peters made answer as he shambled off.

Poor Peters! the pretty thoughts which Percy had just communicated to him were very absurd from his point of view. The idea of talking about angels! He departed convinced that Percy was little more than a simpleton. Yet, do not suppose, my dear reader, that Percy's words were utterly thrown away. Peters departed knowing more of angels, knowing more of beauty, than he had ever known before. These pretty words of Percy's may again awake in Peters' heart, these pretty words may do much towards raising his soul from foulness and sin to the All-beautiful God.

Good words from pure, innocent hearts are never lost; they are seeds of rare flowers whose blossom we shall behold beyond the grave.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH PERCY GOES A-FISHING.

IT was Thursday morning, a full recreation-day. Percy had quite recovered from his stiffness, and, according to agreement, was about to start for the "lakes" on a day's fishing excursion.

Promptly after breakfast, John Donnel, George Keenan, who was John's inseparable friend and classmate, Harry, Tom, Percy, Willie, and Joe briskly issued from the college grounds, and set forward westward along the railroad-track.

"Oh, what a glorious morning!" cried Keenan, taking in a full breath; "it makes one feel poetical."

Now George was a member of the Poetry class.

"Yes, indeedy!—I mean Oh yes," chimed in Percy.

"Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain-top with sovereign eye."

"See here, you young prodigy," said Donnel, where's your mountain-top?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular. This Kansas country is all little hills. But the lines came to my head when George said 'glorious morning,' and I couldn't help saying them. Anyhow, just look at the village-roofs dancing in the light of the sun."

"As Tennyson says in his famous lyric on St. Maure's at Sunrise," George gravely remarked,