

MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

By FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN

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CHAPTER—X.—Continued.

That part of the Ladies' Aid Society which lived in West Covington was bearing down upon them.

"Yonder's our mamas and Miss Minerva," he whispered. "Now look what a mess Billy's done got us in; he all time got to perpose something to get chillens in trouble and he all time got to let grown folks ketch 'em."

"Aren't you ashamed to tell such a story, Jimmy Garner?" cried Frances. "Billy didn't propose any such thing."

"Tain't no use to run," advised Jimmy. "They're too close and done already see us. We bound to get what's coming to us anyway, so you might jus' as well make 'em think you ain't 'traid of 'em. Grown folks got to all time think little boys and girls 'r skeered of 'em, anyhow."

"Aunt Minerva'll sho' put me to bed this time," said Billy. "Looks like ev'ry day I gatter got to bed."

"Mother will make me study the catechism all day tomorrow," said Lina dimly.

"Mamma'll lock me up in the little closet under the stairway," said Frances.

"My mama'll gimme 'bout a million licks and try to take all the hide off o' me," said Jimmy; "but we done had a heap of fun."

It was some hours later. Billy's aunt had ruthlessly clipped the turkey feathers from his head, taking the hair off in great patches. She had then boiled his scalp, so the little boy thought, in her efforts to remove the muckage. Now, shorn of his locks and of some of his courage, the child was sitting quietly by her side, listening to a superior moral lecture and indulging in a compulsory heart-to-heart talk with his relative.

"I don't see that it does you any good, William, to put you to bed."

"I don't see as it do neither," agreed Billy.

"I can not whip you; I am constitutionally opposed to corporal punishment for children."

"I's posed to it too," he assented.

"I believe I will hire a servant, so that I may devote my entire time to your training."

This prospect for the future did not appeal to her nephew. On the contrary it filled him with alarm.

"A husband 'd be another sight handier," he declared with energy; "he'd be a heap mo' 'count to you'n a cook, Aunt Minerva. There's that Major—"

"You will never make a preacher of yourself, William, unless you improve."

The child looked up at her with astonishment; this was the first he knew of his being destined for the ministry.

"A preacher what 'zorts an' calls up mourners?" he said,—"noo on yo' tin-type. Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln—"

"How many times have I expressed the wish not to have you bring that negro's name into the conversation?" she impatiently interrupted.

"I don't perzactly know, 'm," he answered good humoredly, "bout fifty hundred, I reckon. Anyways, Aunt Minerva, I ain't goin' to be no preacher. When I puts on long pants I's goin' to be a Confedrit Vet'r'n an' kill 'bout fifty hundred Yankees an' Injuns, like my Major man."

CHAPTER XI.

Now Riddle Me This.

The children were sitting in the swing. Florence Hammer, a little girl whose mother was spending the day at Miss Minerva's, was with them.

"Don't you-all wish Santa Claus had his birthday right now 'stead o' waiting till Christmas to hang up our stockings?" asked Frances.

"Christmas isn't Santa Claus' birthday," corrected Lina. "God was born on Christmas and that's the reason we hang up our stockings."

"Yes; it's old Santa's birthday, too," argued Jimmy. "'cause it's in the Bible and Miss Cecelia 'splained it to me and she 'bout the dandiest 'splainer they is."

"Which you-all like the best; God or Doctor Sanford or Santa Claus?" asked Florence.

"I like God 'nother sight better'n I do anybody," declared Jimmy. "'cause He so forgivingsome. He's 'bout the forgivingest person they is. Santa Claus can't let you go to Heaven nor Doctor Sanford neither, nor our papas and mamas nor Miss Minerva. Now wouldn't we be in a pretty fix if we had to 'pend on Doctor Sanford or Santa Claus to forgive you every time you run off or fall down and bust your breeches. Naw; gimme God ev'ry time."

"I like Santa Claus the best," declared Frances. "'cause he isn't 'r ever getting in your way, and hasn't any castor oil like Doctor Sanford, and you don't 'r ever have to be telling him you're sorry you did what you did, and he hasn't all time got one eye on you either, like God, and got to follow you 'round. And Santa Claus don't all time say, 'Shet your eyes and open your mouth,' like Doctor Sanford, 'and yoke out your tongue.'" "I like Doctor Sanford the best," said Florence. "'cause he's my uncle,

and God and Santa Claus ain't kin to me."

"And the Bible says, 'Love your kin-folks,' Miss Cecelia 'splained—"

"I use to like my Uncle Doc' heap better'n what I do now," went on the little girl, heedless of Jimmy's interruption. "till I went with daddy to his office one day. And what you reckon that man's got in his office? He 'is got a dead man 'thout no meat nor clo'es on, nothing a tall but just his bones."

"Was he a hant?" asked Billy. "I like the Major best—he's got meat on."

"Naw; he didn't have no sheet on—just bones," was the reply.

"No sheet on; no meat on!" chirruped Billy, glad of the rhyme.

"Was he a angel, Florence?" questioned Frances.

"Naw; he didn't have no harp and no wings neither."

"It must have been a skeleton," explained Lina.

"And Uncle Doc' just keep that poor man there and won't let him go to Heaven where dead folks b'longs."

"I spec' he wasn't a good man 'fore he died and got to go to the Bad place," suggested Frances.

"I'll betcher he never asked God to forgive him when he 'celved his papa and sassed his mama,"—this from Jimmy,—and Doctor Sanford's just a-keeping old Satan from getting him to toast on a pitchfork."

"I hope they'll have a Christmas tree at Sunday-School 'next Christmas," said Frances, harking back.

"And I hope I'll get a heap o' things like I did last Christmas. Poor little Tommy Knott he's so skeered he wasn't going to get nothing at all on the tree so he got him a great, big, red apple an' he wrote on a piece o' paper 'From Tommy Knott to Tommy Knott,' and tied it to the apple and put it on the tree for hi'self."

"Let's ask riddles," suggested Lina.

"All right," shouted Frances. "I'm going to ask the first."

"Naw; you ain't neither," objected Jimmy. "You all three got to ask the first riddle. I'm going to ask the first one—"

"Round as a biscuit, busy as a bee, Prettiest little thing you ever did see?"

"Humpty Dumpty set on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, All the king's horses and all the king's men, Can't put Humpty Dumpty back again!"

"Round as a ring, deep as a cup, All the king's horses can't pull it up."

"House full, yard full, can't ketch—"

"Hush, Jimmy!" cried Lina, in disgust. "You don't know how to ask riddles. You must n't give the answers, too. Ask one riddle at a time and let some one else answer it."

"As I was going through a field of wheat I picked up something good to eat, 'Twas neither fish nor flesh nor bone, I kept it till it ran alone?"

"A snake! A snake!" guessed Florence. "That's a easy riddle."

"Snake, nothing!" scoffed Jimmy. "you can't eat a snake. 'Sides Lina wouldn't 'r a picked up a snake. Is it a little baby rabbit, Lina?"

"It was neither fish nor flesh nor bone," she declared; "and a rabbit is flesh and bone."

"Then it's bou'n' to be a apple," was

Jimmy's next guess; "that ain't no flesh and blood and it's good to eat."

"An apple can't run alone," she triumphantly answered. "Give it up? Well, it was an egg and it hatched to a chicken. Now, Florence, you ask one."

"S'pose a man was locked up in a house," she asked, "how'd he get out?"

"Clam' outer a winder," guessed Billy.

"T wa'n't no winder to the house," she declared.

"Crawled out th'oo the chim'ly, like Santa Claus," was Billy's next guess,

"T wa'n't no chim'ly to it. Give it up? Give it up?" the little girl laughed gleefully. "Well, he just broke out with measles."

"It is Billy's time," said Lina, who seemed to be mistress of ceremonies.

"Tabernicle learnt this here one at school; see if y'all can guess it: 'Tabby had four kittens but Stillsee didn't have none 't all.'"

"I don't see no sense a tall in that," argued Jimmy. "'thout some bad little boys drowned 'em."

"Tabby was a cat," explained the other boy, "and she had four kittens; and Stillsee was a little girl, and she didn't have no kittens 't all."

"What's this," asked Jimmy: "'A man rode 'cross a bridge and Fido walked?' Had a little dog name 'Fido.'"

"You didn't ask that right, Jimmy," said Lina, "you always get things wrong. The riddle is, 'A man rode across the bridge and Yet he walked,' and the answer is, 'He had a little dog named Yet who walked across the bridge.'"

"Well, I'd 'nother sight ruther have a little dog name 'Fido,'" declared Jimmy. "I little dog name 'Yet and a little girl name 'Stillsee ain't got no sense a tall to it."

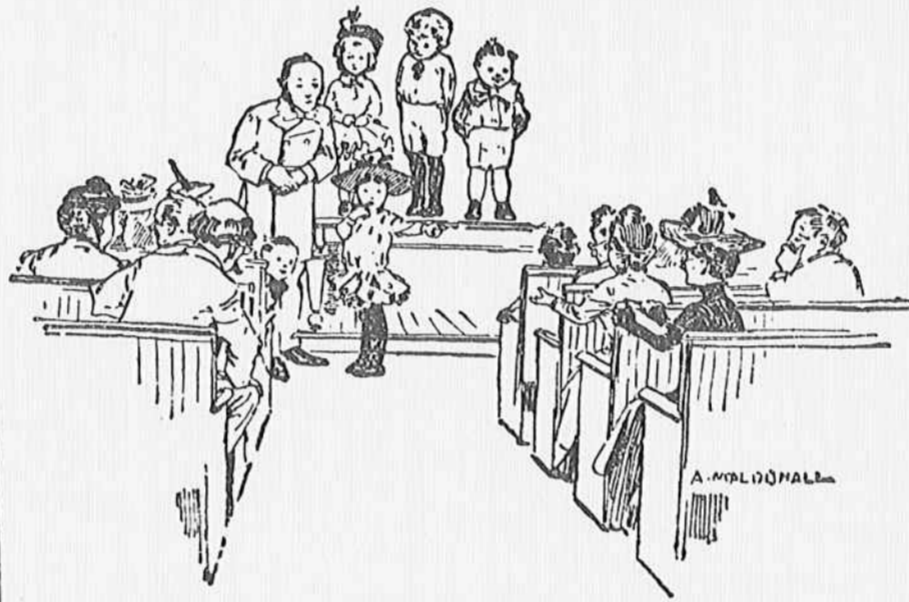
"Why should a hangman wear suspenders?" asked Lina. "I'll bet nobody can answer that."

"To keep his breeches from falling off," triumphantly answered Frances.

"No, you goose, a hangman should wear suspenders so that he'd always have a gallows handy."

CHAPTER XII.

In the House of the Lord. It was a beautiful Sunday morning. The pulpit of the Methodist Church



"My Father and Mother Are Sitting Right There."

was not occupied by its regular pastor, Brother Johnson. Instead, a traveling minister, collecting funds for a church orphanage in Memphis, was the speaker for the day. Miss Minerva rarely missed a service in her own church. She was always on hand at the Love Feast and the Missionary Rally and gave liberally of her means to every cause. She was sitting in her own pew between Billy and Jimmy, Mr. and Mrs. Garner having remained at home. Across the aisle from her sat Frances Black, between her father and mother; and two pews in front of her were Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, with Lina on the outside next the aisle. The good Major was there, too; it was the only place he could depend upon for seeing Miss Minerva.

The preacher, after an earnest and eloquent discourse from the text, "He will remember the fatherless," closed the big Bible with a bang calculated to wake up any who might be sleeping. He came down from the pulpit and stood close to his hearers as he made his last pathetic appeal.

"My own heart," said he, "goes out to every orphan child, for in the yellow fever epidemic of '78, when but two years old, I lost both father and mother. If there are any little orphan children here today, I should be glad if they would come up to the front and shake hands with me."

Now Miss Minerva always faithfully responded to every proposal made by a preacher; it was a part of her religious conviction. At revivals she was ever a shining, if solemn and austere, light. When a minister called for all those who wanted to go to Heaven to rise, she was always the first one on her feet. If he asked to see the raised hands of those who were members of the church at the tender age of ten years, Miss Minerva's thin, long arm gave a prompt response. Once when a celebrated evangelist was holding a big protracted meeting under canvas in the town and had asked those who had read the book of Hezekiah in the Bible to stand up, Miss Minerva on one side of the big tent and her devoted lover on the other side were among the few who had risen to their feet. She had read the good book from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation over and over so she thought she had read Hezekiah a score of times.

So now, when the preacher called for little orphans to come forward, she leaned down and whispered to her nephew, "Go up to the front, William, and shake hands with the nice kind preacher."

"Wha' fer?" he asked. "I don't want to go up there; ev'body here'll look right at me."

"Are there no little orphans here?" the minister was saying. "I want to shake the hand of any little child who has had the misfortune to lose its parents."

"Go on, William," commanded his aunt. "Go shake hands with the preacher."

The little boy again demurred but, Miss Minerva insisting, he obediently slipped by her and by his chum,

Walking gracefully and jauntily up the aisle to the spot where the lecturer was standing by a broad table, he held out his slim, little hand.

Jimmy looked at these proceedings of Billy's in astonishment, not comprehending at all. He was rather indignant that the older boy had not confided in him and invited his participation.

But Jimmy was not the one to sit calmly by and be ignored when there was anything doing, so he slid awkwardly from the bench before Miss Minerva knew what he was up to. Signaling Frances to follow, he swaggered pompously behind Billy and he, too, held out a short, fat hand to the minister.

The speaker smiled benignly down upon them; lifting them up in his arms he stood the little boys upon the table. He thought the touching sight of these innocent and tender little orphans would empty the pockets of the audience. Billy turned red with embarrassment at his conspicuous position, while Jimmy grinned happily at the amused congregation. Horrified Miss Minerva half rose to her feet, but decided to remain where she was. She was a timid woman and did not know what course she ought to pursue. Besides, she had just caught the Major's smile.

"And how long have you been an orphan?" the preacher was asking of Billy.

"Ever sence me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born," sweetly responded the child.

"I 'bout the orphanest boy they is," volunteered Jimmy.

Frances, responding to the latter's invitation, had crawled over her father's legs before he realized what was happening. She, too, went smiling

down the aisle, her stiff white dress standing straight up in the back like a strutting gobbler's tail. She grabbed hold of the man's hand, and was promptly lifted to the table beside the other "orphans." Tears stood in the good preacher's eyes as he turned to the tittering audience and said in a pathetic voice, "Think of it, my friends, this beautiful little girl has no mother."

Poor Mrs. Black! A hundred pairs of eyes sought her pew and focused themselves upon the pretty young woman sitting there, red, angry, and shamefaced. Mr. Black was visibly amused and could hardly keep from laughing aloud.

As Frances passed by the Hamiltons' pew in her promenade down the aisle, Mrs. Hamilton leaned across her husband and made an attempt to clutch Lina; but she was too late; already that dignified little "orphan" was gliding with stately, conscious tread to join the others. This was too much for the audience. A few boys laughed out and for the first time the preacher's suspicions were aroused. As he clasped Lina's slender, graceful little hand he asked:

"And you have no father or mother, little girl?"

"Yes, I have, too," she angrily retorted. "My father and mother are sitting right there," and she pointed a slim forefinger to her crimson, embarrassed parents.

CHAPTER XIII.

Job and Pollie Bumpus.

"I never have told a down-right falsehood," said Lina. "Mother taught me how wicked it is to tell stories. Did you ever tell a fib to your mother, Frances?"

"Tain't no use to try to 'celve my mama," was the reply of the other little girl; "she's got such gimlet eyes and ears she can tell with 'em shut if you're fibbing. I gave up hope long ago, so I just go 'long and tell her the plain gospel truth when she asks me, 'cause I know those gimlet eyes and ears of hers 're going to worm it out o' me somehow."

"Grown folks pin you down so close sometimes," said Jimmy, "you bound to 'varicate a little; and I always tell God I'm sorry. I tell my mama the truth 'most all time 'cepting when she asks questions 'bout things ain't none of her business a tall, and she all time want to know 'Who done it?' and if I let on it's me, I know she'll wear out the slippers and hair-brushes they is paddling my canoe, 'sides switches, so I jus' say 'I do know, 'm'—which all time ain't perzactly the truth. You ever tell Miss Minerva stories, Billy?"

"Aunt Cindy always says, 'twan't no harm 't all to beat 'bout the bush an' try to 'throw folks offer the track 'long as you can, but if it come to the point where you got to tell a out-an'-out fib, she say for me always to tell the truth, an' I jest nachelly do like she say ever sence I's born," replied Billy.

The children swung awhile in st-

lence. Presently Jimmy broke the quiet by remarking:

"Don't you all feel sorry for old Miss Pollie Bumpus? She live all by herself, and she 'bout a million years old, and Doctor Sanford ain't never bring her no chillens 'cause she 'ain't got 'er no husband' to be their papa, and she got a octopus in her head, and she poor as a post and deaf as Job's old turkey-hen."

"Job's old turkey-hen wasn't deaf," retorted Lina primly; "she was very, very poor and thin."

"She was deaf, too," insisted Jimmy, "'cause it's in the Bible. I know all 'bout Job," bragged he.

"I know all 'bout Job, too," chirped Frances.

"Job, nothing!" said Jimmy, with a sneer; "you all time talking 'bout you know all 'bout Job; you 'bout the womanishest little girl they is. Now I know Job 'cause Miss Cecelia 'splained all 'bout him to me. He's in the Bible and he sold his birthmark for a mess of potatoes and—"

"You never can get anything right, Jimmy," interrupted Lina; "that was Esau and it was not his birthmark, it was his birthstone; and he sold his birthstone for a mess of potash."

"Yes," agreed Frances; "he saw Esau kissing Kate and Esau had to sell him his birthstone to keep his mouth shut."

"Mother read me all about Job," continued Lina; "he was afflicted with boils and his wife knlt him a Job's comforter to wrap around him, and he—"

"And he sat under a 'tato vine," put in Frances eagerly, "what God grew to keep the sun off o' his boils and—"

"That was Jonah," said Lina, "and it wasn't a potato vine; it was—"

"No, 't wasn't Jonah neither; Jonah is inside of a whale's bel—"

"Frances!"

"Stommick," Frances corrected herself, "and a whale swallow him, and how's he going to sit under a pumpkin vine when he's inside of a whale?"

"It was not a pumpkin vine, it—"

"And I'd jus' like to see a man inside of a whale a-setting under a morning-glory vine."

"The whale vomicked him up," said Jimmy.

"What sorter thing is a octopus like what y'all say is in Miss Pollie Bumpus's head?" asked Billy.

"Tain't a octopus, it's a polypus," explained Frances. "'cause she's named Miss Pollie. It's a someping that grows in your nose and has to be named what you's named. She's named Miss Pollie and she's got a polypus."

"I'm mighty glad my mama ain't got no Eva-pus in her head," was Jimmy's comment. "Ain't you glad, Billy, your Aunt Minerva ain't got no Miss Minerva-pus?"

"I sho' is," fervently replied Miss Minerva's nephew; "she's hard 'nough to manage now like she is."

"I'm awfud good to Miss Pollie," said Frances. "I take her someping good to eat 'most every day. I took her two pieces of pie this morning; I ate one piece on the way and she gimme the other piece when I got there. I jus' don't believe she could get 'long at all 'thout me to carry her the good things to eat that my mama send her; I takes her pies all the time; she says they're the best smelling pies she smelt."

"You 'bout the piggiest girl they is," said Jimmy, "all time got to eat up a poor old woman's pies. You'll have a Frances-pus in your stomach first thing you know."

"She's got a horn that you talk th'oo," continued the little girl, serenely contemptuous of Jimmy's adverse criticism, "and 'fore I knew how you talk into it, she says to me one day, 'How's your ma?' and stuck that old horn at me; so I put it to my ear, too, and there we set; she got one end of the horn to her ear and I got the other end to my ear; so when I saw this wasn't going to work I took it and blew into it; you-all'd died a-laughing to see the way I did. But now I can talk th'oo it's good's anybody."

"That is an ear trumpet, Frances," said Lina; "it is not a horn."

"Let's play 'Hide the Switch,'" suggested Billy.

"I'm going to hide it first," cried Frances.

"Naw, you ain't," objected Jimmy, "you all time got to hide the switch first. I'm going to hide it first myself."

"No, I'm going to say 'William Com Trumbleton,'" said Frances, "and see who's going to hide it first. Now you-all spraddle out your fingers."

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Algernon Jones.

Again it was Monday, with the Ladies Aid Society in session. Jimmy was sitting on the grass in his own front yard in full view of Sarah Jane, who was ironing clothes in her cabin with strict orders to keep him at home. Billy was in the swing in Miss Minerva's yard.

"Come on over," he invited.

"I can't," was the reply across the fence. "I'm so good now I 'bout got 'ligion; I reckon I'm going to be a mish'nary or a pol'tician, one o' t'other when I'm a grown-up man 'cause I'm so good; I ain't got but five whippings this week. I been good ever since I let you 'suade me to play Injun. I'm the goodest boy in this town, I spec'. Sometimes I get scared 'bout being so good 'cause I hear a woman say if you too good, you going to die or you ain't got no sense, once. You come on over here; you ain't trying to be good like what I'm trying, and Miss Minerva don't never do nothing a tall to you 'cepting put you to bed."

"I hope mama won't never ask me to promise her nothing a tall, 'cause I'm mighty curious 'bout forgetting. I spec' I'm the most forgettigest little boy they is. But I'm so glad I'm so good, I ain't never going to be br' no more; so you might jus' a' well quit begging me to come over and swing, you needn't ask me no more,— 'tain't no use a tall."

"I ain't a-begging you," cried Billy contemptuously; "you can set on yo' mammy's grass where you is, an' be good from now tell Judgement Day an' 't won't make no change in my business."

"I ain't going to be 'ficed into no meanness, 'cause I'm so good," continued the reformed one, after a short silence during which he had seen Sarah Jane turn her back to him, "but I don't b'lieve it'll be no harm jus' to come over and set in the swing with you; maybe I can 'fluence you to be good like me and keep you from 'ticing little boys into mischief. I think I'll just come over and set a while and help you to be good," and he started to the fence. Sarah Jane turned around in time to frustrate his plans.

"You git right back, Jimmy," she yelled, "you git erway 'om dat-er fence an' quit confabbin' wid dat-er Willyum. Fixin' to make some mo' Injuns out o' yo-selves, ain't yeh, or some yuther kin' o' skeercrows?"

Billy strolled to the other side of the big yard and climbed up and got on the tall gate post. A stranger, coming from the opposite direction, stopped and spoke to him.

"Does Mr. John Smith live here?" he asked.

"Naw, sir," was the reply; "don't no Mr. 'tall live here; jest me an' Aunt Minerva, an' she turns up her nose at anything that wears pants."

"And where could I find your Aunt Minerva?" the stranger's grin was ingratiating and agreeable.

"Why, this here's Monday," the little boy exclaimed. "Of course she's at the Aid; all the 'omans roun' here goes to the Aid on Monday."

"Your aunt is an old friend of mine," went on the man, "and I knew she was at the Aid. I just wanted to find out if you'd tell the truth about her. Some little boys tell stories, but I am glad to find out you are so truthful. My name is Mr. Algernon Jones and I'm glad to know you. Shake! Put it there, partner," and the fascinating stranger held out a grimy paw.

Billy smiled down from his perch at him and thought he had never met such a pleasant man. If he was such an old friend of his aunt's maybe she would not object to him because he wore pants, he thought. Maybe she might be persuaded to take Mr. Jones for a husband. Billy almost hoped that she would hurry home from the Aid, he wanted to see the two together so.

"Is you much of a cusser?" he asked solemnly, "'cause if you is you'll hafter cut it out on these premises."

Mr. Jones seemed much surprised and hurt at the question.

"An oath never passed these lips," replied the truthful gentleman.

"Can you churn?"

"Churn—churn?" with a reminiscent smile, "I can churn like a top."

Jimmy was dying of curiosity, but the gate was too far away for him to do more than catch a word now and then. It was also out of Sarah Jane's visual line, so she knew nothing of the stranger's event.

"And you're 'ere all by yourself?" inquired Billy's new friend. "And the folks next door, where are they?"

"Mrs. Garner's at the Aid, an' Mr. Garner's gone to Memphis. That is

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"She's Got a Horn That You Talk Through."