

# MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

By FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

The Infant Mind Shoots.  
Miss Minerva had bought a book for Billy entitled "Stories of Great and Good Men," which she frequently read to him for his education and improvement. These stories related the principal events in the lives of the heroes but never mentioned any names, always asking at the end, "Can you tell me who this man was?"

Her nephew heard the stories so often that he had some expression or incident by which he could identify each, without paying much attention while she was reading.

He and his aunt had just settled themselves on the porch for a reading. Jimmy was on his own porch cutting

up funny capers, and making faces for the other child's amusement.

"Lemme go over to Jimmy's, Aunt Minerva," pleaded her nephew, "an' you can read to me tonight. I'd a heap rather not hear you read right now. It'll make my belly ache."

Miss Minerva looked at him severely.

"William," she enjoined, "don't you want to be a smart man when you grow up?"

"Yes, 'm," he replied, without much enthusiasm.

"Well, jes' lemme ask Jimmy to come over here an' set on the other side you while you read. He ain't never hear 'bout them tales, an' I s'pose he'd like to come."

"Very well," replied his flattered and gratified relative, "call him over."

Billy went to the fence, where he signaled Jimmy to meet him.

"Aunt Minerva say you come over an' listen to her read some or the pretties' tales you ever hear," he said, as if conferring a great favor.

"Naw, sirree-bob!" was the impolite response across the fence, "them 'bout the meekest tales they is. I'll come if she'll read my Uncle Remus book."

"Please come on," begged Billy, dropping the patronizing manner that he had assumed, in hope of inducing his chum to share his marvellous. "You know Aunt Minerva'd die in her tracks fore she'd read Uncle Remus. You'll like these here tales 'nother sight better anyway. I'll give you my 'stoney if you'll come."

"Naw; you ain't going to get me in no such box as that. If she'd just read seven or eight hours I would n't mind; but she'll get you where she wants you and read 'bout a million hours. I know Miss Minerva."

Billy's aunt was growing impatient.

"Come, William," she called. "I am waiting for you."

Jimmy went back to his own porch and the other boy joined his kinwoman.

"Why wouldn't Jimmy come?" she asked.

"He—he ain't feeling very well," was the considerate rejoinder.

"Once there was a little boy who was born in Virginia—" began Miss Minerva.

"Born in a manger," repeated the inattentive little boy to himself. "I knows who that was." So, this important question settled in his mind, he gave himself up to the full enjoyment of his chum and to the giving and receiving secret signals, the pleasure of which was decidedly enhanced by the fear of imminent detection.

"Father, I cannot tell a lie. I did it with my little hatchet—" read the thin, monotonous voice at his elbow.

Billy laughed aloud—at that minute Jimmy was standing on his head waving two chubby feet in the air.

"William," said his aunt reprovingly, peering at him over her spectacles, "I don't see anything to laugh at,—and she did not, but then she was in ignorance of the little conspiracy.

"He was a good and dutiful son and he studied his lessons so well that when he was only seventeen years old he was employed to survey vast tracts of land in Virginia—"

Miss Minerva emphasized every word, hoping thus to impress her nephew. But he was so busy keeping one eye on her and one on the little boy on the other porch, that he did not

and torekly she'll say, 'Yes, go on and lemme read in peace.'

"Aunt Minerva won't give in much," said Billy. "When she say 'No, William, 't ain't no use 't all to beg her; you jest wastin' yo' breath. When she put her foot down it got to go just like she say; she sho' do like to have her own way better 'n any 'oman I ever see."

"She 'bout the mannishest woman they is," agreed Jimmy. "She got you under ler thumb, Billy. I don't see what we mans 're made fo' if you can't beg 'em into things. I would n't let no old spunky Miss Minerva get the best of me inat 'way. Come on, anyhow."

"Naw, I can't come," was the gloomy reply; "if she'd jest tol' me not to, I couldn'er went, but she made me promise, an' I ain't never goin' back on my word. You come over to see me."

"I can't," came the answer across the fence; "I'm earning me a baseball mask. I done already earned me a mitt. My mama don't never make me promise her nothing, she just pays me to be good. That 's hucome I'm 'bout to get 'ligion and go to the mourner's bench. She 's gone up town now and if I don't go outside the yard while

ent now, Jimmy?" asked Billy; "you ain't earned it."

"Would n't you?" asked Jimmy, doubtfully.

"Naw, I would n't, 'thout I tol' her."

"Well, I'll tell her I just comed over a minute to see 'bout Miss Minerva's bustle," he agreed as he again tumbled over the fence.

A little negro boy, followed by a tiny, white dog, was passing by Miss Minerva's gate.

Billy promptly flew to the gate and hailed him. Jimmy, looking around to see that Sarah Jane had gone back to the kitchen, as promptly rolled over the fence and joined him.

"Lemme see yo' dog," said the former.

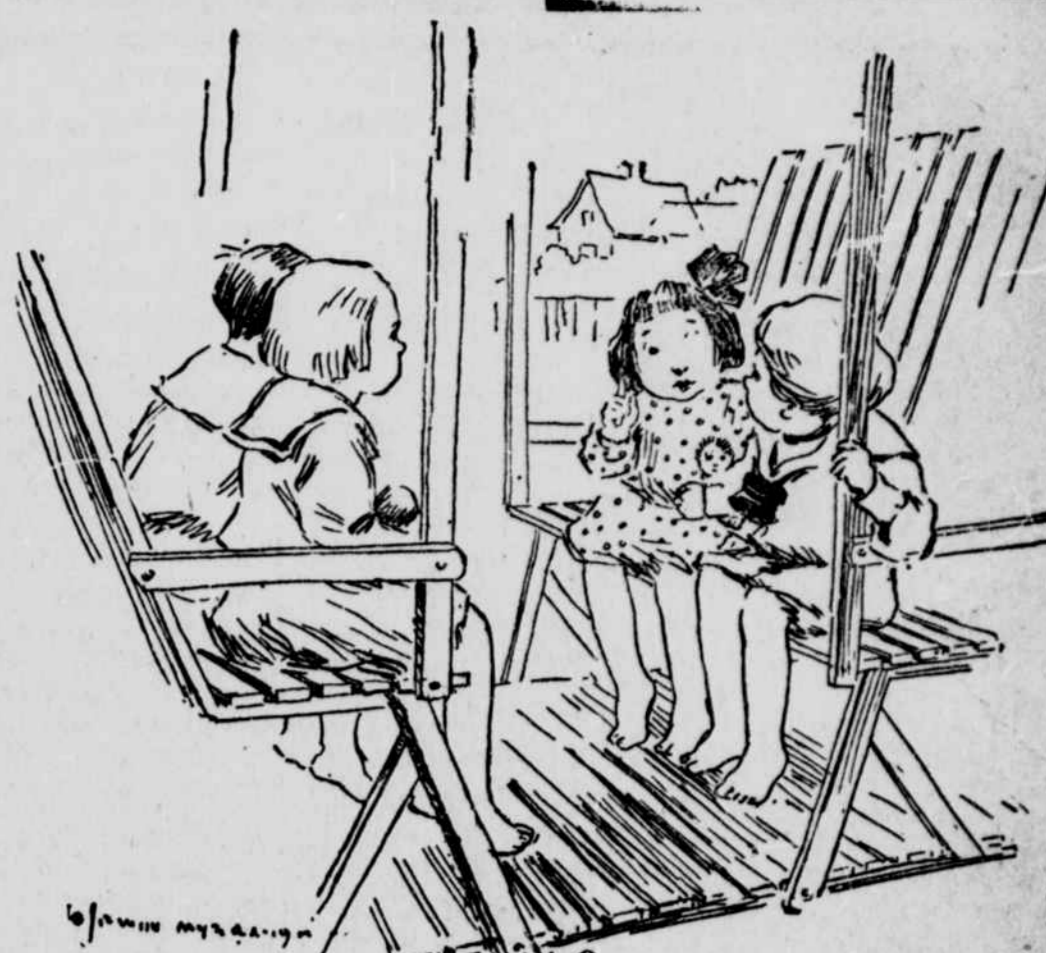
"Ain't he cute?" said the latter.

The little darkey picked up the dog and passed it across the gate.

"I wish he was mine," said the smaller child, as he took the soft, fluffy little ball in his arms; "what'll you take for him?"

The negro boy had never seen the dog before, but he immediately accepted the ownership thrust upon him and answered without hesitation, "I'll take a dollar for her."

"I ain't got but a nickel. Billy, ain't you got 'nough money to put with my



"I wish we knowed how to read an' write when we 's born," said Billy. "If I was God I'd make all my babies so 's they is already eddicated when they gits born. Reckon if we'd pray ev'ry night an' ask God, he'd learn them babies what he 's makin' on now how to read an' write?"

"I don't care nothing at all 'bout them babies," put in Jimmy, "t'aint going to do us no good if all the new babies what Doctor Sanford finds can read and write; it'd jes' make 'em the sassiest things ever was. 'Sides, I got plenty things to ask God for 'thout fooling long other folks' brats, and I ain't going to meddle with God's business nohow."

"Did you all hear what Miss Larimore, who teaches the little children at school, said about us?" asked Lina importantly.

"Naw," they chorused, "what was it?"

"She told the superintendent," was the reply of Lina, pleased with herself and with that big word, "that she would have to have more money next year, for she heard that Lina Hamilton, Frances Black, William Hill and Jimmy Garner were all com-

"You 'member 'bout last Communion Sunday," went on the little girl, "when they hand roun' the little envellups and telled all the folks what was willing to give five dollars more on the pastor's sal'y just to write his name; so Alfred he so frisky 'cause he know how to write; so he tooken one of the little envellups and worten 'Alfred Gage' on it; so when his papa find out 'bout it he say that kid got to work and pay that five dollars h'iself, 'cause he done sign his name to it."

"And if he ain't 'bout the sickest kid they is," declared Jimmy; "I'll betcher he won't get fresh no more soon. He telled me the other day he ain't had a drink of soda water this summer, 'cause every nickel he gets got to go to Mr. Pastor's sal'y; he says he plumb tired supporting Brother Johnson and all his family; and, he say, every time he go up town he sees Johnny Johnson a-setting on a stool in Baltzer's drug store just a-swiggling milk-shakes; he says he going to knock him off some day 'cause it's his nickels that kid 's a-spending."

There was a short silence, broken



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She looked at him sternly over her glasses:

"What makes you so silly?" she inquired, and without waiting for a reply went on with her reading; she was nearing the close now and she read carefully and deliberately.

"And he was chosen the first president of the United States—"

Billy put his hands to his ears and wriggled his fingers at Jimmy, who promptly returned the compliment.

"He had no children of his own, so he is called the Father of His Country."

Miss Minerva closed the book, turned to the little boy at her side, and asked:

"Who was this great and good man, William?"

"Jesus," was his ready answer, in an appropriately solemn little voice.

"Why, William Green Hill!" she exclaimed in disgust. "What are you thinking of? I don't believe you heard one word that I read."

Billy was puzzled; he was sure she had said "Born in a manger." "I didn't hear her say nothin' 'bout bulrushes," he thought, "so 't ain't Moses; she didn't say 'log cabin,' or 't ain't Abraham Lincoln; she didn't say 'Thirty cents look down upon you,' so 't ain't Napoleon. I sho' wish I'd paid 'tention."

"Jesus!" his aunt was saying, "born in Virginia and first president of the United States!"

"George Washin'ton, I aimed to say," triumphantly screamed the little boy, who had received his cue.

she 's gone, she 's going to gimme a baseball mask. You got a ball what you bringed from the plantation, and I'll have a bat and mitt and mask and we can play ball some. Come on over just a little while; you ain't earning you nothing like what I'm doing."

"Naw; I promis' her not to an' I ain't ever goin' to break my promise."

"Well, then, Mr. Promiser," said Jimmy, "go get your ball and we'll throw 'cross the fence. I can't find mine."

Billy kept his few toys and playthings in a closet, which was full of old plunder. As he reached for his ball something fell at his feet from a shelf above. He picked it up, and ran excitedly into the yard.

"Look, Jimmy," he yelled, "here 's a baseball mask I found in the closet."

Jimmy, forgetful of the fact that he was to be paid for staying at home, immediately rolled over the fence and ran eagerly toward his friend. They examined the article in question with great care.

nickel to make a dollar?"

"Naw; I ain't got a red cent."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Jimmy; "we'll trade you a baseball mask for him. My mama's going to gimme a new mask 'cause I all time stay at home, so we'll trade you our old one. Go get it, Billy."

Thus commanded Billy ran and picked up the bustle where it lay neglected on the grass, and handed it to the quasi-owner of the puppy. The deal was promptly closed and a black little negro went grinning down the street with Miss Minerva's ancient bustle tied across his face, leaving behind him a curly-haired dog.

"Ain't he sweet?" said Jimmy, hugging the fluffy white ball close to his breast, "we got to name him, Billy."

"Let's name her Peruny Pearlina," was the suggestion of the other joint owner.

"He ain't going to be name' nothing at all like that," declared Jimmy; "you all time got to name our dogs the pawlaw's best name they is. He 's got to be name' Sam Lamb 'cause he 's a partner."



CHAPTER XXIV.

A Flaw in the Title.

"Come on over!" invited Jimmy.

"All right; I believe I will," responded Billy, running to the fence. His aunt's peremptory voice arrested his footsteps.

"William, come here!" she called from the porch.

He reluctantly retraced his steps.

"I am going back to the kitchen to bake a cake and I want you to promise me not to leave the yard."

"Lemme jes' go over to Jimmy's a little while," he begged.

"No; you and Jimmy can not be trusted together; you are sure to get into mischief, and his mother and I have decided to keep the fence between you for a while. Now, promise me that you will stay right in my yard."

Billy sullenly gave her the promise and she went back to her baking.

"That 's always the way now," he said, meeting his little neighbor at the fence, "ever since Aunt Minerva got onto this here promisin' business, I don't have no freedom 't all. It 's 'William, promise me this, an' it 's 'William, don't forget yo' promise now; tell I 's jes' plumb sick 'n tired of it. She know I ain't goin' back on my word an' she jes' natchelly gits the 'vantage of me; she 'bout the hardest 'oman to manage I ever seen sence I 's born."

"I can nearly all time make my mama do anything 'most if I just keep on trying and keep on a-begging," bragged the other boy; "I just say 'May I, mama?' and she'll all time say, 'No, go 'way from me and lemme 'lone,' and I just keep on, 'May I, mama? May I, mama? May I, mama?'"

CHAPTER XXV.

Education and Its Perils.

It was a warm day in early August and the four children were sitting contentedly in the swing. They met almost every afternoon now, but were generally kept under strict surveillance by Miss Minerva.

"T won't be long fore we'll all hafta go to school," remarked Frances, "and I'll be mighty sorry; I wish we did n't ever hafta go to any old school."



"It looks peractly like a mask," announced Jimmy after a thorough inspection, "and yet it don't." He tried it on. "It don't seem to fit your face right," he said.

Sarah Jane was bearing down upon them. "Come back home dis minute, Jimmy!" she shrieked, "want to ketch some mo' contagious 'seases, don't yuh? What dat y' all got now?" As she drew nearer a smile of recognition and appreciation overspread her big good-natured face. Then she burst into a loud, derisive laugh. "What y' all gwine to do wid Miss Minerva's old bustle?" she inquired. "Y' all sho' ain't done contaritest chillens in dis here copperation."

"Bustle?" echoed Billy. "What 's a bustle?"

"Dat-ar 's a bustle—dat 's what 's a bustle. Ladies useto wear 'em 'cause dey so stylish to make they dresses stick out in the back. Come on home, Jimmy, fore yuh ketch de yaller jandis er de epizootics; yo' ma tol' yuh to stay right at home."

"Well, I'm coming, ain't I?" scowled the little boy. "Mama need n't to know nothing 'thout you tell."

"Would you take yo' mama's pres-

ing to school, and she said we were the most notorious bad children in town."

"She is the spitefulest woman they is," Jimmy's black eyes snapped; "she 'bout the meddlesomest teacher in town."

"Who told you 'bout it, Lina?" questioned the other little girl.

"The superintendent told his wife and you know how some ladies are—they just can't keep a secret. Now it is just like burying it to tell mother anything; she never tells anybody but father, and grandmother, and grandfather, and Uncle Ed, and Brother Johnson, and she makes them promise never to breathe it to a living soul. But the superintendent's wife is different; she tells ever' thing she hears, and now everybody knows what that teacher said about us."

"Everybody says she is the crankiest teacher they is," cried Jimmy, "she won't let you bring nothing to school 'cepting your books; you can't even take your slingshot, nor your air-gun, nor—"

"Nor your dolls," chimed in Frances, "and she won't let you bat your eye, nor say a word, nor cross your legs, nor blow your nose."

"What do she think we 's goin' to her ol' school fer if we can't have fun?" asked Billy. "Tabernicle sho' had fun when he went to school. He put a pin in the teacher's chair an' she

sat down on it plumb up to the head, an' he tie the strings together what two nigger gals had they hair wropped with, an' he squeeze up a little boy's legs in front of him with a rooster foot tell he squalled out loud, an' he 'thowed spitballs, an' he make him some watermelon teeth, an' he paint a chicken light red an' tuck it to the teacher fer a dodo, an' he put cotton in his pants 'fore he got licked, an' he drewed the teacher on a slate. That 's what you go to school fer is to have fun, an' I sho' 's goin' to have fun when I goes, an' I ain't goin' to take no bulldozin' offer her, neither."

"I bet we can squelch her," cried Frances, vindictively.

"Yes, we'll show her a thing or two"—for once Jimmy agreed with her, "she 'bout the butt-in-est old woman they is, and she's going to find out we 'bout the squelchingest kids ever she tackle."

"Alfred Gage went to school to her last year," said Frances, "and he can read and write."

"Yes," joined in Jimmy, "and he 'bout the proudest boy they is; all time got to write his name all over ever' thing."

by Billy, who remarked, apropos of nothing:

"I sho' is glad I don't hafta be a 'oman when I puts on long pants; mens is heap mo' account."

"I wouldn't be a woman for nothing at all," Jimmy fully agreed with him; "they have the pokiest time they is."

"I'm glad I am going to be a young lady when I grow up," Lina declared. "I would n't be a gentleman for anything. I'm going to wear pretty clothes and be beautiful and be a belle like mother was, and have lots of lovers kneel at my feet on one knee and play the guitar with the other—"

"How they goin' to play the guitar with the other knee?" asked the practical Billy.

"And sing 'Call Me Thine Own,'" she continued, ignoring his interruption. "Father got on his knees to mother thirty-seven-and-a-half times before she'd say, 'I will.'"

"Looks like he'd 'a' wore his breeches out," said Billy.

"I don't want to be a lady," declared Frances; "they can't ever ride straddle nor climb a tree, and they got to squinch up their waists and toes. I wish I could kiss my elbow right now and turn to a boy."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Unconditional Surrender.

"They 's going to be a big nigger 'scursion to Memphis at eleven o'clock," said Jimmy as he met the other little boy at the dividing fence; "Sam Lamb 's going and 'most all the niggers they is. Sarah Jane 'lowed she 's going, but she ain't got nobody to 'tend to Bennie Dick. Wouldn't you like to go, Billy?"

"You can't go 'thout you 's a nigger," was the reply; "Sam Lamb say they ain't no white folks 'owed on this train 'ceptin' the engineer an' conductor."

"Sam Lamb'd take care of us if we could go," continued Jimmy. "Let 's slip off and go down to the depot and see the niggers get on. There'll be 'bout a million."

Billy's eyes sparkled with appreciation.

"I sho' wish I could," he said; "but Aunt Minerva'd make me stay in bed a whole week if I went near the railroad."

"My mama'd gimme 'bout a million licks, too, if I prokected with a nigger 'scursion; she 'bout the spankinest woman they is. My papa put some burnt cork on his face