

The Family Circle

A DISAPPOINTED SCHOLAR

Little Sammy Slipperton
Went to school in glee.
'There's lots of things I want to know,
And now I shall!' said he.
But back he came that very night
With drooping heart and head.
'The teacher doesn't know much more
Than other folks,' he said.
'I didn't learn a single thing,
'Cept d-o-o-r, door,
And one and one and one make three—
And those I knew before!
'When I asked teacher why the stars
Weren't right straight in a row,
Instead of being all mixed up,
She said she didn't know.
'She couldn't tell me when they'll build
A railroad to the sun,
Nor how the smell grows in a flower,'
Said Sammy Slipperton.
'I thought that teacher'd know right off
What makes red roses red,
But, oh, she doesn't know much more
Than other folks!' he said.

—Exchange.

HOW TONY PAID HIS TAX

'It's two dollars, Tony; two whole dollars I must make somehow, but, oh! how?' And Betty looked down into the bright brown eyes raised to her face.

Tony leaped upon his little mistress, and wagged his ridiculous little stumpy tail until it is a wonder he did not wag it off; but he could not answer the question which had been puzzling her for days.

For the dog-tax was due—overdue, in fact; and in the little brown house under the hill there were not so many dollars that two could be easily spared, even to save as bright and loving a little playmate as Tony. But then, nobody loved Tony as Betty loved him.

There were so many of them in the little brown house, and they all ate so much and wore out so many clothes, that it was all the busy little mother could do to keep them fed and warm. And how could she be expected to keep a dog, too?

'Not but what Tony is an uncommon nice dog. I'll say that for him,' she had told Betty the day before, when the tax collector had been around for the third time; 'but he's only a dog, and I've no two dollars to pay his tax with. So you'd better take him down to Sullivan's, Betty; he's always wanted him.' She turned away that she might not see the look in Betty's eyes, saying to herself: 'She's only a child and will soon forget.'

Betty ran out of the house and up the hillside, Tony at her heels, leaping and barking, his white body gleaming in the sunshine. But instead of the romp he expected he was snatched up into Betty's arms as she dropped down into the clover and covered his little black head with caresses.

Give Tony away! Betty gasped at the thought. It was almost as bad as if her mother had said 'Give the baby away.' Wasn't Tony one of them? Hadn't he slept on Betty's bed ever since he was a puppy? Had her mother forgotten how faithful he had been when Betty had the fever in the winter, never leaving the room where the sick child lay, and refusing to eat until his little body was as thin as Betty's own?

Oh! none of them loved him as she loved him, and how could she take this little friend down to the butcher and calmly give him away? She loved him. Ever since he had been a puppy he had come to her whistle, following her wherever she went, watching her every movement, and loving her as only a faithful dog can love.

But worse than giving him away was the dreadful thing the collector had said would happen if the two dollars were not ready the next time he came! Betty shuddered at the thought, and hugged Tony's little wriggling body to her, while he struggled to reach her face with his loving, doggy kisses.

Two dollars! It was a great deal of money for a little girl to earn. If she were a boy it would be easier; there were so many things a boy could do. To be sure, there were wild strawberries to pick; but it took so many to make two dollars' worth.

Long hours every night Betty lay awake, thinking, planning ways in which to earn the two dollars, and every morning found her little sunbonnet up on the hillside, bending over the strawberries to see whether they were not just a little riper than they were the day before. If tears could ripen them, the berries would have turned scarlet with all those that Betty shed over them as the days wore slowly on and the dreaded day of the tax collector's promised visit drew near.

'I can't think what ails Betty,' the busy mother said, 'She's white as chalk, and don't eat a mouthful. She ain't really got over that fever yet.' If she could have seen the little girl tossing restlessly at night, or starting up from a fitful sleep to put out her hand to make sure that Tony was still there, she might have understood.

But at last one morning the strawberries gave a rosy welcome to Betty and Tony when they climbed the hill; and that afternoon a clean, fresh little girl, with a basket in her hand and a frisky fox-terrier at her heels, started up the long, dusty road to the summer hotel. Whether it was the fresh sweetness of Betty's strawberries or the fresh sweetness of Betty's face I cannot tell; but she sold every berry, and, when she sat down on the stone wall to count her money, she had seventy-three cents.

That was Thursday, and the tax collector was coming on Saturday.

The next afternoon Betty carried more strawberries to the hotel, but she had picked the best ones the day before, and the inferior ones sold badly. Moreover, the guests of the hotel seemed to have lost their interest; and, as she walked down the long piazza between the two rows of rocking-chairs, for the fourth time, she heard one lady laughingly say: 'Mercy, do you suppose she is coming every day as long as they last?'

As she spoke, she was fondling the ears of a silky terrier that lay curled in her lap, and Betty wondered a little wistfully what she would do if her dog's tax could not be paid.

With a heavy heart she started down the long road home, half her berries, unsold, in the basket that hung like a dead weight on her arm, and thirty cents in her hand. Thirty and seventy-three made a dollar and three cents. It was late in the afternoon, and the tax collector would be around in the morning! Betty sat down on a rock by the lake with a great lump in her throat. What was to be done? Was there no way in which she could get the ninety-seven cents that evening?

'Oh, Tony,' she said, 'what am I to do? I've done my best, and I can't give you up, or see you shot. Oh, Tony, Tony, isn't there some way out?'

At this moment there was a great commotion: a little farther up the lake. Some little boys from the hotel had been sailing their boats; and one of them, a beautifully rigged little schooner, perfect in all its appointments, had broken its string, and was starting off on an independent cruise. There was a great deal of shouting and running up and down the shore, when there came a sudden splash as a small white body plunged into the water and struck out with steady strokes for the retreating boat.

'Oh, see the dog!' cried the boys. 'He's going to get it!'

'He'll break it.'

'No, he won't,' and shouting and cheering they ran down the bank to meet him.

For Tony had seized the runaway and now was steadily bringing it in. The boys cheered and encouraged him until Betty held up her hand in spite of her aching heart; and the little boy who had run crying to the hotel for his father, now returned with him, the tears still wet on his cheeks, but smiling through them. One of the boys took the schooner from Tony as he paused to shake off the water.

'Is that your dog little girl?' said the child's father, when the situation had been explained to him. 'He's a bright fellow, and we are very grateful to him,' and he dropped a bright silver dollar into Betty's lap. 'But wait a moment—you've forgotten your strawberries!'

But strawberries had no further interest for Betty as she sped down the road. Fifteen minutes later she burst into the house.

'There,' she cried, laying the silver dollar on the table, 'Tony paid his own tax.'—Exchange.