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BLACK GILES, THE POACHER;

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF

A Family who had rather live by their Wits than their Work.

IN TWO PARTS.



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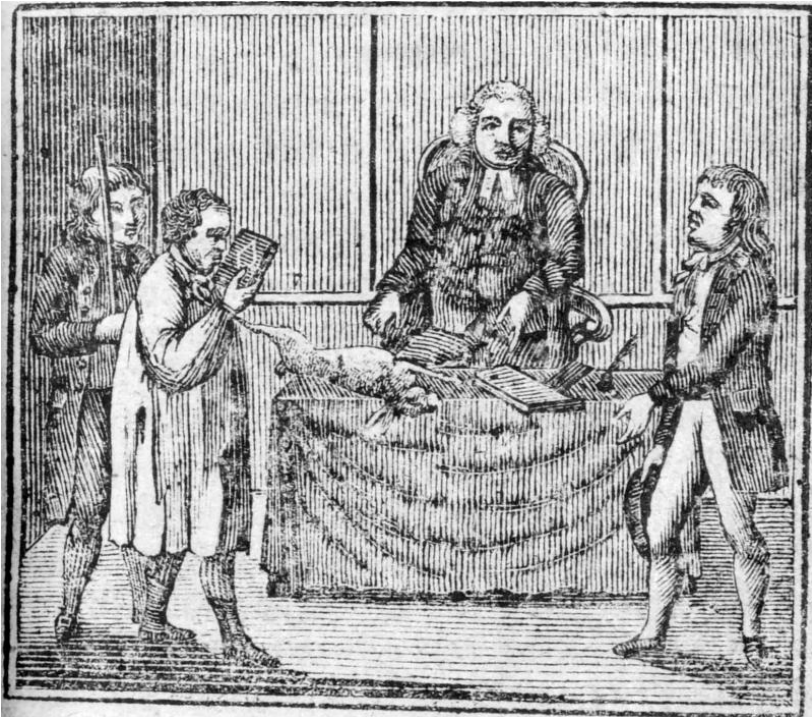
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BLACK GILES, &c.

PART I.

Poaching Giles lives on the borders of one of those great Moors in Somersetshire. Giles, to be sure, has been a sad fellow in his time, and it is none of his fault if his whole family do not end either at the gallows or at Botany bay. He lives at that Mud Cottage with the broken windows stuffed with dirty rags, just beyond the gate which divides the upper from the lower Moor. You may know the house at a good distance by the ragged tiles on the roof, and the loose stones which are ready to drop out from the chimney, though a short ladder and a hod of mortar, and half an hour of leisure time, would have prevented all this, and made the little house tight enough. But as Giles had never learnt any thing that was good, so he did not know the value of such useful sayings as, that “a tile in time saves nine.”

Besides this, Giles fell into that common mistake, that a beggarly looking cottage, and filthy ragged children raised most compassion, and of course drew most charity. But as cunning as he was in other things, he was out in his reckoning here; for it is neatness, housewifery, and decent appearance which draws the kindness of the rich and charitable, while they turn away disgusted from filth and laziness! not out of pride, but because they see that it is next to impossible to mend the condition of those who degrade themselves by dirt and sloth.

The common on which Giles’s hovel stands, is quite a deep marsh in a wet winter, but in summer it looks green and pretty enough. To be sure it would be rather convenient when one passes that way in a carriage, if one of the children would run out and open the gate, as it would save the post-boy from getting off, which is not very safe for the people within the chaise—but instead of any ONE of these children running out as soon as they hear the wheels, which would be quite time enough, what does Giles do, but set all his ragged brats, with dirty faces, matted locks, and naked feet and legs, to lie all day upon a sand-bank hard by the gate, waiting for the slender chance of what may be picked up from travellers. At the sound of a carriage, a whole covey of these little scarecrows start up, rush to the gate, and all at once thrust out their hats and aprons; and for fear they together with the noise of their

clamorous begging, should not sufficiently frighten the horses, they are very apt to let the gate slap full against you, before you are half way through, in their eager scuffle to snatch from each other the halfpence which you may have thrown out to them. I know two ladies who were one day very near being killed by these abominable tricks.

Thus five or six little idle creatures, who might be earning a trifle by knitting at home; who might be useful to the public by working in the field, and who might assist their families by learning to get their bread twenty honest ways, are suffered to lie about all day, in hope of a few chance halfpence, which after all they are by no means sure of getting. Indeed, when the neighbouring gentlefolks found out that opening the gate was the family trade, they soon left off giving any thing. And I, myself, though I used to take out a penny, ready to give, had there been only *ONE* to receive it, when I see a whole family established in so beggarly a trade, quietly put it back again into my pocket, and gave nothing at all. And so few travellers pass that way, that sometimes, after the whole family have lost a day, their gains do not amount to two pence.

As Giles had a far greater taste for living by his wits than his work, he was at one time in hopes that his children might have got a pretty penny by tumbling for the diversion of travellers, and he set about training them in that indecent practice—but unluckily the moors being level, the carriages travelled faster than the children tumbled. He envied those parents who lived on the London road, over the Wiltshire Downs, which being very hilly, enables the tumbler to keep pace with the traveller, till he sometimes extorts from the light and the unthinking a reward, instead of a reproof. I beg leave, however, to put all gentlemen and ladies in mind that such tricks are a kind of apprenticeship to the trades of begging and thieving.

Giles, to be sure, as his children grew older, began to train them to such other employments as the idle habits they had learned at the gate very properly qualified them for. The right of common which some of the poor cottagers have in that part of the country, and which is doubtless a considerable advantage to many, was converted by Giles into the means of corrupting his whole family, for his children, as soon as they grew too big for the trade of begging at the gate, were promoted to the dignity of thieving on the Moor. Here he kept two or three asses, miserable beings, which, if they had the good fortune to escape an untimely death by starving, did not fail to meet with it by beating. Some of the biggest boys were sent out with these lean and galled animals to carry sand or coals about the neighboring towns. Both sand and coals were often stolen before they got them to sell, or if not, they always took care to cheat in selling them. By long practice in this art, they grew so dextrous,

that they could give a pretty good guess how large a coal they could crib out of every bag before the buyer would be likely to miss it.

All their odd time was taken up under the pretence of watching these asses on the Moor, or running after five or six half-starved geese; but the truth is, these boys were only watching for an opportunity to steal an odd goose of their neighbor's. They used also to pluck the quills, or the down from these poor live creatures, or half-milk a cow before the farmer's maid came with her pail. They all knew how to calculate to a minute what time to be down in a morning to let out their lank hungry beasts, which they had turned over night into the farmer's field to steal a little good pasture.—They contrived to get there just time enough to escape being caught in replacing the stakes they had pulled out for the cattle to get over. For Giles was a prudent long headed fellow, and wherever he stole food for his colts, took care never to steal stakes from the hedges at the same time. He had sense enough to know that the gain did not make up for the danger; he knew that a loose faggot pulled from a neighbor's pile of wood after the family were gone to bed, answered the end better, and was not half the trouble.

Among the many trades which Giles professed, he sometimes practised that of rat-catcher, but he was addicted to so many tricks, that he never followed the same trade long. Whenever he was sent for to a farm-house, his custom was to kill a few of the old rats, always taking care to leave a little stock of young ones alive sufficient to keep up the breed; “for,” said he, “if I were to be such a fool as to clear a house, or a barn at once, how would my trade be carried on?” And where any barn was overstocked, he used to borrow a few from thence just to people a neighboring granary which had none; and he might have gone on till now, had he not unluckily been caught one evening emptying his cage of young rats under parson Wilson's barn door.

This worthy minister, Mr. Wilson, used to pity the neglected children of Giles as much as he blamed the wicked parents. He one day picked up Dick, who was far the best of Giles's bad boys. Dick was loitering about in a field behind the parson's garden in search of a hen's nest, his mother having ordered him to bring home a few eggs that night by hook or by crook, as Giles was resolved to have some pancakes for supper, though he knew that eggs were a penny a piece. Mr. Wilson had long been desirous of snatching some of this vagrant family from ruin, and his chief hopes were bent on Dick, as the least hackneyed in knavery. He had once given him a new pair of shoes, on his promising to go to school next Sunday—but no sooner had Rachel, the boy's mother, got the shoes into her clutches, than she pawned them for a bottle of gin, and ordered the boy to keep out of the parson's sight, and to be sure

to play his marbles on Sundays for the future at the other end of the parish, and not near the churchyard. Mr. Wilson, however, picked up the boy once more, for it was not his way to despair of any body. Dick was just going to take to his heels as usual for fear the old story of the shoes should be brought forward, but finding he could not get off what does he do but run into a little puddle of muddy water which lay between him and the parson, that the sight of his naked feet might not bring on the dreadful subject. Now it happened that Mr. Wilson was planting a little field of beans, so he thought this a good opportunity to employ Dick; he told him he had got some pretty easy work for him. Dick did as he was bid; he willingly went to work, and readily began to plant his beans with dispatch and regularity, according to the directions given him.

While the boy was busily at work by himself, Giles happened to come by, having been skulking round the back way to look over the parson's garden wall, to see if there was anything worth climbing over for on the ensuing night. He spied Dick and began to rate him for working for the stingy old parson, for Giles had a natural antipathy to whatever belonged to the church. "What has he promised thee a day, (said he) little enough, I dare say,"—"He is not to pay me by the day, (said Dick) but says he will give me so much when I have planted this peck, and so much for the next."—"Oh, Oh! that alters the case, (said Giles)—one may, indeed, get a trifle by this sort of work—come give me a handful of the beans. I will teach thee how to plant when thou art paid for planting by the peck. All we have to do in that case is to dispatch the work as fast as we can, and get rid of the beans with all speed; and as to the seed coming up or not that is no business of ours; we are paid for planting, not for growing. At the rate thou goest on, thou would'st not get sixpence tonight. Come along, bury away." So saying, he took his hatful of the seed, and where Dick had been ordered to set one bean, Giles buried a dozen. So the beans were soon out. But though the peck was emptied, the ground was unplanted. But cunning Giles knew this could not be found out till the time when the beans might be expected to come up, "and then, Dick, (said he) the snails and the mice may go shares in the blame, or we can lay the fault on the rooks or the blackbirds." So saying, he sent the boy into the parsonage to receive his pay, taking care to secure about a quarter of the peck of beans for his own colt; he put both bag and beans into his own pocket to carry home, bidding Dick tell Mr. Wilson that he had planted the beans and lost the bag.

In the mean time Giles's other boys were busy in emptying the ponds and trout-streams in the neighboring manor. They would steal away the carp and tench when they were no bigger than gudgeons—by this untimely depredation they plundered the

owner of his property, without enriching themselves. But the pleasure of mischief was reward enough. These, and a hundred other little thieveries, they committed with such dexterity, that old Tim Crib, whose son was transported last assizes for sheep stealing, used to be often reproaching his boys, that Giles's sons were worth a hundred of such blockheads as he had; for scarce a night passed but Giles had some little comfortable thing for supper which his boys had pilfered in the day, while HIS undutiful dogs never stole any thing worth having. Giles, in the mean time, was busy in his way, but as busy as he was in laying nets, starting coveys, and training dogs, he always took care that his depredations should not be confined merely to game.

Giles's boys had never seen the inside of a church since they were christened, and the father thought he knew his own interest better than to force them to it, for church time was the season of their harvest. Then the hen's nests were searched, a stray duck was clapped under the smock-frock, the tools which might have been left by chance in a farmyard, were picked up, and all the neighboring pigeon houses were thinned, so that Giles used to boast to his wife, that Sunday was to them the most profitable day in the week. With her it was certainly the most laborious day, as she always did her washing and ironing on the Sunday morning, it being, as she said, the only leisure day she had, for on the other days she went about the country telling fortunes, and selling dream books, and wicked songs. Neither her husband's nor her children's cloaths were ever mended, and if Sunday, her idle day, had not come about once in every week, it is likely they would never have been washed neither. You might, however, see her as you were going to church, smoothing her own rags on her best red cloak, which she always used for her ironing cloth on Sundays, for her cloak when she travelled, and for her blanket at night; such a wretched manager was Rachel! Among her other articles of trade, one was to make and sell peppermint, and other distilled waters. These she had the cheap art of making without trouble, and without expence, for she made them without herbs and without a still. It was her way to fill so many quart bottles with plain water, putting a spoonful of mint water in the mouth of each; these she corked down with rosin, carrying to each customer a phial of real distilled water to taste, by way of sample. This was so good, that her bottles were commonly bought up without being opened; but if any suspicion arose, and she was forced to uncork a bottle, by the few drops of distilled water lying at top, she even then escaped detection, and took care to get out of reach before the bottle was opened a second time. She was too prudent ever to go twice to the same house.

There is hardly any petty mischief that is not connected with the life of a poacher. Mr. Wilson was aware of this, he was not only a pious clergyman, but an upright

justice. He used to say that people who were truly conscientious, must be so in small things as well as in great ones, or they would destroy the effect of their own precepts, and their example would not be of general use. For this reason he never would accept of a hare or a partridge from any unqualified person in his parish. He did not content himself with shuffling the thing off by asking no questions, and pretending to take it for granted, in a general way that the game was fairly come at; but he used to say, that by receiving the booty, he connived at a crime, made himself a sharer in it, and if he gave a present to the man who brought it, he even tempted him to repeat the fault.

One day poor Jack Weston, an honest fellow in the neighbourhood, whom Mr. Wilson had kindly visited and relieved in a long sickness, from which he was but just recovered, was brought before him as he was sitting on the justice's bench; Jack was accused of having knocked down a hare, and of all the birds in the air, who should the informer be but Black Giles the Poacher? Mr. Wilson was grieved at the charge, he had a great regard for Jack, but he had a still greater regard for the law. The poor fellow pleaded guilty. He did not deny the fact, but said he did not consider it a crime, he did not think game was private property, and he owned he had a strong temptation for doing what he had done, which he hoped would plead in his excuse. The justice desired to know what this temptation was. "Sir, (said the poor fellow) you know I was given over this spring in a bad fever. I had no friend in the world but you, Sir. Under God you saved my life by your charitable relief and I trust also, you may have helped to save my soul by your prayers and your good advice. I know I can never make you amends for all your goodness, but I thought it would be some comfort to my full heart, if I could but once give you some little token of my gratitude. So I had trained a pair of nice turtle doves for Madam Wilson, but they were stolen from me, Sir, and I do suspect Black Giles stole them. Yesterday morning, Sir, as I was crawling out to my work, for I am still but very weak, a fine hare ran across my path. I did not stay to consider whether it was wrong to kill a hare, but I felt it was right to shew my gratitude—so, Sir, without a moment's thought, I did knock down the hare which I was going to carry to your Worship, because I knew Madam was fond of hare. I am truly sorry for my fault, and will submit to whatever punishment your Worship may please to inflict."

Mr. Wilson was much moved with this honest confession, and touched with the poor fellow's gratitude. What added to the effect of the story, was the weak condition and pale sickly looks of the offender. But this worthy justice never suffered his feelings to bias his integrity—he knew that he did not sit on that bench to indulge pity, but to administer justice. And while he was sorry for the offender, he would not

justify the offence. “John, (said he) I am surprised that you could for a moment forget that I never accept any gift which causes the giver to break a law. On Sunday I teach you from the pulpit the laws of God, whose minister I am. At present I fill the chair of the magistrate, to enforce and execute the laws of the land. Between those and the others there is more connexion than you are aware. I thank you John, for your affection to me, and I admire your gratitude, but I must not allow either affection or gratitude to be brought as a plea for a wrong action. It is not your business nor mine, John, to settle whether the game laws are good or bad. Till they are repealed, we must obey them. Many, I doubt not, break these laws through ignorance, and many, I am certain, who would not dare to steal a goose or a turkey, make no scruple of knocking down a hare or a partridge. You will hereafter think yourself happy that this your first attempt has proved unsuccessful, as I trust you are too honest a fellow ever to intend to turn poacher. With poaching much moral evil is connected; a habit of nightly depredation; a custom of prowling in the dark for prey, produces in time a disrelish for honest labor. He whose first offence was committed without much thought or evil intention, if he happen to succeed a few times in carrying off his booty undiscovered, grows bolder and bolder—and when he fancies there is no shame attending it, he very soon gets to persuade himself, that there is also no sin. While some people pretend to scruple about stealing a sheep, they partly live by plundering of warrens. But remember that the warrener pays a high rent, and that therefore his rabbits are as much his property as his sheep. Do not then deceive yourselves with these false distinctions. All property is sacred, and as the laws of the land are intended to fence in that property, he who brings up his children to break down any of these fences, brings them up to certain sin and ruin. He who begins with robbing orchards, rabbit warrens, and fish ponds, will probably end with horse-stealing, or highway robbery. Poaching is a regular apprenticeship to bolder crimes. He whom I may commit as a boy to sit in the stocks for killing a partridge, may be likely to end at the gallows for killing a man.

“Observe, you who now hear me, the strictness and impartiality of justice. I know Giles to be a worthless fellow, yet it is my duty to take his information; I know Jack Weston to be an honest youth, yet I must be obliged to make him pay the penalty. Giles is a bad man, but he can prove this fact; Jack is a worthy lad, but he has committed this fault. I am sorry for you Jack, but do not let it grieve you that Giles has played worse tricks a hundred times, and yet got off while you were detected in the very first offence, for that would be grieving because you are not so great a rogue as Giles. At this moment you think your good luck is very unequal, but all this will one day turn out in your favor. Giles is not the more a favorite of heaven

because he has hitherto escaped Botany Bay or the Hulks, nor is it any mark of God's displeasure against you, John, that you were found out in your very first attempt.”

Here the good justice left off speaking, and no one could contradict the truth of what he had said. Weston humbly submitted to his sentence, but he was very poor, and knew not where to raise the money to pay his fine. His character had always been so fair, that several farmers present, kindly agreed to advance a trifle each to prevent his being sent to prison, and he thankfully promised to work out the debt. The justice himself, though he could not soften the law, yet shewed Weston so much kindness, that he was enabled, before the year was out to get out of this difficulty. He began to think more seriously than he had ever yet done, and grew to abhor poaching, not merely from fear, but from principle.

We shall soon see whether Poaching Giles always got off so successfully. Here we have seen that prosperity is no sure sign of goodness; and in the Second Part, we may, perhaps, see that the “triumphing of the wicked is short.”



PART II.

THE HISTORY OF *WIDOW BROWN'S APPLE TREE.*

I think my readers got so well acquainted, in the First Part, with Black Giles the Poacher, that they will not expect in this Part to hear any great good either of Giles himself, his wife Rachel, or any of their family. I am sorry to expose their tricks, but it is their fault, not mine. If I pretend to speak about people at all, I must tell the truth. I am sure if folks would but turn about and mend, it would be a thousand times pleasanter to me to write their histories, for it is no comfort to tell of any body's faults. If the world would but grow good, I should be glad enough to tell of it, but till it really becomes so, I must go on describing it as it is, otherwise, I should only mislead my readers, instead of instructing them.

As to Giles and his boys, I am sure old Widow Brown had good reason to remember their dexterity. Poor woman! she had a fine little bed of onions, in her neat and well-kept garden; she was very fond of her onions, and many a rheumatism has she caught by kneeling down to weed them in a damp day, notwithstanding the little flannel cloak and the bit of an old mat which Madam Wilson gave her because the old woman would needs weed in wet weather. Her onions she always carefully treasured up for her winter's store, for an onion makes a little broth very relishing, and is indeed the only savory thing poor people are used to get. She had also a small orchard, containing about a dozen apple trees, with which in a good year she has been known to make a couple of barrels of cyder, which she sold to her landlord towards paying her rent besides having a little keg which she was able to keep back for her own drinking. Well! would you believe it, Giles and his boys mark'd both onions and apples for their own; indeed a man who stole so many rabbits from the warren, was likely enough to steal onions for sauce. One day when the widow was abroad on a little business, Giles and his boys made a clear riddance of the onion bed, and when they had pulled up every single onion, they then turned a couple of pigs into the garden, who allured by the smell, tore up the bed in such a manner, that the widow when she came home, had not the least doubt but the pigs had been the thieves. To confirm this opinion, they took care to leave the little hatch half open at one end of the garden, and to break down a bit of a fence at the other end.

I wonder how any body can find in his heart not to pity and respect poor old widows! There is something so forlorn and helpless in their condition that methinks it is a call on every body, men, women, and children, to do them all the kind services that fall in their way. Surely their having no one to take their part, is an additional reason for kind-hearted people not to hurt and oppress them. But it was this very reason that led Giles to do both.

It happened unluckily for this poor widow, that her cottage stood quite alone. On several mornings together (for roguery gets up much earlier than industry) Giles and his boys stole regularly into her orchard, followed by their jack asses. She was so deaf that she could not hear the asses if they had brayed ever so loud, and to this Giles trusted; for he was very cautious in his rogueries, since he could not otherways have contrived to keep out of prison; for though he was almost always suspected, he had seldom been taken up, and never convicted. The boys used to fill their bags, load their asses and then march off; and if in their way to the town where the apples were to be sold, they chanced to pass by one of their neighbors, who might be likely to suspect them, they then all at once began to scream out, “buy my coal—buy my sand, O!”

Besides the trees in her orchard, poor widow Brown had in her small garden one apple-tree particularly fine; it was a redstreak, so tempting and lovely that Giles’s family had watched it with longing eyes, till at last they resolved on a plan for carrying off all this fine fruit in their bags. But it was a nice point to manage. The tree stood directly under her chamber window, so that there was some danger that she might spy them at work. They therefore determined to wait till the next Sunday morning, when they knew she would not fail to be at church. Sunday came, and during service Giles attended. It was a lone house, as I said before, and the rest of the parish were safe at church. In a trice, the tree was cleared, the bags were filled, the asses were whipt, the thieves were off, the coast was clear, and all was safe and quiet by the time the sermon was over.

Unluckily, however, it happened, that this tree was so beautiful, and the fruit so fine, that the people, as they used to pass to and from church, were very apt to stop and admire Widow Brown’s redstreaks—and some of the farmers rather envied her that in that scarce season, when they hardly expected to make a pie out of a large orchard, she was likely to make cyder from a single tree. I am afraid, indeed, if I must speak out, she herself rather set her heart too much upon this tree, and had felt as much pride as gratitude to a good Providence for it, but this failing of her’s was no excuse for Giles. The covetousness of this thief had for once got the better of his caution; the tree was too completely stripped, though the youngest boy Dick did beg

hard that his father would leave the poor old woman enough for a few dumplings, and when Giles ordered Dick in his turn to shake the tree, the boy did it so gently that hardly any apples fell for which he got a good shake of the stick with which the old man was beating down the apples.

The neighbours on their return from church stopped as usual, but it was—not, alas! to admire the apples, for apples there were none left, but to lament the robbery, and console the widow: meantime the redstreaks were safely lodged in Giles's hovel under a few bundles of hay which he had contrived to pull from the farmer's mow the night before, for the use of his jack asses. Such a stir however, began to be made about the widow's apple tree, that Giles, who knew how much his character laid him open to suspicion, as soon as he saw the people safe in church again in the afternoon, ordered his boys to carry each a hatful of the apples and thrust them in at a little casement window, which happened to be open in the house of Samuel Price, a very honest carpenter in that parish, who was at church with his whole family.—Giles's plan, by this contrivance, was to lay the theft on Price's sons, in case the thing should come to be further enquired into. Here Dick put in a word, and begged and prayed his father not to force them to carry the apples to Price's. But all that he got by his begging was such a knock, as nearly laid him on the earth. "What you cowardly rascal," said Giles, "you will go and peach, I suppose, and get your father sent to gaol."

Poor Widow Brown, though her trouble had made her still weaker than she was, went to church again in the afternoon; indeed she rightly thought, that trouble was a new reason why she ought to go.—During the service she tried with all her might not to think of her redstreaks, and whenever they would come into her head, she took up her prayer book directly, and so she forgot them a little and indeed she found herself much easier when she came out of the church, than when she went in.—Now it happened oddly enough that on that Sunday, of all Sundays in the year, she should call in to rest a little at Samuel Price's, to tell over again the lamentable story of the apples, and to consult with him how the thief might be brought to justice. But, O reader! guess if you can, for I am sure I cannot tell you, what was her surprize, when on going into Samuel Price's kitchen, she saw her own redstreaks lying in the window! The apples were of a sort too remarkable for colour, shape, and size to be mistaken. There was not such another tree in the parish. Widow Brown immediately screamed out, "lass a day! as sure as can be here are my redstreaks; I could swear to them in any court." Samuel Price, who believed his son to be as honest as himself, was shocked and troubled at the sight. He knew he had no redstreaks of his own—he knew there were no apples in the window when he went to church—and did

verily believe them to be the widow's; and how they came there he could not possibly guess. He called for Tom, the only one of his sons who now lived at home. Tom was at the Sunday School, which he had never once missed since Mr. Wilson the minister had set up one in the parish. Was such a boy likely to do such a deed?

A crowd was by this time got about Price's door among which was Giles and his boys, who had already taken care to spread the news that Tom Price was the thief. Most people were unwilling to believe it. His character was very good, but appearances were strongly against him. Mr. Wilson, who had staid to christen a child, now came in. He was much concerned that Tom Price, the best boy in his school, should stand accused of such a crime. Accordingly he sent for the boy, examined, and cross examined him. No marks of guilt appeared. But still though he pleaded not guilty there lay the redstreaks in his father's window. All the idle fellows in the place, who were likely to have committed such a theft themselves, fell with great vengeance on poor Tom. The wicked seldom give any quarter. "This is one of your sanctified ones!" cried they. "This was all the good that Sunday Schools did! For their parts they never saw any good come by religion. Sunday was the only day for a little pastime, and if poor boys must be shut up with their godly books when they ought to be out taking a little pleasure, it was no wonder they made themselves amends by such tricks."—Another said he should like to see Parson Wilson's righteous one well whipped. A third hoped he would be clapped in the stocks for a young hypocrite as he was, while old Giles, who thought to avoid suspicion by being more violent than the rest, declared "that he hoped the young dog would be transported for life."

Mr. Wilson was too wise and too just to proceed against Tom without full proof. He declared the crime was a very heavy one, and he feared that heavy must be the punishment. Tom, who knew his own innocence, earnestly prayed to God that he might be made to appear as clear as the noon-day, and very fervent were his secret devotions on that night.

Black Giles passed his night in a very different manner. He set off as soon as it was dark with his sons and his jack-asses laden with their stolen goods. As such a cry was raised about the apples, he did not think it safe to keep them longer at home, but resolved to go and sell them at the next town, borrowing without leave, a lame colt out of the moor to assist in carrying off his booty.

Giles and his eldest sons had rare sport all the way in thinking, that while they were enjoying the profit of their plunder, Tom Price would be whipped round the market-place at least, if not sent beyond sea. But the younger boy, Dick, who had naturally a tender heart, though hardened by his long familiarity with sin, could not

help crying when he thought that Tom Price might perhaps be transported for a crime which he himself had helped to commit. He had had no compunction about the robbery, for he had not been instructed in the great principles of truth and justice. Nor would he therefore, perhaps, have had much remorse about accusing an innocent boy. But though utterly devoid of principle, he had some remains of natural feeling and of gratitude. Tom Price had often given him a bit of his own bread and cheese, and once, when Dick was like to be drowned, Tom had jumped into the pond with his clothes on, and saved his life when he was just sinking—the remembrance of all this made his heart heavy. He said nothing, as he trotted bare-foot after the asses and heard his father and brothers laugh at having outwitted the godly ones; and he grieved to think how poor Tom would suffer for his wickedness, yet he kept him silent; they called him sulky dog, and lashed the asses till they bled.

In the mean time, Tom Price kept up his spirit as well as he could. He worked hard all day, and prayed heartily night and morning. “It is true,” said he to himself, “I am not guilty of this sin but let this accusation set me on examining my self and truly repenting of all my other sins, if I find enough to repent of, though I thank God I did not steal those apples.”

At length Sunday came. Tom went to school as usual. As soon as he walked in there was a deal of whispering and laughing among the worst of the boys, and he overheard them say, “Who would have thought it? This is master’s favorite! This is Parson Wilson’s sober Tommy! We shan’t have Tommy thrown in our teeth again if we go to get a bird’s nest, or gather a few nuts of a Sunday.” “Your demure odes are always hypocrites,” says another. “The still sow sucks all the milk,” says a third.

Giles’s family had always kept clear of the school. Dick indeed had sometimes wished to go, not that he had much sense of sin, or desire after goodness, but he thought if he could once read, he might rise in the world, and not be forced to drive asses all his life. Through this whole Saturday night he could not sleep. He longed to know what would be done to Tom: he began to wish to go to school, but he had not courage; sin is very cowardly; so that on Sunday morning he went and sat himself down under the church wall. Mr. Wilson passed by. It was not his way to reject the most wicked, till he had tried every means to bring them over, and even then, he pitied and prayed for them—he had indeed long left off talking to Giles’s sons, but seeing Dick sitting by himself, he once more spoke to him, desired him to leave off his vagabond life, and go with him into the school. The boy hung down his head, but made no answer—he did not however either rise up and run away, or look sulky as he used to do.—The minister desired him once more. “Sir,” said the boy, “I can’t go; I am so big, I am ashamed.”—“The bigger you are, the less time you have to

lose.”—“But, Sir, I can’t read.”—“Then it is high time you should learn.”—“I should be ashamed to begin to learn my letters.”—“The shame is not in beginning to learn them, but in being contented never to know them.”—“But, Sir, I am so ragged!”—“God looks at the heart and not at the coat.”—“But, Sir, I have no shoes and stockings.”—“So much the worse. I remember who gave you both,” (here Dick coloured.) “It is bad to want shoes and stockings, but still if you can drive your asses a dozen miles without them, you may certainly walk to school without them.”—“But, Sir, the good boys will hate me, and won’t speak to me.”—“Good boys hate nobody, and as to not speaking to you, to be sure they will not keep your company while you go on in your present evil courses; but as soon as they see you wish to reform, they will help you, and pity you, and teach you, and so come along.” Here Mr. Wilson took this dirty boy by the hand, and gently pulled him forward, kindly talking to him all the way.

How the whole school stared to see Dick Giles come in! No one, however, dared to say what he thought. The business went on, and Dick slunk into a corner, partly to hide his rags and partly to hide his sin, for last Sunday’s transaction sat heavy at his heart, not because he had stolen the apples, but because Tom Price had been accused. This, I say, made him slink behind. Poor boy! he little thought there was ONE saw him who sees all things, and from whose eye no hole or corner can hide the sinner.

It was the custom in that school for the master, who was a good and wise man, to mark down in his pocket book, all the events of the week, that he might turn them to some account in his Sunday evening instructions, such as any useful story in the newspaper, any account of boys being drowned as they were out in a pleasure boat on Sundays; any sudden death in the parish, or any other remarkable visitation of Providence, insomuch, that many young people in the place, who did not belong to the school, and many parents also, used to drop in for an hour on a Sunday evening, when they were sure to hear something profitable. The minister greatly approved this practice, and often called in himself, which was a great support to the master and encouragement to the people.

The master had taken a deep concern in the story of Widow Brown’s apple-tree. He could not believe Tom Price was guilty, nor dared he pronounce him innocent; but he resolved to turn the instructions of the present evening to this subject. He began thus—“My dear boys, however light some of you may make of robbing an orchard, yet I have often told you there is no such thing as a little sin, if it be wilful or habitual. I wish now to explain to you also, that there is hardly such a thing as a single solitary sin. You know I teach you not merely to repeat the

commandments as an exercise for your memory, but as a rule for your conduct. If you were to come here only to learn to read and spell on a Sunday, I should think that was not employing God's day for God's work—but I teach you to read that you may by this means come so to understand the Bible and the Catechism, as to make every text in the one, and every question and answer in the other, to be so fixed in your hearts, that they may bring forth the fruits of good living.”

Master: How many commandments are there?

Boy: Ten.

Master: How many did that boy break who stole Widow Brown's apples?

Boy: Only one, Master. The eighth.

Master: What is the eighth?

Boy: Thou shalt not steal.

Master: And you are very sure that this was the only one he broke? Now suppose I could prove to you that he probably broke not less than six out of those ten commandments, which the great Lord of heaven himself stooped down from his eternal glory to deliver to men; would you not then think it a terrible thing to steal, whether apples or guineas?

Boy: Yes, Master.

Master: I will put the case. Some wicked boy has robbed Widow Brown's orchard. (Here the eyes of every one were turned on poor Tom Price except those of Dick Giles, who fixed his on the ground.) I accuse no one, continued the master. Tom Price is a good boy, and was not missing at the time of the robbery, these are two reasons why I presume he is innocent; but whoever it was, you allow that by stealing these apples he broke the eighth commandment.

Boy: Yes, Master.

Master: On what day were these apples stolen?

Boy: On Sunday.

Master: What is the fourth commandment?

Boy: Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day.

Master: Does that person keep holy the Sabbath day who loiters in an orchard on Sunday, when he should be at church, and steals apples when he ought to be saying his prayers?

Boy: No, Master.

Master: What command does he break?

Boy: The fourth.

Master: Suppose this boy had parents who had sent him to church, and that he had disobeyed them by not going, would that be keeping the fifth commandment?

Boy. No, Master—for the fifth commandment says, thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother.

This was the only part of the case in which poor Dick Giles's heart did not smite him; for he knew that he had disobeyed no father; for his father, alas! was still wickeder than himself, and had brought him to commit the sin. But what a wretched comfort was this! The master went on.

Master. Suppose this boy earnestly coveted this fruit, though it belonged to another person, would that be right?

Boy. No, Master; for the tenth commandment says, "Thou shalt not covet."

Master. Very well. Here are four of God's positive commands already broken. Now do you think thieves ever scruple to use wicked words?

Boy. I am afraid not, Master.

Here Dick Giles was not so hardened but that he remembered how many curses had passed between him and his father while they were filling the bags, and he was afraid to look up. The master went on.

"I will now go one step further. If the thief, to all his other sins has added that of accusing the innocent to save himself, if he should break the ninth commandment, by "bearing false witness against a harmless neighbour, six commandments are broken for an apple!"—But if it be otherwise, if Tom Price should be found guilty, 'tis not his good character shall save him. I shall shed tears over him, but punish him I must."—"No, that you shan't," roared out Dick Giles, who sprung from his hiding place, fell on his knees, and burst out a crying: "Tom Price is as good a boy as ever lived: it was father and I stole the apples!"

It would have done your heart good to have seen the joy of the master, the modest blushes of Tom Price, and the satisfaction of every honest boy in the school. All shook hands with Tom, and even Dick got some portion of pity. I wish I had room to give my readers the moving exhortation which the master gave. But while Mr. Wilson left the guilty boy to the management of the master, I thought it became him as a minister and a magistrate, to go to the extent of the law in punishing the father. Early on Monday morning he sent to apprehend Giles; in the mean time Mr. Wilson was sent for to the gardener's house two miles distant to attend a man who was dying. This was a duty to which all others gave way in his mind. He set out directly, but what was his surprise on his arrival to see, on a little bed on the floor, Poaching Giles lying in all the agonies of death! Jack Weston, the same poor young man against whom Giles had informed for killing a hare, was kneeling by him offering him some broth, and talking to him in the kindest manner. Mr. Wilson begged to know the meaning of all this, and Jack Weston spoke as follows:

‘At four this morning, as I was going out to mow, passing under the high wall of this garden, I heard a most dismal moaning. The nearer I came, the more dismal it grew. At last who should I see but poor Giles, groaning and struggling under a quantity of brick and stones, but not able to stir.—The day before he had marked a fine large net over this old wall, and resolved to steal it, he thought it might do as well to catch partridges as to preserve cherries; so, Sir, standing on the very top of the wall, and tugging with all his might to loosen the net from the hooks which fastened it, down came Giles, net, wall and all, for the wall was gone to decay. It was very high indeed, and poor Giles not only broke his thigh, but has got a terrible blow on his brain, and is bruised all over like a mummy. On seeing me, Sir, poor Giles cried out, ‘Oh Jack! I did try to ruin thee by lodging that information, and now thou wilt be revenged by letting me lie here and perish.’—‘God forbid, Giles,’ cried I, ‘thou shalt see what sort of revenge a Christian takes.’ So, Sir, I sent off the gardner’s boy to fetch a surgeon, while I scampered home and brought on my back this bit of a hammock, which is indeed my own bed, and put Giles upon it, we then lifted him up, bed and all, as tenderly as if he had been a gentleman, and brought him in here. My wife has just brought him a drop of broth, and now, Sir, as I have done what I could for his poor perishing body, it was I who took the liberty to send to you to come to try to help his poor soul, for the doctor says he can’t live.’

Mr. Wilson could not help saying to himself, “Such an action as this is worth a whole volume of comments on that precept of our blessed Master, “Do good to them that hate you.” Giles’s dying groans confirmed the sad account Weston had just given. The poor wretch could neither pray himself, nor attend to the minister. He could only cry out, “Oh, Sir, what will become of me? I don’t know how to repent. Oh my poor wicked children! Sir, I have bred them all up in sin and ignorance. Have mercy on them, Sir, let me not meet them in the place of torment to which I am going.” He languished a few days, and died in great misery.

Except the minister and Jack Weston, no one came to see poor Giles, besides Tommy Price, who had been so sadly wronged by him. Tom often brought him his own rice milk or apple dumpling, and Giles, ignorant and depraved as he was, often cried out, that he thought now there must be some truth in religion, since it taught even a boy to deny himself, and to forgive an injury.

Mr. Wilson the next Sunday made a moving discourse on the dangers of what are called “petty offences.” This, together with the awful death of Giles, produced such an effect, that no Poacher has been able to shew his head in that parish ever since.



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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed. This book is very old, and it is hard to determine in many cases whether what we might call an error was purposeful, or a printer's error; if in doubt, it is left unchanged.

Scans of this old book were lacking many line endings, and proofing has interpolated the missing words.

[The end of *Black Giles, the Poacher* by Hannah More]