

***EDWARD PRIME-
STEVENSON***



***LEFT TO THEMSELVES:
BEING THE ORDEAL
OF PHILIP AND
GERALD***

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Left to Themselves: Being the Ordeal of Philip and Gerald

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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PREFACE.

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A preface to a little book of this sort is an anomaly. Consequently it should be understood the sooner that these fore-words are not intended for any boys or girls that take up *Left to Themselves*. It is solely for the benefit of the adult reader led by curiosity or carefulness to open the book. The young reader will use his old privilege and skip it.

It was lately observed, with a good deal of truth, that childhood and youth in their relations to literature are modern discoveries. To compare reading for the boys or girls of to-day with that purveyed even twenty-five years ago, in quantity and quality, is a trite superfluity.

But it has begun to look as if catering to this discovery of what young minds relish and of what they absorb has gone incautiously far. There exists a good measure of forgetfulness that children, after all is said, are little men and little women, with hearts and heads, as well as merely imaginations to be tickled. Undoubtedly these last must be stirred in the story. But there is always a large element of the young reading public to whom character in fiction, and a definite idea of human nature through fiction, and the impression of downright personality through fiction, are the main interests—perhaps unconsciously—and work a charm and influence good or bad in a very high degree. A child does not always live in and care for the eternal story, story, story, incident, incident, incident, of literature written for him. There are plenty of philosophers not yet arrived at tail-coats or long frocks. They sit in the corners of the library or

school-room. They think out and feel the personality in narrative deeply. This element, apart from incident, in a story means far more to impress and hold and mold than what happens. Indeed, in the model story for young readers—one often says it, but often does not succeed in illustrating it—the clear embodiment of character is of the first importance, however stirring or however artistically treated or beneficial the incidental side. Jack feels more than he says from the personal contact, feels more, may be, than he knows; and Jill is surely apt to be as sensitive as Jack.

Has there not little by little come to be a little too much of kindly writing down to childhood and to youth? of writing down to it until we are in danger of losing its level and getting below it? Is not thoughtless youth more thoughtful than our credit extends to it? Certainly a nice sense of the balance between sugar and pill seems needed just now—admitting the need of any actual pill. Children, after the earliest period, are more serious and finer and more perceptive natures than we may have come to allowing, or for which we may have come to working. We forget the dignity of even the young heart and mind. Light-hearted youth does not necessarily mean light-headed youth.

This story—with apology for such a preamble—is written in the aim at deferring to the above ideas; and, furthermore, at including in the process one or two literary principles closely united to them. It will be found its writer hopes to embody study, as well as story, for the thoughtful moments in young lives, on whose intelligences daily clearly break the beauty and earnestness of human life, of resolute character, of unselfish friendship and affection, and of high aim. To

them, and of course to all adult readers, who do not feel themselves out of sympathy with the idealizings and fair inclusions of one's early time in this world, what follows is offered.

NEW YORK CITY, *February, 1891.*

LEFT TO THEMSELVES:
BEING
THE ORDEAL OF PHILIP AND GERALD.

CHAPTER I.

MR. SIP'S APPEARANCE AND DISAPPEARANCE— PHILIP AND GERALD BREAK ICE IN SUMMER.

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Mr. Patrick Sip had seated himself by the side of the brook that purred through the deep green ravine lying about three miles back of the Ossokosee House. Mr. Sip was not a guest at that new and flourishing summer resort. Mr. Sip, indeed, had hardly found himself a welcome guest anywhere within five or six years. He possessed a big, burly figure, a very unshaven and sunburnt face, and a suit of clothes once black, when upon the back of an earlier wearer, but long since faded to a dirty brown. Mr. Sip never used an umbrella nowadays, although he exercised much in the open air. Upon his unkempt hair slanted a tattered straw hat. Beside him lay a thickish walking-stick without any varnish. There was one thing which Mr. Sip had not about him, as any body would have inferred at a glance, although it is often difficult to detect by sight—a good character. In short, Mr. Sip looked the complete example of just what he was—a sturdy, veteran tramp of some thirty summers and winters, who had not found through honest labor a roof over his head or a morsel between his bristly lips since his last release from some one of the dozen work-houses that his presence had graced.

“Humph!” said Mr. Sip, half aloud, as he changed his position so as to let his bare feet sink deeper in the rippling creek (Mr. Sip was laving them), “I see plenty o’ water around here, but there aint nothin’ in sight looks like bread.

Plague them turnips! Raw turnips aint no sort o' a breakfast for a gentleman's stomach. Is they, now?"

He splashed his feet about in the pure cold water, by no means to cleanse them from the dust of the highway, but simply because it was easier to drop them into the stream than to hold them out as he sat on the abrupt bank. He whistled a part of a tune and seemed to forget having put his question to the wrens and wagtails in the sassafras.

"If, now, I could jist stick out my hand and pull a ham sangwich off o' that there useless little tree," pursued Mr. Sip, complainingly; "or if you could sort o' lay here an' meditate an' presen'ly find a good-sized pan o' cold victuals a-comin' a-floatin' up."

Neither of these attractive phenomena seeming likely to occur immediately, Mr. Sip sighed as if injured, shook his head, and said with decided temper, "Ugh, natur'! They talk so much about natur' in them books an'—an' churches, an' p'lice courts, an' sich. What's there nice about natur', I'd like to know, when a man can keep company with natur' as stiddy as I do an' never git so much as his reg'lar meals out o' her one day in the week? Natur', as fur as I've found out, don't mean nothing 'cept wild blackberries in season. I don't want no more to do with natur'!" Mr. Sip concluded with an angry slap at a huge horsefly that had lighted upon his ankle, and uttered his favorite exclamation, "My name aint Sip!"—which, although he meant the phrase merely as an expletive when he was particularly put out over any matter, happened to be the case.

Just at that moment Mr. Sip looked across to the opposite bank of the creek and discovered that he and the horsefly

were not alone. A boy was standing rather further up the stream with a fishing-rod in his hand observing the odd figure this wandering philosopher upon nature cut. The boy appeared to be in the neighborhood of twelve years of age. He had a trim figure and fair hair, and the sunlight on it and through a green branch of a young maple behind him made the brightest spots of color in the somber little chasm. On his young face were mingled expressions of amusement and disgust as to Mr. Sip. Across his arm was a basket. A napkin dangled out of this suggestively.

“Come here, sonny,” invited Mr. Sip in an amiable tone, and with a leer of sudden good feeling—for the luncheon basket.

“What did you say?” the boy called back rather timidly, without moving toward his new acquaintance.

“I said, ‘Come here,’” repeated Mr. Sip, sharply, drawing his feet out of the water and beckoning. He took a hasty glance up and down the stream. “How many nice little fishes has you and that pa o’ yourn caught since morning? Ten?”

“I haven’t caught any fish so far,” replied the lad, “and my father isn’t here. He’s up in Nova Scotia, thank you.”

“O,” Mr. Sip responded, “Nova Scotia? I remember I heard o’ his goin’ there. Say, sonny,” he went on, wading out to the middle of the creek with an ugly expression deepening over his red face as he realized that the bearer of the basket was alone, “What time is it?”

The boy retreated a few steps, pulling out a neat little silver watch, too polite to refuse the information. “Half past eleven,” he said, in his pleasant accent.

“O, but is that there watch correck?” inquired the evil-faced gentleman, taking several steps in the water toward that margin from which the lad had drawn back prudently. “Let me come up and see it for myself, wont you? That looks like a new watch.”

“I say, keep off!” cried the owner of the watch, all at once suspecting the designs of Mr. Sip and turning slightly pale. “Keep off, there, I say!” The intrepid little fellow dropped his rod and caught up a stone that lay near. “I—I don’t like your looks! I’ll throw this at you if you come any closer.”

The boy’s face was whiter at each word, although his spirit gave a ring to his threat. But Mr. Sip had invaded too many kitchens and terrified far too many helpless servant-maids to allow himself to be daunted by a boy well dressed and carrying a watch and a basket of good things. He uttered an angry oath and splashed violently toward the lad, stumbling among the sharp flints of the creek. It was open war begun by hot pursuit.

The path by which Gerald Saxton (for that happened to be the name of the solitary little fisherman) had made his way to the creek was steep and irregular. He ran up it now, panting, with Mr. Sip in stumbling chase, the latter calling out all manner of threats as he pursued. The boy was frightened greatly, but to be frightened is not to be a coward, and he knew that the path led into Farmer Wooden’s open meadow.

Through the green underbrush he darted, running up along the slope of the ravine, prudent enough not to waste his wind in cries that would not be at all likely to reach the

farm-house, until he should dash out in the field itself, and planting his small feet carefully.

“If he catches up to me,” thought Gerald, “he will knock me over and get the watch and be off before I can help it! I *must* make the meadow!”

On hurtled Mr. Sip, floundering up the narrow path, still giving vent to exclamations that only quickened Gerald’s flight. Suddenly Mr. Sip saw an opportunity for a short cut by which Gerald might yet be overtaken. He bounced into it. Just as Gerald shot forth into the long meadow the furious philosopher found himself hardly ten yards in arrear.

“*Now* I’ve got yer!” he called, too angry to observe that the farm-house was in sight. “You drop—that basket—an’ that watch—or—” Now Gerald shouted lustily, still flying ahead.

But Mr. Sip did not finish. A new figure came into action.

“What under the canopy is that?” cried a boy who was so much older and larger than little Gerald that he might almost have been called a young man. He was standing by the well up in the Woodens’s dooryard waiting for the horse he had been driving to finish drinking. In another moment he grasped the situation and was leaping swiftly and noiselessly down the long slope over the stubble.

Tramps had been plentiful lately. His voice rang out to comfort Gerald and warn Mr. Sip. Gerald looked up, but with a white, set little face ran past him. Mr. Sip, taking in the height, weight, and courage of the frightened boy’s new ally, turned and began running toward the low oak trees.

A strong ash stick, thrown with excellent aim, struck Mr. Sip squarely in the small of his back. He staggered for an

instant, but rallied, and, a coward to the last, vanished in the thicket with a parting curse. Within an hour he might have been seen drinking buttermilk thirstily at a cottage a mile away. The good-humored farmer's daughter gave it to him, pitying a man who was "walking all the way from Wheelborough Heights to Paterson, in Jersey, marm, to find my old boss and git a job he's promised me."

And now good-bye, Mr. Sip! You have done something today that would surprise your lazy self immensely. You have done a stroke of work. Thanks to your being a brutal vagrant, there is just coming about an acquaintance that is of the utmost import in the carrying on of this story—without which it would never have been worth writing or reading.

"Well, upon my word!" ejaculated the new-comer, wheeling about as if disposed to waste no more pains upon a man of Mr. Sip's kidney, and coming back to Gerald Saxton. "I am very glad I heard you! What did that rascal want of you? His kind have been uncommonly thick this autumn."

"Why—he was after my watch, I think," replied Gerald, sitting down on a flat rock, a smile re-appearing upon his startled face. "I was standing down at the bottom of the path in the glen when he began talking to me. First thing I knew I saw that he meant mischief. I suppose it wasn't wonderfully brave of me to run from him."

"Brave in you!" exclaimed merrily the solid-looking older lad. "As if a brute like that was not as big as six of you! You acted precisely as any sensible fellow of your size would do.

'He who fights and runs away,' you know. Did he do you any harm?"

"Not a bit, thanks. He didn't get close enough to me"—this with a chuckle.

"Were you fishing down in that lonely glen? It is a very fair spot for bass."

"Yes; Mr. Wooden took me down into the ravine quite a little way above it. Do you know the place, sir?"

"O, yes, sir; I know the place very well, sir," answered Gerald's defender, with a quizzical twinkle in his eyes as he repeated those "sirs." Then they both laughed. Gerald slyly compared their respective heights. His new friend could not be so very much taller. Certainly he was not over seventeen.

"You see, I was raised here—after a fashion," went on the latter in his clear, strong voice. "You are one of the guests over at our Ossokosee House, aren't you? I think I've seen you on the piazza."

"Yes; I've been stopping there while my father is away. My name is Gerald Saxton, though almost every body calls me Gerald."

"And mine is Philip Touchtone, but every body calls me Philip, and you needn't call me 'sir,' please. I know Mr. Marcy, who keeps the Ossokosee, very well. It was to deliver a message from him to the Woodens about the hotel butter that I stopped here this afternoon. But do tell me how that scamp dared run after you? The minute I saw him and you, even as far off as Mrs. Wooden's back door, I suspected that it was a tramp, and I didn't hesitate very long."

"No, you didn't," answered Gerald. And he walked along, swinging his arm manfully and fighting over again for Philip

Touchtone's benefit those details of the brief skirmish between himself and Mr. Sip that had hurriedly followed one another previous to Philip's advent. He continued his furtive observation of his new friend all the time. Touchtone had gained about five feet four of his full height, with a broad, well-developed chest, active legs, and a good straight way of carrying himself that reminded one of his sharp, pleasant way of speaking. His hair was dark enough to pass for black, as would his eyes and eyebrows, although they were actually brown, and full of an honest brightness. As for his face, it was rather long, full, and not particularly tanned, though the sun was well acquainted with it. The most attractive feature of it was a mouth that expressed good humor and resolution. In short, Gerald might have easily made up his mind that Philip Touchtone was a person born to work for and get what the world held for him.

"Whew!" exclaimed he, as Gerald reminded him, "I forgot Mrs. Wooden's carpet-beater! I threw it after your friend down there. He got the full benefit of it."

"And I forgot my rod! I dropped it when I thought it was best to run."

"Wait a minute and I'll get both," said Philip. "I know that identical rock where you say you stood—at the foot of the path." And before Gerald could remonstrate Philip ran from his side and darted down into the glen where Mr. Sip must have still lurked in wrath. But sooner than Gerald could feel alarm for him Philip came back with rod and beater.

"We need never expect to see him again," he said, breathlessly. "But—halloa! There are Mrs. Wooden and Miss Beauchamp, who boards with her. She teaches the district

school here, and it's just begun. They must be wondering what has become of me. Suppose we hurry up a trifle. You can ride back to the hotel with me, unless you care to stay and fish—for more tramps."

"No, I thank you," answered Gerald. "You would be nowhere near to help me fight them." A determined flash came into the boy's countenance, such as he had shown when he caught up the bit of rock in defiance of the ragged Sip.

"O, I beg your pardon," he went on in his odd, rather grown-up manner; "I haven't said how much obliged to you I am for coming down there."

"You are quite welcome," laughed his new friend, looking down with frank eyes upon the younger boy.

"Perfectly welcome, 'Gerald,' you were going to say," added his companion, simply, feeling as if he had known for years this winning new-comer, who seemed not so much boy or man, but a confusion of both, that made up some one with whom he could speedily be on familiar terms. "Hark! Mrs. Wooden is calling you. That horse of yours is eating an apple out of Miss Beauchamp's hand, too."

The two Woodens and their boarder, Miss Beauchamp, walked forward to meet the boys as they advanced from the lane.

"Well, Philip," was the white-headed old farmer's greeting, "where did you fly to so sudden? Neither wife, here, nor I could set eyes on you. And so you've struck up an acquaintance with Master Gerald, have you?"

"Well, yes; and struck an acquaintance of his in the middle of his back," responded Philip. "How do you do, Miss

Beauchamp? Didn't you, any of you, see the fight?"

"Fight!" cried Mrs. Wooden, clapping her fat hand to her bosom and nearly dropping the wooden tray of fresh butter she held. "Why, Philip Touchtone! Who has been a-fightin'? Not you—nor you?" she added, turning to Gerald.

"We all have been fighting, I'm afraid, Mrs. Wooden," said the latter—"three of us."

After this preamble there had to be an account of the skirmish. Miss Beauchamp and Mrs. Wooden alike decided it was "shocking."

"He might have drawn a pistol on both of you!" exclaimed Miss Beauchamp, "and a great deal more might have come of it."

"Well," Gerald protested, "the only thing that's come of it is that I have met a friend of yours here."

"And you couldn't do a better thing, Gerald!" exclaimed Mrs. Wooden, beginning to stow away butter and eggs in the spring-wagon from the Ossokosee House. "Mr. Philip Touchtone is a particular pet of Miss Beauchamp's and mine when he is a good boy—as he almost always is," the farmer's fat wife lightly added.

"And a capital friend," added the grave Miss Beauchamp, with a smile, "for a boy about the age and size of one I know to have on his books. You ask Mr. Marcy over at the hotel all about him, Gerald. Now, you do that for me soon."

"O, pshaw, Miss Beauchamp!" Philip interrupted, his wide-awake face rather red, and straightening himself up to endure these broad compliments, "you and Mrs. Wooden ought to remember that people who praise friends to their faces are said to be fond of slandering them behind their

backs. Come, Mr. Wooden, I promised Mr. Marcy to be back as soon as I could. Jump in, Gerald.”

The boy swung his slender figure up to the cushioned seat. Philip quickly followed after a few more words with the farmer. Then the wagon rattled out into the road and was soon bowling along to the Ossokosee. Philip favored the baskets and bundles in the back of the spring-wagon with a final glance, and then turned to Gerald with the manner of a person who intends asking and answering a large number of questions. And Gerald felt quite eager to do the same thing.

Why each of these lads, so entirely out of his own free will, should have mutually confided details of their two histories, when each was so much a stranger, met to-day, and perhaps never sitting again within speaking-distance after to-morrow, was a riddle to both of them. But the solution of it is as old as the rocks in Wooden’s Ravine, perhaps older. We may keep our lives and thoughts under a lock and key as tightly as we like until the day comes when, somewhere along this crowded highway called Life, we all at once run square against some other human creature who is made by fate to be our best friend. Then, take my word for it, whether he is younger or older, he will find out from our own lips every thing in the bottom of our hearts that he chooses to ask about; and, what is more, we ought to find ourselves glad to trust such a person with even more than the whole stock that is there.

CHAPTER II. MUTUAL CONFIDENCES; AND PHILIP TURNS RED IN THE FACE.

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“This has been my first summer at the Ossokosee,” said Gerald, as the wagon trundled on. “Papa and I live in New York, in the Stuyvesant Hotel. We have always been to Shelter Island until this year.”

“I have lived quite a good deal in New York myself,” remarked Philip. “You see, I have nobody to look after me except Mr. Marcy. My mother died several years ago. In three or four weeks from this time Mr. Marcy takes me down to the city with him when this house is shut.”

“Is Mr. Marcy your uncle?”

“O, no! No relation at all. I often feel as if he was, though. He has kept watch of me and helped me with my education ever since my mother’s death.”

Touchtone’s eyes lost their happy light an instant.

“During the summer, of course, I have no time to do any studying, and not too much in the winter. I have a great deal else to busy me, helping Mr. Marcy.”

“Why, what do you help him with?” inquired Gerald, with interest, remembering Touchtone in the office and the dining-room, and indeed every-where about the Ossokosee, except the parlors.

“Well, Mr. Marcy calls me a kind of aid-de-camp to him and Mrs. Ingraham, the housekeeper, too, particularly when

there is danger of the kitchen running short of supplies. Now and then, if the farmers around here fail us, I have to spend half the day driving about the country, or you might starve at supper-table all at once. O, and then I look after one or two books in the office!”

Gerald laughed.

“Papa has kept me here because he heard so much about the table; and because Mr. Marcy told him there were so few boys that I couldn’t get into mischief. Papa used to be a broker, but he don’t do any thing now. I believe he retired, or whatever they call it, a year or so ago. He’s been camping out with a party of gentlemen from the Stock Exchange ever since midsummer away up in Nova Scotia. I haven’t any mother either.”

“Why didn’t you go with them?” inquired Philip, guiding Nebuchadnezzar skillfully through an irregular series of puddles. The view of the rolling green country, dotted with farm-houses and gray or red barns, was now worth looking at as they came out on the flat hill-top.

“I should have liked to go very much; but papa said that they were all expecting to ‘rough it,’ and the weather might be too cold for me. He was afraid I would be sick or something, and I know I’d be a good deal of trouble to him. Hasn’t it stayed hot, though? I suppose they are having a splendid time up there all by themselves hunting and fishing. He wrote me that there wasn’t a house within five miles of them. In October we are to meet in New York again. School begins next week; but I’m not to hurry back this year.”

Gerald spoke of the “splendid time” rather wistfully. The little fellow had been lonely in the big Ossokosee, Philip fancied.

“What school do you go to?” inquired Gerald after a moment; “that is, when you are in New York?”

“Not to any now,” soberly responded Philip, with a frown coming over his forehead. It was the secret grief of his spirit that he had not been able to advance further in a thorough education. When Gerald spoke of his holidays coming to an end; he involuntarily envied this boy. “But before I came to live so much with Mr. Marcy, and when my mother was alive, I went to the Talmage School.”

“Why, that’s my school now!” exclaimed Gerald, smiling. “How queer! But it’s a pretty old school.”

And then came interrogations as to what pupils or teachers had been there in Philip’s school-days.

To Gerald, who was quite wide awake to reflections upon a good many more problems than thinkers of his age often pause over, already there seemed to be something like a mystery hanging around this young Touchtone. He made up his mind that his new friend did not appear a shade out of place this morning driving around a hotel-wagon after butter and eggs from the farms. But he also decided if he should meet Philip in a tennis-suit with a group of the most “aristocratic” lads of Murray Hill, or see him marching about the floor at some crowded “reception” given by the school, why, Touchtone would look just as much in his proper surroundings—only more so. While he was assenting to these ideas something else occurred to make the younger boy puzzled about the older one.

A buggy came spinning along the road to meet them. From the front leaned out a young man, ten or twelve years older than Touchtone, wearing a brown beard. He checked his horse as he approached and called out some words that Gerald at once knew were German. Philip laughed and answered them in the same language quite as fluently. The occupant of the buggy—Gerald rightly supposed him the young German doctor that lived in the village—began quite a chat with Touchtone entirely in German. Both spoke so rapidly that Gerald found his study of the language at the Talmage School did not help him to catch more than an occasional “ja” or “nein.”

The young doctor rode on.

“How well you must know German,” said Gerald, admiringly. “Did you learn it across the water?” the boy added, half in joke.

“Yes,” responded Touchtone, to the astonishment of the other lad. “I learned it in Hanover, when I was there, before we lived near New York.”

Gerald happened to glance at Philip’s face. It was oddly red, and his voice sounded strangely. All this time, too, there was certainly one particular person to whom he had not so much as referred. But after Gerald had bethought himself of this omission and put his next question he would have given a great deal not to have uttered it. The regret did not come until he had asked Philip point-blank:

“I think you said that your—your father was dead, didn’t you? Was that after you came back?”

Philip made no reply. A blush reddened his frank face painfully. His pleasant expression had given place to an