

WILLIAM HERBERT.

CHAPTER I.

“MOTHER,” said William Herbert, “do you think that father would let me go skating to-night on the pond? It is such a bright moonlight night, and John and I walked all over there this afternoon, after school was out, and I am sure the ice is strong enough to bear a loaded wagon and horse.”

“I do not know, my son,” said his mother. “I am sure your father is always ready to grant you any reasonable recreation, if he has no good reason to the contrary; but you know he desires his children to come directly to him when they wish for a favour, and you had better ask him.”

“Yes, mother, I will,” said he, smiling, “I will ask him.”

William hurried away to his father's study, and found him writing.

"Well, my boy, what do you wish?" said the father, as his son entered the room.

"Father, will you let me go skating to-night?"

"Where do you intend to go?" inquired Mr. Herbert.

"Over on Mr. Pomeroy's pond, sir."

"And who is to be there beside you?"

"Horace Bissell, James Jones, Henry King, and all the Williston boys."

"Is that all the company?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, William, I have no objection, as I have learned from Mr. Pomeroy that the ice is strong, and that there are no air-holes."

"No, sir, no air-holes—for I came across there to-day, and I did not see one."

"You must be back at nine o'clock," said his father.

"Yes, sir," replied William, as he gently shut the door, and hastened with a light heart to get his skates from the nail in the shed,—and so he ran leaping

and sliding on the little ponds of ice along the road, till he came in sight of the large pond, where he saw his companions already gathered, with a huge bonfire blazing from a small, barren island in the centre, and the boys, whom William had named, skating in great glee.

He listened for a moment with delight, as he gazed on the bright scene before him.

The moon was just rising. The fair evening star looked down upon the snow-covered hills and glassy surface of stream and lake, while the lurid glare of the bonfire contrasted strangely with the silvery light of the heavens. The beautiful scene could not detain him from his companions, and as he heard the echo of their skates from the sides of the hill, and the shout of their merry laughter, he ran down the bank, and came, with a graceful slide, into the midst of them.

“How glary, isn’t it?”

“Yes, fine skating as ever was,” said James Jones. “I never saw it better, except where we have cut it up some, down at the bend.”

William soon had his skates on, and was welcomed with the hearty greetings

of his companions, with whom he was now gliding swiftly along every nook, and rounding every promontory, (as they called them,) in the pond. "Boys, now Willy Herbert has come," exclaimed Horace Bissell, "let's play peal away."

"Yes, peal away! peal away!" shouted the others.

"How do you play it?" inquired Henry King.

"Oh!" said John Williston, "we just skate in a straight line across the pond till we have cut a deep mark, and then one must stand on the mark and try to catch the others before they can cross it; and every one that's caught must take the stand, and help to catch the others, that's all. So, come on, I'll be 'the first.'"

The mark was cut, and soon all the boys were caught except William, who, being the best skater of the party, held out for a long time, until at last they all spread out on the line, and succeeded in taking our hero.

After playing at "peal away" awhile, the boys turned off, some skating backwards, others sailing swiftly in a circle,

and others amusing themselves in cutting their names and other figures in the ice.

"Hark!" said William,—and the young skaters immediately made the hills echo with the hard grinding of their heels in the ice, and then glided gently along, till not a sound was heard.

"There goes the stage, and I must be off," said William, as the blast of the driver's horn rose shrill on the evening air.

"Why? Do you expect any one in it?" inquired Henry King.

"No, but you know it gets in a little before nine, and I must be home at that time." So he began unstrapping his skates. The rest of the party soon followed, some taking one direction and some another.

"Good night," said William and Henry King to the others, as they took their course towards home.

"Good night. Don't forget Saturday afternoon," shouted the Willistons.

"This is a beautiful night," said Henry.

"Yes," replied William, gazing at the moon, and the fleecy clouds which were

swiftly scudding over her face. "Do you think that the moon is inhabited?"

"I don't know," returned Henry, "I have often thought of that. Look out! There comes a sleigh. It is father's; I know it by the bells. He has been to Chester. Let's ask him to ride."

The horse was checked.

"Get in, boys, get in," said Mr. King, kindly. "Have you been skating?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you will feel all the better for study to-morrow, then."

The boys thought they should; and amused themselves by watching the balls of snow flying from the horses' feet against the dash-board, till they reached Mr. Herbert's house, when William thanked Mr. King for his kindness, and bade them good night.

"Is it nine, father?" said William, as he entered the parlour.

"It wants five minutes of it," replied Mr. Herbert. "I am glad to see my son is so punctual as to be even before the time."

"Oh! I rode up from the corner with

Mr. King, or I should not have been quite so soon."

"Well, you will often find a reward when in the way of your duty."

Mr. Herbert here laid down the book he had been reading, opened the Bible, and read the twenty-third psalm. Then they all kneeled down, while he thanked their kind Benefactor for all the blessings of the day, asked the pardon of their sins, and commended themselves to the care of Him who never slumbers nor sleeps; praying, for the sake of the Redeemer, that they might all meet as a happy family in heaven.

When William had retired to his chamber, he took his Bible, read a few verses, offered a prayer to God, as he had been taught to do, and soon fell into a sweet sleep, for William Herbert was a Christian boy, and acted from Christian principles, and he knew, from his own experience, that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him," "and keepeth him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on God."