Cautionary Tales for Children

by Hilaire Belloc

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CAUTIONARY TALES FOR CHILDREN

CAUTIONARY TALES FOR CHILDREN

Designed for the Admonition of Children between the ages of eight and fourteen years

Verses by H. BELLOC

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Pictures by B. T. B.

DUCKWORTH 3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.

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DEDICATED TO BOBBY, JOHNNY, AND EDDIE SOMERSET

INTRODUCTION

Upon being asked by a Reader whether the verses contained in this book were true.

And is it True? It is not True. And if it were it wouldn’t do, For people such as me and you Who pretty nearly all day long Are doing something rather wrong. Because if things were really so, You would have perished long ago, And I would not have lived to write The noble lines that meet your sight, Nor B. T. B. survived to draw The nicest things you ever saw. H. B.

Jim,

Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion.

There was a Boy whose name was Jim; His Friends were very good to him. They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam, And slices of delicious Ham, And Chocolate with pink inside, And little Tricycles to ride, And

read him Stories through and through, And even took him to the Zoo— But there it was the dreadful Fate Befell him, which I now relate.

You know—at least you ought to know. For I have often told you so— That Children never are allowed To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;

Now this was Jim's especial Foible, He ran away when he was able, And on this inauspicious day He slipped his hand and ran away! He hadn't gone a yard when—

Bang! With open Jaws, a Lion sprang, And hungrily began to eat The Boy: beginning at his feet.

Now just imagine how it feels When first your toes and then your heels, And then by gradual degrees, Your shins and ankles, calves and knees, Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.

No wonder Jim detested it! No wonder that he shouted "Hi!" The Honest Keeper heard his cry, Though very fat

he almost ran To help the little gentleman. "Ponto!" he ordered as he came (For Ponto was the Lion's name), "Ponto!" he cried,

with angry Frown. "Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!"

The Lion made a sudden Stop, He let the Dainty Morsel drop, And slunk reluctant to his Cage, Snarling with Disappointed Rage But when he bent him over Jim, The Honest Keeper's

Eyes were dim. The Lion having reached his Head, The Miserable Boy was dead!

When Nurse informed his Parents, they Were more Concerned than I can say:— His Mother, as She dried her eyes, Said, "Well—it gives me no surprise, He would not

do as he was told!” His Father, who was self-controlled, Bade all the children round attend To James’ miserable end, And always keep a-hold of Nurse For fear of finding something worse.

Henry King,

Who chewed bits of String, and was early cut off in Dreadful Agonies.

The Chief Defect of Henry King Was

chewing little bits of String. At last he swallowed some which tied Itself in ugly Knots inside.

Physicians of the Utmost Fame Were called at once; but when they came They answered,

as they took their Fees, “There is no Cure for this Disease. Henry will very soon be dead.” His Parents stood about his Bed Lamenting his Untimely Death, When Henry, with his Latest Breath, Cried— “Oh, my Friends, be warned by me,

That Breakfast, Dinner, Lunch and Tea Are all the Human Frame requires ...” With that the Wretched Child expires.

Matilda,

Who told Lies, and was Burned to Death.

Matilda told such Dreadful Lies,

It made one Gasp and Stretch one’s Eyes; Her Aunt, who, from her Earliest Youth, Had kept a Strict Regard for Truth,

Attempted to Believe Matilda: The effort very nearly killed her, And would have done so, had not She Discovered this Infirmity. For once, towards the Close of Day, Matilda, growing tired of play, And finding she was left alone, Went tiptoe

to the Telephone And summoned the Immediate Aid Of London's Noble Fire-Brigade. Within an hour the Gallant Band Were pouring in on every hand, From Putney, Hackney Downs and Bow, With Courage high and Hearts a-glow They galloped, roaring through the Town,

"Matilda's House is Burning Down!" Inspired by British Cheers and Loud Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd, They ran their ladders through a score Of windows on the Ball Room Floor; And took Peculiar Pains to Souse The Pictures up and down the House,

Until Matilda's Aunt succeeded In showing them they were not needed And even then she had to pay To get the Men to go away!

It happened that a few Weeks later Her Aunt was off to the Theatre To see that Interesting Play The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.

She had refused to take her Niece To hear this Entertaining Piece: A Deprivation Just and Wise To Punish her for Telling Lies. That Night a Fire did break out— You should have heard Matilda Shout! You should have heard her Scream and Bawl, And throw the window up and call To People passing in the Street— (The rapidly increasing Heat Encouraging her to obtain Their confidence)—but all in vain! For every time She shouted "Fire!"

They only answered "Little Liar!" And therefore when her Aunt returned, Matilda, and the House, were Burned.

Franklin Hyde,

Who caroused in the Dirt and was corrected by His Uncle.

His Uncle came on Franklin Hyde Carousing in the Dirt. He Shook him hard from Side to Side And

Hit him till it Hurt,

Exclaiming, with a Final Thud, “Take

that! Abandoned Boy! For Playing with Disgusting Mud As though it were a Toy!”

MORAL

From Franklin Hyde’s adventure, learn To pass your Leisure Time In Cleanly Merriment, and turn From Mud and Ooze and Slime And every form of Nastiness— But, on the other Hand, Children in ordinary Dress May always play with Sand.

Godolphin Horne,

Who was cursed with the Sin of Pride, and Became a Boot-Black.

Godolphin Horne was Nobly Born; He held the Human Race in Scorn, And lived with all his Sisters where His father lived, in Berkeley Square. And oh! the Lad was Deathly Proud! He never shook your Hand or Bowed, But merely smirked and nodded

thus: How perfectly ridiculous! Alas! That such Affected Tricks Should flourish in a Child of Six! (For such was Young Godolphin’s age).

Just then, the Court required a Page, Whereat

the Lord High Chamberlain (The Kindest and the Best of Men), He went good-naturedly and

took A Perfectly Enormous Book Called People Qualified to Be Attendant on His Majesty, And murmured, as he scanned the list (To see that no one should be missed), “There’s

William Coutts has got the Flue,

And Billy Higgs would never do,

And Guy de Vere is far too young,

And ... wasn't D'Alton's Father hung? And as for Alexander Byng!— ... I think I know the kind of thing, A Churchman, cleanly, nobly born, Come

let us say Godolphin Horne?" But hardly had he said the word When Murmurs of Dissent were heard. The King of Iceland's Eldest Son Said, "Thank you! I am taking none!" The Aged Duchess of Athlone Remarked, in her sub-acid tone, "I doubt if He is what we need!" With which the Bishops all agreed; And even Lady Mary Flood (So Kind, and oh! so really good) Said, "No! He wouldn't do at all, He'd make us feel a lot too small," The Chamberlain said,

" ... Well, well, well! No doubt you're right.... One cannot tell!" He took his Gold and Diamond Pen And

Scratched Godolphin out again. So now Godolphin is the Boy Who blacks the Boots at the Savoy.

Algernon,

Who played with a Loaded Gun, and, on missing his Sister was reprimanded by his Father.

Young Algernon, the Doctor's Son, Was

playing with a Loaded Gun. He pointed it towards his sister, Aimed very carefully, but

Missed her!

His Father, who was standing near,

The Loud Explosion chanced to Hear,

And reprimanded Algernon For playing with a Loaded Gun.

Hildebrand,

Who was frightened by a Passing Motor, and was brought to Reason.

“Oh, Murder! What was that, Papa!” “My child,

It was a Motor-Car, A Most Ingenious Toy!

Designed to Captivate and Charm Much rather than to rouse Alarm In any English Boy.

“What would your Great Grandfather who

Was Aide-de-Camp to General Brue,

And lost a leg at

Waterloo,

And

Quatre-Bras and

Ligny too!

And died at Trafalgar!—

What would he have remarked to hear His Young Descendant shriek with fear, Because he happened to be near A Harmless Motor-Car! But do not fret about it! Come! We’ll off to Town

And purchase some!”

Lord Lundy,

Who was too Freely Moved to Tears, and thereby ruined his Political Career.

Lord Lundy from his earliest years Was far too freely moved to Tears. For instance if his Mother said, “Lundy! It’s time to go to Bed!” He bellowed like a Little Turk. Or if

his father Lord Dunquerque Said “Hi!” in a Commanding Tone, “Hi, Lundy! Leave the Cat alone!” Lord Lundy, letting go its tail, Would raise so terrible a wail As

moved His Grandpapa the

Duke To utter the severe rebuke: “When I, Sir! was a little Boy, An Animal was not a Toy!”

His father’s Elder Sister, who Was married to a Parvenoo,

Confided to Her Husband, “Drat! The Miserable, Peevish Brat! Why don’t they drown the Little Beast?” Suggestions which, to say the least, Are not what we expect to hear From Daughters of an English Peer. His grandmamma, His Mother’s Mother, Who had some dignity or other, The Garter, or no matter what, I can’t remember all the Lot! Said “Oh! that I were Brisk and Spry To give him that for which to cry!” (An empty wish, alas! for she

Was Blind and nearly ninety-three).

The

Dear Old Butler

thought—but there! I really neither know nor care For what the Dear Old Butler thought! In my opinion, Butlers ought To know their place, and not to play The Old Retainer night and day I’m getting tired and so are you, Let’s cut the Poem into two!

Lord Lundy

(SECOND CANTO)

It happened to Lord Lundy then, As happens to so many men: Towards the age of twenty-six, They shoved him into politics; In which profession he commanded The income that his rank demanded In turn as Secretary for India, the Colonies, and War. But very soon his friends began To doubt if he were quite the man: Thus, if a member rose to say (As members do from day to day),

“Arising out of that reply ...!”

Lord Lundy would begin to cry. A Hint at harmless little jobs Would shake him with

convulsive sobs.

While as for Revelations, these Would simply bring him to his knees, And leave him whimpering like a child. It drove his Colleagues raving wild! They let him sink from Post to Post, From fifteen hundred at the most To eight, and barely six—and then To be Curator of Big Ben!... And finally there came a Threat To oust him from the Cabinet!

The Duke—his aged grand-sire—bore The shame till he could bear no more. He rallied his declining powers, Summoned the youth to Brackley Towers, And bitterly addressed him thus— “Sir! you have disappointed us! We had intended you to be The next Prime Minister but three: The stocks were sold; the Press was squared: The Middle Class was quite prepared. But as it is!... My language fails!

Go out and govern New South Wales!”

The Aged Patriot groaned and died: And gracious! how Lord Lundy cried!

Rebecca,

Who slammed Doors for Fun and Perished Miserably.

A Trick that everyone abhors In Little Girls is slamming Doors. A

Wealthy Banker’s

Little Daughter

Who lived in Palace Green, Bayswater (By name Rebecca Offendort), Was given to this Furious Sport.

She would deliberately go

And Slam the door like Billy-Ho!

To make

her

Uncle Jacob start. She was not really bad at heart, But only rather rude and wild: She was an aggravating child....

It happened that a Marble Bust Of Abraham was standing just Above the Door this little Lamb Had carefully prepared to Slam, And Down it came! It knocked her flat!

It laid her out! She looked like that.

Her funeral Sermon (which was long And followed by a Sacred Song) Mentioned her Virtues, it is true, But dwelt upon her Vices too, And showed the Dreadful End of One Who goes and slams the door for Fun.

The children who were brought to hear The awful Tale from far and near Were much impressed,

and inly swore They never more would slam the Door. —As often they had done before.

George,

Who played with a Dangerous Toy, and suffered a Catastrophe of considerable Dimensions.

When George's Grandmamma was told

That George had been as good as Gold, She Promised in the Afternoon To buy him an Immense BALLOON. And

so she did; but when it came, It got into the candle flame, And being of a dangerous sort Exploded

with a loud report!

The Lights went out! The Windows broke! The Room was filled with reeking smoke. And in the darkness shrieks and yells Were mingled with Electric Bells, And falling masonry and groans, And crunching, as of broken bones, And dreadful shrieks, when, worst of all, The House itself began to fall! It tottered, shuddering to

and fro, Then crashed into the street below— Which happened to be Savile Row.

When Help arrived, among the Dead

Were

Cousin Mary,

Little Fred,

The Footmen

(both of them),

The Groom,

The man that cleaned the Billiard-Room,

The Chaplain, and

The Still-Room Maid. And I am dreadfully afraid That Monsieur Champignon, the Chef, Will now be

permanently deaf— And both his

Aides

are much the same; While George, who was in part to blame, Received, you will regret to hear, A nasty lump

behind the ear.

MORAL

The moral is that little Boys Should not be given dangerous Toys.

Charles Augustus Fortescue,

Who always Did what was Right, and so accumulated an Immense Fortune.

The nicest child I ever knew Was Charles Augustus Fortescue. He never lost his cap,

or tore His stockings or his pinafore: In eating Bread he made no Crumbs, He was extremely fond of sums,

To which, however, he preferred The Parsing of a Latin Word— He sought, when it was in his power, For information twice an hour, And as for finding Mutton-Fat Unappetising, far from that! He often, at his Father's Board, Would beg them, of his own accord,

To give him, if they did not mind, The Greasiest Morsels they could find— His Later Years did not belie The Promise of his Infancy. In Public Life he always tried To take a judgment Broad and Wide;

In Private, none was more than he Renowned for quiet courtesy. He rose at once in his Career, And long before his Fortieth Year Had wedded

Fifi,

Only Child Of Bunyan, First Lord Aberfylde. He thus became immensely Rich, And built the Splendid Mansion which Is called

the cedars muswell hill

Where he resides in Affluence still To show what Everybody might Become by

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