

BILLIAM.

"No, father," said Billiam, with decision; "I am not half good enough to make a parson of. You must give the living to Harry. He will make a first-rate. He is all the time mousing about among books!"

Billiam and his father were standing together in the rectory garden, which looked over the beautiful vale of St. John. Helvellyn slept above them, stretched out like a lion with his head low between his paws. The lake glimmered beneath his paws. The light midsummer haze. Bees hummed in the old garden, and the flowers on which they made themselves drunken reeled and shook with the press of the revellers.

The old rector of Aplethwaite was dead. This day of midsummer had been his funeral day. An old man full to the brim with years and dignities, he had lived all his life under the wing of his brother, the Squire, rooted safely in the family living, dining every Sunday and Thursday at a rotation and reading his 100 sermons in a rotation as settled and regular as that of the crops. But now the old rector was changed, and, according to the Squire's providential arrangement, the new order was to be—Billiam.

His real name was William, with something very distinguished after it. Yet nobody thought of calling him anything but Billiam—except only the Squire, when, as at present, Billiam and he differed in opinion. Then he said, "William Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, will you dare to disobey your father?" and Billiam hung his head, for he knew that a day was coming when he would.

At school he had been called Billiam, for the reason that a "Yorker" is called a "Yorker," because it was obvious that he could be called nothing else. The boy whose Latin verses he did said to him, "Now go on, old Billiam, hurry up! I want to go out to the playing fields to smite that young toad, S. Ott Miner, for making faces at me and making me laugh in chapel!" So to save time, Billiam gave him his own copy of verses, and saw the plagiarist pass to the head of the form next day, on the strength of Billiam's iambics. Yet that boy never even thought of thanking the author and origin of his distinction. Why should he? It was "only old Billiam."

Billiam failed also in gaining the love and respect of his masters to the extent which, upon his merits, was his due. For one thing, he was forever bringing all manner of broken-down sparrows, maimed rabbits, and three-legged dogs into the school—and, if possible, even into the dormitory. Then smells of divers kinds arose, and bred quarrelsome dissension of a very positive kind. The house master came one night to find Billiam with an open knife in his hand, driving fiercely into a throng of boys armed with cricket bats and wickets. Whereupon he promptly dashed at the young desperado and wrestled the knife out of his hands.

"Do you wish to murder somebody?" cried the house master, shaking him.

"Yes," said Billiam, stoutly, "if Lowther throws my white mice out of the window."

No further proceedings were taken, because, upon examination, Billiam proved to be scored black and blue with his adversaries. He was, however, from that time forth given a bedroom upon the ground floor, with a little court in front which looked upon the laundry. And here Billiam, still unrepentant, was allowed to tend his menagerie in peace, provided always that it did not entirely destroy the sanitation of the school. But when the Government committee came to inspect the premises, the head master carefully piloted them past the entrance of the court wherein dwelt Billiam, keeping well to windward of it.

Anybody else would have been promptly expelled, but Billiam's father was a very important person indeed, and the head master had known him intimately at college. Besides, no one could possibly have expelled Billiam. The very ruffians who whacked him with cricket bats would straightway have risen in mutiny.

By and by Billiam's father tried him at Oxford, but, though Billiam stayed his terms, he would have none of it. So when the rectory fell vacant it seemed all that could be done to make arrangements by which Billiam would succeed his uncle. The Right Honorable Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, Billiam's "pater," saw no difficulty in the matter. He had been at Eton and Christ Church with the Bishop of Lakeland, and the matter fell itself naturally to this arrangement. Every one felt this to be the final solution of a most difficult problem. Everybody even remotely connected with the family was consulted, and all expressed their several delights with relief and alacrity. But in the mean time nothing was said to Billiam, who had a settler with a broken leg upon his mind, and so lived mostly about the kennels, and smelled of liniment.

But when his father told the proximate rector that he must begin to prepare for the Bishop's examination and go into residence for some months at St. Abbe's famous theological college (called in clerical circles "The Back Door"), Billiam most unexpectedly refused point blank to have anything to do with the plan. He would be no parson; he was not good enough, he asserted. Harry could have it. The Right Honorable Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite, ex-Cabinet Minister and P. C., broke into a rage almost as violent as when his party leader proclaimed a new policy without consulting him. He informed Billiam (under the designation of William Reginald Setoun) how many different kinds of fool he was, and told him as an ultimatum that if he refused this last chance to establish himself in life he need expect no further help or consideration from him.

Billiam listened uneasily, and with a deep-seated regret obvious upon his downcast face. It was pitiful, he thought privately, to see so dignified and respectable a man as his father thus losing control of himself. So Billiam fidgeted, hoping that the painful scene would soon be over so that he might get back again to the lame settler at the kennels.

When Billiam's father had at once concisely and completely expressed his opinions as to Billiam's sanity, Billiam's ingratitude, Billiam's disgraceful present conduct and unparalleled future career, and when he had concluded with a vivid picture of Billiam's ultimate fate (which was obviously not to be drowned) he passed, partly in order to recover his breath and partly to invite suggestions from the culprit. Not that he expected Billiam to answer. Indeed he held it almost an insult for one of his children to attempt to

answer one of his questions at such a moment.

"What have you to say to that, sir? What excuse have you to make? Answer me that, sir. Silence, sir, I will not to a word. You may well stand abashed and silent. Have I brought a son into the world for this—kept you, given you expensive education only for this?"

So Billiam kept silence and thought hard of the settler down at the kennels. Those bandages ought to be wet again. It was an hour past the time. He kept changing from one foot to the other upon the gravel walk.

"Don't insult me by jumping about like a hen on a hot griddle," cried his father, "tell me what you think of doing with yourself, for I will no longer support you in idleness and debauchery."

"I should like to be a veterinary surgeon, sir," said Billiam, scraping with his toe.

"Let that gravel alone, will you—a veterinary devil—an Ormithwaite, a damned cow doctor. Get out of my sight, sir, before I strike you with my cane."

And accordingly Billiam went—down to the kennels to visit the settler, wondering all the way whether, as the skin was not broken, he ought to use an embrocation or stick to the cold water bandages.

And this is briefly why Billiam found himself in Edinburgh and established in a nest of unfurnished garret rooms which he had discovered by chance at the end of Montgomery street, in the Latin quarter of the city. Billiam had £130—a hundred of which had been given him by his father with the information that it must see him through a year, and £30 pounds which his elder brother Herbert (Captain in the 10th Hussars) had sent him.

"Young fool, Billiam—always was!" said Capt. Herbert. "Guess he's pretty tightly off." And with that he stuffed into the envelope the £30 he had set apart as a sedative for his tailor.

"The young blackguard will need the money more than old Moses!" said the Hussar.

Billiam had, to save appearances, compromised on the question of the veterinary surgeon. He was to study hard in order to become an ordinary surgeon and physician of humans. He was only to be allowed to come home once a year. He had agreed not to pester his father with requests for more money. In every way Billiam was made to feel that he was the prodigal son and a disgrace to the Ormithwaite of Ormithwaite. "One of the families, sir," said his father, "which have constituted for 300 years the governing classes of these islands."

So it was in this manner that Billiam took the very modest portion of goods which pertained to him, and departed to the far country of Montgomery street, South Side, just where that notable thoroughfare gives upon the greasy gloom of the Pleasance. How Billiam spent his living and upon whom, this history is to tell.

Day by day the student of medicine scorned delights. Day and night were to him alike laborious. For Billiam, all unknown to his father, was also taking classes at the Veterinary College upon a most ingenious system of alternative truncheon. He attended his medical professors upon such days as it was likely that cards would be called for. And in addition to this he procured a certain interim continuity in his studies by "getting a look at another fellow's notes."

Billiam's "piggery" in Montgomery street, as it was called by the few of his comrades who had ever seen its secrets, was something to wonder at. Instead of taking a comfortable sitting-room and bedroom in a well-frequented and sanitary neighborhood, Billiam entered into the tenancy of an entire suite of rooms upon the garret floor of one of the high "lands" which are a distinctive feature of the old quarter of St. Leonard's.

Within this tumbledown dwelling Billiam found himself in possession of five large rooms, with wide windows, and in some instances with skylights also. He was to pay at the modest rate of £5 in the half-year for the lot. Billiam counted down his first quarter's rent, and went out to order a brass plate. This cost him 30 shillings, and he had to pay separately for the lettering, which said, somewhat vaguely:

CONSULTATION FREE.
Every Morning Before Nine
and
Every Evening After Six.

This Billiam burnished up daily with the tail of his dress coat, which he had torn off for the purpose. "I don't think I shall need it any more," he said, "so I may as well use it."

So he used it. It did very well, being lined with silk.

Then Billiam double-bolted the plate to the door, for he understood the ways of Montgomery street, and sat down to study the monograph of Herr Puppenstock of Vienna upon headaches. Billiam had three chairs to start with—two stiff-backed chairs for clients and an easy chair, which in time of need could be leaned up against the wall. It was a deck chair, and cost 2s. 11½d. at a cheap sale of furniture in Nicholson street. Billiam felt that he might go that length in luxury.

Billiam had once possessed more furniture than this. He had a wooden bed which he had bought in the Cowgate for 4s. and carried up the Pleasance himself, post by post and plank by plank. He only slept upon it one night. The next day he began to cut it up for firewood. It was a good bed though, he said, but not for sleeping on. After the first five minutes it began to bite you all over.

So Billiam burned the 4s. bed, and it turned out all right that way. It cracked like green wood as it burned. Presently the fame of Billiam's brass plate waxed great in the land. Dr. Macfarlane, a short-winded and tempered man, came upon the announcement quite unexpectedly as he was puffing his way up the weary, grimy stone stairs, to visit the sister of the seamstress who lived upon the other side of the landing from Billiam.

To say simply that Dr. Macfarlane was astonished, does considerable injustice to his state of mind. He stood regarding the brightly polished, clearly lettered announcement for fully ten minutes. Then he rang the bell, and an answering peal came from just the other side of the panel. But no one arrived to open, for it was the middle of the day and Billiam was at his classes. Dr. Macfarlane could learn little from the seamstress or her sister beyond the general suspicion that their neighbor on the other side of the landing was "may-bees nowerra richt in his mind."

It was not the seamstress, but the seamstress's sister who volunteered this information.

"But he sent us in these," added the seamstress, who was a pale and exceedingly pretty girl, pointing to some nobly plumped purple grapes which lay on a plate on the little cracked table by the bed-side.

"He'll be a kind of young doctor seekin' a job, nae doot!" said the seamstress's sister sinking back on her pillows. For gratitude was not her strong point.

The suggestion excited the doctor. For he was a man who had worked hard at his most uncertain and unremunerative practice. Besides which, he had a young family growing up about him. If, therefore, he was to have a young interloper setting in the centre of his sphere of influence, it was as well to know with whom he had to contend.

So he called upon Billiam.

It was eight o'clock in the evening when Dr. Macfarlane came stumbling up Billiam's stairs. The door stood slightly ajar, and there came from the other side a confused murmur of voices, the yelping of dogs, with sundry other sounds which even the Doctor's trained ear could not distinguish. But above all, there rose fitfully the shrill cry of an infant. Upon hearing this last the Doctor pushed the door with the brass plate open and entered unceremoniously. He found himself in a large unfurnished room, which when he stepped within, seemed at first nearly full of people. It was brightly enough lighted, for the broad flame of a No. 6 gas burner hissed with excess of pressure above the bare mantelpiece. A fire burned in the grate, which shone cheerfully enough, being heaped high with small lump coal.

Most of the people were ranged along the walls of the room, sitting with their backs against the wall paper, upon which their shoulders had made a glossy brown stripe all round—young lads with dogs between their knees, girls holding cats in baskets, middle-aged women nursing birds in cages. They talked to each other in subdued tones, or to their pets in reproving whispers, sometimes a dog would become excited by the voice of a cat complaining of bonds and imprisonments near him, but he would be promptly cuffed into submission by his master; or a canary would suddenly flutter against the bars, warned by instinct of the proximity of so many enemies.

Mostly, however, there was a respectful silence. The Doctor stood awhile rooted in amazement, and did not even take any notice when several of his former patients nodded affably across to him.

Presently, from an inner room there came forth a hard-featured man, carrying a large book under his arm. Billiam followed behind him, his shock of hair tossed and rumpled. He was stooping forward, and eagerly explaining something to the man. So intent was he upon the matter in hand, that he passed the Doctor without so much as noticing him.

"And I'll look in and see how the pair of you have got on to-morrow," Billiam said, shaking the hard-featured man warmly by the hand at the door.

Billiam turned, and, for the first time, looked the Doctor fair in the face.

"My name is Dr. Macfarlane. I have a practice in this neighborhood," said the physician, "and I should like the favor of a few words with you."

"Certainly. By all means—with pleasure," replied Billiam. "Come this way."

And they went together into the second of the Montgomery street garrets. It was nearly as bare of furniture as the first. There was no more than a table, some bottles, and an instrument case, while round the room, arranged so as to make the most of themselves, stood Billiam's three chairs.

"Take one," said the student politely. But Dr. Macfarlane preferred to stand till he knew exactly where he was.

"I have the honor of addressing—" he said, and paused.

"William Reginald Setoun Ormithwaite" said Billiam quietly.

"You are a doctor?" queried his visitor.

"By no means. I am only a student," said Billiam quickly. "But I give these people a hand with anything they bring along."

"Do you possess any qualifications?" persisted Dr. Macfarlane.

"Qualification?" said Billiam, a little perplexed. "Well, I've been patching up dogs' legs and things all my life."

"But, sir," cried the doctor, indignantly, "this is no better than an equivocation. I heard you with my own ears prescribing for the man who went out just now—an old patient of my own, if I mistake not. And I saw you with these eyes taking a fee from him as he passed through the door. Are you aware, sir, that the latter is an indictable offence?"

Billiam smiled with his usual quietly infinite tolerance.

"Dr. Macfarlane," he said, "it may sound strange to you, but the fact is that man came to consult me about a separation from his wife. And he brought his family Bible out of the pawnshop to show me the dates of his marriage and birth of his children. I gave him something when he went away, so that he would not need to take the Bible back into pawn, at least not immediately. Do you think I need any qualification for that?"

"And those people outside?" said the doctor, not yet entirely convinced.

"Will you go round the wards with me?" said Billiam, smiling brightly and irresistibly.

Without another word he led the way to the door of the next room. It seemed fuller than ever.

"Lame dogs this way," said Billiam in a matter of fact manner, and half a dozen men slouched after him. Very deftly Billiam laid out a row of small shining instruments upon the table, with salve, lint, and bandages arranged behind him.

Then he took animal after animal into his hand, set it upon the table, passed his fingers lightly to and fro over his head and ears a time or two, listened to the owner's voluble explanations without appearing to notice them, and forthwith proceeded to deliver a little clinical lecture. His deft fingers snipped away the matted hair from an neglected and festering sore. He cleaned the wound tenderly, the dog often instinctively turning to snap. Yet all the time Billiam never once flinched, but talked steadily and sympathetically to the animal and his master till the sore was dressed and the patient redelivered with all due directions to his owner.

Before long Dr. Macfarlane became so interested that he waited while case after case was disposed of with the unerring

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accuracy of an hospital expert. Sometimes he would instinctively have the lint or the bandage ready in his hand, just as if he had still been dresser at the old infirmary and waiting for Lister to work off his batch.

At the end of half an hour he had no more remembrances of Billiam's want of qualifications. He asked him to come round for supper and smoke a pipe. But Billiam only smiled and said: "Thank you a hundred times, Doctor, but I have some private cases in the back room to attend to yet, and then I must read up my stuff for to-morrow."

After a while there came to visit Billiam a minister or two familiar with the district, the young resident missionary from the Students' Hall, a stray lawyer's clerk or two—and the Superintendent of Police. They all came to call, but one and all, they remained to hold bandages and be handy with the vaseline.

On one occasion the minister of St. Margaret's offered Billiam the use of a pew in his church. But Billiam said: "Sunday is my day for outpatients, or I should be glad." For Billiam was a gentleman, and always answered even a dissenting clergyman politely.

"You should think of your immortal soul!" said the minister.

"Who knoweth," said Billiam, "the spirit of the beast, that goeth downward into the earth?"

And Billiam could never find out why the minister went away so suddenly, or why he shook his head ever afterwards when they met in the street. It never crossed his mind that Mr. Gregson of St. Margaret's had taken him for an infidel and a dangerous subverter of the system of religion as by law established. Yet so it was.

In due time Billiam's nest of garrets became known as the "Lame Dogs' Home," and grew famous throughout the entire city—that is, the southern city of high land, steep streets, winding stairs, and odoriferous close, with their Arab population of boys and dogs.

"You let that long, lanky chap alone," cried one brawny burglar to another, "or I'll smash your dirty face like a rotten turnip. Now mind me! Don't you know the Dog Missionary?"

Every policeman befriended Billiam and the greater number of the policeman's ordinary clients. He could often be seen walking along the Pleasance or past the breweries in the Laigh Caltoun attended by a dozen dogs, which had followed Billiam far from their wonted haunts, on the chance of a word from him, and which departed obediently, if unwillingly, when he bade them return to their own places in peace.

Year by year Billiam richer and practiced, never a penny the richer, but more and more loving and beloved, his garret, however grew somewhat better furnished. Through the mediation of his soldier brother his father became so far reconciled to him that he increased his comfort than before. He bought a cheap bedstead, it is true, and for a month or two dwelt in luxury, sleeping upon a real mattress with a clean sheet, and folding his overcoat for a pillow. But even that came to an end.

The circumstances were these: Billiam had been at Ormithwaite seeing his father, and his brother (of the 10th Hussars) insisted upon returning to Edinburgh with him.

"You'll have to rough it, mind you," said Billiam, warning him.

"I'm a soldier," said his brother stoutly, "and I guess your hole can't be worse than some places I've put up in."

"All right," said Billiam, "mind, I've warned you. Don't grumble when you get there."

So at their journey's end Billiam opened the door of the garret and invited his brother to step in. A curious damp smell met them on the threshold.

"That's all right," said Billiam, reassuringly. "I washed out the whole blooming shop with chlorate of lime the night before I came away. It's healthy no end, if it does stink a bit."

"Maybe," said his brother the captain, "it's the dog missionery. Is that your bed?" he asked, climbing up beside Billiam, and looking critically at the object.

The rays of a gas lamp upon the pavement shone upon it so that it glowed with a kind of radiance not its own.

"It looks a good bed enough!" the policeman said as he climbed down.

"Can you not get it for us, John?" repeated Billiam.

"Dad, sir, I canna do that without horse-brakin', an' I've been thirty years in the force," answered John; "but there's nae doot that the bed's a guid bed."

And with that he walked heavily away.

The Hussar stood on the pavement with his legs very wide apart and whistled fitfully.

"Well," he said, "what do you propose to do about it, Billiam? Say, let's both go to a hotel and get supper. Then we can stop the night there."

Billiam looked at him with a kind of sad reproach in his eyes.

"You forget," he answered, "that the new collie's bandages must be changed, and the little Yorkshire will need looking to twice or thrice during the night. But you can go, and I'll call round for you in the morning on my way to college."

"Get out, you raving idiot! On my word, I've heard all sorts of lunatics, but I'm hanged if ever heard of anybody before gone dotty on beastly stray dogs."

"And there's the bull with the bad tear on his jaw. I must see that the stitches are keeping and give him some water," continued Billiam, mediocrity.

"Of all the fools!" cried the Captain.

"Well, come on, Billiam, I'll be your keeper tonight and see that you get a neat thing in straw-jackets right away."

And the Hussar strode on with the air of a man who determines to see a desperate venture through to the bitter end.

They came in time to the corner of Montgomery street, and again mounted up the crazy stairs. The fire had died down, and when Capt. Ormithwaite went to the coal box it was empty.

"Hello, Billiam," he said, "how do you propose to keep us warm. Has somebody taken out your coals on loan as well as your bed?"

Billiam threw up his hands again with the same pathetic little gesture of despair.

"I don't know what you'll think of me, Herbert," he said, "but when I went away I gave all I had to the seamstress next door."

"Well," said the Captain, go and see if she can give you any back." But at the suggestion, Billiam's pale cheek flushed.

"I can't quite do that," he said, "but I think I can get some. You wait a minute and I'll run down and see."

Then Billiam proceeded to array himself in an old ulster, remarkably wide and baggy about the skirts. He opened it and showed the Hussar how ingeniously he had sewn two large pockets of strong canvas to each side.

"I bring home the coals in these," he said; "isn't it a prime idea?"

"Where do you buy them?" asked the Captain.

"I don't usually buy them," answered Billiam, simply. "I pick them!"

"Pick them and steal them," said Capt. Ormithwaite. "You young beggar, what would the governor say if he knew?"

Billiam looked up a little wearily, as if the subject had suddenly grown too large for discussion.

"I shan't be very long," he said, and went on buttoning the ulster about his slim young body.

"In for penny, in for a pound," said the soldier.

"I'll come and help you to steal coals if I'm cashiered for it."

Billiam pointed to an old overcoat which hung upon a nail behind the door.

"That's got pockets for coals and things, too, if you really want to come along," he said, not very hopefully, "but I think you had better look to the collie till I come back."

"I'm in for it," said the Hussar; "it's my night out. Come on!" he cried, pulling at the coat, which threatened to turn out too small across the shoulders for him.

"What a rum smell it has, though," he added, lifting up one of the lapels and sniffing at it.

"Oh!" said Billiam, "that's the worst dogs. Sometimes I wrap the only cases

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