

# *A Dozen of Them*



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**A DOZEN OF THEM.**

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AND THOMAS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, MY LORD AND MY GOD.

HE SAITH UNTO HIM, FEED MY LAMBS.

IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT, AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON, CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN.

I AM HE THAT LIVETH, AND WAS DEAD; AND BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOREVERMORE.



**Y**oung Joseph sat on the side of his bed, one boot on, the other still held by the strap, while he stared somewhat crossly at a small green paper-covered book which lay open beside him.

“A dozen of them!” he said at last. “Just to think of a fellow making such a silly promise as that! A verse a month, straight through a whole year. Got to pick ’em out, too. I’d rather have ’em picked out for me; less trouble.

“How did I happen to promise her I’d do it? I don’t know which verse to take. None of ’em fit me, nor have a single thing to do with a *boy*! Well, that’ll make it all the easier for me, I s’pose. I’ve got to hurry, anyhow, so here goes; I’ll take the shortest there is here.”

And while he drew on the other boot, and made haste to finish his toilet, he rattled off, many times over, the second verse at the head of this story.

The easiest way to make you understand about Joseph, is to give you a very brief account of his life.

He was twelve years old, and an orphan. The only near relative he had in the world was his sister Jean aged sixteen, who was learning millinery in an establishment in the city. The little family though very poor, had kept together until mother died in the early spring. Now it was November, and during the summer, Joseph had lived where he could; working a few days for his bread, first at one house, then at another; never because he was really needed, but just out of pity for his homelessness. Jean could earn her board where she was learning her trade, but not his; though she tried hard to bring this about.

At last, a home for the winter opened to Joseph. The Fowlers who lived on a farm and had in the large old farmhouse a private school for a dozen girls, spent a few weeks in the town where Joseph lived, and carried him away with them, to be errand boy in general, and study between times.

Poor, anxious Jean drew a few breaths of relief over the thought of her boy. That, at least, meant pure air, wholesome food, and a chance to learn something.

Now for his promise. Jean had studied over it a good deal before she claimed it. Should it be to read a few verses in mother's Bible every day? No; because a boy always forgot to do so, for a

week at a time, and then on Sunday afternoon rushed through three or four chapters as a salve to his conscience, not noticing a sentence in them. At last she determined on this: the little green book of golden texts, small enough to carry in his jacket pocket! Would he promise her to take—should she say each week's text as a sort of rule to live by?

No; that wouldn't do. Joseph would never make so close a promise as that. Well, how would a verse a month do, chosen by himself from the Golden Texts?

On this last she decided; and this, with some hesitancy, Joseph promised. So here he was, on Thanksgiving morning, picking out his first text. He had chosen the shortest, as you see; there was another reason for the choice. It pleased him to remember that he had no lambs to feed, and there was hardly a possibility that the verse could fit him in any way during the month. He was only bound by his promise to be guided by the verse if he happened to think of it, and if it suggested any line of action to him.

"It's the jolliest kind of a verse," he said, giving his hair a rapid brushing. "When there are no lambs around, and nothing to feed 'em, I'd as soon live by it for a month as not."

Voices in the hall just outside his room: "I don't know what to do with poor little Rettie today," said Mrs. Calland, the married daughter who lived at home with her fatherless Rettie.

"The poor child will want everything on the table, and it won't do for her to eat anything but her milk and toast. I am so sorry for her. You know she is weak from her long illness; and it

is *so* hard for a child to exercise self control about eating. If I had anyone to leave her with I would keep her away from the table; but everyone is so busy.”

Then Miss Addie, one of the sisters: “How would it do to have our new Joseph stay with her?”

“Indeed!” said the new Joseph, puckering his lips into an indignant sniff and brushing his hair the wrong way, in his excitement; “I guess I won’t, though. Wait for the second table on Thanksgiving Day, when every scholar in the school is going to sit down to the first! That would be treating me exactly like one of the family with a caution! Just you try it, Miss Addie, and see how quick I’ll cut and run.”

But Mrs. Calland’s soft voice was replying: “Oh! I wouldn’t like to do that. Joseph is sensitive, and a stranger, and sitting down to the Thanksgiving feast in its glory, is a great event for him; it would hurt me to deprive him of it.”

“Better not,” muttered Joseph, but there was a curious lump in his throat, and a very tender feeling in his heart toward Mrs. Calland.

It was very strange, in fact it was absurd, but all the time Joseph was pumping water, and filling pitchers, and bringing wood and doing the hundred other things needing to be done this busy morning, that chosen verse sounded itself in his brain: “He saith unto him, feed my lambs.” More than that, it connected itself with frail little Rettie and the Thanksgiving feast.

In vain did Joseph say “Pho!” “Pshaw!” “Botheration!” or any of the other words with which boys express disgust. In vain did he tell himself that the verse didn’t mean any such thing; he guessed he wasn’t a born idiot. He even tried to make a joke out of it, and assure himself that this was exactly contrary to the verse; it was a plan by means of which the “lamb” should *not* get fed. It was all of no use. The verse and his promise, kept by him the whole morning, actually sent him at last to Mrs. Calland with the proposal that he should take little Rettie to the schoolroom and amuse her, while the grand dinner was being eaten.

I will not say that he had not a lingering hope in his heart that Mrs. Calland would refuse his sacrifice. But his hope was vain. Instant relief and gratitude showed in the mother’s eyes and voice. And Joseph carried out his part so well that Rettie, gleeful and happy every minute of the long two hours, did not so much as think of the dinner.

“You are a good, kind boy,” said Mrs. Calland, heartily. “Now run right down to dinner; we saved some nice and warm for you.”

Yes, it was warm: but the great fruit pudding was spoiled of its beauty, and the fruit pyramid had fallen, and the workers were scraping dishes and hurrying away the remains of the feast, while he ate, and the girls were out on the lawn playing tennis and croquet, double sets at both, and no room for him, and the glory of everything had departed. The description of it all, which he had meant to write to Jean, would have to be so changed that there would be no pleasure in writing it. What had been the use of

spoiling his own day? No one would ever know it, he couldn't even tell Jean, because of course the verse didn't mean any such thing.

“But I don't see why it pitched into a fellow so, if it didn't *belong*,” he said, rising from the table just as Ann, the dishwasher, snatched his plate, for which she had been waiting. “And, anyhow, I feel kind of glad I did it, whether it belonged or not.”

“He is a kind-hearted, unselfish boy,” said Mrs. Calland to her little daughter, that evening, “and you and mamma must see in how many ways we can be good to him.”

BLESSING, AND HONOR, AND GLORY AND POWER, BE UNTO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND UNTO THE LAMB, FOR EVER AND EVER.

THEREFORE, ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, AND SERVE HIM DAY AND NIGHT IN HIS TEMPLE.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU ALL. AMEN.



**I**T gave Joseph a curious sensation to hear his verse sung over and over again by the choir, the great organ rolling out the melody and seeming to him to speak the words almost as distinctly as the voices did. He had chosen that first verse as his motto for the month, with a dim idea that it somehow fitted Christmas, though he couldn't have told why he thought so. It was sufficiently unpractical not to disturb his conscience, at least; and of this he thought with satisfaction. It would not do to have to live by so many verses. That last month's selection, "Feed my lambs," had perfectly amazed him with its power to keep him busy. It was not only little Rettie, always on hand to be amused, or petted, or helped, in some way, but it was the little neighbor boy who followed his brother when he came for milk; and the little Irish girl who cried over her spelling lesson; and the little Dutch boy 'whom some of them made fun of, in Sunday-school. Many a time during the month, Joseph had sighed a little, and smiled a little, over the

bondage in which that verse held him and had got to hold him for a whole year, and he wondered if Jean had known what she was about. At least he must know what he was about; another verse of that kind would not do to follow soon. This one was grand and majestic, ever so far above him; it was not to be supposed that he could in any way join that wonderful army who were praising. Joseph listened to it with a curious mixture of awe over the grandeur, and satisfaction that it was his, and did not trouble him.

He was seated in the great church, and it was Christmas Eve. The children's anthem was being sung first by the choir, then by a troop of children who appeared to catch the strain and re-echo it as far as their shrill young voices could reach. This was the closing anthem of the evening.

It had been a very nice evening to Joseph. He had taken part in the recitation, and his teacher had whispered, "Well done, Joseph," when he took his seat.

He had mounted little Rettie on his knee, the better to view the great Christmas-tree, thereby winning a smile and a "Thank you, Joseph!" from Mrs. Calland.

He had answered to his name when called, and received a handsome Bible from his teacher; altogether he had never spent a happier Christmas Eve. He saw himself writing a letter to his sister to tell all about it; and just then that anthem burst forth. Then the minister arose to pronounce the benediction. But instead of doing it, he made a little speech.

“Children,” he said, “I heard one of you call the anthem a grown-up anthem. I asked what that meant, and the little fellow who said so, told me it wasn’t for boys and girls, but for angels, and such things. That is a mistake. It is for you and me; you at four, and I at forty, and all the rest of you who are all the way between. ‘Blessing and honor;’ suppose we go no farther than that. Can’t we bless Him? Can’t we say thank you to the Lord for all his mercies? And can’t we honor Him? Don’t you remember that every little thing we do, or keep from doing, because we think it would please Him, is an honor to Him?”

There was more to the talk; not much, though, for the minister knew better than to make a long talk on Christmas Eve. But, bless you, it was long enough for Joseph! It came over him with a dismayed sort of feeling, that with all his care he had chosen a verse which was going to hedge him about worse than the other had.

“Every little thing we do, or keep from doing. Oh, dear!” he said, and was startled to discover that he almost said it aloud. “A fellow gets all mixed up with verses and things, and can’t stir. I wish Jean had been asleep when she made me promise.”

However, he got through Christmas day beautifully. It happened that every duty of his that day had to do with what he liked, and was no trouble at all. It was mere fun to sweep the light snow from the front walk, in the clear sparkling morning. It was simply delight to hitch up the ponies and go to the depot for company who were coming to the farm to dinner. He liked nothing

better than to turn pony himself, and give Rettie a ride on her box sled; and so through the day everything was merry and happy. I am not sure that he thought of his verse more than once; that was when they were seated at the beautiful dinner table and a sentence of thanksgiving in the blessing reminded him of it. Not unpleasantly; he found that he felt very thankful indeed, and would just as soon say, "I thank you," as not. If that was what the verse meant by "blessing" he was more than willing.

In the evening the school-tree was to be enjoyed, and none looked forward to it more than Joseph. For the past two days the schoolroom door had been shut against them all, and speculation had run high as to what glories it would reveal when next it opened for them. The time was drawing near; Joseph came with a bound from across the hall, at Farmer Fowler's bidding, to see if the kitchen doors were closed against the wind which was rising. He had heard the call to open the schoolroom doors; in ten minutes more all the mysteries hidden therein would be revealed.

In the middle of the kitchen he stood still. I am not sure but it would be very near the truth to say that his heart stood still as well as his body. The door leading into the dining-room was open, and in the great dining-room fireplace there crackled, and blazed, and roared a freshly adjusted log, sending up flames which lighted the entire room as with sunlight glory. But the fire did more than glow and sparkle; it snapped—sent out spitefully across the room regular showers of brilliant sparks, lighting, some of them, on the cedar with which the mantel was trimmed. Joseph sprang to them

before they did mischief, then stood again as if rooted to the spot. A fresh log, very large, one of the sputtering kind, and it would sputter in that way, sending out its showers of dangerous sparks for a half-hour at least—longer than that—until all the fun in the schoolroom was well over.

What of it all? What concern was it of his? He didn't put the log on. He had never been set to watch the dining-room fire. No; but what was that? "Blessing, and honor, and glory!" Well, what of it? What had blessing, and honor, and glory, to do with a few sparks which might not do a bit of harm if left alone to themselves? Sparks almost always died out if let alone.

What was that he said—"Every little thing we do or keep from doing, because we think it would please Him, is an honor to Him?"

Dear, dear! Why need the minister have said that? It wasn't talk for Christmas Eve! And was it to be supposed that he, Joseph, who had never belonged to a family Christmas-tree before in his life, could stay out there and watch sparks while all the fun was going on? He really couldn't. Hark! Listen to that shouting! The fun had begun; he must go this minute. Wait! Look at that spark! It had lighted on the tissue-paper mat on the lamp-stand; it was going to burn! It will burn, it will blaze and set the house on fire! No, it won't; the wicked and industrious little sprite has been firmly crushed in Joseph's fingers, and has died, and left only a sooty fleck on the whiteness to tell of its intentions. But Joseph turned from it, and sat down in the big wooden rocker, near the snapping log, his face sorrowful and determined.

There was no help for it. The fun must go on, and the snapping must go on, and he must sit and watch it. "Every little thing we keep from doing" he could keep from going into the schoolroom, and he knew it would please Him.

"Because," said Joseph scornfully, to the log, "any idiot would know it was the right thing to do. You are not to be trusted, you snapping old thing, and you have got to be watched." Why, then, he was bound to do it, because he had promised to be led by the verse of his choice. "It's enough sight worse than the other one," he told the log mournfully, meaning the other verse; and then he kept watch in silence; no more sparks made even an attempt to do any harm, which Joseph considered mean in them after having obliged him to stay and watch them. They might at least have given him the excitement of undoing their mischief. He even meditated deserting them as past the dangerous point, but just then a perfect shower blazed out into the room, and though they every one died out before they settled, Joseph told them that was no sign of what they might choose to do next time.

At last there came a prolonged shout from the distant schoolroom, mingled with the opening of doors, and the hurrying of eager feet and cries of:

"Where is he? Where's Joseph?"

"Why, where in the world can Joseph be?"

And the dining-room was peopled with eager searchers, among whom came Farmer Fowler.

“Why, my boy,” he said, as Joseph arose from the rocker, “what in the world does this mean? Haven’t you been in at the fun, after all? We didn’t notice until your name was called. Why weren’t you there?”

“I had to watch the sparks,” said Joseph, pointing to the snapping log. And then I am glad to state that those sparks did show a little sense of decency, and coming out in a perfect shower, lighted on the other tissue-paper mat, and Joseph had to suit the action to the word, and spring to its rescue.

“Well, I never!” said Fanner Fowler.

“I really think that is remarkable,” said Mrs. Calland. But whether they meant the sparks, or the log, or the tissue-paper mat, none of them explained.

And then all the children talked at once.

“Why, you had a hand-sled!” said one.

“A perfect beauty!” exclaimed another.

“One of the boss kind!” explained a third. “And it has your name on it in red letters.”

“Come on in and see it!” Whereupon the troop vanished with Joseph at their heels. He thought he could safely leave the sparks to Farmer Fowler’s care for awhile.

“Father,” said Mrs. Calland, “I think that is a very remarkable boy; I wish you would let me have him. I believe Harry would take him into the office.”

“We’ll wait and see whether you can do better by him than I,” said Farmer Fowler, his eyes twinkling. “I think your mother has

plans for him. Well, mother, I don't know but he saved the old farmhouse for us tonight. That log is uncommon snappy. He is an unusual boy, somehow, and no mistake."

"I told you so from the first," said Mother Fowler, looking as pleased as though he was her son.

But Joseph knew nothing about this, and, in fact, had forgotten all about his verse. He was examining his new sled, and thinking how he would describe it to Jean when he wrote.

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH.

BY ONE MAN SIN ENTERED INTO THE WORLD, AND DEATH BY SIN.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

NOAH DID ACCORDING UNTO ALL THAT THE LORD COMMANDED HIM.

I WILL BLESS THEE; AND MAKE THY NAME GREAT; AND THOU SHALT BE A BLESSING.



**T**here was a broad smile on Joseph's face; he was fully satisfied with his verse for the month.

In the first place, it was very short—only five words; in the second place, he had no brother, so it was not possible for it to get him into what he called “scrapes,” by living up to it.

Now you know which verse it is? Yes; that is the very one: “Am I my brother's keeper?”

Yet the New Year's Eve frolic was not over before he found the verse fitted in. They were having a tableau party, and Joseph was dressed in an extraordinary manner—like a youthful musician of the olden time. Mrs. Calland had managed—nobody but she knew how—to arrange for him a most remarkable wig of soft curling hair; the mustache part was easy; a little burnt cork settled

that. Then there was little Fannie Stuart and her brother Rex dressed surprisingly!

It was just as all the toilets were completed and Mrs. Calland was ready to arrange her living picture behind the curtain, that Joseph's verse came into prominence.

I am not sure that he would have thought of it in just the way he did, had it not been for Mrs. Calland's remark as she finished arranging Rob Walker's cloak. Rob Walker was a day scholar who had been invited to the evening's fun because they were sorry for him; as he was at his uncle's, more than a thousand miles away from home, during this holiday time. He was another musician, representing a different style of dress, and Mrs. Calland, as she fastened the wide collar about his neck, had said:

“Why, how this dress changes one's appearance! You and Joseph would pass for brothers, now.”

After which, Rob, much amused, had called his companion “Brother Joseph.”

It was while she was bending over Rex that there fell from Mrs. Calland's own collar a gleaming pin which Joseph did not know was a diamond; but he knew it was beautiful, and very much beloved by Mrs. Calland. He knew, too, in less than five seconds after its fall, what became of it.

Rob, the almost stranger among them, also saw it fall, gave a swift glance about the room to see if others were looking, then stooped and put the gleaming thing in his pocket, and said not a word! How utterly astonished and dismayed was Joseph! He could

not go on with his part, and took such stupid positions instead of the right one, as to make the others laugh, and to call from Mrs. Calland the question:

“Why, Joseph, what has happened to you? Are you taking a nap?”

“Brother Joseph, you must do better than that, or I’ll disown you,” said Rob good-naturedly.

“Brother Joseph!” The words chimed in with the boy’s thoughts. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Something seemed asking Joseph that question.

Unless you are the sort of boy who can understand it without explanation, I don’t know that I can help you to feel how dreadfully Joseph hated to meddle with this matter. It was so uncomfortable to think of going to Mrs. Calland with tales about another boy! He knew just how grave she looked when any of the scholars pointed out the faults of others. And *such* a fault! Did Rob really mean to *steal*?

If so, the owner ought certainly to be told; yet perhaps Rob meant only a little mischief, and would give the pin back in a little while; in which case, how very mean he, Joseph, should feel to have been tale-bearer. But then, on the other hand, what if Rob shouldn’t give it back?

“I don’t care,” said Joseph to himself; “what business is it of mine, anyhow? I didn’t take it, and I am not supposed to know anything about it. What is Rob Walker to me?”

*Am I my brother’s keeper?*

It startled Joseph to think the verse seemed to fit what he was planning. If the truth must be told, one grave fault of this boy, Joseph, was to shirk responsibility. Besides, he had the fault common to many good-hearted boys; he hated to be called a “tell-tale;” hated it to such a degree that it was hard work for him to tell, even when he felt sure that telling was duty.

There was much thinking, and there were also many blunders, over which the young people had great merriment, before Joseph finally reached the point:

“I don’t care, I’m going to tell her. If she thinks it’s mean I can’t help it; if she thinks I don’t do it with the right feeling, I can’t help that either: I believe I ought to tell. That little old verse of mine will go and choke me if I don’t; and Rob, maybe, will choke me if I do; but I can stand his choking better than the other. Who would have thought there would be a place for that verse to fit in?”

With Joseph, to decide, was to perform. Very grave indeed Mrs. Calland looked when she bent her head and received the hurriedly whispered story.

Still, her words encouraged him: “You did just right, Joseph, to speak to me quietly. Don’t mention it to any person; we will both be quiet and I will decide what to do.”

But Joseph remained sober all the rest of the evening.

You may imagine he was on the alert when, nearly two hours afterwards, as they were making ready for the closing tableau, Addie Fowler suddenly said, “Sister Kate, you have lost your pin!”

Everybody but Joseph looked at Mrs. Calland; he looked down on the floor, and felt his face grow red.

“I know it,” said Mrs. Calland quietly. “It has been gone for some time. I must have dropped it early in the evening.”

There was an instant bustle of looking for the pin, but it was Rob Walker’s voice stopped them:

“I know where it is; I guess you will find it in the Italian musician’s pocket; those fellows are always thieves.”

Then you should have seen the red in Joseph’s face. He looked over at Mrs. Calland, now, in a helpless, pitiful sort of way, which made some of the scholars say in whispers:

“Why, would you think it possible! I would never believe it if he didn’t show it in his face at this minute!”

At the same time, the poor fellow dived both hands into his pockets and drew out, sure enough, the gleaming thing; whereat Rob laughed loud and long. But no one else did.

What a “scrape” for a boy to get into! What in the world was he to do? What would Mrs. Calland do or think? Would she possibly think he stole it, and then tried to palm the theft off on Rob? Hark! What was that she was saying in her quiet voice:

“Never mind laughing any more, Robert; we will not keep the company waiting for the closing tableau; but by and by you shall tell me why you picked up my pin, carried it in your pocket for nearly an hour, then slipped it slyly into Joseph’s pocket. You must have had some reason for it all; remember, *I saw you do it,*”

continued Mrs. Calland; then added, “but we will not keep our guests waiting longer, now. Get your places, girls.”

“I don’t believe I could have thought *you* would steal it, my dear boy,” said Mrs. Calland to Joseph, late that night, when at last she was alone with him for a moment in the kitchen. “I don’t think I could look into your honest eyes and imagine such a thing; but of course what you told me, put me on my guard and prepared me to watch poor Rob. So, you see, your verse saved yourself, and will be helpful to him in the end. I think the boy means only mischief; but it is mischief of a very malicious kind, which might have brought trouble upon you. I think you ought to thank sister Jean in your next letter, for suggesting such a shield for her brother.”

From which you will understand that Joseph had also confided to Mrs. Calland the story of the verse.

*To Be Continued . . .*