

## Chapter 1

### *THE STORYTELLER*

A little lad stood at his mother's knee, listening to tales as old as the world. And his eyes went wide with the wonder of them: the dim old days when order and beauty sprang out of darkness at the breath of the Almighty; the days when giants worked their will upon a shivering earth, until God's wrath smote in a Flood that changed the world; the days of the pilgrimage of the patriarchs, of the faith of an old man who lifted a knife at the command of his God to slay his only son; of the gentleness of a maiden who would water the camels of a stranger come out of the west, and of the love of her that made light of deserts and rivers and mountains to reach her chosen lord; of the wonderful adventures of a boy who dreamed dreams, who toiled as a slave, who languished in the dungeon, who was set on high by a king, and then, in the bowing of his cruel brothers' forms, saw his dreams come true.

And the little lad drank it all in, night after night, in the charmed family circle, with his brother, and his elder sister, and his bent, toil-wearied father.

It was a humble home, mud-walled, mud-roofed, a table within and a stool for one, with a bench, a pot or two, and some pallets on the floor - the home of a slave family. A twisted rush, oil-soaked, for a light sometimes, or only the glow of the coals under the savory pot, or again the stars above for company, with the uneasy stirrings of the cattle or the sheep in the fold. And yonder, dim and ragged and cruel in grim threat, the rising walls of the treasure city which the toil of the slaves was rearing.

A slave mother! But she told stories! And to her it was the wide eyes of a boy that thanked her; it was the heart of a child that drank those stories in; it was for this little one whom God had given to her twice over that she remembered, and formed

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

for telling, and made wonderful in simplicity and power, the stories of God's dealings with men for two thousand years.

She hoped that those stories would help to hold him to his God - and they did. But she never knew, she never could dream, how they would go sounding down the ages of the world to the last day thereof, and fill with faith and joy and hope and strength millions upon millions of men to come.

A little hut in the grassy lands of Goshen, a weary mother with the day's toil as yet not ended, a little lad with his ever-present word, "Mother, tell me a story!" But when Jochebed told stories to her little boy Moses, she gripped the world with a lever kings could not grasp, and she set God in the hearts of men.

*Storytelling an Ancient Art.* Storytelling, the oldest of literary arts, after being pushed out of the way by the press for half a millennium, has in our time found a new popularity. The teacher has discovered, what the child always knew, that printed stories cannot compare in vividness and force with stories told. And so the ancient art is welcomed now as one of the chief assets of pedagogy.

### **A. Storytelling a Must for Parents and Teachers**

Who can tell stories? You can. Don't say: "Oh, no; I can't tell stories. I never could." Maybe you never did; but "never did" is a very different thing from "never could." Let your motto be: "Not what I like to do, but what I see needs to be done." You can tell stories, because, as a teacher, present or to come, you need to. If you never have told stories, all you need to do is to resolve that you will tell stories, then learn how to begin, then begin, and then keep on learning how to tell them better. And so, whether as parent, teacher, or entertainer, you will gradually come to love it.

Does every mother need to be a storyteller? Yes, she does, and every father does too, as well as every teacher and every leader of children and youth. For father and mother are the natural teachers of the child; and storytelling is a very important

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

part of teaching. So also every teacher, and every young person who looks forward to being a teacher or a parent, should learn to be a storyteller.

We can help to ensure rightdoing on the part of the child by telling him stories; for, remember, stories inspire to imitation. It is better to form right impulses than to correct wrong acts. It is better to lead than to check. It is better to say, "Come on; let's do this!" than to be saying, "Stop; don't do that!" Don't wait until the fall frosts to plant your potatoes. Look ahead. Give your child models of conduct, not merely mottoes. Storytelling will help you in this.

We can make the hard way easier by telling stories. The tangly hair, the dishwashing, the broken shoestrings, the slight of a schoolmate, the giving up of a picnic - the story helps to smooth them. Of course the story is not everything; there is a great deal more to the teaching of patience, and fortitude, and courage, and self-denial. Really, the story can be little more than the reflection of our own spirits, but nevertheless it is a great smoother of life's rough pathways. For, remember, the right kind of story teaches the true philosophy of life.

We can do much to hold the interest and sympathy of our children through storytelling. It helps us to be companionable; and companionship is a chief essential in child training. If you keep the practice of companionship with your children, you will always have a free entrance into the doors of their hearts. Without this association, you have lost the key.

*No Natural-Born Storytellers.* Of course it is easier for some persons to tell stories than it is for others. The natural storyteller will always have the advantage, provided he improves his talent as diligently as does the other person. We shall none of us be exactly equal in our ability to tell stories, any more than in other abilities. But that doesn't matter. We have a loving little audience that will listen to us, and snuggle up to us, and flatter us by many an encore. And we - why, we don't care whether an audience of grownups would give us a handclap or not; we just want to do our best for our children and for our heavenly Father.

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

*Elder Spalding himself declares:* “If it is any comfort to you, I will tell you that I am not a natural storyteller. My mind runs to other forms of thinking, and stories slip away from me. I have to keep practiced to meet the demand. I was twenty-four years old before I began to tell stories. Upon the eve of going out to teach (and teacher training involved no storytelling then), I said to myself: ‘If you are going to be a teacher, you have to tell stories.’ And forthwith I went at it. I can tell stories now; the children of my home have kept me at it, and the children of my schools, of my audiences, and of my friends’ homes have seconded the motion. And I know that if *I* could learn to tell stories, *you* can.”

Just feel the calmness induced by this story:

### **A Little Boy Who Listened**

Once there was a little boy named Samuel. He lived with the good priest Eli in the house of God. Little Samuel had work to do every morning, and every night, and all day long. In the morning he would open the doors of the house, and sweep out the rooms, and put everything in place. And at night he closed the doors, and trimmed the lamps, and put everything in place again, before he lay down to sleep. And he used to run errands for Eli and bring in wood and water, even as little boys do nowadays. Eli taught him to read, and he taught him to pray to the great God who is our Father.

The Lord looked on the little boy Samuel, morning and night, and all day long; and He saw how faithful he was to bring the wood and the water, and to open the doors on time, and to sweep, and to trim the lamps, and everything. And He said: “I love the little boy Samuel; he is so faithful and good. I will give him something greater to do. And I will go and talk with him Myself.”

So one night, after Samuel had done his work, and had lain down on his bed to sleep, he heard someone calling him: “Samuel! Samuel!” And he thought it was Eli calling him. So he

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

jumped up and ran in to where Eli was. And he said: "Here I am, for you called me."

"Oh, no, little Samuel," Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go lie down again."

So Samuel went and lay down again. But before he went to sleep, or had taken the littlest wink, again he heard someone calling: "Samuel! Samuel!" And up he jumped and ran to Eli. "Here I am," he said, "for you called me."

"Oh, no, little Samuel," Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go lie down again."

So Samuel went and lay down again. But before he had gone to sleep, or had taken the littlest wink, again he heard someone calling him: "Samuel! Samuel!" And though he was sleepy and tired, he didn't say: "Well, Eli doesn't want me; I'm going to sleep." No; but he jumped up as quickly as before, and ran in to Eli, and said: "Here I am, for you did call me."

Then Eli knew that it was the Lord God who was calling the child. And he said: "Little Samuel, go and lie down. And if He calls again, say: 'Speak, Lord, for I hear You.'"

So Samuel turned and walked back to his bed. "Oh," he thought, "the great God in heaven is going to talk to little Samuel." And you may believe that he didn't go to sleep, nor take the littlest wink. No; but he lay there with his eyes wide open, and his ears wide open, and he listened.

And sure enough! Exactly as before, the Lord came and stood, and called: "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, in the tiniest voice: "Speak, for I hear You." And then the Lord talked to little Samuel, and told him what he should say to the people.

### **B. The Story Hour**

Between the dark and the daylight,  
When the night is beginning to lower,  
Comes a pause in the day's occupations,  
That is known as the Children's Hour.

Longfellow.

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

It is not always that the twilight can be spared for a quiet time with the children, though who that knows the glamour of the time would choose another in preference? But at some time in the evening, whether at twilight or later, there must be set aside a time for converse with the children. Perhaps after supper and after the final chores of work are done, as you sit around the fireplace or around the center table, make leisure to talk with your children, to listen to their reports and their questions, and to teach them.

A part or all of this time you may make The Story Hour. If there are very small children, the bedtime is the best time for The Story Hour. Either tucked in bed or in Mother's or Daddy's arms out in the family circle, let Bobby or Katydid be ushered into the beautiful Land of Story. You will find the story a wonderful bedtime persuader to those little boys and girls who find it hard to agree with Mother and Father as to the time to go to bed.

The Story Hour is not the only time to tell stories. You may tell a story while you are about your work, with your little girl or your little boy helping or simply listening. And you may tell stories as you walk with them along the road or through the fields and groves, or in the park, on a Sabbath day. "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deuteronomy 6:7.

What child could resist while this story was being told?

### **Davy the Diver**

One bright day in June, Davy the Diver, with a kick and a sprawl, rolled out of his eggshell, and looked upon the world. It was the first that Davy had ever seen of this great world; for that was the day and that was the way he was hatched.

Davy the Diver found himself lying on a nest of moss and rushes above the water near the shore of a beautiful lake. And

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

that was exactly where Davy wanted to be. For you see, Davy was a little loon, and loons are the greatest divers of all the birds in the world. And of course they have to have water to dive in. So that was why Davy's mother, Sallie Loon, had built her nest right there. All that Davy had to do was to scramble off the nest, and there he would be in the water, where he wanted to be.

And so in two or three days he did, and joined his father and mother in swimming around in the lake. For Davy was an only child this year. The other big brown egg that might have been his brother never hatched, and so Sallie Loon and her husband had only one little loon to feed and to teach.

What do you think they fed him? Fish. For loons can dive so far and swim so fast under water that they can overtake the fish as they dart here and there. Fish is what they live on and what they feed to their children.

What do you think his parents taught Davy? They didn't have to teach him to swim, for he could swim as soon as he struck the water. And they didn't have to teach him to dive, for he could dive as well as he could swim. But they had to teach him to fly. Loons have a hard time to start flying because they have heavy bodies and small wings. But when they get into the air, they fly very fast.

Davy the Diver swam around with his parents on the lake, and after a while his father and mother began to beat their wings and rise out of the water, paddling with their feet as they rose, and at last they got into the air. But poor Davy, try as he might, could not go up above the water. He could go *on* it, and he could go *under* it, but he couldn't go *above* it. He watched his parents fly up there in the air, and he felt lonesome. But pretty soon he saw them come shooting down and strike the water, and he was happy when they were with him again. So he watched them day after day, and gradually he learned to flap his wings and paddle with his feet very fast, and at last he got into the air, and so he learned to fly.

Then they had to teach him to keep away from danger. For there were many animals, besides men, that would catch him

and kill him if they could. One day, soon after Davy had left his nest, there came a man in a canoe on the lake, and out there he saw Davy the Diver and his mother, Sallie Loon. The man thought it would be fun to chase them, and he started paddling after them as fast as he could.

Sallie Loon uttered a cry which her little son Davy knew meant, "Danger!" Quick as a flash he dived. His mother dived, too, and came up near the canoe, where she made a great splashing with her wings and feet to keep the man's attention on herself. But the man knew what trick she was up to, so he kept his eye out for Davy, and pretty soon, away off on the lake, he saw the little diver come up and sit still.

The man paddled over toward him. Again the mother uttered her warning cry, and Davy dived into the lake toward his mother. Again Sallie Loon dived near to the boat and made a great noise, but she could not make the man follow her. He kept after Davy every time the little bird came to the top.

At last Davy thought it was time to quit being chased, so he dived under some brush that overhung the bank, and there he put the tip of his bill out of the water into the brush, so he could breathe but could not be seen. The man could not find him, and so at last he had to give up and go away.

When the man was out of sight, Sallie Loon swam toward her baby, uttering a low cry, and Davy came out from his hiding place. As his mother lowered herself in the water, he swam upon her back, and she carried him off. He had had enough diving for that day, but well had he earned his name of Davy the Diver.

### **C. The Storyteller and the Child**

The storyteller, in coming to the little child, must hear a voice as from a burning bush: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Here is the untrodden field of a soul fresh from the hand of the Creator; here is the temple of life opened to the service of a consecrated priest. With what reverence must the teacher



## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

approach one whom the Master used as symbol of the kingdom of heaven! Out of the turmoil and strife of the world the storyteller steps into the presence of the child as into a sanctuary of innocence and peace. The altar with its eager fire is waiting for the incense; let it be compounded of myrrh and cassia and aloes and cinnamon.

There is a psychological as well as a moral sense to Jesus' declaration: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Give me no teacher who scorns to teach little children. He is not a teacher; he is a pedagogue. There lurks in his arrogance the suspicion that he cannot teach, and none are so ready as children to find him out. The substance of teaching is not in great swelling words; it is in the impartation of life. Every candidate for master must begin by teaching the child; and only as he proves his competence in that field is he to be trusted to instruct more mature minds. Who was the master-the disciple who pushed the children away, or Jesus who took them in His arms?

*Become as a Little Child.* But to teach children, you must become as a little child. You must for the occasion and for the cause think as a child and therefore speak as a child. You must see as a child, appreciate as a child, love as a child.

But to meet the occasion you must have and maintain within you a reservoir of child life. Happy are you if you have never lost the child's point of view while gaining also the adult's. He is poor indeed who, like a boring worm, must fill his past with the excavation of his future.

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." If to gain a house, a car, a coat, and a ring one shall give up the treasures of the child-the scent of a rose, the pearly translucence of a dewdrop, the angel call of a thrush in the depths of the wood, the joy of giving and the ecstasy of receiving - oh, what shall measure the misery of his poverty?

All who deal with children know that they are not all nor always cherubs. They are little pieces of us; they inherit the

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

frailties of our human nature, and they are influenced by the environment and education we give them. They learn by imitation, and what they do has already been done by us. If we are materialistic or sordid, we shall find the same disease in them. On the other hand, if we seek with them the things of God, we shall find these same things in the children also. Jesus knew the nature and dispositions of the children better than we do, yet He said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

*Maintain a Reservoir of Child Life.* It is by sympathetic association with children that one becomes as a little child. Therein is the blessed opportunity of the parent; and to them who are not yet parents or who may never become parents, the current of heavenly life is yet to be found flowing through childhood. God gives us children to keep us in His kingdom. Find time and make occasion to associate with children, to play with them, to talk with them accommodating your thoughts to theirs, perfecting yourself in their speech as you would learn a foreign tongue.

If books have too greatly monopolized your time and thought, have ossified your mind, go limber up in the society of children. If men and women and their affairs have claimed your exclusive attention, forget your society or your business or your politics, and renew your life in the clear waters of childhood.

Yet not ultimately for your cure, but for your ministry, are you to live with children. You must receive from them that you may give to them. In your journeys you must have gathered treasures which are to the child as wealth of the Indies. Hide not these treasures away. Bring them out and bring them down in stories of experience, of learning, and of wisdom. Stories are framed not in words alone but in scenes, in actions, in drama that is real, lived, and observed.

*Children Are Honest Judges.* Children, of course, differ in comprehension. That is affected by endowment, age, environment, and education. Children of the same age are not always of the same comprehension. What is well received by one child or by one group of children may not register so well with another. This fact adds to the lure of storytelling; you

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

never lack for spice and adventure. It is easy enough to tell whether or not you have reached the children's interest with your story, for normal children have not the handicap of politeness to gloss our failures. If your story captures them, it is apparent in their attitude of attention, of avid interest; if it misses them, they are everywhere but in your control. You cannot fail to know. Be honest in appraisal of your service as the children have been ingenuous in their judgment.

*Must Keep On Trying.* But then, if you have failed, be not discouraged. Every storyteller fails sometimes, somewhere. Be thankful that you have heights yet to climb. Seek constructive criticism. Study the causes of your failure. Was the story too long? Was it not simple enough in style or in diction? Was it beyond the child's mind or experience? Was it too dull? Was it marred by mannerisms which you could and should correct?

Call on your science already learned to help you make corrections. Perhaps you should shorten the story. Perhaps you must study to cast it in simpler terms. Perhaps you need to be more animated in delivery. Perhaps you should use direct discourse more fully. Perhaps you should reject this story for this age group or this occupational group, and find one that appeals to their experience. In any event, try again and again; never cease trying until you cease living.

Need it be said that you must love the children? Nothing succeeds without love. If children are little rats to you, they will run; if fairy paragons, they will evade you. But if, apart from faults and apart from virtues, you take them as something very precious to love, they will be yours forever. Whether you can do this or whether you cannot depends upon whether you have been converted and become as a little child.

Now read this story. Do you think the writer has lived with children? Do you think he has learned to talk the language of the little ones?

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

### Me-Me

Once upon a time, away over in the mission field, there lived a little girl called “Me-me.” When she was six years old, her mother brought her to the mission school.

And her face was *all* dirty.

And her hands were *all* dirty.

And her dress was *all* dirty.

And her feet were *all* dirty.

And in her nose was a dirty little string with a dirty little penny tied on it And in her ears were two more dirty little strings, with dirty little pennies tied onto them.

Around her neck was another dirty little string with more dirty pennies tied onto it.

Around her stomach was another dirty little string with more dirty pennies tied onto it.

And around her wrists were two more dirty little strings with more dirty little pennies tied onto them.

And around her ankles were two more dirty little strings with dirty little pennies tied onto them.

And our missionary looked at that dirty little girl, and said, “What’s your name, little girl?” And she said, “My name is Me-me.”

Now “me-me” means “kitty,” so the missionary said, “Isn’t that a lovely name for a lovely little girl who wants to come here to school!”

Then he said, “Me-me, what is that dirty little string with the dirty little penny tied on it in your nose for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t get into my head.”

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh! And what are those dirty little strings with the dirty little pennies tied onto them in your ears for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t get into my ears.”

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh! And what is that dirty little string with dirty little pennies tied onto it around your neck for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t get inside of me.”

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh! And what is that dirty little string with the dirty little pennies tied onto it around your stomach for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t make my stomach ache.”

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh! And what are those two dirty little strings with the dirty little pennies tied onto them around your wrists for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t make me do bad things with my hands.”

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh! And what are those dirty little strings with the dirty little pennies tied onto them around your ankles for?”

And Me-me said, “That’s so as the devils can’t make me fall over when I’m running along.”

And the missionary said, “O-o-oh!” Then he looked into Me-me’s little face and said, “Me-me, do you know that you needn’t be afraid of the devils while you are here at our mission school, for God has more good angels than there are fence posts around the mission, and they won’t let a single devil hurt anyone who is here.”

Then Me-me said “O-o-oh!” And she went over to the girls’ house, and she took a pair of scissors, and she cut off the dirty little string in her nose.

And she cut off the dirty little strings in her ears.

And she cut off the dirty little string around her neck.

And she cut off the dirty little string around her stomach.

And she cut off the dirty little strings around her wrists.

And she cut off the dirty little strings around her ankles.

And she put them all away.

Then the school mother gave her a clean dress and some soap, and Me-me went down to the river with the other girls

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

and she washed and she washed till her face was *all* clean, and her hands were *all* clean, and her feet were *all* clean. Then she got dressed in her clean dress, and the big girls combed her hair, and you should have seen Me-me! She was one of the sweetest little girls in all the school, and you should have heard her singing, “Jesus loves me! this I know”!

One day the missionary went over to the school and said, “How many would like to go with me in the motorboat to Me-me’s village this afternoon?”

And every one of the twenty-six boys and girls put up both hands, they were so happy to go. After school they got into the motorboat, and the missionary started the engine, untied the rope, and away they went, pop-pop-pop-pop; pop-pop-pop-pop; pop-pop-pop-pop; pop-pop-pop-pop; pop-pop-pop-pop; pop-pop-pop-pop-all the way to Me-me’s village. Then they got out and stood in a big ring around the missionary and sang, “Jesus loves me! this I know.” And while they sang, their mothers, and fathers, and uncles, and aunties, and grandpas, and grandmas, their nieces, and nephews, and all their little cousins came running to hear.

“Oh, who are these children singing such beautiful songs?” they said. “Are these angels out of heaven?”

“Why, no, these are not angels; these are your children,” the missionary replied.

“Oh, no they’re not! No, they’re not!” they said. “Our children don’t have clean faces like that! Our children don’t have clean dresses like that!”

And the missionary said, “They are too your children!” Then he saw Me-me’s mother standing there, and he said, “Don’t you know your own little girl Me-me? This is your little Me-me!”

And Me-me’s mother went up close and she felt her face, and she felt her dress, and she looked-and she looked. Then she grinned and said, “So it is! So it is! It’s my little Me-me, and I didn’t know her because she was so clean.”

After the meeting there was a little time for visiting, and the missionary went up into Me-me’s house to visit with Me-me’s

## CHRISTIAN STORYTELLING

mother. As he was going up the bamboo ladder, he saw Me-me run over to her mother and put something in her hand. Then, holding her mother's hand shut tight in both of hers, she danced up and down as she said, "Mother! we don't need these anymore now, Mother, because up at the mission school there are so many good angels that they won't let the devils come anywhere near us."

The missionary wondered what it was that Me-me put in her mother's hand, so he went up close till he could peek into Me-me's mother's hand. And what do you think he saw?-all those *dirty little strings* with all the *dirty little pennies* tied onto them. Me-me had given them all back to her mother. And Me-me was so happy. And her mother was so happy. And the missionary was so happy, and I think Jesus was happy too! Don't you?