

The Leak in the Church Oil.

A TRUE STORY

Johannie Carr was a bright, pleasant boy, and a general favorite in the town where he lived.

One was reluctant obedience. He always intended to obey his father and mother, but wanted to do it in his own time and in his own way.

One Saturday afternoon he was sent to the store for oil. His mother said: "Go straight there, Johannie, and don't stop anywhere."

Johannie promised, but on the way he met Nicholas Barnes, called for short "Nick." He was a new boy in town, and had several times made a great deal of trouble for his folks.

That night Nick disappeared and was never seen again; but Johannie had to come before the Parish Committee.

The church people heard the story, and it was on the lips of all the school children. Johannie felt the disgrace keenly, and to be called "oily" at school seemed more than he could bear.

Not long after Johannie's parents removed to another place, but Johannie learned a lesson he never forgot. If he had obeyed his mother's command on that Saturday afternoon, he would not have been tempted to sin, and the South church would never have had a leak in its oil.

"Not a red," answered Johannie. Nick thought a moment, then he began to talk of something very different.

"When are we going to have some chocolate cream?" Johannie's mouth watered, for he was fond of that kind of confectionery.

"Dad-no money is scarce down our way." They were now nearing the church.

"Let's sit down here on the Old South steps and talk it over," said Nick. "Let's see, I treated on chocolates last time, now it's your turn."

Johannie had not thought of that when he accepted half the contents of the candy bag! For the first time it dawned upon him that Nick would expect him to return the compliment.

"I don't know when I'll be, Nick. Pa's sold one of his horses' cause he was short for money; he's going to make one do all the work, so I don't think I'll get much spending money this summer."

Suddenly a queer look came over Nick's face. He spoke quickly, but in a low tone. "You just keep still a minute, Johannie, I'll tell you something."

He dashed away without giving any information, Johannie kept "still" until he was tired of it; and was about starting for the store when Nick appeared, very much excited.

"Johannie," he said, "we can have some chocolate to-day." "How so?"

"It came into my head just now when I see the old sexton going down into the graveyard," said Nick. "He left the church open, the cellar door's unlocked and their's a whole barrel of kerosene in there!"

As the plan flashed upon Johannie's mind, his face grew very red. Nick did not seem to notice this and went on: "Let's fill the can, who'll know the difference? I figure two quarts of oil won't kill nobody."

Johannie was greatly shocked, but before he could speak Nick had disappeared with the can. When he returned it was full. He passed it to Johannie, who shrank back.

"I can't take the oil, Nick; it don't belong to me. I's stealing." "Stealing? Oh, no," said Nick slowly. "Now you look here, the oil belongs to the parish, and your pa is one of them. So you see a part of the oil is his'n."

He stopped suddenly with a look of fright, the old sexton was returning. Evidently Nick thought his argument would not convince him, for he said hurriedly: "It won't do for us to hang around here any longer, he'll know the whole thing. Let's hide the can and have some fun up town."

As they went, Nick seeing that Johannie did not feel right about it, said: "The 'South church' folks are rich as mud. An old feller died here once and left them piles of money to run things with. So his oil don't come out of their's. It went hurt them to give us a little one in a while, as long's they get a whole barrel. If the sexton don't lock up the cellar I'm going to fill mother's can."

By this time the boys had arrived at the store. Soon their pockets were filled with chocolate. Johannie did not enjoy them so much as usual, he began to feel sick. This was soon explained away by the bad boy. He said some of the oil on their hands had got on the candy; and he was feeling very much the same, which was some comfort.

That night Johannie was very ill, and tossed sleeplessly in his little bed. Somehow he did not want to call his mother, neither did he feel like saying his prayers. He was not alarmed at his sickness, for what Nick had said about the oil seemed reasonable. Often he turned on his pillow and closed his eyes, saying: "Of course, everybody knows kerosene oil and chocolate cream won't mix!"

But this did not appease his stomach or his conscience and give sleep. He

longed to return the oil; but this he could not do without being found out. He thought it would be just as well to put its value into the contribution box as soon as he could earn it. He half resolved to tell his mother all, but something held him back. He decided to confess to her when he had paid for the oil.

After such a miserable night and the pleadings of conscience, one might suppose that Johannie would never have been tempted again. His intentions were good; but Nick's influence was bad; having taken the first step in wrongdoing, the second and third were easier.

The boys filled their cans again and again, but one day they filled them for the last time, for as they knelt before the great barrel, a heavy hand was laid upon them and they were both in disgrace.

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