

MR GRYCE. Stop! And what is that *noise* supposed to represent? Miss Fenton I am very disappointed. I've heard sweeter sounds coming from a slaughter-house! This is supposed to be a hymn of joy – not a dirge. The whole school will therefore return to this hall after school is over. Then you'll sing. Or I'll *make* you sing like you've never sung before. Now, with joy!

ALL (*sing*). If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
As more of Heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Will dawn on every cross and care.

The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love
Fit us for perfect rest above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

GIRL (*falteringly*). This morning's reading is taken from Saint Matthew Eighteen. Never despise one of these little ones. I tell you they have their Guardian Angels in Heaven who look continually on the face of me Heavenly Father.

The pupils gradually begin coughing through the next paragraph. One person. Silence. Then three. Seven. More and more.

Suppose a man has hundred sheep if one of 'em strays does he not leave the other ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the one that strayed . . . the one that strayed . . .
(*She gives up.*)

MR GRYCE. Stop that infernal coughing! It's every morning alike. As soon as *one* starts you're *all* off. It's more like a dirt track than an Assembly Hall.

Pause. Silence. Then, a lone cough near MACDOWALL, but clearly enough to be not him.

Who did that? I said, who did that? (*No one owns up.*)
Mr Sugden. Somewhere near you. Didn't you see the boy?

MR SUGDEN *pushes his way into the lines of PUPILS.*

There Sugden! That's where it came from! Around there!

MR SUGDEN *grabs hold of MACDOWALL.*

MACDOWALL. It wan't me, sir.

MR SUGDEN. Of course it was you.

MACDOWALL. It wasn't, sir. Honest.

MR SUGDEN. Don't argue lad, I saw you.

MR GRYCE. MacDowall. I might have known it. Report to my office after assembly and Heaven help you. Right, carry on, girl.

GIRL (*Even more faltering and anxious now*) . . . and go in search of the one that strayed. And if he should find it I tell you your Heavenly Father is more delighted over that sheep that strayed . . . (*She loses her place.*) . . . that sheep that strayed than over the ninety-nine that never strayed. Here ends this morning's reading.

MR GRYCE. Very good, girl. Now sit.

All the PUPILS sit, except the daydreaming BILLY who remains standing.

There will be a meeting . . . Casper! Casper!

BILLY *opens his eyes and sits down.*

Up Casper! Up on your feet, lad.

The PUPILS are riotous.

Silence! Unless some of you want to stand up with him. (*To BILLY.*) And get your head up, lad! Or you'll be falling asleep again. You were asleep weren't you? Well? Speak up, lad!

BILLY. I don't know, sir.

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