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THE
CHRISTMAS BOX:

OR,

TIMELY CONVICTION.

EMBELLISHED WITH THREE COPPER-PLATE ENGRAVINGS.

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1804.

THE
CHRISTMAS BOX.

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ALFRED Waller having  
his father during the tender years  
of infancy, was brought up with  
the tenderest attention by a truly  
affectionate mother, whose chief  
felicity centered in her beloved  
children; but when Alfred was  
about six years of age, this amiable  
woman was reduced from affluence  
to poverty, by the failure of her  
banker; and she no longer knew  
how to support the little family  
which had hitherto experienced no  
serious difficulties.

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Whilst she was weeping over her sad reverse of fortune, and earnestly praying for some providential assistance, she received a letter from her worthy neighbour Archibald Freeport, containing a bank note for twenty pounds, and expressing a desire to render her every possible assistance. The good baronet stated that he had known Mr. Waller many years ago, and should deem himself happy in alleviating the distress of his widow. He therefore proposed in the most delicate manner, that Alfred should spend the greatest part of his time at Freeport-House, as a companion to young Archibald; and that every ex-

ertion should be made to place his sisters in a respectable situation. These proposals were consequently accepted with the warmest gratitude; and Alfred soon became the bosom-friend, as well as the play-mate, of Sir Archibald's only son.

In the same village resided a Mr. Glover, whose son Robert, a youth of about nine years old, had contracted a strict intimacy with Archibald Freeport, but his character was by no means so open or ingenuous as that of Alfred, and his selfishness was so apparent on almost every occasion, that it required the whole of Archibald's good nature, to pass it over in si-

lence. The youths, however, were accustomed to play together two or three times a week, and Robert generally found means to wheedle his companion out of something.

One morning, in the beginning of January, Robert went to Freeport House, at an earlier hour than usual, and, finding Alfred by himself, began to enquire what Christmas boxes his friend Archibald had received; "for," said he, "as his father is so immensely rich, he must have had some noble presents."

Alfred, having no idea of the end to which this question led, readily replied, that his benefactor's son had indeed received

several valuable Christmas boxes, among which were a microscope, a case of drawing instruments, a draft-board, a dozen china figures, several companies of French and English soldiers cast in lead, a quantity of ivory fish and counters, a large plum cake, and a quantity of candied orange peel; besides some boxes of sweetmeats, and several bottles of capillaire.

Robert's eyes sparkled with delight at the account of these rich presents, and in the fulness of his heart he whispered to Alfred, as a most important secret, that Archibald was finely *taken in*. Alfred was shocked at the expression, but he had sufficient pru-

dence to conceal his anger while he required an explanation. "Why," said Robert, rubbing his hands with evident pleasure, "you must know that I and Archibald agreed, about six weeks ago, to go equal shares in all our Christmas boxes which should be in their nature divisible. Now it happens that with the exception of a cake and a few preserves, I have only received *one* Christmas box, and this," said he, drawing out an elegant gold watch, "cannot possibly be divided. You see therefore—

"Yes," said Alfred, "I see too plainly that my worthy friend is to be cheated by your superior

dexterity. He will only receive half a cake and some preserves for all that he is to give up. But permit me to tell you that I find it very difficult to believe your assertion with respect to *your* Christmas boxes; and even if it be true that you have had no more, it must be base and ungenerous indeed, to take such an unjust advantage. Surely it would be more to your honour, were you candidly to tell him the affair, and quit him of his promise."

Robert received this salutary advice with a contemptuous toss of the head, and declared that he would insist upon Archibald's fulfilling his engagement in the strict-

est manner, and that if he attempted to go from his word, he should be hooted through every thoroughfare in the village, and publicly proclaimed a cheat and deceiver. "Go," said he, "and tell this to your friend, and at the same time add, I wish him joy that he is so finely taken in."

Alfred's face was suffused with the glow of honest indignation, while Robert addressed him in this manner, and when he had done speaking, the brave little fellow replied: "It appears, Master Glover, that you wish to add insult to your ungenerous proceeding; but with respect to your threats of *enforcing* Archibald's

promise, they are truly contemptible. "What," continued he, "do you suppose *him* as base as yourself, that he would break his word, or try to outwit another? Should he act in that manner, insignificant as I may be, and wholly dependant on his father's bounty, I would never look upon him again; but I know him too well to think him capable of any dishonourable action." Robert felt embarrassed by the conscious dignity with which Alfred delivered these noble sentiments; but he pretended to pay no attention, and, taking up his hat, sauntered out of the house.

Alfred went immediately in

search of his friend, and, at length, found him in another apartment, perusing a letter which he had just received from the ungenerous Robert.—Alfred was indeed astonished at the provoking language in which it was written, and thought still more meanly of the writer than he had done before; but, on Archibald's asking his advice, with respect to the division of the Christmas boxes, he declared it would admit of no doubt, but half must be fairly and truly given up.

Poor Archibald could not conceal his vexation, but declared he thought Robert had asserted a falsity; and therefore he did not

think himself bound to abide by his promise. “You know,” said he, “that Glover had much better Christmas boxes than myself, both last year and the preceding, and I naturally supposed ——

“O! my friend,” cried Alfred, “you are rightly served; for I perceive you thought to have had the advantage, whereas fortune has turned against you; but it is impossible that you should go from your engagement. I innocently told him all that you had received, and although you may feel reluctant to part with one half of such a treasure, yet reflect that you will have plenty left; and above all things consider how

much reputation such an action will gain you. Every one who hears of the transaction will love and admire you when they consider how willingly you sacrificed your childish amusements to preserve your word inviolate; while Robert will be universally scorned for his meanness; and if, as you suppose, he has really deceived us, depend upon it, he will never be able to look you in the face again, but will ever feel ashamed and confounded before such superior virtue.

Archibald listened to his friend with profound attention, and was so effectually convinced of the kindness and propriety of his ad-

vice, that he embraced him with all the warmth of fraternal affection, calling him his brother and preserver, and desiring that all the Christmas boxes might be divided immediately." "Yes, my dear friend," said he, "I will learn to scorn the baubles that had almost seduced me from the path of honour, and you yourself shall halve them, that Robert may have his share without further delay."

As soon as the boys had breakfasted, they ran to Archibald's study, in order to divide the presents, which completely filled a large two handled basket. "Well," said Alfred, beginning to count them, "here are two hundred fish

and twenty counters, six companies of soldiers —

“Ah!” sighed Archibald, “how pleased we should have been in ranging those troops against each other in a winter evening.”

“Pshaw, never mind them,” replied Alfred, “you shall keep the English, and few as they are, they are worth a host of Frenchmen. These fish too, must be divided, one hundred for you, and as many for Robert. A draft-board and microscope. Give him the draft-board, the other will prove more useful and entertaining.”

“O my sweet china images!” said Archibald, “it will grieve me to part with these!” “No,

no,” replied Alfred, “you will not be grieved when they are gone; the four seasons shall be given to Robert, and the muses shall remain to adorn your study: however, as the greatest number of these fall to your share, you must let me throw in the other fish and counters, to make up for them. These copper-plates may be exactly divided; and now nothing remains but the cake, the sweetmeats and capillaire, which I would advise you to divide in his presence, lest he should think you had eaten any of them before his arrival.”

Archibald heaved a deep sigh, and desired that Robert might

take the things away as soon as possible. "I would not for the world," said he, "violate my promise, or have any occasion for self-reproach; but I am compelled to acknowledge, that the sight of these treasures distresses me, and I tremble lest I should repent of the resolution I have formed."

Alfred exhorted him to think no more about it; but to consider that he had done his duty; and would consequently secure himself the esteem and admiration of all good men. I will fetch Robert directly," said he, "and am sure you will soon perceive the effects of all I have told you."

When this friendly adviser had

left the room, Archibald approached the table with a sorrowful countenance, and bitterly regretted his folly in having made so foolish an engagement. "In addition to my loss of all these charming things," said he, "I shall have the mortification of being laughed at, for making such a ridiculous bargain. All that heap of pretty things must be given up, and for nothing!—No, it is not so either. My *word* is something—my *honour* is at stake, and I must act as others *ought* to act by me."

During this speech, Archibald's sister had been looking in at the door, and now approached the

table, enquiring whether he intended one of those shares for her? He replied that he should have been extremely happy to have given her such a proof of brotherly affection; but that he had the misfortune to tell her, those things were not at his disposal; for that he had bargained with Robert to divide their Christmas boxes, and he was obliged to give him up one half of every thing upon the table, although he had received nothing in return but a few preserves and half a plum-cake.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Matilda, “this is a trick, contrived between Robert and Alfred, and I have not the least doubt but Al-

fred will have his share for the trouble he has taken. There is no compulsion, that you should give up any thing, and when they come to take all their treasures away, let them see that you are not to be laughed at.”

Archibald represented that he had pledged his word in the most solemn manner, and must consequently be considered as a cheat, if he did not fulfil it. Matilda, however, laughed at all his scruples; and, at length, declared she would run and tell her papa, that he might be prevented from acting in so ridiculous a manner. With this declaration she rushed out of the apartment, and left Archibald to his own reflections.

“ Well,” said he, after a pause of some minutes, “ I don't know but Matilda may be in the right; for if my papa should forbid me to follow Alfred's advice, I shall keep every thing, and yet not falsify my word. Yet I am not satisfied with this. I ought not to have made such a bargain without thinking of every circumstance, and fixing my resolution accordingly. I would fain act with justice, and yet I hardly know how to give up so much to a boy who is, very probably, deceiving and laughing at me. I wish Alfred would return—O, here he is. Alfred, what do you think my sister has proposed? She says she

will acquaint my papa with this business, and then he will lay such commands upon me, that I need not be accused of breaking my promise, though I shall keep all my play-things.”

“ Shall you preserve your *peace of mind*?” asked Alfred. “ I see you are conscious that it would be impossible. Why then, my dearest friend, will you attempt to stifle the feelings of honour and generosity, when you know how much inward satisfaction results from following them? You know that these *toys* are not necessary to your happiness, and when they are gone, you shall find me more industrious to procure you other

sources of amusement. Robert will very soon be here, and will naturally expect you to keep your word. Shall *he* then have to say, that he found you a *deceiver*, that you had amused him with a *gross falsity*, and had acted altogether *unworthy* of your birth and character?"

"No, my faithful friend," said Archibald, "this shall *never* be said of me; but, on the contrary, I will give up *more* than half, that Robert may see how much I can despise such childish toys when put in competition with my honour. My sister has used her utmost efforts to dissuade me from acting in this manner, and I am

now fully resolved to yield to your more salutary counsel."

Alfred was much affected by this speech, and imagined that Archibald had never before appeared so dignified or so amiable as at this moment. Whilst he was complimenting him, however, on his noble resolution, a tap at the door announced the arrival of young Glover, and the two amiable friends consequently broke off their conversation.

Robert entered with an embarrassed air, and after much hemming and coughing, he stammered out some expressions of regret for his Christmas box having been so trifling. Archibald

begged him to be seated, and observed, that the things on the table might probably make up for his disappointment. "Here," said he, "are all my presents, which have been halved pretty equally, but as the muses, which I wish to retain, are more valuable than the seasons, I have thrown into your heap the whole of my ivory fish and counters. The microscope and draft-board cannot be divided, and therefore, according to our agreement, I might have kept them both, but I have chosen to put the draft-board to your share. Here also are some fine copper plates which I understand you did not know of;

but I should scorn to keep them back on that account. The capillaire and sweetmeats I wish *you* to divide, and here is a large cake, the half of which belongs to you; but I must run and fetch a knife to cut it.

Archibald ran down stairs, humming a lively tune while Robert sat silently surveying the Christmas boxes, and evidently covered with the deepest confusion. "Well," said Alfred to him, "you perceive that I did not mistake the character of my friend when I ventured to assure you, that he would need neither threats nor force to make him fulfil a promise. Any other youth in

his situation might have reproached you for wishing to deprive him of so much, or, at least, he might have given you your share with reluctance; but you see he is *happy* in fulfilling what he considers as an indispensable duty, and he not only gives you the half, but even throws in more, of his own generosity, as if anxious to convince you that he values his honour above every other gratification."

Robert's face was crimsoned with the blush of conscious guilt, and when Archibald re-entered the room, he could scarcely lift up his eyes to look at him.— Archibald saw his confusion; but instead of taking any notice of it,

he proceeded to divide the cake, and then placing the largest heap of play-things carefully in a basket, he presented them to Robert, earnestly assuring him that he offered *more* than half of all he had received. "My heart," said he, "does not accuse me of having held back anything, or of using any evasion. I have acted honourably, and you are perfectly welcome to all these things. Take them therefore, my good friend, and I sincerely wish you may find in them an agreeable source of entertainment."

This mild speech had such a powerful effect upon Robert, that he was unable to make any an-

swer, and at length burst into a flood of tears, pushing back the basket of presents, and declaring, with many sobs, that he considered himself a mean, pitiful fellow, for having acted so basely towards such a generous and amiable youth.

“Acted basely!” exclaimed Archibald, “Why, it is impossible that you can have acted basely by me! as we are both children of respectable friends, and have been intimate from our infancy.”

“Alas, yes;” sighed Robert, “but those very circumstances tend to aggravate my guilt, and to increase my confusion. I own, with the deepest shame, that I have

deceived you; for although I have not received any playthings or sweetmeats this Christmas from my father, here are four new guineas which I begged him to give me in their stead. You see, therefore, that I was indeed a deceiver, while you acted so nobly toward me. If you will pardon me, and again admit me to your friendship, I will strive to merit your approbation; but if not, I shall be most completely miserable. Here are the two guineas which of right belong to you, and I wish I could atone for my contemptible conduct.”

Alfred was enraptured at this explanation, and Archibald not only forgave his deceiver, but

pressed him to his bosom, in the most affectionate manner, telling him that he felt abundantly happy in a circumstance which had happily tended to discover the real feelings and sentiments of each others heart.

In the midst of these kind assurances, Matilda came running into the room, and said that Alfred must go immediately to her papa. All parties were vexed at this interruption, and poor Alfred in particular, as he was anxious to witness the termination of so interesting a scene. Matilda, however, refused to wait a single moment, and pulled Alfred along by the arm, exclaiming,

“Would you wish, papa, to wait for you?”

When they had left the room, Archibald frankly acknowledged that his generous conduct had resulted entirely from the exhortations of his young friend, and Robert made a similar confession. It was therefore determined that all the Christmas boxes should be given to that faithful friend and adviser, and the footman was immediately called to carry the basket to Alfred's mother; but while they were adjusting the soldiers, and the china-images, Alfred knocked at the door, and desired to be let in immediately. The young folks

were vexed at this interruption; but, at length, they placed the footman behind the door, and then admitted their good friend, whom they endeavoured to amuse till the basket should be got off. By mere accident, however, the little fellow got a glimpse of it; and discovered the whole contrivance. He was deeply affected by such a proof of generosity; and thanked his friends repeatedly for their kind intentions, but positively declared, he could not think of accepting anything.— Archibald insisted, Alfred begged, and even the footman exhorted him to lay aside this resolution; but he remained inflexible, till, at

length Sir Archibald, having overheard the whole conversation, put an end to the dispute.

“ I have heard all the particulars of this business,” said he, “ and must tell you Archibald, and you master Glover, that you acted imprudently in making any agreement relative to your Christmas boxes. Your present behaviour, however, does honour to your hearts and your understandings; and Alfred has shewn so much delicacy and disinterestedness that he *shall* be rewarded. I desire therefore that each of you may keep your respective presents, and at the same time I give *him* a Christmas box which will be more useful to him.—

self and his worthy mother—With these words, Sir Archibald presented the worthy Alfred with a draft for a sum of money, which purchased a little annuity for his widowed mother, and rendered herself and her little offspring completely happy.—Archibald and Robert were ever afterward inseparable friends, and Alfred was happy beyond expression, in contemplating the comfort of his family, or in listening to the warm applauses which were bestowed on his conduct, by all who heard the adventure of the CHRISTMAS BOX.

F I N I S.

*Bryer, Printer, Bridge Street, Black-friars.*