Hannah More, â??The Plum-Cakes; or The Farmer and His Three Sonsâ?•

Description

HANNAH MORE

â??The Plum-Cakes; or The Farmer and His Three Sonsâ?•

A farmer who some wealth possessed,
With three fine boys was also blessed;
The lads were healthy, stout, and young,
And neither wanted sense nor tongue.
Tom, Will, and Jack, like other boys,
Lovâ??d tops and marbles, sport and toys.
The father scouted that false plan,
That money only makes the man;
But, to the best of his discerning,
Was bent on giving them good learning.
He was a man of observation,
No scholar, yet had penetration;
So with due care a school he sought,
Where his young sons might well be taught.
Quoth he, â??I know not which rehearses
Most properly his themes or verses,
Yet I can do a fatherâ??s part,
And school the temper, mind, and heart;
The natural bent of each Iâ??ll know,
And trifles best that bent may show.â?•

â??Twas just before the closing year,
When Christmas holidays were near,
The farmer callâ??d to see his boys,
And ask how each his time employs.
Quoth Will, â??Thereâ??s father, boys, without;
Heâ??s brought us something good, no doubt.â?•
The father sees their merry faces,
With joy beholds them and embraces:
â??Come, boys, of home youâ??ll have your fill.â?•
â??Yes, Christmas now is near,â?• says Will;
â??â??Tis just twelve days â?? these notches see,
My notches with the days agree.â?•
â??Well,â?• said the sire, â??again Iâ??ll come,
And gladly fetch my brave boys home;
You two the dappled mare shall ride,

Jack mount the pony by my side.
Meantime, my lads, Iâ??ve brought you here,
No provision of good cheer.â•
Then from his pocket straight he takes
A vast profusion of plum-cakes;
He counts them out a plenteous store,
No boy shall have or less or more:
Twelve cakes he gives to each dear son,
When each expected only one;
And then, with many a kind expression,
He leaves them to their own discretion:
Resolvâ??d to mark the use each made
Of what he to their hands conveyâ??d.

The twelve days past, he comes once more,
And brings the horses to the door;
The boys with rapture see appear
The pony and the dappled mare;
Each moment now an hour they count,
And crack their whips, and long to mount.
As with the boys his ride he takes,
He asks the history of the cakes.
Says Will, â??Dear father, life is short,
So I resolvâ??d to make quick sport;
The cakes were all so nice and sweet,
I thought Iâ??d have one jolly treat.
â??Why should I balk,â?? said I, â??my taste?
Iâ??ll make at once a hearty feast.â??
So, snugly by myself I fed,
When every boy was gone to bed;
I gorgâ??d them all, both paste and plum,
And did not waste a single crumb:
Indeed they made me, to my sorrow,
As sick as death upon the morrow;
This made me mourn my rich repast,
And wish I had not fed so fast.â•
Quoth Jack, â??I was not such a dunce,
To eat my quantum up at once;
And though the boys all longâ??d to clutch â??em,
I would not let a creature touch â??em;
Nor, though the whole were in my power,
Would I myself one cake devour.
Thanks to the use of keys and locks,
Theyâ??re all now snug within my box;
The mischief is, by hoarding long,
Theyâ??re grown so mouldy and so strong,
I find they wonâ??t be fit to eat,
And I have lost my fatherâ??s treat.â•

â??Well, Tom,â?• the anxious parent cries
â??How did you manage?â?• Tom replies,
â??I shunned each wide extreme to take,
To glut my maw, or hoard my cake;
I thought each day its wants would have,
And appetite again might crave.
Twelve school-days still my notches counted,
To twelve my fatherâ??s cakes amounted;
So every day I took out one,
But never ate my cake alone;
With every needy boy I shared,
And more than half I always spared.
One every day, â??twixt self and friend,
Has brought my dozen to an end.
My last remaining cake to-day
I would not touch, but gave away;
A boy was sick, and scarce could eat,
To him it proved a welcome treat.
Jack called me spendthrift, not to save;
Will dubbed me fool, because I gave;
But when our last day came I smiled,
For Willâ??s were gone, and Jackâ??s were spoiled.
Not hoarding much, nor eating fast,
I served a needy friend at last.â?•
These tales the fatherâ??s thoughts employ:
â??By these,â?• said he, â??I know each boy.
Yet Jack, who hoarded what he had,
The world will call a frugal lad;
And selfish, gormandizing Will,
Will meet with friends and favorers still;
While moderate Tom, so wise and cool,
The mad and vain will deem a fool;
But I his sober plan approve,
And Tom has gained his fatherâ??s love.â?•

APPLICATION.

So when our day of life is past,
And all are fairly judged at last,
The miser and the sensual find
How each misused the gifts assigned;
While he who wisely spends and gives,
To the true ends of living lives.
â??Tis self-denying moderation
Gains the great Fatherâ??s approbation.

NOTES:

Title First published anonymously, under the same title, in 1796; â??signed at the end: Z., i.e. Hannah Moreâ?• *(ESTC*, T42504*).*

31 *notches* A groove or incision made into a wooden stick to track the passing of days.

40 *plum-cake* â??A cake containing raisins, currants, and often orange peel and other candied fruitsâ?• *(OED).*

61 *balk* â??To waste or throw away a good chanceâ?• *(OED).*

69 *repast* â??Food, nourishment; supply of foodâ?• *(OED).*

71 *dunce* â??One who shows no capacity for learningâ?• *(OED).*

72 *quantum* â??The actual amount or quantity of something present, available, etc.â?• *(OED).*

86 *glut* â??To overload or surfeit with foodâ?• *(OED); maw* â??The mouth of a greedy personâ?• *(OED).*

95 *â??twixt* â??Betwixt; archaic form of â??betweenâ??â?• *(OED).*

101 *spendthrift* â??One who spends profuselyâ?• *(OED).*

111 *gormandizing* â??To eat like a glutton; to feed voraciouslyâ?• *(OED).*

Source: *Cheap Repository Tracts: Entertaining, Moral, and Religious,* vol. I (New York, 1840?) pp. 99-103.

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