



Taken from a Fourth Grade Reader

The Boys' and Girls' Readers - Fourth Reader
by Emma Miller Bolenius (1919)

BISHOP'S NOTE: Today's story is intended to evoke an attitude of perseverance in the young reader of the early last century – thereby perhaps contributing to the character and fortitude of the "Greatest Generation" of World War II.

Perseverance Wins

Author unknown

It is not what a boy wears on his back that makes a man of him, but what he has inside his heart and head. As you read this story compare this boy's "outside" with the precious things he had within.

About thirty years ago, I stepped into a bookstore in Cincinnati, in search of some books that I wanted. While there, a ragged little boy, not over twelve years of age, came in to ask whether they had "geographies" to sell.

"Plenty of them," was the salesman's reply.

"How much do they cost?"

"One dollar, my lad."

"I did not know that they were so dear."

He turned to go out, and even opened the door, but closed it again and came back.

"I have only sixty-two cents," said he, "will you let me have the book, and wait awhile for the rest of the money?"

How eagerly the lad looked for an answer, and how he seemed to shrink within his ragged clothes when the man refused his request! The disappointed little fellow looked up at me with a poor attempt at a smile, and left the store. I followed and overtook him.

"And what now?" I asked.

"I shall try another place, sir."

"Shall I go, too, and see how you succeed?"

"Oh, yes, if you like," said he, in surprise.

Four different stores I entered with him, and four times I saw the boy's face cloud at a harsh refusal.

"Shall you try again?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. I shall try them all, or I should not know whether I could get one."

We entered the fifth store, and the little fellow walked up manfully and told the gentleman just what he wanted and how much money he had.

"Do you want the book very much?" asked the proprietor.

"Yes, sir, very much."

"Why do you want it so much?"

"To study, sir. I cannot go to school, but when I have time I study at home. All the boys have geographies, and they will be ahead of me if I do not get one. Besides, my father was a sailor, and I want to know about the places that he used to go to."

"Does he go to those places now?"

"He is dead," replied the boy softly. Then he added, after a while, "I am going to be a sailor, too."

"Are you, though?" asked the gentleman, raising his eyebrows curiously.

"Yes, sir, if I live."

"Well, my lad, I'll tell you what I will do. I will let you have a new geography, and you may pay the remainder of the money when you can; or, I will let you have one that is not new for fifty cents."

"Are the leaves all in it, and is it just like the others, only not new?"

"Yes, it is as good as the new ones."

"It will do just as well, then, and I shall have twelve cents left toward buying some other book. I am glad they did not let me have one at any of the other places."

The bookseller looked up inquiringly, and I told him what I had seen of the little fellow. He was much pleased, and, when he brought the book along, I saw a nice new pencil and some clean white paper in it. "A present, my lad, for your perseverance. Always have courage like that, and you will make your mark," said the bookseller.

"Thank you, sir, you are very good."

"What is your name?"

"William Hartley, sir."

"Do you want any more books?" I now asked, earnestly regarding the boy's serious face.

"More than I can ever get," he replied, glancing at the volumes that filled the shelves. I gave him a bank-note. "It will buy some for you," I said.

Tears of joy came into his eyes.

"May I buy what I want with it?"

"Yes, my lad; whatever you want."

"Then I will buy a book for Mother," said he. "I thank you very much, and some day I hope I can pay you."

He asked my name, and I gave it to him. Then I left him standing by the counter, so happy that I almost envied him. Many years passed before I saw him again.

Last year I went to Europe on one of the finest vessels that ever ploughed the waters of the Atlantic.

We had pleasant weather the greater part of the voyage, but toward the end there came a terrible storm, and the ship would have sunk, with all on board, had it not been for the captain.

Every mast was laid low, the rudder was almost useless, and a great leak was filling the vessel with water. The crew were strong and willing men, and the mates were practical seamen of the first class. But, after pumping for one whole night, with the water still gaining upon them, the sailors gave up in despair and prepared to take to the boats, though they might have known that no small boat could live in such a wind and sea.

The captain, who had been below examining his charts, now came up. He saw how matters stood, and; with a voice that I heard distinctly above the roar of the tempest, he ordered every man to his post.

It was surprising to see those men bow before his strong will and hurry back to the pumps. The captain then started below to look for the leak. As he passed me I asked him whether there was any hope of saving the vessel.

He looked at me, and then at the other passengers, and said: "Yes, sir. So long as one inch of this deck remains above water, there is hope. When that fails I shall abandon the vessel, not before, nor shall one of my crew. Everything shall be done to save the ship, and, if we fail, it will not be our fault. Bear a hand, every one of you, at the pumps."

Thrice during the day did we despair. But the captain's dauntless courage, perseverance, and powerful will mastered every man on board, and we went to work again. "I will land you safe at the dock in Liverpool," said he, "if you will be men."

And he did land us safe, but the vessel sank soon after she was moored to the dock. The captain stood on the deck of the sinking ship receiving the thanks of the passengers as they hurried down the gangplank.

As I passed, he grasped my hand and said: "Judge Preston, do you not recognize me?"

I told him that I did not. I was not aware that I had ever seen him before I stepped on board his ship.

"Do you remember the boy who had so much difficulty in getting a geography, some thirty years ago, in Cincinnati? He owes a debt of gratitude for your encouragement and kindness to him."

"I remember him very well, sir. His name was William Hartley."

"I am he," said the captain. "God bless you!"

"And may God bless you, too. Captain Hartley," I said. "The perseverance that thirty years ago secured you that geography, has to-day saved our lives."

1. *In what ways would a geography be of use to a boy who wanted to be a sailor?*
2. *Would William Hartley neglect his mother? How do you know?*
3. *Do you think that he paid Judge Preston back? Give a reason for your belief.*
4. *What is meant by "ploughed the waters" and "owe a debt of gratitude"?*
5. *Prove that Captain Hartley knew his business well. Was his decision wise?*
6. *Practice reading aloud the conversation, making up speeches where they are not given.*
7. *If a boy is forced to go to work, how can he still keep up his education?*
8. *What are different ways to earn money for books?*
9. *What things would William Hartley not do in the schoolroom and on the playground?*
10. *Tell the class which of your school books you like best. Why?*