



In Church

THE BELL OF THE SMALL CHURCH BEGAN TO RING. THE PEOPLE BEGAN to gather to hear Mr. Sprague speak to them. Mr. Sprague spoke to them in church every Sunday, and prayed with them.

The Sunday-school children now sat with their fathers and mothers, who would try to keep them quiet. Aunt Polly came, and Tom and Sid and Mary sat with her. Tom was placed as far as possible from the open window and the interesting summer scenes outside.

Other people came in and went to their seats. There were the old and poor. There were the middle-aged. There were the pretty girls in bright summer clothes, and the young men, with their eyes following the girls. There was Mrs. Douglas, whose husband died. She was rich and good-hearted, and she lived in the big house on Cardiff Hill. There was Mufferson, the "Good Boy" of the village. He came to church with his mother. All the other mothers talked of his goodness. All the other boys did not like him.

Now the bell was heard again, and then the church became very quiet. They were ready to begin.

They began with a song. After the song, Mr. Sprague read a very

long list of meetings to come in the following week. Then he prayed.

He prayed for many things and for many people. He prayed for the church, and for the little children of the church, and for the other churches of the village, and for the village, and then for the whole country, and for the Government, and then for people of far countries.

Tom did not enjoy hearing Mr. Sprague pray, but he knew he must remain quiet.

While Mr. Sprague prayed, a flying bug stopped on the back of the seat in front of Tom. It moved its front legs together, one over the other. It put them around its head, and seemed to pull until Tom thought that the head would separate from the body. It used its back legs to clean its wings. And it did all this slowly, as if knowing that it was safe. And indeed it was safe. Tom did not dare to reach for it. He believed that his soul would be destroyed suddenly if he did such a thing while Mr. Sprague was praying.

But with the last words, his hand began to move forward. When the last word came, the bug was in his hand. But his aunt saw this. She told him to let the bug fly away.

Then Mr. Sprague began a longer talk. He read the words he was saying and Tom counted the pages as he turned them. After church, Tom always knew how many pages there had been. He did not often know what had been said.

But this morning Tom was interested for a little while. Mr. Sprague talked about future peace in the world. The strong and powerful nations, he said, would be friends of the weak. The strong, he said, would be like a strong, wild animal of the forest. The weak would be like a weak animal of the farm. But the strong animal would not hurt the weak animal. They would lie down beside each other, in peace. They would be so gentle and friendly that a little child could lead them.

Tom wished to be that child.

Then there was no more talk about animals. Again Tom began to suffer. He remembered a valuable object that he carried, and he took it from his pocket. It was a large black bug in a small box.

The bug quickly took a painful hold on Tom's finger. The next

moment, the bug was on the floor, on its back, and Tom's finger was in his mouth.

The bug lay there, moving its legs, but it could not get on its feet again. Tom could not reach it. It was too far away. But he watched it.

Other people, also not interested in Mr. Sprague's words, found pleasure in watching the bug.

Then a dog entered the church. He was sad at heart. He wanted some new, different thing to do. He saw the large black bug, and his tail lifted and moved a little, happily. He looked at the bug carefully; walked around it; put his nose nearer; lay down with the bug between his front feet; and began to sleep. His head moved down, it touched the bug, and the bug took a painful hold on his nose. The dog cried loudly, shaking his head.

And the bug fell again on the floor, on its back.

People sitting near were laughing gently, with their faces covered. Tom was completely happy. The dog seemed like a fool, and perhaps felt like a fool. There was anger in his heart, also. He went near the bug again and began jumping at it. Moving in a circle, he jumped again and again.

Then he had had enough of jumping. He found a smaller bug and followed it for a while. Then he had had enough of the smaller bug. Forgetting the large black bug, he sat down on it.

With a wild cry of pain, he went running around the church. The bug kept its hold. The dog ran across the front of the church, and across the back. His cries grew louder and louder. Then he jumped into his owner's arms. His owner threw him out a low window. Then slowly the sound of his voice grew softer and was gone as he ran quickly away.

Now all the people in the church had red faces and were trying not to laugh. Mr. Sprague had stopped speaking. He began again, but it was not easy for him to continue. Here and there a laugh could be heard. All were glad when it was time to go home.

Tom Sawyer went home quite happy. Church was a pleasure when something different happened. There was only one thing that he did not like. He was glad to let the dog play with his bug. But the dog should not have carried it away.