

**SELF-CONQUEST:  
THE STORY OF  
DULCIE WARD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649701483

Self-Conquest: The Story of Dulcie Ward by Florence Wilford

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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DULCIE WARD**





"Save for the help of Dulcie's supple young fingers, his baskets would have been too clumsily finished off to find a sale."

*Frontispiece.*

*Page 112.*

# SELF-CONQUEST:

The Story of Dulcig Ward.

BY

FLORENCE WILFORD,

*Author of "Golden Gorse," "What Friends are meant for," &c.*



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PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION,  
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.  
—

LONDON:

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, CHARING CROSS;

43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET; 48, PICCADILLY;

AND 135, NORTH STREET, BRIGHTON.

NEW YORK: E. & J. B. YOUNG & CO.

2537. f. 115.

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## SELF-CONQUEST.

### CHAPTER I.



"DULCIBELLA WARD?"

The rather unusual name was repeated in a questioning tone, and the Lady Superintendent of a town Sunday-school looked round the class, and not seeing the little girl who generally answered to it, remarked, "This is the second Sunday she has been absent. Do you know if she is ill?"

It was the teacher of the class who was addressed, but before she could reply, a brisk, forward little maiden popped up from the bench, and said eagerly, "No, mum, please, mum, she ain't ill; but she's not coming to school no more, for her father's sold her."

There was a great sensation among the



children at this startling announcement, and even the superintendent looked up from her "Attendance Register" in great surprise, while the teacher said gravely, "Sold her! What do you mean, Ellen? Are you not making a mistake?"

"No, teacher, please, it's quite true; he have sold her to a circus. Ain't he, Polly?"

"Yes, that he has, teacher," assented Polly, a quiet, matter-of-fact little thing, not likely to run away with a false report; and, thus encouraged, Ellen Heywood added—

"He said he couldn't do with her no longer, because he's got to go all over the country fighting, and she was in his way like; so they've took her at the circus, and they're going to learn her to jump through hoops and——"

"That will do; you can sit down, Ellen," interrupted the superintendent, cutting short further revelations. "I will inquire into this, and let you know what I hear, Miss James;" and she passed on to another class, while Miss James, a kind-hearted young shopwoman, who had taught in the school for many years, began to question her girls on the Gospel for the day.

Little Dulcie Ward, with her bright brown face and great gipsy eyes, had been a very regular and very eager scholar for the last three months, so neither her own teacher nor Miss

Harding, the superintendent, could fail to be interested in the news concerning her.

Miss Harding, a sensible, loving-hearted woman, thought much of her that night, and added to her usual prayer for her Sunday-scholars a special little prayer for Dulcie—that the Heavenly Father would watch over her and shield her from evil, even if the earthly father were forgetting his trust. And the very next morning she set off to the house where the child and her father had been lodging, determined to find out the truth about her.

It was in one of the narrowest back streets of the large town, and its owner was a shoemaker, who pursued his trade in a humble way, without a shop or any outward sign of his calling except a written notice, "John Farmer makes and repairs Boots and Shoes," stuck up in the front window of the ground floor. He and his wife were very poor, but very respectable; and though his pale, pinched face, stooping figure, and short, dry manner were not attractive to strangers, one had only to look at *Mrs.* Farmer to be taken with her at once. She had been a bright, fresh, country girl when John married her, and though she was a woman of five-and-thirty now, and her bloom was a little faded, there was something countrified about her still.

She had not the sallow, drudging look of most of the women in her street, and there was a sweet, frank kindness in her smile, as if she had been used to be on friendly terms with everybody about her, and not to live in a place where it was considered the height of respectability to "keep yourself to yourself," and not know your next door neighbour.

It was John who opened the door when Miss Harding knocked ; and he begged her to walk in and take a chair, saying his wife was at home, and would be down directly.

"She is gone up to speak to that queer lodger of ours—that man Ward," he explained, when Miss Harding was seated. "He's leaving of us to-day, and I can't say I'm sorry for it. We shouldn't have kept him so long only that he's been ill. He's not the kind of lodger we want at all, we never should have taken him in but for the child ; my wife felt a pity for her like, and didn't consider that it was him and not the child we had to look to for the rent."

"It is about the little girl that I came to speak," said Miss Harding ; "she has not been at school the last two Sundays, and one of the children gave me such an odd reason for her absence that it has made me anxious."

"My missus can tell you all about it," said