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THE BOY-ARTIST.

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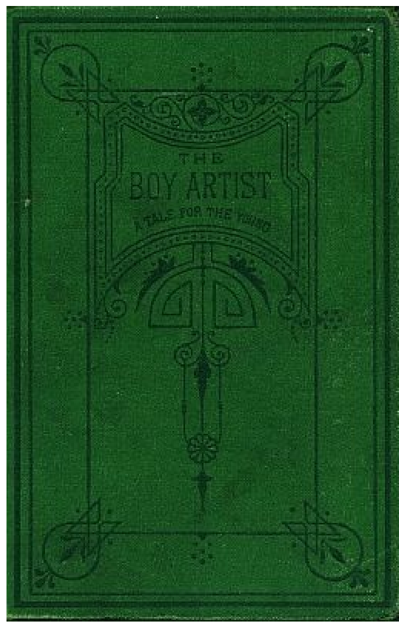
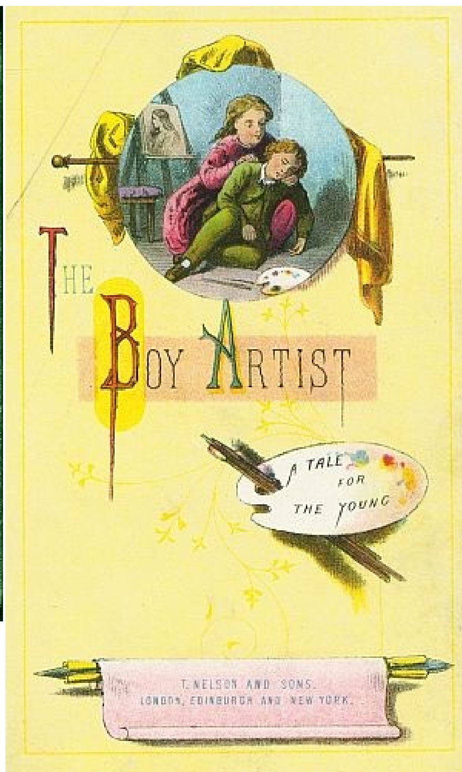
THE PICTURE.





THE BOY-ARTIST.

A Tale for the Young.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"HOPE ON," "KING JACK OF HAYLANDS," ETC.

—————————————
"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."
PSALM xxvii. 10.
—————————————

LONDON:
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——————
1872

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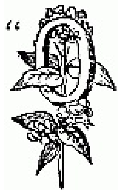
THE BOY-ARTIST.

CHAPTER I.

THE PICTURE.



"OH, Madge, just stay as you are; there—your head a little more turned this way."

"But, Raymond, I can't possibly make the toast if I do."

"Never mind the toast; I shan't be many minutes," said the boy who was painting in the window, while he mixed some colours in an excited, eager manner.

"The fire is very hot. Mayn't I move just to one side?"

"No; it is the way that the firelight is falling on your hair and cheek that I want. Please, Madge; five minutes." [8]

"Very well," and the patient little sister dropped the toasting-fork, and folded her hands in her lap, with the scorching blaze playing on her forehead and cheek, and sparkling in her deep brown eyes.

The boy went on with rapid, bold strokes, while a smile played over his compressed lips as he glanced at Madge every few moments.

"The very thing I have been watching for—that warm, delicious glow—that red light slanting over her face;—glorious!" and he shook back the hair from his forehead, and worked on unconscious of how the minutes flew by.

"Raymond, it is very hot."

"There—one moment more, please, Madge."

One minute—two—three, fled by, and then Raymond threw down his brush and came over to his sister's side.

"Poor little Madge," and he laid his hand coaxingly on her silky hair. "Perhaps you have made my fortune."

[9] This was some small consolation for having roasted her face, and she went to look at the picture. "I'm not as pretty as that, Raymond."

[10] "Well, artists may idealize a little; may they not?"

"Yes. What is this to be called?"

"Faces in the Fire."

"Shall you sell it?"

"I shall try."

Raymond Leicester had not a prepossessing face; it was heavy, and to a casual observer, stupid. He had dark hazel eyes, shaded by an overhanging brow and rather sweeping eyelashes; a straight nose, and compressed lips,

"FACES IN THE FIRE."

hiding a row of defective teeth; a high massive forehead and light hair, which was seldom smooth, but very straight. This he had a habit of tossing back with a jerk when he was excited; and sometimes the dull eyes flashed with a very bright sparkle in them when he caught an idea which pleased him,—for Raymond was an artist, not by profession, but because it was in his heart to paint, and he could not help himself. He was sixteen now, and Madge was twelve. Madge was the only thing in the world that he really cared for, except his pictures. Their mother was dead, Madge could hardly remember her; but Raymond always had an image before him of a tender, sorrowful woman, who used to hold

THE COTTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

[11]

[12]

him in her arms, and whisper to him, while the hot tears fell upon his baby cheeks,—"*You* will comfort me, my little son. *You* will take care of your mother and of baby Madge." And he remembered the cottage in the country where they had lived, the porch where the rose-tree grew, the orchard and the moss-grown well, the tall white lilies in the garden that stood like fairies guarding the house, and the pear-tree that was laden with fruit.

He remembered how his mother had sat in that porch with him, reading stories to him out of the Bible, but often lifting her sad pale face and looking down the road as if watching for some one.

And then there came a dark, dreary night, when the wind was howling mournfully round the cottage and their mother lay dying. She had called Raymond to her, and had pressed her cold lips on his forehead, telling him to take care of Madge; and if his father ever came, to say that she had loved him to the end, and she had prayed God to bless him and to take care of her children. Then she had died, and the neighbours told Raymond that he was motherless.

[13]

THE DYING MOTHER.

[14]

He recollected how the sun shone brightly on the day that she was buried, and that he and Madge stood by the grave crying, when she was put down in the cold earth; and that a man rode up to the paling of the quiet green churchyard, and threw the reins over his horse's neck, and came with hurried footsteps to the grave just as the last sod was thrown upon the coffin; and how this man had sobbed and cried, and had caught them in his arms, and said, "My poor little motherless ones," and had kissed them and cried again so piteously and wildly, that the clergyman had stopped in the service and had tried to comfort him. And when the funeral was over, and the neighbours were taking the little ones home, how the man had held them tightly and said, "No; mine now, never to leave me again. I am their father. Margaret, I will try to make up to them what I withheld from you; is it too late?"

This was the father whom their mother had spoken of with her dying breath; but who had come too late to implore her forgiveness for having left her in want, while he squandered his money upon his own pleasure. But now, in the impulse of grief and remorse, he had determined to act differently, and returned to London with his children.

[15]

Here they had lived ever since. Their father had returned to his old gay life, and left the children very much to take care of themselves. Sometimes carelessly kind to them, more often harsh and impatient, Mr. Leicester supposed that he fulfilled the vow which he had made about her children, beside his wife's grave.

Raymond and Madge had no very definite idea as to what their father did with his time. From time to time they changed their lodgings, always coming to some quieter ones, and now they had got to the highest flight of a tall house in a very shady street. Their father was not at home very often, but they did not mind this much, and were very happy together.

Raymond made a little money by drawing pictures for a cheap periodical, and with this he bought materials for his darling pursuit. Madge watched him and gloried in him, and dusted the rooms, and laid the table for meals, and mended his clothes, and thought hopefully of the time when Raymond should be a famous painter, and she should leave the dingy London lodging and live in the fresh breezy country which her brother told her about.

[16]

Madge was not beautiful; her little face was sallow and pinched: but she had two pretty things

about her. One was her hair, which was of a rich warm brown colour, with a dash of chestnut in it, and when unbound it fell in ripples nearly to her feet; the other was her eyes—large, lustrous, brown eyes—with an intense earnestness in them, seldom to be seen in one so young. These eyes appeared in every one of Raymond's pictures, for they haunted him.

"Now, Raymond, come to breakfast," Madge said when she had finished making the toast.

He did not appear to hear her, for he went to a little distance and surveyed his picture with his head on one side.

Madge poured out the tea, and then came over to him, laid her hand on his which held the brush, and said entreatingly, "Come." [17]

"Well, it is too bad," he said laughingly, "first to make you roast your face, and then to keep you from eating your breakfast;" and he laid down his brush and pallette and came to the table; but he ate hurriedly and soon returned to his work.

Madge put away the things and brought her sewing to the window, where she sat all the morning watching Raymond's busy fingers. Then she went out to the colour-shop at the end of the next street, to buy something which her brother wanted, and to see if the picture he had left there was sold.

Alas! it was still in the window along with several others; a few butchers' boys, working-men, and ragged little girls were eagerly pressing their faces against the glass looking at the pictures, but none of them were likely to be purchasers. Raymond's picture was called "The Welcome." There was a cottage room, and an open door, through which a working man was coming in, while a little girl sprang to meet him. The girl had Madge's eyes; but no one in that wondering throng [18] knew that. They were saying how well the workman's dress and the tools which he carried were done.

Madge went into the shop. Mr. Jeffery was talking to a gentleman who stood by the counter; but he turned to serve her as soon as she appeared.

BUSY FINGERS.

She laid down her money and took her tiny parcel, then said [19] falteringly, while the colour came into her pale cheeks, "Please, sir, is my brother's picture sold yet?"

"No, my dear, nor likely to be," said Mr. Jeffery, laughing.

"Poor Raymond," thought Madge, and as she turned away, she raised her hand to brush away the tears which filled her eyes.

The gentleman who had been standing, now stepped forward and opened the door for the little girl to go out.

She raised her face timidly and said, "Thank you, sir," in a soft, low tone, then hurried off without trusting herself again to look in at the shop window.

"Who's that, Jeffery?"

"A little girl who comes here very often, sir. Her brother paints a little, and he's left a picture here to try and get it sold."

"I should like to have her hair and eyes for a model," the artist said. "Jeffery, if that child comes again send her up to me; she would exactly do for my Ruth."

But it was many and many a long day before little Madge came to that shop again.

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[20]

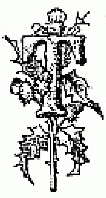
CHAPTER II.

THE RESOLVE.

HAT same evening, when it was too dark for Raymond to paint, he and Madge sat by the fire talking.

"It's not much good trying any more; is it, Raymond?"

"Trying what?"



"Why, your painting, to be sure."

"Nonsense, Madge, I must paint; it's my life to paint."

Madge gave a long deep sigh, too long and deep for a child of her age.

"Raymond, what's *my* life?"

"Woman's life is to glory in man," said Raymond grandly.

"Oh!" said Madge, with an unbelieving laugh, "there's more than that in it; there's a great deal of work, too, I can assure you." [21]

"I daresay," Raymond answered carelessly; "but, Madge, you must never talk of my giving up painting, because I should die if I did."

"Should you? O Raymond, don't."

"No, I won't until I have done something great—something to make you proud of me—something which shall make my name to be remembered;" and the boy's eyes flashed now, but it was too dark for any one to see it.

Madge liked to hear him say these kind of things, though she was not an artist herself, only a patient, loving little girl, who thought there was no one in the world like Raymond, and she put out her hand and laid it softly upon his, as if she would lay her claim to that by which his fame was to come.

They sat in silence for some time—Raymond looking into the fire, and thinking of his future; Madge looking at him, and wondering if she should ever see him as famous as she felt sure he ought to be. [22]

The door was opened suddenly, and their father came in. Even with streaks of gray in his hair, and deep lines upon his face, Mr. Leicester was handsome; and he had a gay, dashing air, that heightened the charm of his appearance. He carelessly kissed Madge, and laid his hand on Raymond's shoulder, then sat down by the fire.

"It's cold to-night, children."

"Yes, father; shall I get tea?"

"Not to-night, sweet Madge. I must be off soon; I have an engagement. I only looked in to see how you were getting on."

"Very well," said Raymond gruffly.

"Oh! that's right; I'm glad to hear it."

There was a long pause, then Mr. Leicester said abruptly, "Raymond, lad, I've found some work for you at last."

Raymond started. He had long ago found work for himself, and did not want any other.

"Stephens and Johnson will shortly have a vacancy, and then you can go to them as soon as you like."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that they want a shop-boy." [23]

Raymond stood up proudly. "I'm a gentleman, father."

"Come, come, never mind that. We know all that; but I don't want heroics. You must either work or starve."

"I'm working."

"Pooh, pooh! A little desultory dabbling in painting; let me tell you, Master Raymond, that is not my idea of work."

"But, father, I must paint; I could not live if I did not."

"Nonsense; that is all the ridiculous ideas that you get up here. When you are shaken out in the world you will lose them."

Raymond's hands were raised to his face, and he was shivering with excitement. Madge came to her father's side, and put one hand on his shoulder.

"Father, Raymond is a painter. If you were to send him to a shop, he would be a painter still. You cannot crush out what is bound up in his heart. Is it not better for him to rise to fame by painting? Some day he will be your glory and mine."

Mr. Leicester shook her hand off.

"You don't know what you are talking about. Little girls should hold their tongues, and learn to be silent." [24]

Madge shrank back immediately, and her father went on fiercely. "I'll tell you what it is, children; I'm off to-night to the Continent, and that's all the cash I can leave you," and he produced three sovereigns. "I can't find bread enough for all of us. Raymond *must* work. I shall be gone for a month. The place will not be ready for him before that. When I return he must go immediately."

Madge breathed more freely—there was a month's reprieve, and she stretched out her hand to Raymond. He clutched it, and held it in a vice-like grasp.

"Father," he said at last, and his voice was low and hoarse, "I want to ask you something."

"Well?"

"You are not coming back for a month. If during that time I can sell one of my pictures, and can hand you over a reasonable sum of money, may I go on painting?"

[25] His father thought for a moment, then laughed. "Yes, safe enough. Perhaps you'll know what it is to be hungry before the month's out, and will be glad enough to leave off your dabbling."

Then he stood up—patted Madge's head—went to the door, and came back again as if seized with a new impulse—shook hands with Raymond, and kissed his little daughter's forehead. "Good-bye, children; take care of yourselves," and he went away. Then Madge came to Raymond's side, and he laid his head upon her shoulder with a low piteous cry.

"Hush, darling, hush," she whispered. "It will all come right, don't fear. Let us trust God; he has given you this talent for painting, and he will teach you how to use it. There's a whole month, and who knows what may happen in that time! You may become famous." She went on earnestly; but he took no notice—only pressed his hands tighter and closer over his throbbing forehead.

"Raymond, I know you will be an artist—a great one—some day," whispered Madge.

[26] "Never, never, if I am to be ground down in a shop," he groaned.

THE LITTLE COMFORTER.

[27] "You will, you will," she answered, throwing her arm round his neck. "If you keep up a brave, strong heart, and are not discouraged. Nobody can do anything if they lose heart."

"But to be always, always working, and to have no success. O Madge, it is so hard and bitter!"

"No success! Why, Raymond, if you'd only heard how the errand-boys praised the way you had done the workman's basket of tools in the *Welcome*. It was a success in itself."

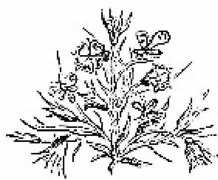
In spite of himself Raymond laughed, and Madge was satisfied. She went on brightly. "Some day I shall be so proud to be the sister of Mr. Raymond Leicester, the great painter, whose picture will be one of the gems in the Royal Academy some year or other; and we shall glory in you."

"Not he—never; he would *never* care."

"Oh, he would—he would; and if he didn't, you would be mine—all mine," she added softly, as she laid her hand on his arm.

[28] Raymond looked up suddenly. "Madge, you are a witch, I think. I wonder what those men do who have no sisters—poor fellows;" and then he kissed her.

There was a glad light in Madge's eyes then. He so seldom did this, except for good-night and good-morning, that she knew what it meant. She was very silent for a few minutes, then sprang up, exclaiming, "Now we must have tea, and then you have your etching to do, and I am going to pay up the rent, and then I'll read to you, and do my sums."



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[29]

CHAPTER III.

THE FEVER.

ND Raymond did work. Madge watched him with hopeful pride, and seldom stirred from his side. Their small store of money was nearly gone, and there seemed but little likelihood of a fresh supply.

Raymond's hopes were bound up in the picture he was then engaged upon. If only he could finish that, he felt sure that he could sell it. There was a feverish light in his eyes, a burning flush upon his cheeks, while he worked. He spoke seldom; but Madge saw him raise his hand sometimes to his forehead as if in pain. The picture was nearly done, and Raymond looked up for a minute one morning, and saw that the sun was shining brightly [30] down on the sea of roofs and chimney-pots which for the most part constituted the view from their garret window, and then he said to Madge, "Go out, and get a breath of fresh air; it is stifling work for you to be always up here."

"Shan't you want me to mix your colours, Raymond?"

"No; go. I should rather you went."

She put on her bonnet, and then stood for one moment looking at his work. "I wish you would come with me; it would do you good, and rest you."

Raymond gave a wearying sigh. "No rest for me yet, Madge. I must toil on until this is done. I can't rest when I go to bed. I am thinking all night when will the morning come, that I may be at work again. No, no; there is no rest until this is sold. Do you know that in a day or two we shall be penniless and starving?"

Madge looked up at him with a smile. "No, Raymond, we shan't be left to starve; don't fear."

Raymond looked doubtful, and went on with his work, and Madge went out. [31]

She felt very lonely and sad as she wandered through the crowded, busy streets, and gazed into the faces of the passers-by, all were so completely wrapped up in their own concerns. None knew her history; none would care to know it. What did it matter to any one of that moving throng if she and Raymond died?

Almost unconsciously she bent her steps in the direction of the colour-shop. One hurried glance she cast at the window, and then turned away with a sickening heart.

Raymond's picture was still there.

She went home, and ascended the long flight of stairs with a slow, hesitating step. For a moment she paused at the door of their own room; she heard a groan within, and hastily went in. Her first glance was directed to the easel in the window; but Raymond was not there. Another look discovered him lying on the floor with his head pressed against the ground.

"Raymond, Raymond!" she cried as she threw herself down by him. "Dear Raymond, what is the matter?" [32]

THE COLOUR-SHOP WINDOW.

"O Madge, my head, my head! I could not bear it any longer."

[33] He raised it for a moment, and Madge caught a sight of his fevered cheeks and heavy tired eyes. She thought for an instant what was best to be done, then ran down-stairs to call their landlady. Now, Mrs. Smiley was in the midst of her cooking operations, and as she bent over her large saucepan, she did not like being interrupted by the sudden appearance of one of her top lodgers.

"What do you want? Don't you see I'm busy?" she said roughly, as she turned a very red face round from the fire to Madge.

But Madge, in her terror for Raymond, gained courage. "If you please, ma'am, do come and see Raymond; he is so ill, and I don't know what to do."

"And who's to take this saucepan off, I should like to know, or baste the meat? Do you think I'm to be at the beck and call of top-flight lodgers, who only pay five shillings a-week, and that not regular. I can tell you then that you're in the wrong box, young woman, so you'd best be off."

Madge turned to go, but still stood irresolute, and Mrs. Smiley, looking round to enforce her injunction, caught a sight of her wistful, terrified face. The little girl went [34] away as directed; but as soon as she was gone, Mrs. Smiley opened the door of the back-kitchen, [35] and called out, "Here, you Polly, come up here, and keep an eye on this dinner. Now keep basting the meat properly; for if it's burnt, I'll baste you when I come back;" and then she followed Madge up-stairs. She found her kneeling beside Raymond, supporting his head upon her

shoulder.

"Well, Mr. Raymond, so you don't find yourself very well!"

AN UNGRACIOUS LANDLADY.

A groan was her only answer, and Madge looked imploringly at her.

"You'd best go to bed, sir, I'm thinking.—Miss Madge, my dear, you're in for a bit of nursing. I'm afeard it's a fever that's on him."

Mrs. Smiley's character was changed. She had children of her own, and there were soft spots in her heart still, though the outer coat, formed by her worldly business, was hard and rough. She had known what sickness was, and she was rather a skilful nurse, so from that time whatever spare minutes she had were devoted to Raymond. [36]

Poor little Madge! The days that followed were very sad ones. Her brother grew worse and worse, and she sat by his bedside listening to his wild ravings of delirium, in vain endeavouring to soothe him, or to allay his burning thirst.

Their scanty supply of money was exhausted; and many little comforts which Raymond needed, his sister was unable to procure for him. "I must do something; this cannot go on," she thought; and then an idea flashed into her mind, which she longed to carry out. She went over to the easel, and took down Raymond's picture. It was very nearly finished. "I will go and see if Mr. Jeffery will buy it," she said; and covering it under her little cloak, she set out.

Very timidly she presented herself at the counter, and produced her picture. Mr. Jeffery looked at it. "This is not finished," he remarked.

"No, sir; Raymond was too ill to finish it."

"I cannot take it in this state," said the picture-dealer. "It will never sell." [37]

"Then you can do nothing for us?" asked Madge sadly. [38]

NO HOPE.

"Nothing. Stay, though;" and he began turning over the leaves of his memorandum-book. "Yes, you are the child. Well, Mr. Smith—Mr. Herbert Smith—the great artist, wants to see you. Here, take this direction and give it to him when you find his house;" and Mr. Jeffery hastily wrote a few lines upon a piece of paper, and handed it to Madge.

Mr. Herbert Smith, the great artist. Yes! she had heard Raymond speak of his pictures—she would go; there was a gleam of hope before her; she would take Raymond's picture to him; he could not fail to discover how clever it was—Raymond could only be appreciated by master minds, and this was one of them. It was a dull wet day, and the streets looked dark and dingy; the rain was driving in her face, and her heart was with Raymond in the garret, where he was tossing in restless fever; but the brave little maiden went on steadily, until she reached Mr. Herbert Smith's door.

She rang at the bell, and asked to see the artist. The servant, well accustomed to receiving every variety in the way of visitors to his master, models, &c., &c., ushered her up a long stair into the studio. [39]

Why, there sat the gentleman who had once looked so kindly at her in the picture-shop; she had often wondered who he could be.

"A little girl to see you, sir," said the servant, and then withdrew. Mr. Smith was reading his newspaper, seated in an easy-chair, arrayed in dressing-gown and slippers, with a cigar in his mouth, and a cup of fragrant coffee by his side.

He turned round impatiently, but when he saw Madge, his expression changed to one of easy good-humour.

"Mr. Jeffery—please, sir, he told me to come to you," said little Madge, while she looked down on the ground.

"Oh, yes, I remember; and so you have come to give me a sitting?"

"A what, sir?"

"A sitting, my child; to let me paint your eyes and hair."

"Please sir, I came to show you this; Raymond's ill;" and she held out the cherished picture. [40]

"Ah, yes; lay it down. I'll look at it presently; but, meanwhile, I must lose no time in transferring you to canvas. Now, then, take your place, so; your head [41]

a little more turned to the light." And in a few minutes, with easy, rapid strokes, the artist was progressing in his work.

THE GREAT ARTIST.

"And what is your name, my little girl?" he asked presently.

"Madge Leicester," she replied softly.

"Your eyes have grown sadder than they were when I last saw you, Madge!" They were very sad then, for large tears were gathering in them, and rolling down the thin white cheeks.

She raised her hand and dashed them away.

"What is it all about?" said Mr. Smith.

"O Raymond, Raymond!" she faltered.

"Is Raymond your brother?"

"Yes."

"Have you a father and mother?"

"My mother is dead, and my father is away, and Raymond is ill."

"Poor child, where do you live?"

Madge told him.

"And does no one care for you?"

"Oh yes, Raymond does." [42]

"But I mean, does no one do anything for you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Smiley is minding him while I'm out!"

"How did you come to leave him to-day?"

A quick flush came to Madge's cheek; she was ashamed to confess their poverty; but after a moment she added, "I wanted to sell Raymond's picture."

"Does Raymond like painting?"

Madge's face lit up with a sudden brightness. "Yes, yes! he loves it—he delights in it—he says it is his life."

"Poor boy, he does not know what up-hill work it is; he thinks it is mere fancy play, I suppose?"

"I don't think he does, sir."

"Has he ever had teaching?"

"Only a few lessons from an artist who had the down-stair rooms in the last house where we lodged."

Mr. Smith came over suddenly, and unfastened Madge's hair; it fell in golden ripples all over her neck. The light was shining upon it, and the sunbeams danced about it, making it in some places to resemble— [43]

"In gloss and hue, the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within;"

and in others there were luxuriant masses of rich deep brown, clustering in curls about her shoulders. For a moment the artist stood lost in admiration; then he silently resumed his work. It was an enjoyment to him, as Madge could see from the pleasant smile that played around his lips, and the kindly look in his eyes, when he glanced at her; but the poor, little, anxious sister was only longing for the time to be over, that she might return to Raymond's side; and when at last Mr. Smith laid down his brushes and pallette, saying, "I will not keep you longer to-day," she sprang to her feet joyfully.

"Will you come again soon, Madge?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, if I can!"

"Well, this is for your first sitting;" and he held her out half-a-crown. For a moment she hesitated, then she thought of Raymond, and the nourishment he so much needed, and she took it. "And about the picture, sir?" she asked wistfully. [44]

"Oh, yes, about the picture," said Mr. Smith, taking it up; but at this moment he was interrupted; the servant announced a visitor, and he had only time to add, "I will tell you about the picture the next time you come, little Madge; good-bye;" and then she had to go away.

Back through the dreary streets, to that dreary home; back to that garret room, to that lonely watching, to that brother who lay so near the borders of the grave, though Madge knew it not. How often we pass in the crowded thoroughfare some sad suffering hearts, hurrying back to

scenes such as these; it may be that they touch us in the crowd, and yet we know nothing of the burden which they carry; God help them! Let us thank him if we have light hearts ourselves; and let us remember that each load that we lighten leaves one less sad face and heavy heart in the world about us.

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[45]

CHAPTER IV.

THE FRIEND.

WEEK passed, and Mr. Smith saw nothing more of Madge. Raymond had become worse, and she never left him.

It was Saturday evening, about five o'clock, when Mrs. Smiley was called up from the kitchen by hearing that a gentleman wanted to speak to her. She came up, smoothing down her apron with her hands, which were not of the cleanest.

"Do two children of the name of Leicester live here?"

"Yes, sir, surely; at least there were two of 'em a couple of hours ago, but I can't rightly say whether the lad's alive yet." [46]

"What! is he so ill, then?"

"Ay, ay, sir, ill enough, I warrant."

"I will go up to them."

"Very well, sir; I'm sure if you're a friend that'll do something for them, I'm right glad to see you, for they sorely need one."

Mr. Smith, for it was he, followed Polly's guidance to Raymond's room, then thanking her, he knocked at the door himself, and entered.

Madge was leaning over the sick boy, holding a glass of water to his lips; and as she looked round, Mr. Smith thought he had never seen a face so strangely and sadly altered as hers. It had lost nearly all its childishness—it looked so old, and womanly, with a weight of care in it that was pitiable to see; and yet, with all this, it was so calm and still, so composed, that any one would have imagined that her one thought was how to nurse her patient. And so it was. Madge felt that a great deal depended upon her fortitude and self-control. Had she lost this, she could not have attended upon Raymond; and though she was only a weak little girl in herself, God gave her the [47] strength she needed. She did not spend her time in idly fretting, or in gloomy thoughts about the future; she just did the duties that came in her way, one by one, and left the rest trustfully to God.

One glance was sufficient to show Mr. Smith how ill the boy was. The wildness of the fever was past, and he had sunk into a state of almost complete lethargy.

"Madge," said the artist, "I came to see why you had not come again to me."

Madge only pointed to Raymond's sharpened features resting on the pillow; it was excuse enough.

"He is very ill," said Mr. Smith. "I never saw any one looking more ill."

"Mrs. Smiley says he is dying," said Madge in a low tone of forced calm; and she repeated the last words sadly to herself, "dying, O Raymond!"

"When was the doctor here?"

"We have had no doctor, sir."

"Why not? That has not been wise, Madge." [48]

"We could not afford it, sir."

"There was the parish doctor." [49]

"I knew nothing about him, sir; and I had nobody to tell me."

"Poor child, poor child!" and the artist was feeling the boy's pulse. Raymond opened his eyes, and seeing a man by his side, said faintly, "I've failed, father—I'll go

THE ARTIST'S VISIT.

to the shop—it's not done!"

"Hush, hush, my boy; we must not talk now." And then Mr. Smith beckoned Madge into the next room. She followed him silently, and for a moment or two her new friend stood looking into her pale, troubled face. Then he laid his hand on her head, and there were tears in his eyes as he spoke.

"I have a little daughter at home, Madge, who is about your age; and if she were in trouble—;" suddenly his voice faltered, and he added hurriedly, "may God grant that my Lilian may never be left as you are."

Madge lifted her eyes to his face, then clasping his hand, she said, "Oh, sir, save Raymond; I will love you always, if you will save him. Oh, do not let him die!"

"Keep up your brave little heart; I will do my best. Madge, if your brother lives, he will some day be a great artist." [50]

Again that glad, joyful light came into Madge's eyes, which the artist had seen there once before. "I know it! I know it!" she cried. "Did you like the picture, sir?"

"Yes, my child. I saw unmistakable signs of genius in it. I am buying it myself, little Madge; will you receive the purchase-money?"

"No, no; wait till Raymond can have it himself. He must live!—he will, he will!"

"Hush, my child; there is One above who only knows about that; he must do as seemeth to him best. Now, Madge, go back to him; I will go and get a friend of mine to come and see him."

Madge did as he bid her; and in about an hour Mr. Smith returned with a doctor.

He looked very grave when he had examined his patient, and then beckoned Mr. Smith away.

"I have very little hope of him," he said sorrowfully; "the prostration of strength is fearful; I fear he will never rally; but he must have stimulants now, and plenty of nourishment;—we must do what we can." [51]

"Yes," said Mr. Smith warmly; "and if you save him, Morton, you will have saved one who will be a great man some day. That boy has an artist's soul within him; he will rise to fame."

"I should like to save him for the sake of that little patient maiden who is watching him. What a touching face the child has, and how she seemed to be hanging on every look of mine!"

"Poor little Madge, she loves him better than herself."

For a few days, Raymond hung between life and death; then Dr. Morton's face looked even graver than before. Madge saw that he had no hope.

On Sunday evening, she was sitting beside her brother, watching the fluttering breath, which seemed every instant as if it must cease altogether; when suddenly Raymond opened his eyes. "Madge."

"Yes, dear." [52]

"I've been asleep a long time, and I'm so tired."

"You must try to sleep again, darling Raymond."

A bewildered look passed over the boy's face, then he said eagerly, "Madge, am I going to die?"

She put her face close down to his, and said gently, "We must not talk now, dear; try to sleep again."

He was silent for a few minutes, then the words came thick and fast.

"Madge, I've not been a good brother to you; I meant to have been, but I have thought and thought of nothing but myself. I ought to have gone to the shop. I ought not to have let you want. O Madge! if I might but live, if I might but live!" and then tears fell one by one down the thin, pale cheeks, and dropped on Madge's hand.

"Please, dear Raymond, lie quiet; the doctor said you must be very quiet."

"But, Madge, it doesn't signify; I'm dying, I know I am, and I must speak to you!" he said, raising his voice, and speaking with all the energy of those who know that they are soon to be silent for evermore; "what will you do? what will become of you?" [53]

"Don't fear for me, dear brother," answered Madge, who was crying bitterly.

"No, you love and fear God, and he will take care of you; I know he will! O Madge, I wish I had loved him as you have; but I've been a bad boy, and now it is too late, too late;—if I might but live!" The words were spoken in a low, vehement whisper, and a smothered groan followed them.

"Raymond, our dear Saviour loves you. Think of him, do not think about yourself," and Madge's

face became calm as she spoke.

A smile came over her brother's countenance, he closed his eyes and feebly pressed her hand. Then he lay very still and motionless. Once only his lips moved. Madge thought he said, "Mother!" Then all was silent as the grave, except the ticking of the clock in the next room. Madge seemed counting every swing of the pendulum. They seemed like the last grains of sand in the hour-glass of her brother's life, and his breath was getting shorter. At length she could hardly [54] find out whether he breathed or not. She thought of what the doctor said to Mr. Smith: "If he does not rally, there will probably be a short period of consciousness before he dies, and then he will go off quietly." She supposed that period was over now, and Raymond would never speak to her again,—Raymond, her pride, her glory. He was slipping away from her, and soon she should have no brother. Poor little Madge! Years afterwards she could recall that scene more vividly than any other in her life—the look of everything around her; the lazy flies creeping up the window-pane, and one or two which were buzzing about her head; the glass standing on the chair by Raymond's side, which she had held to his lips but a few minutes before, and which she knew he would never drink from again; the way in which she had smoothed the bed-clothes and moved his pillow; and that still, white face, so inexpressibly dear to her, that rested upon it. There was a step beside her, and looking round she saw Mrs. Smiley. The good woman started as she saw Raymond. Then drawing Madge away, she said tenderly, "Poor lamb, come in here now;" and she [55] tried to induce her to leave the room.

"No, no! I must stay," Madge said vehemently, and she sprang to Raymond's side. "Mrs. Smiley, he isn't dead."

"Then he looks like it. Come away, Miss Madge."

"But he isn't. He breathes still."

Yes, there was just a feeble pulsation, so feeble that it was hardly discernible, but it brought new hope to Madge's heart. She moistened his lips with a stimulant, then knelt beside him, with her eyes fixed upon him in intense anxiety. The moments seemed like hours. But at last there came a little short sigh, and then the breathing became more soft and regular. The lines of the face were relaxed, and Raymond was sleeping peacefully.

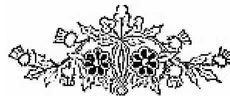
"If he sleep, he will do well," were words spoken long ago. And so it was.

When the doctor came again, he pronounced his patient better, and told Madge that he might recover.

[56] That night, about twelve o'clock, as she was sitting beside the bed, keeping watch, Madge heard a low, weak voice saying her name. She bent down her head, and Raymond whispered, "Madge, I have had such a happy, beautiful dream, about my painting. Ask God that I may live."

"Perhaps your dream will come true, darling, for the picture is sold," she answered gladly. Then she feared that she had said what was unwise, and that she had excited him. But she was satisfied when she saw the quiet smile of satisfaction that stole over his features.

"Now rest, dear Raymond," she added, as she kissed him, "you will yet live to be my glory."



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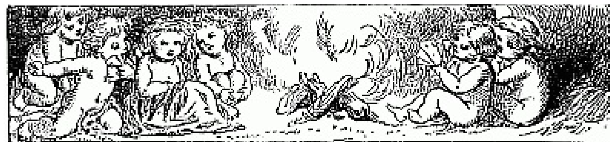

CHAPTER V.

THE INVITATION.

WHAT a pleasant sight it was to see Madge's face, when Raymond was able to sit up. It was still quiet and calm, but there was a deep gladness in it that was beautiful; and the thoughtful care for her brother, the way in which every wish or desire of his was forestalled, showed plainly that her love had rather been increased than diminished by that long nursing. She made allowance for all the fretfulness of convalescence, which is so prevalent after severe illness—especially in men or boys, who feel the depression of extreme weakness peculiarly trying—and was always patient and bright. One day Raymond, after watching her for some minutes gliding about the room and making things [58] comfortable for him, said to her, "Madge, which is the best life, yours or mine?"

"Mine at present; and yours is going to be," she answered, with her own quiet smile.

"I've begun to doubt that. Do you know, I've nearly come to the conclusion that I would change with you, and that your unselfish life is more noble than all the fame and glory I could heap together."

Madge stopped in her work, and looking earnestly at her brother, replied,—

"If that fame and glory is the *only* object of your life, Raymond, it is not what I thought and hoped it was going to be."

"What do you mean?" he asked, half laughing at her gravity.

"I can't put it as plainly as I want to do; but, Raymond, I mean that your painting will not be only for your own glory, if you use it rightly."

Raymond was silent, and his face became very thoughtful. "Madge," he said presently, "I don't want that arrowroot. Come over here." [59]

"Wait one moment, dear. I know my duty as nurse better than that. If I leave this too long it will get quite thin, and then you will call it 'horrid stuff,' and not taste it."

Raymond laughed. "You are getting quite tyrannical, Madge. You take an unfair advantage of my weakness."

"I must make the most of my brief authority," she answered merrily; and in another minute she had brought the little tray to his side. "Now what is it, Raymond?"

"Well, Madge, I've been thinking a great deal, and I've come to the conclusion that it's right for me to go to the shop. I can't rise to fame in painting without some teaching, and I can't get that, and I must earn money for you."

"But, Raymond, that picture is sold. You know Mr. Smith brought the money the other day. Why should not others be sold also?"

"And what are you to do meantime, little woman?"

Madge was amused at the grave elder-brother tone, and answered, "As I have done before. But let us consult Mr. Smith." [60]

"Very well; but he can't know both sides of the question. Nobody but an artist could understand what it is to me to give up painting—not even you, Madge."

Now Mr. Smith had charged Madge to keep it a strict secret from Raymond that he was an artist. He wished to watch him quietly, for there was a little scheme of benevolence in the good man's head, which he wanted to carry out if possible. Many a time had Madge found herself on the point of telling Raymond about the sitting, and Mr. Smith's studio, and the lovely pictures about it; but she kept her counsel bravely, and had her reward. Raymond often questioned her as to how she had made acquaintance with Mr. Smith, but she always told him it was through Mr. Jeffery, and turned the conversation; and by degrees his curiosity abated, he became content to receive him as an old friend, and learned to look forward to his visits as one of his greatest treats.

But with this secret in her possession, it was hardly to be wondered at that Madge smiled when Raymond deplored Mr. Smith's probable want of sympathy in his favourite pursuit; but she only said, "He must have some taste for painting, or he would not have bought your picture." [61]

"You little flatterer! he probably did that because he had a fancy for you."

At this moment Mrs. Smiley entered the room. She was the bearer of a letter which had just been left by the postman.

It bore a foreign post-mark, and the children knew that it was their father's hand-writing. It contained but a few lines, evidently written in haste.

> "My Dear Children,—I have got an appointment abroad, which will detain me for a long time,—for how long I cannot say. I wish I could have you with me—but this is impossible. I send you £5. It is all I can do at present. Raymond must give up his dabbling, and set to work like a man. I hope you will get on well. I shall see you some day.
>
> —Your affectionate father, Raymond Leicester."

And this was all! They had looked forward to his coming home. They had watched for him day by day. In Raymond's heart there was a strange yearning to see the face of his only living parent; to know if he would be glad that he had been restored, when he was so near death; and these few hurried words were all! They read them through several times. Then Madge clasped her hands, and hid her face with a low cry. [62]

"Don't, Madge, don't," said Raymond, though his own voice was trembling with emotion. "I cannot bear to see you like that."

"O Raymond, will he never come back?"

"Yes; don't you see he says that he will, some day. Meanwhile, we will do our best."

"*You* will never leave me, Raymond?"

"Never, if I can help it," he said, laying his long thin fingers on her hair.

"Poor father! Raymond, I did want to see him so much."

"So did I."

They did not speak much more. For some time they only sat holding each other's hands, and thinking mournfully of the future. Everything seemed very dark and gloomy that evening, both within and without. A heavy rain was falling, and the sight of wet roofs and chimney-pots gleaming in the twilight is never very enlivening. Raymond at last gave a long, deep sigh, at the sound of which Madge started up. [63]

"That won't do, Raymond. I'm forgetting my duty as nurse, and it is very bad for a patient to get vapourish! Oh, here's Mr. Smith!"

He came in, in his own pleasant, friendly way, but his quick eye soon discovered that something was wrong, for Madge's quiet little face was troubled, and Raymond looked tired and moody.

Mr. Smith sat down, and began in a lively tone,—"Well, Raymond, my boy, how have things gone to-day? are you any stronger?"

"Not much, sir," he answered mournfully.

"And I don't expect you will be, while you are up here. You want change of air to set you up."

"I must get well as soon as possible," he said, with a very determined look.

"You must not be in too great a hurry. People want a great deal of patching up after an illness like yours."

"I must be at work!" said Raymond.

"Yes, when you are well. What is the cause of this extreme impatience? You were quite content yesterday to lie back in your chair and let Madge nurse you and pet you to her heart's content." [64]

Raymond answered by holding out his father's letter. Mr. Smith read it silently. He made no remark when he had finished it, but handed it back to the boy.

"And now, sir, what are we to do?"

"Get well and strong, my dear boy, in the first place."

"But about the shop, sir? My father said the place was ready, and I could take it."

"You are not fit for it at present."

"At present!" Then Mr. Smith thought he ought to go when he was well! The thought was very bitter, and Raymond bent his head in his hands, and tears came dropping one by one through his fingers. They came from his extreme weakness, and he was very much ashamed of them, so much ashamed that he did not look up until he had banished them. Then Mr. Smith spoke:—

"Little Madge, do you think Raymond is well enough to have a change?" [65]

"There is no place for him to go to, sir," she answered, while there was a quick throb of pain in her heart at the thought of being separated from him.

"I have a country-house in the Isle of Wight. Will you both come and pay me a visit there, and see my little daughter Lilian?"

Madge's face lit up instantly. "Raymond, do you hear? The country—the country—and the beautiful sea—and you will get strong there!"

"But I don't know how we could do it, sir?" said Raymond doubtfully, but in a tone of gladness which showed how much he liked the proposition.

"You must let me be your father for the time, and I will see to it all," replied Mr. Smith kindly. "Mrs. Nurse, don't you think it would be the best thing possible for your patient?"

"Oh, yes," she answered gladly.

"Then you must be ready by the end of next week," said Mr. Smith; "and consider that it is a settled thing. Lilian will be in such delight."

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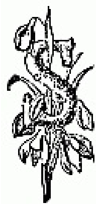
[66]

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURPRISE.

EAPOINT was beautifully situated on a headland, which commanded a view of the boundless sea on one side, and on the other a panoramic view of the fertile Isle of Wight. And this was the summer home of the artist's little daughter. Her governess, Miss Mortimer, had charge of her, but her father came backwards and forwards to see her constantly; for Lilian was all that was now left to him in this world to love except his art, and the days when he came were the brightest of his little girl's life. She knew that he would take her on long rambling walks, and let her clamber about amongst the rocks and little bays and creeks in which she delighted; and that, when she was tired, there was always a [67] comfortable resting-place ready for her in that father's arms; and loving, tender words, which she never heard from any one but him. In his little daughter the artist found his ideal of childish beauty realized. The exquisitely shaped oval face; the large eyes of dark blue, through which the loving little heart looked out at him, and in which, though generally sparkling with fun and merriment, there was sometimes a dreamy intentness, as if they beheld a world more beautiful than any which his art or imagination created; the perfectly formed nose and mouth; the arched forehead, shaded with golden brown hair; the delicate complexion; and the witching charm of the graceful little figure, were a perpetual feast to the artist-father. Miss Mortimer complained bitterly that nothing would make Lilian behave with the due propriety of a young lady; but to her father there was a winsomeness in her free, gay manner, that made up for her wild spirits, which sometimes carried her past the bounds which the worthy governess laid down for her. [68]

It was one of those glorious evenings in early summer, when all nature is bathed in that soft golden light which precedes sunset, and little Lilian was watching for her father's arrival; for it was Friday, and he generally came on that day to stay till Monday.

The eager child had not long to wait; she heard the well-known footstep on the gravel, and she bounded out of the door.

"Well, my Lilian."

"Well, papa." And the soft arms were thrown about his neck as the father stooped to kiss his little daughter.

"All right here, Fairy?"

"Yes, all right. And Miss Mortimer has got so many good things about me to tell you; and isn't it fine? Won't you take me for a beautiful long walk, papa?"

"Yes, darling. Shall we go now? I will just speak to Miss Mortimer, and then we will set off; and I will ask them to defer tea until we return."

"Beautiful!" said Lilian. "I will go and get my hat. Miss Mortimer is in the school-room, papa."

EAGER WATCHING.

[69] Mr. Smith walked across the grass, and entered the school-room by a folding glass-door that opened upon the lawn. Lilian returned presently; her shady straw hat fastened with blue ribbons, a little basket on her arm, and her face [70] glowing with pleasure and excitement.

"Now, Miss Mortimer, you said you would tell papa about my lessons to-day."

The governess, a tall staid lady of about fifty, whose face betokened that her mind was full of grammars and dictionaries, smiled a little, and answered, "I have been informing your father of the marked improvement which you have lately made in your studies."

"Yes, Lily, I have heard all about it," said Mr. Smith, looking down fondly into the bright little face that was raised to his. "And I have been telling Miss Mortimer of a treat that I have in store for you."

"What is it, papa?" she cried eagerly.

"Oh, I am not going to tell you, until we get to your favourite seat among the rocks."

"Then don't let us lose another minute, papa," said Lilian, and they set off.

Away over the breezy hill-side which overhung the sea; away through the furze, the gorse, and the large brake-ferns; away until they had left the pretty villa far behind them, and found themselves in the small sheltered bay where Mr. Smith's boat, the *White Lily*, was moored. [71]

"It is very calm, may we go out for a little way, papa?"

"Yes, dear," said the artist, as he unfastened the padlock which moored the boat. Then he placed Lilian in the stern, and sprung in himself, taking the oars, and pushing away from the strand.

The setting sun shed a flood of glory over the quiet bay, with its brilliantly coloured rocks, and its shore covered with white pebbles, and fell upon the little boat that danced over the rippling sea, lingering lovingly on the beautiful face of the artist's child as she bent forward to claim the promised secret.

"Now, papa, what is the treat?"

"Well, Lily, you know I have told you about Raymond and Madge."

"Yes, papa; and I was going to have asked how Raymond was, and whether he liked the fruit I sent him, only the thought of the treat put it all out of my head."

"He is much better, darling. And what would you say if you were soon to see him?" [72]

"Oh, papa!"

"I have asked Madge and him to come here, that he may recover his strength; and I have come on to make all preparations. They will be here to-morrow."

A BEAUTIFUL SCENE.

"Oh, joy, joy!" cried Lilian. "Mayn't I have a whole holiday, papa?"

"Yes, to-morrow you shall; and after that Madge shall do her lessons with you."

"And Raymond too, papa?"

"No, darling. Raymond will do his lessons with me." [73]

"Shall you teach him to paint beautiful pictures as you do, papa?"

"Yes, I hope so," replied the artist, smiling.

Lilian drew a long-sigh of contentment.

"I do wish it were to-morrow! Will you take them out in the boat, papa?"

"Raymond will not be well enough at first; but by-and-by, I hope, we shall have some grand excursions."

"And that dear little Madge that you have told me about; oh, papa, I shall love her so much! Do you think she will love me?"

The fond father thought within himself that it would not be very easy for her to help doing so; but he only answered, "I think she will, Lily."

And thus they talked in the pleasant evening light, until the red sun had dipped down behind the hills on the further coast; and then Mr. Smith moored the boat, and the father and daughter walked home in the red glow which the sun had left behind it.

The rest of the evening passed away very slowly to Lilian, she was looking forward so eagerly [74] to the morrow; and it was not until she had planned and replanned every kind of pleasure that was likely to be given to her, during the visit of her friends, and wondered over and over again what they would be like that sleep came over her; and before she knew anything more, the much longed-for morning had arrived.

Mr. Smith had gone to meet the children at their landing-place; and about two o'clock Lilian heard the sound of the carriage-wheels coming near. Then a fit of shyness came over her; and she hung back, so that it was not until she heard her father's voice calling her that she went to the door, just in time to see him helping out of the carriage a tall, delicate-looking boy of about sixteen, followed by a quiet-looking little girl of twelve.

"Here are your new friends, Lily; come and speak to them," said Mr. Smith.

Then Lilian stepped forward, and shook hands with Raymond, and kissed Madge. Madge returned the kiss; but she seemed intent on watching Raymond, as if she had no other thought than to take care of him. [75]

"I will take Raymond to his room, and he had better lie down for a while," said Mr. Smith.

The boy smiled faintly, but he was too tired to speak; so his friend and Madge helped him to the pretty room which had been prepared for him, overlooking the sea.

He lay on the bed with his eyes fixed on the water; but very soon, overcome with the fatigue of the journey, he fell asleep; and when, a little while after, Madge stole softly into the room, she found him slumbering peacefully. For an instant she bent over him, and the dark earnest eyes were filled with tears of thankfulness that he was spared to her, and was likely to recover health

and strength in this beautiful home. Then little Madge drew the curtain across the window to exclude the light from his eyes, and left the room as quietly as she had entered it.

She found Lilian waiting for her at the foot of the stairs; and before long the two children had become quite confidential, and were rapidly making friends. [76]

In the evening Raymond was allowed to come down-stairs, and to lie on the sofa in the pretty drawing-room.

Lilian came to his side with a handful of bright-coloured geraniums and white roses. "Papa says you like pretty things; and he told me I might bring you these."

Raymond took them with a bright smile. They were not as beautiful as the child who gave them, glowing as the colours were.

"Are you better?" said Lilian.

"Yes, much better, thank you; I shall soon be quite well."

"Do you like being here?"

"Very much; and so does Madge," he answered, laying his hand on hers as she knelt beside him.

"We are going to have great fun when you are well again; and I am to have shorter lessons; and Madge is going to do lessons with me; and you will do lessons with papa. He says so."

Raymond lay very still, sometimes looking out at the sea, sometimes at the "airy fairy Lilian," by his side, sometimes at the beautiful pictures around the room. "I wonder who painted that one!" he said, pointing to a likeness of a lovely lady and child. [77]

"It is mamma and me," said Lilian, a little sadly; and then pointing to one that hung near it, she said, "I like that picture better than any."

RAYMOND AND LILIAN.

"Whose is it?" [78]

"It is done by the great artist, Herbert Smith," she answered, laughing.

Raymond looked at it with eager delight; and at this moment Lilian's father entered the room.

"Chatterbox, I hope you are not tiring Raymond;" and he looked kindly and inquiringly at the invalid.

"Not the least, sir; I was thinking that you are fortunate to possess so many of the paintings of Herbert Smith. How beautiful they are!" and the young artist's eye kindled with enthusiasm.

His new friend smiled.

"I am very fond of painting, Raymond."

"You must be, sir, from the way you have talked to me about it, and from your having such beautiful pictures. Do you paint yourself?"

"Why, Raymond," said Lilian, "don't you know—;" but a warning look from her father stopped her saying anything more. She only looked over at Madge, with her large blue eyes full of laughter.

Then her father bent down over the boy, and said, "I paint a great deal, Raymond." [79]

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Raymond eagerly. "Then you will not think it wrong of me to want to be an artist."

"So far from thinking it wrong, Raymond, I am going to help you in it. I am going to get you taught."

A bright flush came over Raymond's face as he looked up for an explanation.

"Who will teach me, sir?"

"Mr. Herbert Smith."

Raymond started up. "Do you know him, sir? Do you know Mr. Smith, the greatest artist that is living? Is he a relation of yours?"

"Raymond, I am Herbert Smith," said his friend kindly.

A look of wondering doubt passed over the boy's face, which quickly changed to one of intense veneration, almost of reverence, at feeling himself in the presence of this master mind. Then, as

the thought of all his friend's former kindness came over him, and of this great privilege before him, he covered his face with his hands; and the tears, which he vainly tried to conceal, fell through his thin fingers. [80]

THE SURPRISE.

Madge bent down over him. "Raymond, dear Raymond, look up. Do not be sad now, it is all joy."

"I am so glad, I cannot help it, Madge," said Raymond. "All my brightest dreams coming true. I shall be an artist yet." [81]

Mr. Smith turned away his head, his heart deeply moved by the boy's delight; but Lilian could not restrain her gladness.

"And did you not know that papa was the great Herbert Smith?" she asked. "What fun! Did you know, Madge?"

"Yes," said Madge, looking shyly into Raymond's face.

"O Madge, how *could* you let me go on talking to Mr. Smith about my poor little paintings without telling me."

"He told me not to tell you," she said.

"Yes," said Mr. Smith; "I wanted, Raymond, to watch you for a little while, before you knew who I was. I wanted to see if your whole heart was really devoted to painting, and that you were likely to rise in your profession, before I offered you assistance. I am satisfied; and now shake hands: if you are willing to endure a life of labour, I think I can promise you success."

"I am willing for anything," said Raymond. And to Madge he whispered, "You shall glory in me some day, little sister."

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[82]

CHAPTER VII.

THE SUCCESS.

ND the day came, after years of patient labour.

The morning sun shone in brightly upon a room, in one of those pleasant villas which abound in the suburbs of London. A party were assembled at breakfast—an old, infirm man, and his son and daughter. The old man was Mr. Leicester, and the other two were Raymond and Madge. Their father had come back to them, broken down in health and spirits. Raymond met him accidentally in the streets of London, and brought him to the little home where he and Madge lived, and they had cared for him tenderly ever since. [83]

We last saw Raymond and Madge almost as children; we find them now grown up. Raymond's character has deepened. He is a great artist, and a great man also—for, added to the depth and strength of mind which the mastery of one subject gives, there were many noble traits in him—and many men now feel themselves privileged if they call Raymond Leicester their friend.

Madge has the same character, and nearly the same face, as she had when a child. She is still Raymond's fireside genius, and a dutiful, tender daughter to her father.

But we were speaking of that sunshiny morning when they were at breakfast. A newspaper lay by Raymond's side, and when he had sipped his coffee he unfolded it. "The Academy is open, Madge," he said quickly; then ran his eye down the long columns.

Madge looked up eagerly, and saw the deepening colour in his cheek as he read. She took up the paper as he laid it down, quickly found the place, and her heart bounded as she read:— [84]

> "But, without doubt, the picture which attracts most notice is the one which Mr. Raymond Leicester exhibits. We feel, as we study it, that we are gazing on the work of a great man, and a deservedly famous artist. He has not belied the early promise of his youth; and that man must have but little taste and good feeling who can move away, after the contemplation of this masterpiece, without feeling that he is the better for having seen it," &c.

The tears blinded Madge, so that she could read no more. But what more was there for her to read? The wish of her life was fulfilled. Raymond was a great artist—the world proclaimed him so—and he was her brother, her pride, and her glory.

THE NOTICE IN THE NEWSPAPER.

[85]

"Little Madge," and Raymond's hand rested with its caressing touch upon her head, "I feel that I owe it all to you."

IN THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

"No, no," she answered, laying her hand upon his. "No, not to me—to Mr. Smith."

"Noble-hearted man!" said Raymond warmly; and then his voice sunk so low that only Madge could hear it. "I will go and ask for Lilian to-day."

"God speed you!" said Madge, smiling through her tears; "and papa and I will go and look at your picture in the Academy."

Anybody who had been in the Royal Academy that morning would have seen a feeble old man leaning on the arm of his daughter, lingering near the picture round which every one thronged. Madge was feasting on their praise of it, and repeating chosen bits to her father, who was very proud of his son now. It was a happy day to Madge, as she looked at the picture, and felt that Raymond was worthy of the praise that was bestowed upon it. She thanked God in her heart that he had spared Raymond's life, and allowed her to see this day. [86]

Raymond gained Lilian for his wife, but he is "Madge's glory" still.

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[87]

TOWN DAISIES.

CHAPTER I.

A LONELY LIFE.

MR. VALENTINE SHIPTON was one of the wealthiest farmers in Dilbury; and yet every one pitied him. He did not ask them to do so, but they could not help it, he seemed so lonely and forlorn in the world. Nobody loved him, unless it might be the big cat which slept by his fireside; and even she did not care very much about him, so that she was left undisturbed in the possession of her own corner. Every day Mr. Shipton walked out and took a survey of his premises, gave directions to his men, and then returned to his [88] large, old-fashioned, dreary-looking parlour, and smoked his pipe over the fire in the winter, or in his front porch in summer. Every Sunday he took down his best hat from its peg, and his large red Prayer Book from the shelf, and walked to the village church; but he never spoke to any one either going or returning, and even the little children shrunk away from him as he passed them.

No one ever came across the threshold of Dilbury Farm, except the tenants to pay their rent to him, or his men to receive their wages; and Mr. Shipton never went away except to the neighbouring fairs, and then he always returned in the evening, looking more moody than ever.

Picture then the astonishment of the old woman called Betty, who cooked his dinner, when her master, one evening in December, suddenly came into the kitchen, and taking his pipe from his mouth, said,—"Betty, I'm going to London to-morrow, and most likely I shall be away for a fortnight!"

[89]

"To London, master! why, that be many miles off!"

"I know it is, Betty; and mind you lock up the house every evening at six o'clock, and never

allow any one across the door-step."

Betty was too much astonished to make any answer, she only smoothed down her apron very vigorously, and gazed at her master as if he were slightly demented. Then a sudden idea occurred to her, and she gasped out, "Then, master, you'll want your best shirts put up; and I must see to it, and get the ruffles done up quick."

Farmer Shipton gave her no answer, but turned round and left the room.

"Sure it's some mistake," said old Betty musingly, as she put her irons in the fire; "he'll change again before to-morrow."

But Mr. Shipton did not change; and the next morning early his gig was at the door, his old-fashioned portmanteau was put into it, and presently the old man himself got in and drove off as fast as the old mare was disposed to go. This part of the journey was all very well, and the farmer felt in better spirits than usual; the sky was bright and clear above him, and the gig went on [90] smoothly enough over the well-made road to the station. But the train was an invention which Mr. Shipton utterly despised, and when he found himself seated in the railway carriage, and in quicker motion than he had ever experienced before, he felt inclined to stop at the first station and go back to Dilbury at a more reasonable pace. However, he had a motive for going to London, and so he resisted his inclination, and was whirled on until he arrived at the great metropolis. After a most confusing search for his portmanteau, he discovered it being whisked off by another man; but having succeeded at last in obtaining possession of it, and taking his place in an omnibus, he was soon rattling away over the paved streets in the direction of Islington. The omnibus deposited him at the corner of a street, and there he found a boy who was willing to carry his luggage to a small and retired row of houses which was his destination.

"Which house?" said the lad when they had reached Crown Row. Farmer Shipton stopped, drew his spectacles from out of their hiding-place under his waistcoat, placed them on his nose, [91] and then felt in his pocket for a leather pocket-book, which generally lived there. When he had opened it, he turned over the papers one by one—receipts for money, farm accounts, bills, &c.—until he came to two letters tied together. These he drew out. One of them was written in a trembling, almost illegible hand, and the other had a deep black edge to it—it was to this one he referred, and then folding it up again and replacing them both in the pocket-book, he turned to the boy and said,—

"No. Five, boy—but stay, I want a lodging first; I must leave my box somewhere before I go out visiting."

"No. Five—and here be lodgings to let," said the boy with a grin.

"The very thing," said the old farmer, rubbing his hands; and then he added to himself, "Now I can watch the state of things quietly, without saying anything to anybody; I'll see what these folks are made of."

He knocked at the door and it was opened by a tidy little girl, whose face would have been [92] pretty if the fresh air of the country had brought the roses into it; at least so Farmer Shipton thought, as she dropped a courtesy to him.

"Lodgings to let here?" he inquired in his own gruff, surly tone.

"Yes, sir."

"Got a room that would do me?"

"Yes, sir; I think so."

"Mother at home, girl, or your missus?"

"Mother is, sir; will you please to walk inside?"

"Put down the box, lad, and here's your sixpence;—shameful charge to make; why, in the part I come from, a bigger lad than you would have got no more for a whole day's work; but it's my belief this London is made up of thieves and fools! Here's a staircase dark as midnight! Why, they say country folks come to town to be *enlightened*—but it doesn't seem much like it! Thieves and fools—thieves and fools. Thieves to do the fools, and fools to be done by the thieves!" Thus grumbling, he got up the first flight of stairs, and paused at a door which the little girl who guided him opened. And here *we* must pause for a moment, just to say that Farmer Shipton, for [93] reasons best known to himself, dropped his name outside the door, and entered that room as Mr. Smith.

A middle-aged woman, dressed in rather rusty black, and wearing a widow's cap, stood up as he appeared, and laid down some very fine needlework, which she was engaged upon. A girl about a year younger than the little maiden who had opened the door, was sitting on a low stool by her mother's side, cutting out a paper-pattern; and a boy of about nine years old was stretched on the rag-mat fast asleep. The room was scrupulously neat, but very poorly furnished; and the old farmer looked round keenly as he stood on the threshold. "Hum!" he said to himself, "no extravagance here, most certainly!" but aloud he said, "I want a lodging; are there any to be had?"

"I have got a nice bedroom, sir; I'll show you," said the widow; "and you can have a small

sitting-room down-stairs; but I only own the upper flight of this house." [94]

"Hum! one room would do!—can I board with you?"

"Well, sir, our lodgers don't generally do that, but—"

"Can't take the room unless I do," he interrupted; "I've not come to London to squander *my* cash, I can tell you."

There was a struggle in the widow's mind; she sorely wanted money, and she might not have another chance of letting the room. This grumpy old man might prove pleasanter on further acquaintance; at any rate he might not be so disagreeable as many another; and with one glance at her little sick boy upon the rug, the mother made up her mind and decided to take her lodger as a boarder.

Mr. Smith was quite satisfied with his room, and though he pretended to grumble at the price asked for it, he really thought it moderate; so he unpacked his portmanteau, laid the shirts which Betty had done up so speedily and well in a drawer, and then sat down once more to read the letters which he had consulted before knocking at the door of No. 5. Shall we read them, too? it [95] may, perhaps, give us some clue to the old man's secret.

The first, as we said before, was written in a trembling hand, and hardly legible:—

> "My Dear Father,—If I had strength and health to do it, I would come to you, and never leave off asking your pardon until you had given it. Father, I am dying, and these few words are the prayer of a dying man. It was wrong to leave you, even though I didn't like the country, and longed for the great city—it was wrong to leave you all alone in your sorrow. If Val had lived he would have been a better son to you than me—may God forgive me. You will get this, father, when perhaps it is too late; but if you have any pity, any love left for your boy, come to me once more—*once more*, father! I am leaving my wife and four children quite unprovided for; will you be a father to them? I do not ask it for *my* sake, but for their helplessness—the fatherless and the widow—"

Here the trembling hand had failed, and a blot of ink showed that the pen had fallen from the writer's hand; it was taken up to add,—

> "Come to me, dear father, and forgive your dying son.
>
> "Alan Shipton."

The father had *not* gone, and the next letter was from the widow:—

> "Dear Sir,—My husband is dead—almost his last words were, 'Will father come in time?'—he longed to see you once more. He suffered very much at the last, but [96] he was very happy, and I look forward to meeting him again in the land where there is no more parting. I have moved to smaller rooms with my children, at No. 5 Crown Row, Islington, where I have taken the top flight in the house, and hope to find a lodger to take the one room which we shall not occupy. I shall be able to earn sufficient money, I hope, by dressmaking to support myself and my three youngest children—my eldest boy Alan has gone to sea. I wish I could think that my dear husband had your entire forgiveness.—I remain, sir, yours dutifully,
>
> "Ellen Shipton."

The date of this letter was a year old, and the farmer had written underneath it, "Hypocrites! I know town folks better than they think!"

Why then was he reading it over? Why was he in this house under the name of Mr. Smith? Why had he after so many months come to seek out these unknown relations? It was because the old man's heart was lonely—because underneath his gruff exterior he had a kindly heart—because he longed to have some one who would care for him and comfort his old age. This was why he had left his country home to come up to the great city. He had determined to find out his son's family, with the purpose of adopting one of the children, if he found that the faults which he believed to [97] be inherent in all children of the town were such as he could get rid of without much trouble to himself; but he thought it would be easier to watch them if they did not know who he was; for, as he said to himself, "they are quite cunning enough to deceive me—town children always are." And now having given you this little insight into the old man's mind, let us return to the widow's room and make acquaintance with her and her children.

"Mother," whispered Ellen, the little girl who had opened the door to the stranger, "is he really to be with us all day? How horrid it will be!"

"Hush, my dear; don't let us think of that, let us think of the money we shall get, and all the good it will do our little Maurice. Poor child! how pale he looks there on the rug!"

"He looks like father did," said Janet, the second daughter, who was cutting out the pattern by her mother's side. A shudder passed through Mrs. Shipton's frame, and for one moment she [98] raised her hand to her face with an expression of pain.

"Janet, don't say that," whispered Ellen. "It hurts mother."

Janet looked up. "Mother, dear, I didn't mean it. I didn't mean so bad. Maurice is better than

he was, isn't he? He had quite a colour this morning, and was not so tired as he was yesterday; and by the time Alan comes home, I expect he will be quite well."

Her mother put her work down for a minute, and laid her hand upon Janet's fair hair—

"My good little girl, I didn't think you meant to pain me, and I know how you love your little brother. You both help me beautifully in taking care of him, and if it's God's will I think he will get quite well—but he sadly wants care. If your dear grandmother was alive, I'd send him into the country to her for a little bit, to my old home. I know *that* fresh air would soon make him well again."

"Mother, I'd like to see your home. The house with the roses growing over it, and the school where grandmother taught, and the church, and the green fields, and the hills, and the—" [99]

"Hush, Janet; here's the old gentleman."

Mr. Smith came in and sat down. First he cleared his throat, then settled his stiff cravat, crossed his legs, and looked round on the little party.

"Girls go to school, Mrs.—what's your name?"

"Shipton, sir, Mrs. Shipton. No, sir, my little girls stop at home and help me."

"Help, hum! not much help in them, never is in town girls—think of nothing but lark and fine dresses. Do they earn anything?"

"No, sir, not yet; they will by-and-by, but I think they do quite enough now in helping me."

"Hum! got any more children, Mrs. Shipton?"

"One boy at sea, sir."

"At sea!—ran away?"

"No!" burst indignantly from Janet and Ellen; "he went because he got a good chance; and he didn't like going, but he said he wouldn't stop and burden mother." [100]

"He's a good son, sir—my boy Alan!" said the mother proudly.

"Alan!" said the old man, lingering on the name; "why do you call him that?"

"It was his father's name, sir," said the widow, as she bent her head lower over her work.

Ellen noticed that the old gentleman bit his lip and looked down on the ground, and she thought he must be rather kind, because he did not ask any more questions, and did not look at her mother's sad face.

At this moment Maurice roused himself from his heavy sleep, and looked round in stupid, slumbering wonder upon the stranger who seemed to have made himself so much at home.

Janet ran to his side, and eagerly whispered the news, while Maurice rubbed his eyes and took a good look at the new-comer.

"Hum! not much stuff in that little chap," said Mr. Smith.

"He has been very ill," replied the mother, looking anxiously at her youngest child. [101]

"Doctor's bill to pay, I suppose?"

"Yes," she answered hastily.

"Make haste, boy, and get well—sick boys are expensive things."

"What a queer man," said little Maurice.

"Come, Maury, come to mother's room, and I'll put you neat," said Ellen kindly, as she took his little thin hand and led him away.

Then Mr. Smith put on his spectacles and drew the paper from his pocket, and spoke no more until tea-time.

After that meal was over, the mother went out to deliver her parcel of work, and the two little girls sat down with their sewing.

Suddenly their lodger spoke: "Do you like stories, children?"

"Yes, oh yes!" they answered eagerly, while a look of pleasure came over Maurice's pale, shy face.

"What shall it be about?"

"Do you know much about the country, sir?" said Janet.

"Yes, my girl, more than most folks."

"Please, then, tell us about that," said Ellen. [102]

The old man looked satisfied, and began a long description of the country delights of his boyhood. The children listened attentively to them; it was like some fairy tale, or a story of enchanted ground.

"Father used to tell us things like that," said little Janet.

"Did he?" said the old man quickly. "Did your father love the country?"

"Yes; but he ran away and left it, because he thought he would like the town better," replied Ellen.

"And did he?" asked the stranger, while he looked keenly into the little girl's face.

"No," she answered thoughtfully. "He said it wasn't right of him, and that he had often wished himself back again there;—but I don't believe father ever did what was wrong."

"Hum!" Mr. Smith suddenly looked away towards the fire and cleared his throat violently; as he did so, his eyes rested on little Maurice, who was sitting on his little stool in the chimney-corner, with the firelight falling on his face. The old man started and muttered low, "Alan, my little lad!" Then gave an impatient pshaw! and turned again to Ellen. [103]

"The river ran right through the fields, and my brother used to bathe in it, and fish—ay, many's the hour we've spent on its banks with a rod and basket—many's the dish we've brought back in pride to our mother."

Suddenly Maurice got up and came to his side. "Did you ever see a boy drowned?"

Mr. Smith looked at the child in silent amazement for a moment, but Maurice repeated his question.

"Did you?"

"Yes," answered the old man in a tremulous voice, while his hands shook as he clasped them together.

"Uncle Val was drowned," Maurice went on, "quite drowned in the water—father said so—he was drowned deep down under the willow-trees."

"Hush, Maury dear; it was very dreadful: father used to sigh when he spoke of Uncle Val, and Maurice is always thinking about him; please, forgive him, sir."

Mr. Smith did not answer, and at this moment the mother came in. [104]

The children received her with delight, telling her, immediately upon her entrance, that Mr. Smith came from the country, and could tell beautiful stories. Mrs. Shipton thanked him gratefully for being so kind to her little ones, and began to feel more comfortable about the expediency of having admitted him into their family circle.

It was soon time for the children to go to bed; but before he left the room, little Maurice knelt down beside his mother and said his evening prayer. Mr. Smith watched the child with curious attention as he prayed, and once or twice with a sudden abruptness he cleared his throat and crossed and uncrossed his legs.

Maurice never raised his head, but went on with the simple words, "Bless dear mother, and Nellie, and Janet; and take care of Alan out on the sea this night, and bring him safe home; and bless grandfather, and take care of him now that he is an old man. For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

Why did the lodger start? Why did he so hastily dash his hand across his eyes, then stand up and go to his own room? When there, why did the old man let the bitter scalding tears run down his cheeks? why did those broken, mournful words come from his lips,— [105]

"Alan! Alan! my son; would God I had died for thee, Alan, my son!" He paused, then went on more sorrowfully:—"Why, why did you leave me, if you loved me? Oh, my boy! why did you break my heart, Alan?—Dead! dead! and I am alone now; yet you taught your children to pray for the lonely old man. Bless you, my boy—too late—too late—my blessing would have made you happy in life, but now it can do nothing for you."

Then the old man put his head outside the door, and called to Ellen, who was passing, to say that he was going to bed.

But it was long before sleep came to him, for he lay thinking of the old days, long ago, when children had loved him, when life had been sunny and warm,—why had it grown so chill and cold of late? Ah, Farmer Shipton, there is but one thing which can make life full of warmth and sunshine, and that is the love of God.

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[106]

CHAPTER II.

TRANSPLANTED DAISIES.

MONTH soon passed away, and old Mr. Smith had become quite one of the household. He was very kind in his manner to the children, though sometimes blunt and abrupt, but he seemed constantly to be watching their mother, with a suspicion which she could not understand. However, he was out a great deal, and she did not find him at all in the way, and she was glad the children had made friends with him.

"Mother, I like Mr. Smith; he's very good to us; but isn't he a funny man?" said Ellen one evening, and she looked up from her work as she spoke. [107]

"I think he's very kind to you, my dear, and you are quite right to like him," replied Mrs. Shipton slowly, for there was something about her lodger which she could not understand; and she was not quite sure whether she liked him or not.

"He goes out to see London, doesn't he, mother?"

"Yes; he has never been here before, and there is plenty for a stranger to see."

"But, mother."

"Well, Ellen?"

"I think he's very kind, and all that; but I don't think he's happy: often and often when I look up, I see him looking at me with his eyes full of tears. Isn't it odd and queer for a man to cry. Father never cried."

Mrs. Shipton did not answer; why should the child know of all the bitter tears which her father had shed?

"Perhaps Mr. Smith has some trouble that we do not know of, dear."

"I think he has, mother; but wasn't it kind of him to get that bottle of wine for Maurice?" [108]

"Yes; poor little Maurice! Ellen, I sometimes think—," and the mother's voice trembled.

"What, mother?"

"I think he's going from me too;" and the poor woman put down her work, and bowed her head in her hands.

Little Ellen came up close to her mother, and slipping her arm round her neck, laid her face close to hers, and whispered, "Mother, mother, don't cry—God will take care of Maurice; he won't let him die."

"I think sometimes that he will, he is so like poor father, and he seems so delicate and weakly, and I have no means of getting him the strengthening things he needs."

"But, mother, he is better than he was."

"Not much, dear; he has never got over that illness, and sometimes I think that he will not live much longer; but I cannot let him go—my boy—my youngest—my little Maurice."

"Mother, we will pray to God to make him well; and you say God always hears us when we pray." [109]

"Yes, dear, yes, he does; pray to him, dear Nellie; we will all pray to him to spare little Maurice."

The mother and daughter had not perceived that Mr. Smith had entered the room, and was standing opposite to them.

"What's the matter, eh? what's the matter?" said the old man, as Ellen looked up, and he caught sight of the tears on her cheeks. Mrs. Shipton got up quickly and hurried out of the room; and Ellen dried her eyes, and busied herself in putting the work away.

Just then Janet came in with Maurice, and they eagerly claimed a story from Mr. Smith. The old man looked earnestly at them for a minute, and then said, "I don't know any story to-night, little ones."

"Then tell us something about the country," said Maurice.

"You should see a corn-field, children; that's the sight," said Mr. Smith. "Oh, how you'd like to see them binding up the sheaves, and how quickly the sickles cut down the ripe grain!"

"But don't the men cut down beautiful flowers at the same time?" said Janet. "Father used to tell us about the flowers." [110]

The old man was silent for a moment, and then said quickly, "Flowers—ah! poor children, you don't know what flowers are here, in your smoky, dirty town."

"What kind of flowers grow in the country?" said Ellen.

"Why, there's primroses, and violets, and roses, and honeysuckle, and poppies, and a hundred things."

"Well, we've got flowers in the town too," said Janet.

"Indeed," said Mr. Smith incredulously. "I haven't discovered them yet, except a few things, stunted and withered, and all boxed up in smoky gardens."

Janet smiled to herself, and determined that she would show the country stranger the truth of her words.

The next day was Sunday, and Mr. Smith went to the nearest church with Ellen and Janet, while Mrs. Shipton stayed at home with Maurice.

Janet did not return with the others, but when they had been in a few minutes, her bounding footstep was heard on the stairs, and she entered with a whole handful of daisies, which she held out triumphantly to Mr. Smith. [111]

"There!" she cried, "there are flowers in the town!"

Mr. Smith laughed. "Where did these come from, little one?"

"Out of the churchyard, from off father's grave," said Janet, dropping her voice.

Mr. Smith took up the flowers and looked at them as if he was trying to discover how they were made, so intently were his eyes bent upon them.

"Mother says we are like daisies, sometimes," said Janet merrily.

"How?" asked the old man.

The child coloured, and did not answer; but Mrs. Shipton replied for her,—"Because whenever I am gloomy and unhappy, these children brighten me and cheer me by looking up to the sun; they always find out a sunny side to my troubles."

Mr. Smith laid his hand lightly on Janet's head, and said, "I have learnt many things since I came to London, but I did not know that I should find country flowers in this large, wicked place." [112]

"We value them more because they are not plenty, and because we have not many other things," said Mrs. Shipton.

"Ay, ay—well, can town daisies be transplanted, think you?"

Ellen looked wonderingly at the old man, for she saw that his eyes were fixed on Janet with a meaning smile, but the little girl herself seemed quite unconscious of it, and answered quickly, "If you have plenty of flowers in the country, you don't want them."

The strange lodger laughed, but it was a rather sad laugh. "I do want them," he answered; and then, after pausing for a minute or two, he went on abruptly, "Mrs. Shipton, I've been a month with you, haven't I?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I must go home to-morrow; now, I've got something to say to you. You're not rich, and there's no nonsense about you to pretend you are."

The widow's colour was heightened, but she had grown accustomed to her lodger's abrupt manner of speaking, so she took no notice of his remark, and he went on,— [113]

"I'm a lonely old man, and have neither chick nor child to care for me. I didn't believe anything pure and innocent could be found in this place; but I've discovered some daisies, and I want to dig up one and take it back to my home."

"I'll dig up one for you to-morrow," said Janet eagerly; but Mrs. Shipton saw his meaning, and she became very pale, and looked anxiously at her child.

"Thank you, my dear," said the old man, putting his arm round her. "Now, I want you to come and be my own little girl, and live with me in the country."

"And go away from mother?" said Janet, lifting her eyes to his face.

"Yes; come and be mine, and perhaps I'd bring you to see your mother sometimes."

Janet looked away to her mother, and saw that her eyes were full of tears; then she sprang into her mother's arms and hid her face on her shoulder.

"I will promise to take all care of her," said the old man; "and the country would do her all the good in the world." [114]

"I can't leave mother! no, no, no!" sobbed little Janet.

"I would adopt her for my own, and provide for her liberally," said Mr. Smith. "Come, Mrs. Shipton, you're a sensible woman, you know how much better it would be for your child."

"I cannot give her up, sir," said the mother anxiously; "she is too young to leave me."

"Well, then, may I have Ellen?"

Ellen shrank to her mother's side. "No, no!" she whispered. A disappointed look crossed the old man's face. "Come, Mrs. Shipton, you are slaving your life away for these children, will you lose so good a chance of providing for one of them?"

"I'll go if I ought, mother, if it would be better for you and the others," said Ellen bravely; but she put her hands over her face, that her mother might not see how much those words cost her.

"No, sir," said the widow firmly, as she drew her children closely to her; "God has given me these children, and he will give me the means of keeping them." [115]

Mr. Smith cleared his throat violently.

"Well, then," he muttered, "I suppose I must live and die—lonely—lonely."

Mrs. Shipton's eye wandered wistfully to Maurice, who was looking on with eyes full of wonder.

"Sir, you are very, very kind," she said, and then paused.

"Don't talk of it—I can't get what I want," said the old man.

"I cannot bear giving up one of them," said the widow; "but there's Maurice,—the child is ill, I believe he will die here in the town, but he might live in the country; will you take him, sir?" and then, having said thus much, Mrs. Shipton quite broke down, and hid her face among Janet's curls.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a scream from Maurice, as the door was opened, and a boy in a sailor's dress stood amongst them.

"Alan!"

"My boy, my boy!" and Mrs. Shipton held out her arms to him. [116]

ALAN'S RETURN.

Mr. Smith looked at him for a minute, and then putting his hand to his head, he hastily left the room. It seemed as if he saw his own Alan again, in all the strength and beauty of his boyhood. [117] Before the lodger returned to the sitting-room, Alan had been told who he was, and what he wanted to do; and though he thought for Maurice's sake it was best, the way in which his arm was twisted round his little brother's neck, told how sore a trial it would be to part with him. Maurice alone was unmoved; the thought of the country seemed to have great attractions for him, and Mr. Smith's stories and general kindness had quite won his heart. Mr. Smith lifted him on to his knee, but did not speak a word, for he was looking intently at Alan all the time.

"Do you like being at sea, Alan?" asked Janet.

Alan shook his head, but said quickly, "Janet, it doesn't matter what one likes; it's what's best;" and a brave courageous smile came upon the boy's handsome face.

"Isn't he like his father?" whispered Mrs. Shipton to Ellen.

"Yes; he smiles just like him," said Ellen.

"Just like him," said Mr. Smith, in a low, deep voice, that startled them all. [118] Maurice was frightened, and slipped down off his knee, and Ellen looked in her mother's face in silent astonishment. "Alan, Alan, my son!" and the old man rose up and came over to the sailor-boy's side. Alan stood up, and his grandfather put one hand on his shoulder, passed his hand over his dark curly hair, and then drawing him closely into his arms, said, while the tears ran down his cheeks, "Alan, be my son, instead of him that's gone."

"Who is it, mother?" asked Maurice fearfully.

But Mr. Smith, or, as we may now call him again by his rightful name, old Farmer Shipton, answered, "I am the grandfather whom you have been taught to pray for! Ellen, my daughter, my own Alan's wife, forgive me; I am your father now!"

Then Mrs. Shipton came to him, knelt down beside him, and laying her hand in his, said, "Alan always said you would come! Father, have you forgiven him?"

"Ay," said the old man; "may God forgive me as freely. And now, daughter Ellen, you must never leave me; and your children must be mine, and I must have you all. Alan will leave the sea and become my eldest son, and there's room in the old house for you all. Will you come, little daisy?" and Janet smiled gladly as she answered, "Yes, grandfather." [119]

"God be thanked for all he has taught me in this room," said Farmer Shipton. "Ellen, my little one, will you love me too?"

"I'll try," said Ellen shyly; "but why did you want us to leave mother?"

"I don't know," said the old man gravely. "I came to London for the purpose of finding out if there was any good in any of you; and then I could not make up my mind to telling you who I was, until I had watched you and tried you to the utmost; but when I saw Alan, I could wait no longer.—Alan, will you be my son? I'm an old man, and all alone."

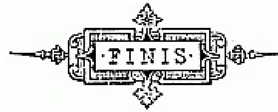
The sailor-boy went to his mother's side, and looking into her tearful face fondly, he said, "Mother, what do *you* say?"

A smile crossed her lips as she looked at him proudly, and answered, "Be as good a son to your grandfather as you are to me, Alan, for that would have pleased your father. Oh, if he could but know this!" [120]

Then Alan shook hands with his grandfather, and said, "Will you teach me to be a farmer, sir? We'll all like to live with you very much."

A few evenings after, the whole party were comfortably established in the old farmhouse at Dilbury, to Betty's great delight and astonishment.

The anxious mother soon had the pleasure of seeing the colour brought back into the cheeks of her little Maurice; and Janet and Ellen made acquaintance with the delights of country life. They often came home from woodland rambles laden with wild-flowers, which they exhibited with pride and delight; but their grandfather always declared that no flowers would ever appear so beautiful to him as his own little Town Daisies!



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Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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