

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## The Man Who Would not Forgive.

(Louise J. Strong, in the 'Western Recorder'.)

There was a stir in the congregation like the rustling of leaves when, in response to the preacher's earnest invitation, Robert Clark rose to his feet, thus signifying that he had found the Saviour.

Back by the door there was a sudden, short, mocking laugh, strangely out of place at that solemn moment, and at sound of which Robert squared his shoulders, and stood the straighter, though a dull red crept over his face. It was Anson, of course, and Anson would not believe in his sincerity; it was long since they had believed any good of each other.

The country church was crowded and everyone there knew how matters stood between the Clark boys; a good many of them had taken sides in the fierce quarrel that had arisen over their father's will and division of property. Neither were Christians, and each had for years nourished a bitter feeling of hostility amounting almost to hatred for the other.

Robert thought of it all before he rose, and in the new light that had come to him he felt sorrow and shame over his own conduct as to make him forget for the time the presence of his brother Anson. The short involuntary laugh of scorn stayed Robert's feet when he would have pressed up with the others as a candidate for church membership.

'I cannot, I cannot yet,' he thought, saying over to himself, 'When thou comest to the altar—leave there thy gift and first be reconciled to thy brother.'

His gift was himself, his heart, his love, his service, his life; but first he must be reconciled to his brother. Swiftly as possible he made his way through the throng of friends whose moist eyes and fervent hand clasps told their sympathy, to where his wife stood, her face glowing with joy.

'Mary,' he whispered, pressing the hand she slipped into his, 'Mary, go on with the children, I must see Anson.'

'Yes,' she murmured, understandingly; 'Oh, Robert, I am so glad.'

Anson rarely went to church, but he had heard that Robert was 'interested,' therefore he had gone to see for himself. He was a little ashamed of having drawn attention to himself by laughing out so unexpectedly, and had left immediately. But as he plunged along the road in the darkness the laugh was repeated many times with every degree of scorn and incredulity.

'Rob got religion! Rob become a Christian! As well expect reformation of the devil himself! He leaned on the gate, chuckling derisively. 'Rob the robber! The thief!'

Hark, someone was hurrying down the road after him; was it the boys leaving their mother to drive home alone? The rapid steps halted beside him, a voice cried:

'Anson, brother Anson, I have come to confess my wrong-doing towards you, and ask your forgiveness.'

'Don't "brother" me, you robber! You thief! That is what you are as you well know. I would not demean myself by speaking to you but for the chance of tell-

ing you once more what I think of you. You a Christian!'

A few days ago Robert would have replied in kind; now he scarcely noticed the bitter words.

'I am sorry, Anson, for all my unkind words and unbrotherly acts, and they have been many; I ask you to forgive them and forget them. As far as it is possible I will put right that which is wrong between us. Come, let bygones be bygones; forgive me and let us be brothers again,' he held out his hand as he spoke.

Anson stepped back with clenched fist as if to strike the extended hand.

'You whining hypocrite,' he said. 'Forgive you! Never as long as we both live, nor afterwards, if I know myself. Don't think a few soft words will undo all the wrong you have done me—cheating me out of my own all these years. Put right that which is wrong between us, you say; do it—you know how—but even then I will not forgive you—'

'As you hope for forgiveness yourself—' Robert broke in, pleadingly.

'Never!' Anson declared fiercely. 'I will never forgive you—for myself I have no need to ask forgiveness of anyone, my record is clear—that is the reason I will not forgive you—the wrong was all on your part—all the injustice, the lying, the cheating—I wonder you have the face to ask me to forgive you. Be off!' he broke out violently, 'before I am tempted to punish you as you deserve for daring to come to me like this.'

Robert sent him a letter filled with the outpourings of an earnest heart—it was returned to him unopened. His wife ventured a few words of pleading that the breach between the brothers might be healed, and was silenced by such speech as he had never used to her before.

The meetings were growing in interest and Robert made open profession of his faith in the face of Anson's jeering smile, but he could not be persuaded to offer himself for baptism.

'I must first be reconciled to my brother,' was his answer to all urging.

'And if he waits for that he'll wait till the crack of doom,' Anson exulted, 'for I'll never forgive him.'

'But, my friend, no human being has the right to withhold forgiveness. We are all alike in need of God's mercy,' the preacher remonstrated.

'Speak for yourself, parson. I have suffered wrong, not committed it, and such wrong as I will not forgive. Let him make restitution, if he is sincere, not to buy forgiveness of me, for he cannot, but for simple honesty and justice,' Anson answered stubbornly.

When he heard this Robert questioned whether he were really required to do this thing, for he knew Anson's meaning. But after anxious consultation with his wife and family he decided that even this would not be too much to bring about the reconciliation for which he so longed and prayed.

A few days later Anson was visited by a lawyer, an old friend of his father's, who was familiar with the trouble between the brothers.

'This was made out against my advice,' he said presenting a paper, 'but I prevail-

ed upon Robert to leave it with me for recording. I thought you would not, could not ask this of him.'

Anson glanced over the paper eagerly. 'It is only what should have been done years ago,' he declared, 'I will see that it is recorded.'

'But you cannot realize what it is to them, what he is giving up to you—'

'Only my own—' Anson interrupted.

'I have never thought that,' the lawyer replied. 'I believe the division was quite fair and this is turning them out of their home.'

'Rob knows it is only simple justice,' Anson said shortly.

But he wondered how Rob could have brought himself to do that against which he had fought, tooth and nail, for years.

'He's becoming a fool, religion or not, any man's a fool that'll do such a thing. And if he thinks to get around me that way he'll see—' was the conclusion he reached.

But he did not experience the perfect satisfaction at thus getting his 'just dues' that he had expected. He felt angry impatience with Robert for the scruple that held him waiting for reconciliation against the advice of everyone.

'He's a fool, for I never will forgive him. I will never take his hand again,' he declared to himself when he had for the third time rejected Robert's overtures of peace. 'Why should he take such a position as that and put me in the wrong with everyone.'

For it seemed to him the people looked at him disapprovingly, and his brother's pleading eyes were a reproach. He began to feel a strange dissatisfaction with himself, an uncertainty as to whether he was and had been wholly right, something he had never doubted before. It was not a pleasant feeling, it irritated him; he would go to the meeting no more. He rose early and toiled late striving to stifle, to put by that troublesome something that tormented him.

Coming to the division fence one evening he stood looking over at the old homestead where he was born and raised; Robert's so long by their father's will, now his by the deed that was buttoned safely in his breast pocket. It was still unrecorded, but to-morrow he would attend to it without fail. Rob would move on to the back sixty and give him possession by spring. Perhaps he ought to allow something more than sixty in exchange—but no, he was the elder—the right of choice should have been his. Queer why Rob should have done it, he must be sincere and in earnest if he was a fool—there came to him some words about being 'a fool for Christ's sake,' and with them came some words, a significant, piercing question. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

For some reason that question demanded immediate answer, and he sat down on the brown grass, facing his patient horses with the load of corn he had picked, to have it out. 'Lose his own soul!' Why, he had hardly thought before whether he had a soul or not—as for losing it—he wasn't such a sinner—more than others. Ah! not a sinner, when he had all his life rejected the salvation purchased for him