

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THE LAST OF THE LUSCOMBS.

BY HELEN PEARSON BARNARD.

XVIII.—Continued.

Monday was lovely and cloudless; Winn rose early, and finished the chores before breakfast. When the first note of the bell rang across the bay, he entered his boat, with a basket of lunch, a few books, and a slate. Mrs. Luscombe walked down the hill with him, and bade him good-by from the landing, as affectionately as his own mother might have done. Winn could see her dress flutter in the sea breeze, as she watched his progress.

With a beating heart he crossed the bay, drew his boat into a sheltered place, fastened it securely, and started for school.

It was really his first encounter with such an assemblage of youths. He wondered how he should like the boys and girls who entered the building and thronged the steps.

There was silence everywhere when he appeared; each noisy, chattering group was hushed, and bright eyes scanned the new boy with cool, pitiless curiosity. Winn kept his courage up by telling himself that this was what every new scholar had to meet, but it was certainly unpleasant.

He reported himself to Master Graham. His kindness was like a gleam of sunshine. If Winn had known him, he would have seen that he was unusually kind; if he had known the scholars, he would have found that they were unusually distant; but he did not know, and "ignorance was bliss!"

He could not understand why there was so much fuss about his seat; finally he was put with the minister's son. Jack turned red, and appeared very uncomfortable. There seemed to be a cloud over the whole school. At recess nobody played with or spoke to him. Kitty Graham stole into the school-room to whisper.

"Papa, nobody will speak to the new boy. Is it not too bad?"

"Nobody?" lifting her chin, and smiling into the sweet face. "Cannot you remedy that?"

Kitty sighed.

"I knew I'd have to, because I'm the master's daughter; isn't it horrid, papa? Jack Willoughby said he had to sit with him because he was the minister's son—we always have the hard jobs, papa!"

Master Graham did not smile, as usual, at her pretty petulance—he gravely sharpened a pencil, and began to mark a composition. Kitty lingered, pouted, then went out and scanned the new boy again. He certainly did not look so dreadful, with his ruddy cheeks and fair hair as he sat alone on the step.

"Do you like school?" she asked.

"I don't think I do yet," said Winn, slowly. "I thought I should, at first, but I'm not sure, now."

Kitty liked his frank, gentlemanly manner.

"This is only the first day," she said; "bye and bye, when you get acquainted, you'll find the scholars real nice."

Winn made no reply.

Kitty, feeling that she had done her duty, joined the others, and was soon the centre of a merry game.

It was just the same at noon. Those who brought lunches, ate in groups in some favourite spot. Winn dined by himself. The boy had never felt so lonely. He fairly suffered as the long day wore away, and it became evident that he was shunned by the entire school.

At the afternoon recess, Master Graham appeared among the boys. After watching the sports for a moment, he called out:

"Here's Winfred Campbell, he looks as if he liked games, too!"

There was a sudden silence. Then Calvin Watkins said:

"This 'ere game's full!"

Master Graham frowned, and returned to the school-room, and his desk.

Jack Willoughby, the minister's son, who was earnestly regarding the new-comer, now spoke:

"You know this game is not full, Cal. Why not ask the new boy?"

"We ain't a goin' to put up with no poor-house trash, what works out for a livin'," observed Cal, loudly.

Winfred could not help hearing. There was a subdued "Oh!" and twenty pair of eyes were turned upon him. No wonder his face turned hot and red. He bent over his slate, with a pretence of cyphering, but his hand shook.

Winn knew now for the first time why they shunned him! Despite Joe's precaution "the poorhouse sign was a stickin'" to him after all!

It would be impossible to describe the emotions that filled the heart of the orphan as he sat on the steps of the old school-house, in the flickering sunlight, with the careless, happy children about him, and felt himself an outcast. He was suddenly smitten with a sense of shame, like one convicted of crime. The school and the scholars grew instantly hateful to him. He wished he had not attempted to come, he would go home that night and never return. Soon he rose and went slowly into the school-room.

"He's going to tell on me!" muttered Calvin Watkins. "He's jest one o' them still, deep, fellars that tells tales out o' school."

Jack Willoughby reconnoitred through the door-crack, and reported a little triumphantly—for he had never liked Calvin—

"He's gone to his desk. He had no idea of telling Master Graham, I know."

There were many glances directed towards Winn that afternoon. But they could not make much out of the grave, boyish face that bent so industriously over his books.

School closed with the singing of a hymn. Winn seized books and hat, and hastened away with a sense of relief. The children were talking and laughing now, as they walked gayly homeward in groups, or in confidential pairs. They

had apparently forgotten the incident at recess. But the new scholar still brooded over it, as he passed through the village and along the dusty road towards the beach, unmoored his boat, and rowed swiftly for Moor's Island.

Mrs. Luscomb was on the landing. Winn poured out his troubles at once, saying, passionately:

"I'll never go near them again. I couldn't stand another such day. You can't think how lonesome I was this afternoon."

Mrs. Luscomb did not remonstrate. She said she was sorry, and she looked as if she was, which comforted Winn greatly. He felt some better for telling her. Burdens are always harder, borne alone; his had grown much lighter, as he went about his chores.

After supper they had a talk, Mrs. Luscomb and he, in the kitchen, while she folded the clothes for the morrow's ironing, and Aaron smoked and pondered on the rocks.

"I am going to preach you a little sermon, my boy," said the good lady. "My text is self-reliance. To learn to be manly and independent is of great importance. You have your own way to make in the world, Winn; there is little that I can shield you from," she sighed—"you must learn to stand alone, if need be. If you can go through such a trial as this, and not be overcome, you will be the gainer."

"Do you want me to go to school, and have nobody to speak to?" asked Winn, in a pained tone.

"I would have you be self-reliant enough to go, even if they did not speak to you," was the prompt response, and there was a fire in Mrs. Luscomb's eyes that awoke Winn's spirit. "But I am sure if you go right along, pleasantly, as if nothing had happened, this matter will soon be forgotten by your school-mates. In other words, you 'will live it down.'"

The clothes were folded, and put into the basket, and a bit of cloth laid across it—this ended the "sermon," for Mrs. Luscomb had something to do in another part of the house.

Winn thought over what she had said for a long time.

"Haint ye sorter down at th' mouth?" queried Aaron, coming in later. "Like yer school? Haint nothin' happened there agin yer grain, eh?"

Winn replied evasively, and concluded it was time to retire.

"What ails the boy, mother?" asked Aaron, as Mrs. Luscomb appeared. She told him.

"I knowed it!" he said. "That air poorhouse story's broke out, 'n' it'll hev to hev its run through th' school like th' measles, or some sich catchin' disorder. But our boy's got th' rale grit, he'll live it down, 'n' be a credit to us yet, mother!"

XIX.—THE FERRYMAN'S DAUGHTER IN SCHOOL.

"It's got to come sometime, I knew it!" said John Moor, as he paced back and forth before his retreat in the forest, "one cannot expect to keep such a lively child here. But I hoped she would not go until she was older."

It was Elsie that disturbed him of late, she had wearied of the woodland solitude and being the sole pupil of such a grave master, she longed to go to school, for the society of "other girls," and the stir of the town. The brown-eyed maid neglected her family in the hollow tree, entirely giving up her mimic housekeeping.

John Moor found it up-hill work to teach his discontented pupil, and at length decided to let her go to the town school.

She was to start this morning. He was waiting for her, as he paced the woodland path; the dog waited for her, running back and forth between the landing and the house; the boat waited for her at the pier.

"Elsie! Elsie!" he called impatiently.

There was a noise inside the hut as of some one hastening after forgotten articles. Then the door flew open and Elsie appeared, her sash half buttoned and her hat hanging from her arm.

"I'm here, father," she apologized, "it takes a body a long time to dress to go when they always stay at home!"

The little maid was greatly excited, her fine brown eyes sparkled and the lovely colour came and went in her cheeks.

John Moor regarded her gloomily. Elsie did not notice this; she ran down the path, chatting merrily while she fastened her sash, and sprang so carelessly into the boat that it dipped almost into the water.

"I've a great mind to keep you at home," said her father, "you are too heedless to go to school."

But nevertheless he took her. There was quite a sensation when John Moor strode up the steps, before the bell rang, followed by his daughter. Elsie smiled at the scholars in her half shy, half roguish way, that was quite irresistible.

"Isn't she just lovely?" said Kitty Graham.

"Now you are going to like her better than me!" said Minnie Willoughby, who was Kitty's intimate friend.

"Now, Minnie dear, don't be jealous"—Kitty put her arm about her waist—"of course I shall have to get acquainted because father's the teacher."

Within, John Moor was laying down the law to the master. He had brought his daughter because she was so uneasy at home that he could make nothing of her. He wanted her taught thoroughly, nothing fancy, only what would make a sensible woman of her.

"Father," whispered Elsie, pulling at his sleeve, "there's the boy that came with Captain Marsh."

Yes, there was Winn, in his seat, arranging his books for the day. He looked very grave for a boy; but had brightened suddenly as he answered Elsie's friendly smile.

"Will she have to sit with some one?" asked the father, eyeing the double seats as if he would have one alone for Elsie.

"Oh, yes," interposed the child, who longed for a companion, "I'll sit with that pretty girl in the door; or—that nice boy over there!"

How the scholars would have laughed! Master Graham bent an amused look upon her.

"The girls and boys do not sit together," said he, gently, "that girl in the door is my daughter. Come here, Kitty!"

In a few moments the two had wandered to the farther part of the room, and were talking rapidly. John Moor

watched them with a moody face. Apparently he did not care to have Elsie appropriated by any one. But Elsie, who had been kept so secluded, was like a bird let out of a cage. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shone like stars. Soon Kitty drew her out of the school-room, and among the children, who had often heard of the ferryman's pretty daughter. As she vanished, the father sighed.

"It is just as I thought—the child will be just crazy to get with the rest of them," he muttered.

"I presume you dislike to have your little girl form new acquaintances," observed Master Graham. He knew of his visitor's hermit-like habits.

"It is against my wishes," said John Moor. "I do not know why I yielded to her entreaties and brought her." He then added morosely, "Doubtless it was to sow bitter seed for myself and her!"

"Do not think so," said the school-master, kindly. "My pupils are above the average youth of these days. I know some of them are striving to be useful men and women. I will look sharply after your little Elsie, and see that she associates with only good children."

The bell rang and the children came in noiselessly and folded their hands. Elsie was assigned a seat. The bell struck a single note, and each head dropped upon a desk, while the master offered a short petition, after which the Lord's Prayer was recited in unison. There was something touching in the devotions of the old-fashioned school.

The stern ferryman sat beside the master. Perhaps those youthful, bowed heads, the murmur of devotions, and the hymn afterward, calmed his fears, for his brow cleared a little. He soon left. Then the "roll" was called; each scholar answering when his or her name was read—"present." These preliminaries over, Master Graham called Elsie to him and had a little talk. He knew that the child had never been to school before, and he wished to prepare her for the discipline. Master Graham arranged to have a short time in the morning, for such extra matters as this, and he felt well repaid. One of his favourite sayings was the old one about the "ounce of prevention." By having a plain, kindly talk with each, explaining regulations and getting personally acquainted, he established a bond of sympathy that made the school discipline comparatively easy. He had not talked long with Elsie before it was plain that there would be no trouble with her; she showed herself a frank, generous, affectionate little girl.

Elsie was far beyond the others in many studies, thanks to her father's careful teaching.

Winn thought she was very smart; it was plain that she was to be a general favourite in the school, by the friendly glances she got. He could not help contrasting her reception with his, especially at recess. Everybody wanted Elsie in some game, and she romped and ran and jumped rope as if she was bound to make up for lost time.

"Who is that boy?" she finally asked in the afternoon.

"What boy? O him? Why, that's the fellow what old Luscomb took out of the poor-house!" Calvin Watkins hastened to reply.

"What's his name? Captain Marsh told father, but he forgot."

"Winfred Campbell," said Kitty, adding, "It's quite a pretty name, I think."

"Don't he ever play?" inquired Elsie. "I should think he'd want to come down here and have some fun."

"He'd like to, no doubt," said Jack Willoughby, "he waits for an invitation, I expect."

Elsie looked puzzled.

"We haint asked him," said Calvin, eyeing the quiet figure on the school-house steps, "we don't 'sociate with no paupers here!"

"Oh," said Elsie, and looked very closely at Winn. When she went home that night she got upon her father's knee, and told him the story of the day. Suddenly she said:

"They don't play with that nice boy at all, father, 'cause he's poorhouse trash, and a pauper!"

"Don't repeat such expressions," said John Moor, frowning as he saw how soon she had caught somebody's term. "Who said that?"

"Calvin Watkins."

"Ah, Calvin Watkins!" repeated her father in a sarcastic tone; "the Watkins's are growing particular, it seems. When I went to school, we thought them trash; I do not wish you to talk with Calvin, or anybody else, if you can possibly help it; you are there to study, not to form acquaintances. I want my one little bird all to myself!"

He clasped her closely, and she saw that his eyes were very sad. Elsie knew that he was thinking of her mother, and those brothers and sisters who perished with her, and although it happened when she was an infant, a feeling of sadness entered the tender heart of the child also. She nestled closer to her father, saying softly:

"Don't be sorry, father, you've got Elsie left and she'll always be good to you!"

XX.—MOORSTOWN MORE FRIENDLY.

Meanwhile the "poorhouse boy" Winfred Campbell, was manfully withstanding the tide of school opinion. To be despised because one does wrong, is bitter, but to be despised because one is unfortunate as is the additional sting of injustice. As Winn often said to Mrs. Luscomb,

"If I had done anything mean, or treated any of them rudely, it would be different. I should expect to be called names! I should n't blame the boys for not wanting to play with me. But when a fellow's trying to do right, I say it's a shame to be bringing up 'poorhouse,'—as Cal Watkins does."

"Is Calvin Watkins the only one?" inquired Mrs. Luscomb.

"No, but he's at the bottom of it. Sometimes I think they would like me first-rate if he did n't keep it going."

Mrs. Luscomb could have told him why. She was shrewd enough to guess the reason. But she was too wise to let Winn know that it was simply jealousy that made Calvin torment him. She often recalled the day when Calvin applied for the place that Winn now held, to help