

BOYS AND GIRLS

Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

(By Julia McNair Wright.)

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CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

'Yes, of course; to know something.' 'But for what, brother? What will you do with it?'

'I can find that out afterwards,' said Rodney easily.

'I don't make you out, pardner,' objected Rasmus. 'I see when folks puts a cargo on a boat they knows where to carry it, and what it will come to. When we loads up a cart we knows where we're going to carry the load, when the farmer plants corn or 'taters, he knows pretty well where he'll find a market; and seems to me if you're going to load up your head, likewise you should know what you're going make out of it.'

'You see, Rasmus, there's a certain amount of learning that must be a beginning for any profession. I must have Latin and Greek and mathematics, and—'

'What's them agin?' asked Rasmus.

'Why, languages and—figures, numbers.'

'O, as for langidge, I've got a pretty lively tongue in my head; and as for numbers, I can count as far as all the dollars I'm likely to get.'

'O, there's more than that; this counting and so on is just arithmetic. I've been through that; but what do you think of being able to tell how much the world weighs, and how far it is to the sun, and how far from one star to another?'

'I don't see any use in it,' said Rasmus. 'It's farther to the sun or moon than the strongest man can throw, and who cares to know how far it is from one star to another, seeing no man can go it? I'd much rather know how far it is from Pittsburg to Harrisburg; there's something you can tie to in that. And then, who can tell how much the world weighs, just as if there is any one who can pick it up in his hand, like one can a cake?'

'So there is,' said Rodney; 'God can. It says in the Bible that God holds the seas—the ocean, you know—in the hollow of His hand, and takes up the islands as a very little thing, same as I could an apple-seed.'

'I don't believe it,' said Rasmus, promptly.

'But you have to; it's in the Bible, and that's true. Then if one studies what I tell you of, one learns all the names of every star, and that some of them make a big bear, and some a little bear, and some a man named Orion, walking along the sky, and some a pair of little fat twins, and some a great snake.'

'That's most awful bamboozle, not a word of the truth.'

'It is true. I saw it in a book, a celestial atlas; Mr. Andrews had it. I wanted to bring it along, but it was too big. I'll get my uncle to buy me one. And it tells you all how the world goes flying round the sun.'

'Now ain't you ashamed, Rod, to tell such awful lies, on a day as you've heard preaching in the morning! I know the sun moves, 'cause I see it, but the world don't move, or I'd have seen that.'

'But you're on the world, you know.'

'What difference does that make?'

'Were you ever on a railroad train? Didn't the trees and fences seem to spin by you, and you stand still? While really it was you that went, and they kept still? So the world goes whirling round the sun, and the sun don't go at all. We keep going round the sun.'

'I swan!' cried Rasmus, who was cosmopolite in speech.

'You see the world is round—' began Rod.

'I don't see no such thing,' said Rasmus rising and looking about. 'Well, yes, the sky does seem to settle kind of circ'lar. Yes, meby it is round like a plate.'

'Not like a plate—like a ball—shape of an orange.'

'Oh, you stow that, Rod, I'll get mad if you

try to fool me too much. I can't stand every-thing.'

'I'm telling you the truth. If I had wires and apples, little and big, and potatoes and nuts, I could make it all out for you, and show you the hang of the whole thing. The world is round, and goes rolling over and over.'

'Then we'd fall off,' interrupted Rasmus, 'and what's more, some would stand up straight, and some would stand heads down, and some kittering. Now all the men ever I see stood straight, only when they was drunk.'

'The world is so great, you see, and the—what we call sky, so far off, we always are straight in regard to all that is around us, and that is all that's needed.'

'No, said Rasmus, virtuously, 'we ought to be real straight if we pretend to be; 'tain't enough to say we're straight.'

'Why, see here,' said Rod, looking for a symbol. 'If I'm good-natured to all people around me, all that ever see me, then I am good-natured, ain't I, even if in my mind I said I was furious mad at the emperor of China?'

'He'd shake in his shoes if he knew it,' said Rasmus, with a big wink, thrusting his tongue into his cheek.

But Rodney was intent on science. 'And we don't fall off the world, and go flying through the sky, because of something in the world, called the attraction of gravitation, which holds us fast to it—sticks us, you know.'

Rasmus considered this attraction of gravitation in the light of bird lime, or other sticky substance, and meditatively turned up the broad sole of his shoe. Then he said:

'Don't try to humbug me. If we were stuck like that, we couldn't go, and we wear shoes and change shoes. I tell you, pardner, if this kind of truck is what you learn going to college, you'll learn ten times more along the road. Do you know what time of day the chickweed wakes up; what time the dandy-lion goes to sleep, why the sorrel folds its leaves down the stem of nights? Did you ever see a flower eatin' flies, and know how it does that same? When you find a nutshell in the woods, can you tell what kind of a critter ate the meat of the nut? Do you know whether crows can count, and whether ants can count? Do you know whether flowers like ants or hate 'em? Did you ever see a wood-pecker storing up food for hisself? Do you know what kinds of animals laugh? If you see a little round hole in the ground, 'bout the size of a little pipe-stem, would you know what made it?'

No, Rodney would know none of these things.

'That's the kind of learning I've got along the road,' said Rasmus with pride, 'and there's sense in that.'

'I should like to learn these things, too,' said Rodney.

This placated Rasmus—he replied affably: 'You see your learning may be good of its kind, though it is powerful hard to swallow some of it. Still, if you can make it clear to me, I don't mind hearing some of it. I don't object to nothing I can get without much trouble, 'cept the small-pox, or a fever, or some of them things. Now you and me is going in for a good time. I'll tell you just how we'll work it. We'll stop aboard here till to-morrow, and then we'll look over our traps and get ready for the road. The weather's just beautiful. We'll take it easy along, and I'll show you every day a hundred new things you never see before. You'll feel as if you've got ten eyes instead of two in your head, and the way you'll get acquainted with all kinds of bees, and bugs, and birds, and little animals, and flowers, will make you just as happy as a king. I shouldn't think kings would enjoy themselves much, anyway, I've seen their pictures, with a great heavy thing, like a piece of carpet or table-cloth with a spotted border, trailing from their shoulders to the ground, and behind 'em, and a great heavy pointed thing like a piece of a pot-rim, called a crown, on their heads; standing stiff as a poker—what's the use of being king, I says, if you can't have your liberty? And as I was planning to you, brother, by them same cheerful ways, we walks along the roads, and the scenery is just beautiful—until finally we

come to New York, and finds your uncle, and I'll advertize for my Robin, but I've got nine dollars in my pocket, and I asked the steward if they had pretty big papers in Pittsburg, and he said they had, so I guess I'll drop one advertize in the paper there, to ease my mind, as I go along.'

'But where will you say he is to address you, if he sees it, and you will be going all the time, you know?'

At this puzzle Rasmus shook his round black head.

'The man in the newspaper office might tell you. And how will you write out your advertisement?'

'Suppose you do that,' said Rasmus.

'All right—you tell me what you want in.'

Rodney took out a little note-book and pencil, and waited.

'Why, pard, you say that 'bout twelve year ago—no, you say that information is wanted, of a little chap named Robin, with a mighty pretty face, and curly yellow hair, as got took from a Home for the Friendless, in New York City, and carried into Indianny, and from there west; and his brother wants him, and can take good care of him, and wants whoever has him to give him up.'

'But that won't do. It must be short—the longer you make it, the more they charge.'

'I don't mind charge. I'll pay the nine dollars.'

'But you'll need some of that; and you want to say for other papers "to please copy"; and they won't, if it is a whole chapter long. Now, if you and Robin had a last name—'

'But we haven't; if ever we had I've forgot it. I was Rasmus and he was Robin, and dad was dad, and mammy was mammy; and dad was called "drunken Bobby" by the neighborhood boys, and I used to lamm them good for their sass. S'pose he was drunken, they needn't go to throw it up at him; plenty of 'em was beginning that line theirselves, spending their pennies on gin and chewing-tobacco, and hanging round the grog-shops for treats. Dear knows, Rod! how many of them little chaps I used to play shinny with, and making dams in the gutter, do you s'pose is reelin' about, drunken men, now, or in State's prison, or dead in fights, or in the streets, mostly along of liquor?'

'Good many of them, I guess,' said Rod; 'they say sixty thousand a year go that way, and I suppose a good many come out of New York.'

'They weren't such bad little chaps, if they'd had half a chance,' said Rasmus; 'downright jolly, kind-hearted, plucky little men they were, some of 'em. Had the makings of as nice men as me, or the boat captain, in 'em. But what did they ever see but badness? What was ever so much in their way as whiskey? They sucked it with their mother's milk; they got it by example. Why, if it hadn't been for Robin, and me taking care of him, and then two years in the country with the farmer, where I had plenty to eat, and good milk and coffee, and hard work to keep me out of mischief, and good enough bed, and a warm fire to sit by, I'd have gone that way, too, I reckon; and after I ran away, I always had my mind on one thing—finding Robin, and I knew he wouldn't take to me, and I couldn't do for him, if I took to drinking. But when I look back and think of all them little fellers I played with 'long the streets, or down to the Battery evenings, why, it goes against my grain, to feel how such a raft of them came into this 'ere world, without half a chance for theirselves; and no one to lend 'em a hand, and no one hindered their destruction, and they had a bad time all through, and went to the bad altogether.'

During this monologue, Rodney had toiled away at a form of advertisement, and produced the following:

'Wanted to Find:—A little boy, named Robin: with yellow hair, and a hump-back, by his brother, Erasmus. Other papers please copy. He went West. Address—'

'I've left the address out, till we ask the men at the paper office.'

'Well, brother, you must put in he's pretty, or, seeing that "hump-back," some one might allow he was ugly, and he ain't.'

'Well: I can say—"pretty face."'

'Yes—ladle that out; but my name ain't