

The Coolest Time.

BY MARTHA BURR BANKS.

Oh, the five o'clock chime brings the coolest time,

That is found in the whole of the day, When Larry and Gus, and the others of us,

Come in from our study or play;

When we push the big chair to the hearth over there,

And pile the wood higher and higher, And we make her a space in the very best place—

And mother sits down by the fire.

There's a great deal to say at the close of the day,

And so much to talk over with mother; There's a comical sight or a horrible plight,

Or a ball game, or something or other.

And she'll laugh with Larry and sigh with Harry,

And smile to our heart's desire.

At a triumph won or a task well done— When sitting down there by the fire.

Then little she'll care for the clothes that we tear,

Or the havoc we make on her larder; For the toll and the strife of our every-day life,

She will love us a little bit harder.

Then our lady is she, and her knights we would be,

And her trust doughty deeds will inspire;

For we long then anew to be generous and true—

When mother sits down by the fire.

“Probable Sons.”

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MAXWELL'S SORROW.

Milly spent a very happy afternoon at the keeper's cottage the next day, and came down to dessert in the evening so full of her visit that she could talk of nothing else.

“They were so kind to me, uncle. Mrs. Maxwell made a hot currant cake on purpose for me, and the cat had a red ribbon for company, and we sat by the fire and talked when Maxwell was out, and she told me such lovely stories, and I saw a beautiful picture of the probable son in the best parlour, and Mrs. Maxwell took it down and let me have a good look at it. I am going to save up my money and buy one just like it for my nursery, and do you know, uncle—”

She stopped short, but not for want of breath. Putting her curly head on one side, she surveyed her uncle for a minute meditatively, then asked a little doubtfully: “Can you keep a secret, Uncle Edward? Because I would like to tell you, only, you see, Mrs. Maxwell doesn't talk about it, and I told her I wouldn't—at least not to the servants, you know.”

“I think you can trust me,” Sir Edward said gravely.

“This is it, then, and I think it's so wonderful. They have got a real live probable son.”

Sir Edward raised his eyebrows. His little niece continued,—

“Yes, they really have. It was when I was talking about the picture Mrs. Maxwell took the corner of her apron and wiped her eyes, and said she had a dear son who had run away from home, and she hadn't seen him for nine years. Just fancy! Where was I nine years ago?”

“Not born.”

“But I must have been somewhere,” and Milly's active little brain now started another train of thought, until she got fairly bewildered.

“I expect I was fast asleep in God's arms,” she said at length, with knitted brows, “only of course I don't remember,” and having settled that point to her satisfaction she continued her story:

“Mrs. Maxwell's probable son is called Tommy. He ran away when he was seventeen because he didn't like the blacksmith's shop—Mrs. Maxwell and I cried about him—he had such curly hair and stood six feet in his stockings, and he was a beautiful baby when he was little, and had croup and—and confusions, and didn't come to for four hours, but he would run away, though he laid the fire and put sticks on it and drew the water for Mrs. Maxwell before he went. And Mrs. Maxwell says he may be a soldier or a sailor now for all she knows, or he may be drowned dead, or run over, or have both his legs shot to pieces, or he may be in India with the blacks; but I told her he was very likely taking

care of some pigs somewhere, and she got happy a little bit then, and we dried our tears, and she gave me some peppermint to suck. Isn't it a wonderful story, uncle?”

“Very wonderful,” was the response.

“Well, we were in the middle of talking when Maxwell came in, so we hushed, because Mrs. Maxwell said, ‘It makes my man so sad’; but, do you know, when Maxwell was bringing me home through the wood, he asked me what we had been talking about, and he said he knew it was about the boy because he could see it in Mrs. Maxwell's eyes. And then I asked him if he would run and kiss Tommy when he came back, and if he would make a feast; and he said he would do anything to get him home again.”

Milly paused, but said wistfully,— “I wish I had a father, Uncle Edward. You see, nurse does for a mother, but fathers are so fond of their children, aren't they?”

“It does not always follow that they are,” Sir Edward replied.

“The probable son's father loved him, and Maxwell loves Tommy, and then there was David, you know, who really had a wicked son, with long hair—I forget his name—and he cried dreadful when he was dead. I sometimes tell God about it when I'm in bed, and then he—he just seems to put his arms about me, and send me off to sleep; at least, I think he does. Nurse says God likes me to call him my Father, but of course that isn't quite the same as having a father I can see. Maxwell is a very nice father, I think. I told him I would pray for Tommy every night when I go to bed, and then I told him that God had lots of probable sons, too—the clergyman said so on Sunday, didn't he?—people who have run away from him. I've been asking God to make them come back. I hope he will let me know when they do. Do you know any one who has run away from God, uncle?”

“You are chatting too much, child,” said Sir Edward irritably, “sit still and be quiet.”

Milly instantly obeyed, and after some moments of silence her uncle said,—

“I don't mind you going to Maxwell's cottage, but you must never take Fritz with you. He is not allowed in that wood at all. Do you quite understand?”

“Yes, but I'm very sorry, for Fritz doesn't like being left behind; the tears were in his eyes when nurse told him he wasn't to go with me. You see, no one talks to him like I do. He likes me to tell him stories, and I told him when I came back about my visit, so he wants to go. But I won't take him with me if you say no.”

When she was leaving him that night for bed, she paused a moment as she wished him good-night.

“Uncle Edward, when you say your prayers to-night, will you ask God to make Tommy come home back? His mother does want him so badly.”

“I will leave you to do that,” was the curt reply.

“Well, if you don't want to pray for Tommy, pray for God's probable sons, won't you? Do, Uncle Edward. Mrs. Maxwell said the only thing that comforted her is asking God to bring Tommy back.”

Sir Edward made no reply, only dismissed her more peremptorily than usual, and when she had left the room he leaned his arms on the chimney-piece, and resting his head on them, gazed silently into the fire with a knitted brow. His thoughts did not soothe him, for he presently raised his head with a short laugh, saying to himself,—

“Where is my cigar-case? I will go and have a smoke to get rid of this fit of the blues. I shall have to curb that child's tongue a little; she is getting too troublesome.”

And whilst he was pacing moodily up and down the terrace outside, a little white-robed figure, with bent head and closed eyes, was saying softly and reverently as she knelt at her nurse's knee—

“And, O God, bring Tommy back, and don't let him be a probable son any more; bring him home very soon, please, and will you bring back all your probable sons who are running away from you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.”

Sir Edward did not escape several visits from ladies in the neighbourhood offering to befriend his little niece, but all these overtures were courteously and firmly rejected. He told them the child was happy with her nurse he did not wish her to mix with other children at present, and a year or two hence would be quite time enough to think about her education. So Milly was left alone, more than one mother remarking with a shake of the head,—

“It's a sad life for a child, but Sir Edward is peculiar, and when he gets a notion into his head he keeps to it.”

The child was not unhappy, and when the days grow shorter, and her rambles out of doors were curtailed, she would lie on the tiger-skin by the hall fire with Fritz for the hour together, pouring out to him all her childish confidences.

Sometimes her uncle would find her perched on the broad window-seat halfway up the staircase, with her little face pressed against the window-pane, and late on one very cold afternoon in November he remonstrated with her.

“It is too cold for you here, Millicent,” he said sternly; “you ought to be in the nursery.”

“I don't feel cold,” she replied. “I don't like being in the nursery all day; and when it gets dark, nurse will have the lamp lit and the curtains drawn, and then there are only the walls and ceiling and the pictures to look at. I am tired of them; I see them every day.”

“And what do you see here?” asked Sir Edward.

“You come and sit down, and I will tell you. There's room, uncle; make Fritz move a little. Now, you look out with me. I can see such a lot from this window. I like looking out right into the world, don't you?”

“Are we not in the world? I thought we were.”

“I s'pose we are, but I mean God's world. The insides of houses aren't his world, are they? Do you see my trees? I can see Gollath from this window; he looks very fierce to-night; he has lost all his leaves, and I can almost hear him muttering to himself. And then, uncle, do you see those nice thin trees cuddling each other? I call those David and Jon'than; they're just kissing each other, like they did in the wood, you know. Do you remember? And there's my beech-tree over there, where I sit when I'm the probable son. It's too dark for you to see all the others. I have names for them all nearly, but I like to come and watch them, and then I see the stars just beginning to come out. Do you know what I think about the stars? They're angels' eyes, and they look down and blink at me so kindly, and then I look up and blink back. We go on blinking at each other sometimes till I get quite sleepy. I watch the birds going to bed too. There is so much I can see from this window.”

“Well, run along to the nursery now, you have been here long enough.”

Milly jumped down from her seat obediently; then catching hold of her uncle's hand as he was moving away, she said,—

“Just one thing more I want to show you, uncle. I can see the high-road for such a long way over there, and when it is not quite so dark I sit and watch for Tommy—that's Maxwell's probable son, you know. I should be so glad if I were to see him coming along one day with his head hanging down, and all ragged and torn. He is sure to come some day—God will bring him—and if I see him coming first, I shall run off quick to Maxwell and tell him, and then he will run out to meet him. Won't it be lovely?”

And with shining eyes Milly shook back her brown curls and looked up into her uncle's face for sympathy. He patted her head, the nearest approach to a caress that he ever gave her, and left her without saying a word.

Another day, later still, he came upon her at the staircase window; he was dining out that night, and was just leaving the house, but stopped as he noticed his little niece earnestly waving her handkerchief up at the window.

“What are you doing now?” he inquired as he passed down the stairs. Milly turned round, her little face flushed, and eyes looking very sweet and serious.

“I was just waving to God, Uncle Edward. I thought I saw him looking down at me from the sky.”

Sir Edward passed on, muttering inaudibly,—

“I believe that child lives in the presence of God from morning till night.”

(To be continued.)

A YOUTHFUL MARTYR.

In the first ages of the Church of Christ, in the city of Antioch, a believer was called forth to die as a martyr.

“Ask any little child,” said he, “whether it were better to worship one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and one Saviour, who is able to save us, or to worship the many false gods whom the heathen serve.”

Now it was so that a Christian mother had come to the spot, holding in her hand a little son, of about nine or ten years of age, named Cyril. The heathen judge no sooner heard the martyr's words than his eyes rested on the child, and he desired the question to be put to him. The question was asked, and, to the

surprise of those who heard it, the boy replied, “God is one, and Jesus Christ is one with the Father.”

The judge was filled with rage. “O base Christian!” he cried, “thou hast taught that child to answer thus.” Then turning to the boy, he said more mildly: “Tell me, child, how did you learn this faith?”

The boy looked lovingly into his mother's face, and replied: “It was God's grace that taught it to my mother, and she taught it to me.”

“Let us now see what the love of Christ can do for you,” cried the cruel judge; and at a sign from him the officers, who stood ready with their wooden rods of the fashion of the Romans, instantly seized the boy. Gladly would the mother have saved her timid dove, even at the cost of her own life, but she could not do so; yet she did whisper to him to trust in the love of Christ, and to speak the truth.

“What can the love of Christ do for him now?” asked the judge.

“It enables him to endure what his Master endured for him and for us all,” was the reply.

And again they smote the child. “What can the love of Christ do for him?”

And tears fell even from the eyes of the heathen, as that mother, as much tortured as her son, answered: “It teaches him to forgive his persecutors.”

The boy watched his mother's eyes as they rose up to heaven for him, and when his tormentors asked whether he would not now acknowledge the gods that they served, and deny Christ, he still said: “No; there is no other God but one, and Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world. He loved me, and I love him for his love.”

The poor boy now fainted beneath the repeated strokes, and they cast the bruised body into the mother's arms, crying: “See what the love of your Christ can do for him now!”

As the mother pressed her child gently to her own crushed heart she answered: “That love will take him from the wrath of man to the rest of heaven.”

“Mother,” cried the dying boy, “give me a drop of water from our cool well upon my tongue.”

The mother said: “Already, dearest, hast thou tasted of the well that springeth up to everlasting life—the grace which Christ giveth to his little ones. Thou hast spoken the truth in love. Arise now, for thy Saviour calleth for thee. May he grant thy poor mother grace to follow in the bright path!”

The little martyr faintly raised his eyes, and said again, “There is but one God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent,” and so saying, he gave up his life.—Golden Sayings for the Young.

HOW A DEBT CAN BE PAID.

An office-boy in London owed one of the clerks three half-pence.

The clerk owed the cashier a penny.

The cashier owed the boy a penny.

One day the boy, having a half-penny in his pocket, was disposed to diminish his outstanding indebtedness and paid the clerk to whom he owed three half-pence one half-penny on account.

The clerk, animated by so laudable an example, paid one half-penny to the cashier, to whom he was indebted a penny.

The cashier who owed the boy a penny paid him a half-penny.

And now the boy having his half-penny again in hand, paid another third of his debt to the clerk.

The clerk, with the said really “current” coin squared with the cashier.

The cashier instantly paid the boy in full.

And now the lad, with the half-penny again in his hand, paid off the third and last instalment of his debt of three half-pence.

Thus were the parties square all round and all their accounts adjusted.

AN OVERSIGHT.

“These hotels don't seem to have any enterprise,” remarked the woman who goes shopping a great deal.

“What makes you think so?”

“They don't take advantage of the example set them by the dry-goods stores. I'm sure that a hotel charging \$4.00 a day could get lots of women to favour it when the family goes away for the summer if they'd mark the price down to \$3.99.”

Little Bobby—“Say, pa, what makes your hair so gray?” Pa—“I am afraid it is because you have been a naughty boy sometimes, Bobby.” Little Bobby (after a moment's consideration)—“What a bad boy you must have been, pa! Grandpa's hair is real white!”