

THE OLD READING CLASS.

BY WILL CARLETON.

I can not tell you, Genevieve, how oft it comes to me—
That rather young old reading class in District Number Three,
That row of educationists who stood so straight in line,
And charged at standard literature with amiable design.
We did not spare the energy in which our words were clad;
We gave the meaning of the text by all the light we had;
But still I fear the ones who wrote the lines we read so free
Would scarce have recognized their work in District Number Three.

Outside the snow was smooth and clean—the winter's thick-laid dust;
The storm it made the windows speak at every sudden gust;
Bright sleigh-bells threw us pleasant words when travellers would pass;
The maple trees along the road stood shivering in their class;
Beyond, the white-browed cottages were nestling cold and dumb,
And far away the mighty world seemed beckoning us to come.
The wondrous world, of which we counted what had been and might be,
In that old-fashioned reading class of District Number Three.

We took a hand at History—its altars, spires, and flames—
And uniformly mispronounced the most important names;
We wandered through Biography, and gave our fancy play,
And with some subjects fell in love—"good only for one day."
In Romance and Philosophy we settled many a point,
And made what poems we assailed to creak at every joint;
And many authors that we love, you with me will agree,
Were first time introduced to us in District Number Three.

You recollect Susannah Smith, the teacher's sore distress,
Who never stopped at any pause—a sort of day express?
And timid young Sylvester Jones, of inconsistent sight,
Who stumbled on the easy words, and read the hard ones right?
And Jennie Green, whose doleful voice was always clothed in black?
And Samuel Hicks, whose tones induced the plastering all to crack?
And Andrew Tubbs, whose various mouths was quite a show to see?
Ah! we cannot find them now in District Number Three.

And Jasper Fenekes, whose tears would flow at each successive word,
(He, in the prize-fight business now, and hits them hard, I've heard);
And Henry Bayne, whose every tone he murmured as in fear,
(His tongue is not so timid now; he is an auctioneer);
And Lanty Wood, whose voice was just endeavoring hard to change,
And leaped from hoarse to fiercely shrill with most surprising range;
Also his sister Mary Jane, so full of prudish glee,
Alas! they're both in higher schools than District Number Three.

So back these various voices come, though long the years have grown,
And sound uncommonly distinct through Memory's telephone;
And come are full of melody, and bring a sense of cheer,
And some can quite the rock of time, and summon forth a tear;
But one sweet voice comes back to me, whenever said I grieve,
And since a son, and that is yours, O perfect Genevieve!
It brightens up the olden times, and throws a smile at me—
A silver star amid the clouds of District Number Three.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

I shall always think that *Merry began it*, but she says that I alone am to blame. It's the most serious disagreement we ever had. I'll tell you how it came about and you can decide for yourself.

The very beginning was on a stormy day early this Winter. Oh, but it was a dismal day! And I with nothing better to do than stand at the window drumming on the glass, while the wind sighed outside, and Merry was just as doleful within over an old dress she was trying to make over.

"Do you know, Chrissie," she said, at last, in a melancholy tone, "I'm getting quite discouraged over this dress!"

"No. Are you, dear?" quoth I, pausing in my musical effort. "You surprise me! When you view that ancient ruin" (here I took an oratorical attitude on the hearth-rug and waxed tragical in voice and gesture) "you should feel the joy that seamstresses feel in a garment worthy of their steel."

"I wish you would be serious," was the almost fearful rejoinder.

I looked soberly over at my twin sister and better self. She wished I would "be serious." To be sure! All my life I had heard that desire expressed, accompanied by my teacher's exasperated "Miss Chrissie!" mother's gentle "Chrissie, dear!" or father's terrible "Chr-r-r-ristabelle!" I believe Merry and I got mixed up in our cradle and have each other names. You see for yourself that they don't fit. If we were girls in stories, my gentle, peaceful sister would have been the sweet lady Christabel and I would have been "Merry," for I am merry, while Merry, thank fortune, isn't me or like me. If we had been girls in a book, now, we wouldn't have such difficulty with the "wherewithal ye shall be clothed" either! With one drop of ink

judiciously applied we could be gorgeously apparelled and wed to millionaires. Girls in books! If they were poor, their ill-fitting shoes never concealed the beauty of their tiny feet or shabby dress their superlative loveliness. Of course not; but life as I found it, not in a book, was not so accommodating. That very morning I had discovered a hole in the library carpet, and then there was father's shabby overcoat and my darling Merry moaning over that gown.

"I am going for a walk," I announced suddenly.

When difficulties get too obtrusive and life generally looks like a rather solemn business, I like to take a good long walk. It always helps me to think things out and screw up my courage.

"I'll tell you what I've decided on," I cried, a moment later, poking my head in the door, "that we get married! I shall go down to the Metropolitan Bazaar and get us each a husband. Would you prefer yours with old-gold hair, or hay-colored, gray eyes or green?"

"It's snowing again, Chris, and the sidewalks are a glare of ice. Have you your rubbers?" was the irrelevant reply.

"Rubbers! Oh, what a groveling soul the girl has—and indifferent as to the shade of her hair. When I return, bearing homeward a gay young man with cardinal hair, she'll say, 'I would so much rather have had a brown one to match my suit.' And well pleased at the smile I had evoked by my plaintive tones, I ran gayly down the hall and out into the open air.

The walks were slippery, but the cold, keen air was good to feel, and after a brisk walk of a mile or so, I began to take a more cheerful view of things, and "count up my mercies." If father had failed, it was an honorable failure that left us no brown stone front and liveried servants, and Merry and I were doing all we could to help.

The delicate, half-invalid mother could not spare us both to go out and "fight life's battles," as had been our first eager thought; and how could one go? The parents on earth may have made a mistake in giving us our names, but the Father above had manifested His wondrous care over His children when He gave us each other.

From the cradle, which was our first partnership, I had had to look after Merry's rights and see that she was not imposed on—while she spent most of her time in explaining my idiotic remarks, and trying to convince the public that I didn't always say what I meant, or mean what I said.

So we resolved to stay in the home nest and "never to desert Mr. Micawber," vigorously turning our attention to that deceptive penny falsely said to be worth the pound earned.

We learned that we could still survive and be happy without many things that had once seemed to us among the necessities of life. Mysteries were the rites performed in our tiny kitchen, resulting sometimes in dainty, seductive dishes to tempt the appetite of the dear mother; sometimes, alas! in curious compounds that were secretly consigned to the friendly depths of the ash-barrel.

Still and slimy were the collars with which—after failing utterly an untold number of times, and embossing our fingers with blisters in a new style of decorative art—we encircled the neck of our proud father, who blindly declared himself the richest man in the city. Then I was young and strong, my walk in the cold had sent the warm blood tingling through my veins, and in my hand was a new book, over which Merry and I would have a cozy time when the lights were lit and the curtains drawn. Poor Merry, with her old gown! I must cheer her a little.

"Let me see. I will tell her how I got a husband for her and brought him as far as the gate," I mused, as I saw two young men meeting rather demonstratively at our gate just as I began carefully traversing the icy stretch at our corner. "That tall one is the one, his hair is nearly red—a narrow escape from it."

Now, at this point is where I get confused, and can't tell how I did it, but I was planning some nonsense for Merry's edification, and just opposite these unconscious youths my foot slipped, and with that insane impulse which always seizes me when falling, I threw up my hands, hurling my muff into space and my book with great force against the broad shoulders of him of the golden locks.

Turning, with an exclamation of surprise, to see whence and wherefore this cowardly attack, his feet slid under those of his laughing companion, and in a second we were all three prostrate. I sat dumbly gazing at the scene of devastation, until the younger of my two victims, checking his evident desire to break into wild laughter, sprang to his feet and bent anxiously over his friend, who groaned as he said:

"I guess I've hurt my lame arm. Help me to a drug-store, or somewhere. I'll be all right in a trice."

"Oh, bring him in here!" I cried wildly, leading the way up the walk and into the parlor, where the wounded man was deposited, halflaunting on the sofa.

"Don't be alarmed," said the other: "his arm has been broken and is not very strong yet. I guess it's only twisted. I'll go for a physician."

Now that would have been reassuring, but that, instead of going, he gazed at his hand on which there was a bleeding cut about a quarter of an inch long, and murmuring something about the sight of blood always making him sick, sank into a chair with a pallid face as his companion.

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried I, rushing through the hall and opening the library door. There I stopped, unable for a moment to speak. Mother was knitting serenely by the fire and Merry playing softly on the organ.

"What a racket you made coming in, Chris," said Merry, without looking around. "Were you dragging in our husbands?"

"Yes, I was," I gasped. "I knocked them both down. Yours is dead, and the other has swooned."

"What is the matter? What does the child mean?" cried the two at once, but without waiting for any further remarks, I drew them down the hall and thrust them into the parlor to see for themselves. Merry is a born nurse, and soon she was flying around with bandages and pitchers of water, while the physician (whom I believe only came home with me because he thought me raving mad and to be restored to the bosom of my family at any cost) was investigating the extent of the damages. Oh, what an age they were! and all the while I, the miserable cause of it all, roved around the kitchen, with all the doors tightly closed, wondering if I could have killed them both, and all the while distracted by a silly rhyme Will Clare had warbled to us the night before. Over and over it went in my mind:

"The Grand Marajah of Calcutta,
Got tipsy and fell into the gutta,
The Grand Marajah."

"Oh, Merry," said I, laying violent hands on her as she came for more water, "is he dead? Have I, like Lamech, slain a young man to my wounding and—?"

"How you can laugh!" she began reproachfully. "Why, you're crying!"

"I should think I might," I said, heavily. "I never killed any one before, and now two at one fell blow."

"Why, you silly child," giving me a gentle shake, "how could you kill any one? Anyway, one is all right again, and the other isn't dead by any means. Poor fellow! he's just had a lonely time in his hotel with a broken arm, and now it's broken again, I'm afraid."

And so it was, and a low, nervous fever accompanying, he didn't leave mother's kind care. It wasn't likely she was going to send him to his hotel and the care of hirelings alone when her daughter had caused it all.

So the whole house seemed to adapt itself to the new state of affairs. The physician came regularly, a trained nurse glided around with potions of all kinds, and Frank Oakley ran in and out, bringing to his suffering friend all sorts of delicacies that he couldn't eat, and exhibiting through it all a cheerfulness that I considered heartless, while Merry said it was best to be cheerful in a sick-room. I believe "Roy," as the rest used to call him, was never dangerously ill, but he was delirious most of the time, and so wild that it required two or three to give him anything he did not want. So mother and Merry used to assist the nurse, make ministering calls and lave his fevered brow, but I, never.

It was enough for me to be haunted by the remembrance of his ghastly face upon the crimson sofa-pillow as I had seen it last, and then, too, how could I be sure but that there was method in his madness, and he might greet me with Mr. George Sampson's sublime reproach: "Demon, with all respect for you, behold your work!"

But there was an end put to that. One fated day I was prowling around the hall, listening to his ravings, when mother called me, with the dreadful remark:

"Chrissie, you'll have to come and help me give him a powder. The nurse is taking a nap, and he will not keep his hands off the spoon."

Sure enough; and Merry out riding with that cheerful friend under the pretext that she was getting pale with so much care.

Slowly I dragged myself to the half-opened door through which at this moment came frenzied appeals for "Mabel." From the bottom of my heart I echoed their fervency. How I wished Mabel would appear and take my place. Judge, then, of my bewilderment to hear, upon my presenting myself, the frantic tones change to a pleased "Why, there she is! Come here, dear."

Gazing wildly around in search of the damsel, I think I should have fled in a second more, but mother put a spoon into my shaking hands and said, soothingly:

"Yes, here she is, and she's brought you something to help your poor head."

He opened his mouth for that agitated spoon as meekly as a lamb, and, after confiding to me that he was so glad I had come, he couldn't trust one of those other folks, fell into a troubled sleep, tightly grasping my hand, and occasionally half-waking to give it an affectionate pat, or to call me "dear little Mab," and implore me not to leave him. Mother seemed to think this a fortunate whim, but to me it was intensely embarrassing. Did I want him calling me all the sweet names meant for the other young woman?

"I can't send for Mabel. I told you he had no near relatives. She was his only sister, and has been dead for years," said Frank Oakley, speaking soberly for once, as I met them in the hall after their drive.

"Chris, dear," said Merry, thoughtfully, as she brushed out her beautiful hair that night, "do you remember once when we made up our minds never to marry and leave each other?"

"Sartin," remarked I, laconically, strug-

gling with an obstinate shoe button until I was black in the face.

"We're always going to hold to that, aren't we?" she continued, slowly.

"Of course we are!" very decidedly, "unless as usual, you will rectify my blunders by consoling that poor fellow down stairs."

It occurred to me afterwards that Merry hadn't finished her remarks that time, but I popped out the light and was asleep in two minutes. Anyway, she need not have offered to console our poor invalid, for I had to do that myself and no joking.

After that day, under the delusion that I, his slayer, was "little Mab," he wailed when I absented myself for a second at a time, and his suspicions of something deadly in every draught but those I mixed and offered.

This was not so astounding when you considered that the youth was out of his mind, but after "reason resumed her sway," the hallucination remained all through the long, slow convalescence that I could shake up pillows more scientifically than any one else, compound more delicious drinks, and was an extraordinarily good nurse generally.

I must say that Merry bore my exaltation to her particular office with remarkable composure, and I tried not to grow vain but carry my honors meekly. But it was good to be so appreciated, even if I was conscious that it was but a delusion to which there must come an awakening. It was good to care for so gentle an invalid, one so wonderfully grateful for the least attention. And so the winter wore away, and the leaves were swelling in their wholly cases.

"How lovely it is to-night!" said my patient, turning slowly away from the window at my stern command. "I will not be tyrannized over so any longer, Miss Chrissie. I'm nearly well, and the fresh air seems so good. It's so long since I've been out doors. Why, it was snowing that day, and now its springtime!"

Nearly well! So he was, and would be going away. Strange I had not thought of that before. It didn't matter, of course. If only that boy outside would stop that dreary whistling and go away.

"Oh, I dare say," I remarked, turning away to poke the fire sputtering on the hearth, "you will never forget that day, or that I am to blame for your long sickness."

"Miss Chrissie, you must not speak in that way. Don't knock that fire entirely to pieces. Come here; I want to tell you something."

That was pretty good, wasn't it? After I had ordered him around for so long and had never been used to minding any one. But I went, though I still kept the tongs that I might chatter them if the "something" should be of an exciting nature. But somehow I forgot to clutter them. Would I, could I take this that way offered me? Only the old home—wouldn't they miss naughty Chris? and hadn't I promised Merry never to leave her?

"What is it?" said I, lightly, looking stonily at the outstretched hands. "Oh, the tongs! Yes, you can have them."

So he took the proffered tongs and the trembling fingers that held them, requesting me at the same moment to "be serious a moment, my—"

"Oh, don't you ask me to be serious. I never could. I don't wish to," I broke in hurriedly. "Hear Merry and Mr. Oakley laugh! They aren't serious. I'm going over there. Look out, you'll drop the tongs!" and I ran quickly across the hall to the parlor door.

I passed suddenly in the doorway. Mr. Oakley was bending rather low over Merry's chair, it occurred to me.

As I appeared, without troubling himself to loose Merry's hand, he said laughingly:

"Is it you, sister Chrissie? Merry has been telling me the object of your expedition on that day I first had the pleasure of beholding you. It was kind in you to take so much trouble for Roy, but you'll have to make some other arrangements for him. I can't spare him, Merry. You look rather grieved, sister mine. Never mind, I'll forgive you. You may come and kiss me if you like."

"You know, Chris, the red-haired one wouldn't match my suit," said Merry, blushing like a sweet blush rose. How happy they were! horribly cheerful!

And through the half-closed door across the hall I could see the firelight gleaming on the bent head supported by one thin, white hand. Turning swiftly, I went back, and entering the room noiselessly, knelt beside the motionless figure, laying my cheek against the thin hand lying so still on the chair arm.

"An it please you, I've come back," I whispered, laughingly, with quivering lips, "and I feel horribly serious. May I stay?"

Now this is as far as this story is going; for, if you don't see how Merry began it, you never will. Merry says that, after railing at stories, I have ended this by having the girls get married just like every other story, but I don't think that objection holds, for I've observed that people out of books sometimes marry. Besides, what did I say about marrying? The very last thing I said on the subject was to mention two girls who had vowed never to marry. Never! oh, no!

PRINCE DOMINIQUE DEMIDOFF and Mlle. Chappa-Abbéma, a young Cuban heiress, were married last Saturday, at the church of Ste. Clotilde. Prince Léon Demidoff, Chamberlain to the Emperor of Russia, the uncle of the bridegroom, was present at the ceremony, which was numerously and fashionably attended.