

BOYS AND GIRLS

Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

(By Julia McNair Wright.)

By special arrangement with the National Temperance Society and Publication House, who hold the American Copyright.

CHAPTER III. Continued.

The succeeding days were days of glory. Rasmus and Rodney were a mutual admiration society; to Rasmus, Rodney was a gentleman and a scholar, as well as a very beautiful lad; to Rodney, Rasmus was an athlete and a leader. They were both new to the luxurious table, and gay people about them. Rodney was friends with all the children, and petted by all the ladies; Rasmus was called 'Mr. Rasmus,' and sometimes 'Mr. Harris,' from Rod's last name, and no one dreamed that this was in truth a tramp, without so much as a surname, or a knowledge of the alphabet, and that a little before he had been floating down the Ohio River, asleep in a pig-pen, on a bed of straw and corn-stalks. Little Moses out of his woven cradle was carried to a palace, and Rasmus, rescued from the rushes, was feasting and feted in an Ohio River boat. Heathen would here be prone to remark that Fortune is just as potent and just as blind to-day as in antiquissimis temporibus. Christians would say that to-day, just as intently and individually as in days of yore, does Divine Providence watch over humanity, and lead each soul in its destined way.

The hot suns had fulfilled the prophecies of the child of Nature. Spring, partcolored and laughing, had come with a dash. All along the banks the red-bud spread its crimson blossoms, and the dogwood, yellow and white, not waiting for the departure of its natural predecessor, expanded wide bloom. Each tree was like a huge bouquet, scarlet, primrose-color, white; the grass grew green, the noisy crows followed the plow; blackbirds with necks blue and green, or with broad red epaulettes, glittered in the sun, flashing from tree to tree, on the edges of the swamps; blue-birds built, robins sang, yellow hammers pounded away on the hollow trees. All the glorious reviving of the world filled the heart of Rasmus with ecstasy, and the progress of the boat up-stream seemed very slow, so did he long to be out once more along the roads. In fact, the boat was making poor time. She was due at Pittsburg Saturday noon, and it was evident that she would not arrive there before midnight on Sunday—there had been the afternoon's delay, and then the heavy climb up the swift strong current of the flooding river. Sunday morning an unusual stillness hung over the boat. Many of the passengers were those who were accustomed to be in their own homes or at their churches on the Sabbath, and the talk and amusement of the week fell into a sudden hush. To Rasmus all days were alike. When he had lived during two years with the farmer, he had occasionally been taken to church; since then, he had only been two or three times in a church, and then by accident. After breakfast Rodney found him looking at the water over the port-bow, and wondering how soon he could be on dry land. 'Rasmus, they're going to have preaching.'

'What's that agin?' asked the child of the nineteenth century.

'Why, church—don't you know? It's Sunday, and there is a preacher on board, and he's going to have a service in the saloon. I s'pose you'll come?'

'Certain,' said Rasmus. 'I lay out to do whatever is respectable, now I've got into good clothes. What'll it be like, brother?'

'Why, you don't mean to say you've never been to church?'

'Oh yes, I have. I rambled into one last summer, as ever was. It was a powerful hot day, down in Jersey, and I dropped into a church I see by the roadside, thinking it would be a fairish sort of place to take a cool nap; but not a wink of sleeping could I do. Whew! wasn't that parson giving it to all kinds of wickedness. I was glad I was a good man,

or I'd been scared out of my skin. He didn't let badness have no quarter, but he got it down and hammered it. I'd rather hear him than see a mill any day. He struck square out from the shoulder, as pretty as anything ever you see in your life.'

Rodney was rather confounded by this pugilistic description of a sermon. Mr. Andrews had considered it a proper part of a boy's education to send him to church and Sunday-school, and keep him within doors Sunday. He had not been a religious man himself, but he had respected religion, and had had a vague notion that he should bring up Rodney as his dead parents would have done. The boy had had a few religious books that had belonged to those parents, 'The Life of Payson,' 'The Life of Brainerd,' 'The Life of Judson,' and a few volumes of missionary experiences, with his Bible and 'Pilgrim's Progress.' These had furnished him with some religious ideas, while Mr. Andrews had been a disciplinarian in the way of morals. Thus Rodney's advantages had been much greater than those of many boys, while far less than those of boys with Christian parents. As for Rasmus, he was an embodiment of nineteenth century heathenism—an example of how, in the bosom of a Christian country, one can go from babe to man untouched by the religiousness of the country in any particular—can be without a letter of the alphabet, or a line of the ten commandments, and know nothing of God, except as His name is used in an oath. Of such heathenism Rasmus was a profound example, and yet endowed with a shrewd mind and a kindly disposition, he had been kept from immoral courses by the memory of his little brother, and the dim hope of meeting him and being his life-companion. He followed Rodney to the grand saloon, where sofas and chairs had been arranged to accommodate the audience, and he listened with attention to a sermon, of which he understood almost nothing, because he was ignorant of the rudiments of Christian truth which the minister was obliged to take it for granted that every one understood. During prayer, Rasmus decorously covered his eyes as other people did, but he peeped through his fingers, and was amazed at seeing 'the parson talking away with his eyes shut,' and also at the reverend demeanor of his fellow-worshippers. What pleased him most was the singing—and especially the voice of Rodney, fresh and sweet, in the beautiful old hymns. After service, several who had noticed Rodney's singing, asked him to sing for them, and a lady played the accompaniment while he sang—

'Hark, hark, my soul, angelic strains are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore.'

and

'Come unto me when shadows darkly gather—
And the tired soul is heavy and oppressed.'

'I tell you what, boy,' said Rasmus, confidentially to him, when they went on deck, 'if you don't find your uncle, you won't starve—for they'll be glad to pay you to sing in a theatre, or a concert saloon.'

'I wouldn't do it,' said Rodney, angrily; 'I'm made for something better. I'm a gentleman, and I shall be a scholar.'

'If that don't beat all!' said Rasmus; to him the oiled and painted, waxed-mustached singer in a cheap theatre or a concert hall was a demi-god, to be named with admiration and viewed from afar worshipfully—and Rod thought this all beneath him!

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE MAN.

'Flusheth the rise with her purple favor
Gloweth the cleft with her golden ring,
'Twixt two brown butterflies waver,
Lightly settle and sleepily sing.'

The river had by this time begun to fall; there was little of wreck and drift whirling by; it had gone down-stream. Instead, the surface was crowded with all varieties of craft taking advantage of high water. There

were 'coal tows'—great barges with square ends—knit close together, an acre of them almost, lying five or six abreast, and pushed by one of the great stern-wheel steamers that set its strong prow against them, while the big wheel churned and dashed the muddy water behind. The coal barges lay low, almost at the water's edge, and the coal rose in a rough heap in each like a little black hill with points that glittered in the sunshine. Then came the lumber-rafts, mighty processions, gliding silently along, the mellow creamy hue of the fresh lumber, glowing against the tawny color of the turbid water, and the fresh green of the banks—an acre of sweet-smelling boards welded into one raft—at the front five or six 'sweeps,' like great oars, fastened for steering—at the stern, three or four new board huts for eating and sleeping, and cooking—along the length three or four poles, where lanterns swung, or torches flared of nights; the crew, a dozen or so, big, red-shirted men; and now and again across the raft a swaying, sagging line of clothes, red, white, blue, brown, ingeniously supposed to be clean, after a washing in the muddy river. Down came the 'keel-boats' or 'barges,' relics of old time, trading-boats that could go down with the current, but never come up, and must be sold below, come down for trading, owned perhaps by the family that inhabited each one. These take from six to nine months going to New Orleans and coming back, it laboriously poled; so in these days of steam, they are generally sold at the end of the down trip, which may last three months. These barges had families living in them, and were laden with glass from the Pittsburg glass works, or with pottery, or small wares, and turned in to trade at all the river towns. Ferry-boats bustled from shore to shore between the towns. Small 'stern-wheelers' made short trips between the larger villages, and now and then a gigantic and splendid 'side-wheel boat' majestically passed, going up or down between Pittsburg and Cincinnati, or New Orleans.

To watch this stirring life, Rodney and Rasmus sat in a favorite place of theirs on a great coil of rope lying on the forecastle. Between landings this spot was nearly deserted, and there they would sit for hours, looking at the shores and talking. Too much of 'the grand company,' as Rasmus called the saloon passengers, oppressed them both. On this Sunday evening as they sat there in the long, slow sunset of April, Rasmus had been meditating on the astounding fact that Rodney expected to be something far better than an actor, or cheap-hall singer. What could the lad be thinking of? Rasmus had some shrewd and practical sense, if he had no learning, and had been dazzled by actors the very few times he had been able to afford ten cents or a quarter for a cheap show.

'I say, brother, what are you going to do with all that college learning you propose to get?'

'I don't know,' said Rod, who was rather a dreamer; 'the first thing will be to get it.'

'But ain't there no object in getting it?' asked Rasmus.

(To be continued.)

Tackling Something Hard.

After the debate was over, one of the judges expressed surprise that it should have been Richards who won first place. He said that he had met Richards a year or two before, and took him for a very average fellow, as to his mental power. But his work in the debate had shown such force of thought, and such a persistent logical development of his point, that it had been almost a brilliant performance.

One of the professors, who taught the most difficult subject in the college course, thought he could throw a little light on the lad's success. 'It is a logical development of character,' he said. 'I asked Richards once, when he was having a tussle with his work with me, why he happened to choose a study so hard for him. He said, "For that very reason, professor. I think you've got the toughest subject in the whole course, and what I need is to tackle something hard and beat it." And,' added the professor, 'he did beat it, too!'—Selected.