



The Family Circle.

CONTENTED JOHN.

One honest John Tompkins, a hedger and ditcher, Although he was poor, did not want to be richer; For all such vain wishes to him were prevented By a fortunate habit of being contented.

Though cold was the weather, or dear was the food, John never was found in a murmuring mood; For this he was constantly heard to declare, What he could not prevent he would cheerfully bear.

"For why should I grumble and murmur?" he said, "If I cannot get meat, I'll be thankful for bread, And though fretting may make my calamities deeper, It never will cause bread and cheese to be cheaper."

If John was afflicted with sickness or pain, He wished himself better, but did not complain, Nor lie down to fret in despondence and sorrow, But said that he hoped to be better to-morrow.

If any one wronged him or treated him ill, Why, John was good-natured and sociable still; For he said that revenging the injury done Would be making two wrongs where there need be but one.

And thus honest John, though his station was humble, Passed through this sad world without even a grumble; And 'twere well if some folk, who were greater and richer, Would copy John Tompkins, the hedger and ditcher.
—Old Poem.

LED ASTRAY.

A TALE FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN.

"But when will he be home?" The speaker was a little fragile thing of about six summers, with a sweet engaging countenance, poorly clad, and shivering in the bleak March wind. Her brother, to whom she addressed her question, was several years older, his face thoughtful and serious, as though the troubles of life had commenced all too soon for him. Holding his little sister by the hand and leading her carefully along, the expression on his countenance deepened to sadness as he looked fondly down upon her upturned face. "When will he be home?" he said. "Why, let's see, it was about a month before mother died that he went away. I know it was a month, because I heard mother say to the minister—'He has only been gone a month,' she says, 'out of five years, and what will become of my poor little ones all the time he is gone?' She meant me and you, Jenny, that's who she meant. Well, she died the very next day, I know. It was a Sunday and my birthday was that same week, and I was nine then, and now I'm turned thirteen. Let's see"—counting on his fingers—"ten's one, eleven's two, twelve's three, thirteen's four, fourteen's five. Yes, I know, he'll be home again a month before I'm fourteen; but that'll be a long while yet." The little one looked disappointed. "Ever so long ago," she said, "Aunt Mary told me that he would be home when I was seven; and I'm nearly seven now, ain't I?" "No," returned the boy, "you won't be seven for ever so long. I know when you're seven. You're seven next October, and I'm fourteen next December, and father will be home a month before that—that'll be November; but November don't come till the summer's all over, and the summer ain't come yet."

They went on a few steps in silence; then the child said—"Jemmy, what did they take father away for like that? Some little girls at my school said he was in prison. Is he?"

Jemmy looked at her gravely. "They had no business to say so," he said; "and you shouldn't listen to 'em, Jenny. Father will be home by-and-by, and we shall see him again, and then it won't matter where he's been, will it?"

"N—no," replied the little one. "But what did they take him to prison for? Was he naughty?"

"You mustn't ask such questions, Jenny. It's nothing for little girls like you to know; so when he comes we'll only show him how pleased we are to see him. Never mind where he's been."

Whether the child was satisfied or not, she said no more; and her brother soon turned her attention to other subjects. Could he have told her what she wished to know if he had been disposed so to do? Oh yes, the story was graven deeply in his young mind; but it was a story of shame and sin, and he was determined that, if he could prevent it, the little one should never know it.

Five years before this conversation took place, James Waters was a decent though humble member of society. He was a shopman at a small house of business, and although his salary was not large, he was able by care and economy to keep his young wife and two children in comparative comfort. But in an evil hour he formed an acquaintanceship which led to his ruin. Down to this time his companion at the counter was a person older than himself, of upright character, and steady, home-loving habits; and there can be no doubt that whatever there was of worth at this time in the character of James Waters was largely due to the influence of his friend. But this worthy man removed into the country, and was succeeded at the shop by a young man of Waters' own age. George Anson was a smart, intelligent man, fascinating in person and manners, and agreeable in conversation; and, professing a large amount of friendship for his new associate, he speedily established himself in the latter's good opinion. But, as is too often the case, these outward graces of manner covered a vicious and immoral character. The tavern-parlor, and billiard-room, the common music-hall—these were the resorts of George Anson after the day's business was done; and the effects of the night's excesses were scarcely disguised by the forced activity and superficial gaiety of the morning.

The baneful influence of such a character soon began to tell upon the weak and plastic nature of James Waters. First there came the temptation to take a friendly glass together—a temptation that was feebly resisted for awhile, but only for awhile, for who could be so churlish (so the matter presented itself to the young man's mind) as to continually oppose such friendliness as George Anson's? Then came the suggestion to go and see some billiard-playing. "A really scientific and interesting game," said the tempter, "and one you really ought to know something about—you ought, indeed. Keep you out late at night! oh no, no need for that. Besides, a man does not want to be always tied at home; he can be spared now and then for a little harmless recreation, surely." This temptation also succeeded. The music-hall followed; then the convivial gathering at the parlor of "The Crown"; and gradually from the steady, quiet "home-bird," as his companion laughingly called him, James Waters became a spendthrift and a drunkard. Pecuniary difficulties followed, of course. How could the income, which was only just sufficient when carefully administered to keep the little family out of debt, support the young man in the infatuated habits into which he had now fallen? Debauchery was followed at length by dishonesty, and one memorable evening, to his wife's unutterable anguish, James Waters was torn from the bosom of his family and carried away to shame and ignominy. After nearly two months of direst suspense he was convicted and condemned to penal servitude for five years. His heart-broken wife bore up till she knew the worst; but when at length all hope had fled, she sank beneath the load of shame and sorrow and penury which her husband's sin had cast upon her, and in a month from the date of his conviction, James Waters' children were left motherless. His friends and relatives, smarting under the sense of the shame in which their connection with him had involved them, absolutely re-

fused to do anything for his children—all but one good creature, the poorest and least able of them all. The "Aunt Mary" of whom the child had spoken—a lone widow, maintaining herself with difficulty by the work of her hands—when she found that no one else would come to their help, committed herself and them to the care of him who is the Father of the fatherless and the Husband of the widow, and took them to her own home. For nearly five years she had struggled on, and by denying herself every little comfort to which she had been accustomed by working early and late, and by teaching the children as soon as it was possible to do so to assist her in her work, she had contrived with God's blessing to maintain herself and them without absolute want. Her reward was the approval of a good conscience, the love of the children, and the grateful prayers and blessings of the now penitent sinner.

When the two children reached home on the evening of the conversation which has been recorded, they found Aunt Mary sitting by the fire with tearful eyes and with an open letter on her lap. She quietly folded the letter as they entered and placed it in her pocket; then, hastily brushing away her tears, received them with even more than her usual cheerfulness and affection. From these signs the boy judged that the tears he saw were tears not of sorrow, but of joy. The little Jenny was put to bed that evening rather earlier than usual. When she was gone, Aunt Mary laid her hand on the boy's shoulder, and said—"Jemmy, I've some news for you."

"Good news?" asked the boy, looking up with a smile.

"Yes, dear, glad news. Your father is coming home!"

"Coming home!" cried the boy, eagerly.

"What, soon?"

"Very soon, Jemmy. In three days. Here is his letter. Read it."

Jemmy took the letter, and sitting down, spread it out before him on the table. The letter ran as follows:—

"My dear, kind sister,—Thank God I shall be with you soon. Next Thursday this weary, weary time will end, and I shall be free once more. I should shrink from showing my face amongst you, though my heart yearns to see you all, only I know so well the generosity, and sympathy both of yourself and of my dear boy. How shall I ever repay you for all your goodness? Please God we will get right away from all old associations; and with His help I am hoping and praying to be made even yet a blessing to you all.

"Let Jemmy read this. Although it is the bitterest cross of all to be thus degraded in the knowledge of my child, I am sustained by the consciousness of his sweet affection and his sturdy resolution to forget as far as possible the past, and to maintain his filial respect even for such a father as I have been. God bless him, and you, dear sister, and the little darling, innocent of the knowledge of my father's sin. How I long to clasp her in my arms again! I can say no more. God bless you all.

"Your grateful and affectionate brother,
"JAMES WATERS."

With tearful eyes the boy returned the letter to his aunt. In a broken voice he said—"I'm so glad he's coming, aunt! And Jenny, won't she be pleased?"

"Yes, dear, I wouldn't mention it till you had read the letter." Then, putting her arm around him, she said softly—"Let us thank God, Jemmy."

They knelt where they had often knelt together before, and in silent gratitude—for neither could speak—they lifted their hearts to God.

It was a bright cheerful morning when James Waters stepped out of the prison gates into the glorious sunshine, a free man again. With his eyes bent on the ground, he hurried away in the direction of his sister's residence. He had just got clear of the little group surrounding the gates, when a boy emerged from behind a corner, where he had been watching and waiting, and taking him by the arm, said softly—"Father!"

The man stopped suddenly, and trembling with emotion, clasped the boy to his arms. "God bless you, my boy!" he faltered. "God bless you!" Then he released him, and taking him by the hand, they hurried along in silence.

I need not describe the meeting between the released convict and his little family;

the affectionate welcome of the sister who had been a mother to his children; the delight of the little Jenny, who did not even remember her father's face, but in whose heart the thought of him and the childish love for him had been fostered and kept alive by her brother's filial tenderness.

In about a week's time they removed to a locality where they were altogether unknown, and there, in a very low and humble sphere, James Waters began life afresh.

Need I say that his first step was to sign the temperance pledge, and that his bitter repentance for the past resulted, by the grace of God, in a change of heart, followed by a humble, careful walk and conversation; and that as the years rolled on, the aspiration of his letter was realized, and he became indeed a blessing to those who had remembered him so tenderly in his shame and punishment.—*British Workman.*

WORKING FOR NOTHING.

BY LIZZIE CHASE DEERING.

"I shall not be able to hire you after this week, George," said a pale, delicate-looking woman to a boy about fourteen years old who had been in the habit of getting her wood and water for her. "I find I cannot spare the money, and I shall have to try and do the work myself."

She said this in a very sad tone of voice; so sad that almost any one would have noticed it. But George Burch did not notice it, or the sad look in her face when she said it. The only thought in his mind was that he should lose his twenty-five cents a week he had been earning.

"Why? Don't I suit! I work as cheap as anybody, I guess."

"Oh, yes, you don't ask any too much and you do your work well. But the reason is only that I cannot spare the money, as small as the sum is. I hope you can find something else to do to take the place of this, I am sure. I wish I could keep you, for I am afraid drawing the water is going to be almost too much for me. Here is your money, George."

As he took the money and turned to go, Mrs. Noble called to him:

"George, I guess I shall have to get you to bring me an extra pail of water. I may feel too tired to get it myself in the morning. Here are three cents extra for it."

George took the three cents as a matter of course, and listened with satisfaction to hear them drop down into his pantaloon pocket with the other money he had just received.

After he had gone Mrs. Noble seated herself before her fire with a heavy heart. It was a gray November afternoon, and she felt more lonely than usual. She felt sick, too, and she wondered how, with her failing strength, she should be able to bring water from the well, split her kindlings and do the other work which George had been doing for her. She wished that she had spared a few cents more and got him to cut a few more kindlings, for it seemed to her she needed a day or two to get up courage enough to do it herself.

Perhaps it seems strange to most of you that it should seem such a burden to her—work that to you would seem so light. But Mrs. Noble had never drawn a pail of water or split a stick of wood. She had until recently had plenty of money and servants to help her. But within a short time death took from her her husband and only child. Misfortunes of various kinds, which boys and girls would not care to stop and read about, reduced her large property to a very small one, and the small one to an income so small as to hardly support her comfortably. After the death of her husband she removed to the little village of —, and occupied alone the cottage of which I have spoken. Tears filled her eyes as she thought of the past, of the dear ones now gone, of the far-distant home of her youth, and of her present condition of loneliness and poverty. She had a brother, she supposed, somewhere in the world, but she knew not where. He had left home many years before, during some family trouble, and had never made known his whereabouts. He was probably dead. So, because she had no relatives, no special friend to whom she could go for help, and no money to spare for hiring her work done, she must try, sick or well, to do it herself. Little did George Burch think what a sorrowing heart he was leaving, although tears were in her eyes when she bade him goodbye. Perhaps we ought not to expect a boy of his age to feel or show sympathy for such