



The Family Circle.

LITTLE PROPHETS.

BY A. A. E. TAYLOR, D.D.

The lilac buds now burst their bands ;
Poor captives, bound in wintry chains,
They scent the footsteps of the sun
And catch the songs of joyous rains.

Kindling in saffron, purple, white,
The crocus lifts its timorous flame.
Come, chemist, with thy spectrum test,
Tell whence these royal splendors came.

The green swords of the hyacinth
Stand guard around their pillared king ;
Rich waxen clusters form his crown,
Whose royal blood sweet incense bring.

The honey-bees, with trembling wings,
Flew far to taste my flowers to-day ;
Then sank within the velvet bloom,
Too weak to bear their wealth away.

The frost and snow have quit the field,
And fled to frigid Arctic halls ;
While heaven's warm light on sleeping life,
With mild, persuading vigor falls.

I vowed I'd tangle not my pen
In tatters of this threadbare theme ;
But Spring's soft fevers flush my veins,
And while I muse they tell my dream.
—N. Y. Independent.

"POOR UNCLE SI."—A TRUE STORY.

BY HELEN HARCOURT.

I shall never forget that bright, sunny afternoon, when my father stood looking down at us, my two brothers and myself.

We had been planning, with great glee, how we should dress up, some dark night, and in the character of ghosts, frighten a certain timid schoolfellow of ours.

"It will be jolly fun, boys, I can tell you!" I exclaimed, with a shout of laughter at the idea.

"Jolly fun to you, Harry, but what will it be to him?" asked a deep, reproachful voice from the doorway, and glancing up, there stood our father with a pained look on his face.

It was a new idea! It would be fun to us, but what would it be to him, the poor, unoffending boy we were planning to frighten so cruelly?

We had never thought of that side of the question at all; boys, ay, and men too, are only too apt to look at one side only, and that side the one that pleases themselves the most.

Our father stood a moment in thought, and then came into the room and sat down.

"My sons," he said, "I see the time has come for me to tell you a story of the long ago, when I was a boy, so full of life and fun that, like you, I did not stop to think whether my fun might not be just the opposite to some one else."

He paused awhile, and a sad, pained shadow crept over his face, a look I had often seen there, and had learned to connect with a certain man who dwelt in a little cottage near by.

He was a large, strong man, about our father's age, but alas! the light of his life, his reason, had gone out for ever; he was a lunatic, gentle and harmless, and for the most part cheerful and playful, but there were times when he would fall prone on the floor, quivering with terror, and shrieking out wild appeals to be saved from the ghosts that were about to seize him.

My father often visited this poor fellow, "poor Uncle Si," we boys called him, and on a few occasions had taken me, his eldest boy, with him; he never went with empty hands, but always carried some little gift, a picture-book, candy, cake or a toy; and even, at such times, I noted that weary, sad expression creep over my father's usually cheerful face, and remain there like a cloud, long after our return home. I knew, too, that it was he who, with my Uncle John's assistance, paid the rent of the lunatic's cottage, clothed him, and provided the old woman who lived with and took care of him.

And sorely had all this puzzled me, for I knew that "Uncle Si" was in no wise related to my father or mother, and that the money expended in his support could ill be spared for that purpose.

Often had my father promised to tell the story "when the right time should come," and it had come now, it seemed, for his first words were of "Uncle Si."

"My boys," he said, "I am going now to tell you the story of Uncle Si, and it is the saddest story of all my life. When you have heard it, you will know why I think it my duty to tell it to you just now.

"I would give ten years of my life if I had no such story to tell. But it is my cross, and one of my own making, so I must bear it patiently as my punishment. When I was a boy going to school, there was among my schoolmates a bright little fellow, a good scholar but a very nervous, timid boy. His mother was a poor woman, who worked hard to support herself and him, and it was her greatest ambition to see him win his way up in the world.

"We all liked Silas, he was so gentle; but at the same time we took advantage of his good temper and his timid nature, and were always playing jokes on him.

"His mother was an Irish woman, and was full of queer superstitions. There seemed nothing too marvellous for her to credit, and Silas had inherited this superstitious tendency in a great degree.

"We boys soon found out his weakness, and nothing pleased us more than, after the afternoon session was over, to sit on the school-house steps and vie with each other in inventing the most outrageous and startling stories of ghosts, robbers and murderers. Si would listen with his blue eyes almost starting from their sockets, and his cheeks turning white and red, finally becoming excited to such a pitch that he would jump at every sudden noise, the slamming of a door, or the stamp of a foot on the pavement.

"One afternoon we had been indulging in our favorite amusement until the sun had almost gone down and darkness began to steal across the fields and woods around us.

"Oh, what shall I do!" exclaimed Silas, looking fearfully around. "I must go over to Farmer Brown's before I go home, and it will be dark before I can get back."

"To Farmer Brown's!" said I, winking at the other boys; "then you'll have to cross the old bridge over Long Pond, Si, and they say that the ghost of a woman who drowned herself there haunts it after nightfall; that's only on the anniversary of her death, though, so—but I say, boys, what day of the month is this?"

"The tenth," was the answer.

"I drew in my lips in a long whistle, and looked hard at Silas.

"Then I'm glad I don't have to go that way to-night," I muttered in a low tone, but not so low but that he heard me, as I meant he should.

"Why, why?" he stammered, turning white as a sheet; "is it—"

"Yes, it is, since you must know. But do not be afraid, old fellow, I don't believe the story, anyhow. Who ever heard of a ghost with fiery ribs and fiery spots all over its face? Pshaw, it's all humbug."

"But poor Silas was thoroughly alarmed; indeed, I intended he should be, and thought his terror fine sport, or, rather, the beginning of some fine sport, for I had made up a plan, of which this was only the prelude.

"While Silas hesitated, divided between the fear of meeting the ghost and the certainty of getting a whipping if he did not perform his errand, I called my brother John aside, and in a hurried whisper told him of my plan, which we decided to keep to ourselves.

"As a result John proposed to accompany Silas on his errand, an offer the poor fellow gratefully accepted, and so they set off together and the rest of our party started for home.

"I made some excuse to turn off before I reached my own home, and ran with all speed to the drug-store, where I bought a stick of phosphorus; then I darted home and succeeded in getting possession of a small sheet and in slipping off again unnoticed.

"Very soon I found myself at the bridge, and there, hidden behind a bush, I proceeded to trace over my dark jacket the outline of skeleton ribs, and very startling they looked—the white, glowing lines shining out clear and distinct through the darkness, for by this time it was entirely dark. Then I put some of the phosphorus on my hands and face and

wrapped the sheet around my waist, leaving it to trail behind me.

"Thus prepared, I posted myself a few yards beyond the bridge, on the side the boys would reach first on their return path.

"Directly I heard Silas' voice,

"Oh John, I'm afraid, I'm afraid."

"Nonsense," answered my brother. "The idea of a ghost. I only wish there was such a thing. I'd like to see one."

"Oh, don't, don't say that. Oh, o-h!"

"Such a cry of intense, utter horror I hope never to hear again, and as Silas uttered it he fell all in a heap on the ground. John, according to our agreement, shrieked also and started to run as if terribly frightened. An instant Silas lay there, and my heart gave a great leap. Was he dead? Had I killed him? But no, my boys, I had done nothing so merciful as that.

"Silas sprang to his feet again, and uttering shriek after shriek, rushed headlong down the road toward the bridge. By this time, seeing how terribly in earnest he was, I began to think that my fun had gone quite far enough, so I followed at full speed, calling out to him that it was all a joke and no ghost at all.

"But he never heeded a word I uttered; on and on he ran, shrieking all the way until he reached the bridge, and there to my horror he sprang with one leap over the wall down into the soft, slimy mud and water at the margin of the pond.

"John had turned back, and, tearing loose the sheet from around my waist, I rushed with him down the steep bank to the spot where Silas was. There was more mud than water just there, as we well knew, and the force of his descent had sent him down into the deep, yielding slime until only his head and shoulders were above the surface, and to our further alarm we saw that he was slowly sinking down, down, down!

"Something must be done, and that speedily, or he would be buried alive before our eyes. Some heavy planks were lying on the shore, and seizing these we dragged them out in the mud until, we had formed a line reaching to the spot where poor Silas was still shrieking, 'The ghost! the ghost! the ghost!'

"How we two boys contrived to drag him out of that oozing slime I cannot to this day understand. But we did it somehow, and between us we got him back home, though he broke from us several times with the old cry of 'The ghost!'

"He was very ill for weeks after that, and when his body got well the doctors said his mind would never come back again, and from that time to this he has been just as you see him now.

"As long as his unhappy mother lived your Uncle John and I helped her to take care of him, and ever since her death, long years ago, we have entirely supported the miserable victim of our cruel 'fun,' though it was more my sin than your uncle's, for I was the ring-leader.

"My sons, that piece of 'jolly fun' has saddened my whole life and clouded its brightest moments."

My father ended his story, and sat looking down at our awe-struck faces as we murmured in sorrowful tones:

"Poor Uncle Silas!"

"Well, my sons," he said after awhile, "I am waiting to hear what that plan is that it will be such fun to play off on Sam Harrow."

We hung our heads in silence, and he smiled gently.

"Ah, I see you know why I have told you my sad story to-day. You have read its lesson. And now, boys, I can trust you, I know; but lest you might forget, I want each one of you to lay his hand on this Holy Book, and, remembering that our Father in heaven is listening to you, promise never to indulge in any sport that may injure or distress your fellow-creatures."

And then, standing at our dear father's knee, we each gave a solemn pledge that we have never broken, and our lives have been the better and the happier for it.

My boy reader, and you also, my girl reader, I plead with you to go and do likewise, for so shall you obey the Saviour's command to "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you."—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*

All common things, each day's events,
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend.
—H. W. Longfellow.

WHOBUILT THE CHURCH.

ALEXANDER MACLEOD, D.D.

It is not good to be without food or help. But also it is a danger for us to have too great abundance either of food or help. And that is the meaning of the prayer in the Book of Proverbs: "Give me neither poverty nor riches . . . lest I be full and deny Thee . . . or lest I be poor and steal."

In a delightful book of old-world ballads by Mr. Baring Gould, I have found two stories which will help us both to understand these dangers and how to escape from them. I cannot give them just as they are given in the book. But I shall tell them briefly in homely prose.

About thirteen hundred years ago there was living in the city of Constantine a great emperor called Justinian. When he cast his eyes over the city in which the palace was, he saw that there was no church, or no worthy church, for God. And he said to himself, "I will supply this want. I will build a church with which God shall be pleased. And I alone shall do it. And the glory of doing it shall be altogether mine." And he further said, "God will be pleased. And when I die and my soul arrives at the gate of heaven, the angels of God will come out and blow their trumpets and say: 'Enter, Justinian, who built the great church to God.'"

So he called together the architects, and masons, and workers in wood, and iron, and brass, and gold, and said to them, "Build me a church for God, such as there shall be none equal to it for magnificence. See that no one is suffered to contribute nail, or plank, or stone to it except myself. And when it is finished, inscribe above the great door of it these words: 'Built to God by the Great Emperor Justinian.'"

And the architects, and builders, and workers in wood, and brass, and gold, began to work. And soon the harbor was crowded with ships bringing marble to build the walls, and the streets with waggons, drawn by oxen, carrying the marble to the site. And by-and-by the walls began to rise. And after a time they were completed. Marble outside gloriously carved; inside, gold, and silver, and precious stones. Then a day to open it was set. And on the day before, above the great door, the words were carved as the Emperor had commanded: 'Built to God by the Great Emperor Justinian.'

At last, on this day that was set, a chariot of gold was brought to the door of the palace, and the nobles, and chief captains, and priests, and all the great workers who had worked at the church, and all the army, came dressed in glorious apparel, and waited behind the chariot. Then the doors of the palace were thrown wide open, and amid the blowing of trumpets Justinian came out, shining in gold and purple and precious stones, and took his seat on the chariot of gold. Such a day had never been known in Constantinople. The streets resounded with music and with the shoutings of the people, as the great emperor drove, at the head of his nobles and armies, to open the church he had built to God.

As he drew near to the church his heart swelled with pride. He alone had done the work for God.

He raised his eyes to see the inscription. But what he saw there was not what he expected to see. His face flushed with anger. His brow knit, his eyes flashed fire. Justinian's name was nowhere to be seen. What he read was this:—This house to God, Euphrasia, widow, gave.

Who had dared to mock Justinian in this way? He called for the carver of the inscription; but he, trembling, could only say it was the Emperor's name which he had carved. He called for architects, chief priests, chief captains. They replied in fear, "O mighty Emperor, this only we know, that last night our eyes beheld thy name, and not another, graven on that wall."

Then, when every one was silent, the chief priest found courage to say, "My lord Emperor, it may hap that this is not of man but of God. Who knows whether this strange name has not been written by the finger that wrote the Ten Commandments on stone, and the strange words on the walls of Belshazzar's palace?"

When this was said the Emperor began to tremble, and to ask, "Who, then, is Euphrasia the widow?" At first everybody thought she must be some rich lady, richer than the Emperor, who, unknown to him, had given more than he to the church. And a search began. And at last the search-