

BOYS AND GIRLS

For Honor's Sake.

(E. Boyd Bayly in 'Sunday at Home'.)

CHAPTER II.

Davie's father had been a much-respected tradesman, carrying on a small business in Christchurch. Calamities, of the kind that no foresight can avert, came upon him; and before he had time to recover from them, he took a fever and died, leaving five children, the eldest a boy of fourteen, and his affairs encumbered with debts. They were honest debts, such as come in the order of trade, and would have been cleared as he went along, but for his misfortunes. The chief creditor held a mortgage on the business and stock, which passed into his hands: the smaller claims were left—no one thought of pressing them. Kindly men felt for the widow, and hard ones said it was no use trying to draw blood from a stone. All agreed that Marriott would have done well and paid up, if he had lived. The widow gave up everything but the necessary furniture of a humble dwelling—left her comfortable home, and went with her children to a lean-to, on the edge of the town.

In England, we add lean-tos to houses already built. In the colonies, they begin with a lean-to, and leave space in front to build the house when they have prospered and can afford it. Some people never do prosper, and go on living in lean-tos.

Mrs. Marriott's had ground behind it as well as before, and a well at the back which never failed. These, with the comparatively low rent of an unpopular suburb, were her attractions to the place, since she had decided to try laundry-work. It was very different from anything she had been brought up to expect, for her father was a substantial shopkeeper in a country town in England, and her husband's prospects were very bright when she married him. But the work could be done in her own home, with her children about her. There was a demand for it: it was highly paid, and, as a rule, very badly done in Christchurch then; and she had the appliances her husband had bought for her own use in their happy home. There was nothing else which she could do as well which was equally well paid; so she brought her mind to it.

But when she left the dear and pleasant home of years, and came with her children to the three-roomed shed with a little wash-house at the back, her heart almost failed her. The children came running up to her, crying 'Mother, where shall we sleep?' 'Where can we put this or that?' For a moment she turned her face away from them, leaning on the mantelpiece, and wished she could lie down and die. The battle was too great for her.

'Our things never will get in here, mother,' said George, despairingly.

Then a thought came to her, like the cake baked on the coals which the angel showed to Elijah when his heart fainted.

'That's what I said to father, when we went into our little cabin on board ship,' she answered, 'and he said "Oh yes, they will,"—and so they did. This place is not home; it is only our little cabin on the voyage "Home," where he has gone on first; but he would want us to put it tidy. Has the cart gone, George?'

'Yes, mother.'

'Shut the door, then, and let us kneel down together before we touch a thing, and ask God to be our Father here, and tell us what to do.'

Her burden overwhelmed her: she could

not bear it any longer without help. They knelt down among the packages, and she began—

'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

There her voice failed: she could only pour out her tears before the Lord, her children sobbing round her. But again she quieted herself, and the sound of her voice stilled their weeping, as she prayed—

'O Lord God Almighty, come to us and be our Father here. Bless us in our little cabin. Tell us our duty, and make us strong to do it. Help us to earn our daily bread. Make us faithful here, and bring us all safe Home at last, for our dear Saviour's sake. Amen.'

They rose, and the four children clung round her. Davie was not there: he had gone to Rakawahi the day before.

'We'll make it home, mother,' said George.

'We will try, dear,' she answered. 'Now open the basket, and you shall have dinner before we do anything else.'

Children's tears dry quickly. The little ones were soon laughing over the picnic meal. They had scarcely finished when an old friend looked in to see if he could be of use. With the help of his strong arms, the goods were pushed into place; and as the rooms assumed a habitable look, with the remnants of her old home arranged in them, the strong temptation which had assailed the mother to loathe the place and feel she could never do anything but hate it, vanished away. She had come there, feeling as if they had nothing before them but one grinding struggle for bread; but while she prayed, that load was lifted. The Lord Almighty had taken charge of it. Bread would be given them, and water would be sure.

She began to take an interest in making the best of her little place. Friends had been kind, and she had a small sum of money to lay out in fitting up her washhouse. She spared a few pence for flower-seeds, and by Christmas, they had sprung up.

George went to work in a gentleman's house and garden, with leave to help his mother on Mondays and Saturdays, when clothes had to be fetched and returned. He sometimes had plants given to him, and the front garden became quite gay. Already, Mrs. Marriott's house was not like other lean-tos down that unfashionable road; it had a character of its own, received from its mistress.

So had her washing. It was hard work, even harder than she expected: but week after week, when she arranged her piles of linen white as snow, daintily ironed and got up—though every bone in her body ached by Friday night, she had the pleasure of success. She knew that her customers were satisfied, for more and more work came in. Nellie, the eldest girl, had left school to help her, and even the two little ones did their part; but the work became too much for the family, and yet not enough, as yet, to pay for constant help. The mother toiled on from day to day, pleading her daily prayer, 'Tell me my duty, and make me strong to do it.'

Saturday was her day for home, when everything was rubbed up and set in order; and on the Saturday morning before the Monday, which would be Christmas Day, cleaning was interspersed with a great many looks down the road to see if Davie was coming.

The kind stranger had never found his way to the house again. He had once driven down the Coxley Road, seeking it, but failed to find it. He always thought that he would

he happened to have something else to do, until months and years passed on, and it was too late to take up again the little link which had been forged by his meeting with Davie. The lives of two households had touched for an hour, and parted again for the rest of life. We are always forming such links and dropping them, along life's crowded way. If we tried to hold them all fast, they would strangle us. Enough if they are links of loving-kindness for the hour they last.

The stranger came as an angel of mercy indeed, to the boy and his mother. Sore as Davie was, he would have been much sorer still, but for that brief touch of love.

As Christmas approached, Ned had tormented him by telling him he had another card up his sleeve, to 'do' with him. Davie silently resolved that, whatever the card might be, if it were played, he would run away and never come back. He vowed vengeance and defiance, and when the day came everybody looked him up only too assiduously; and he found himself bowling along, on a glorious summer morning, his little legs dangling from the back seat, and Emmie, in the highest spirits, chattering to her father in the front. They were going in to buy good things for Christmas Day.

The Maori-heads were a wilderness of tawny gold, the sunshine glancing on them as they shook in the passing breeze. The beautiful tui-tui grass—like pampas grass, only taller and more graceful—stood guarding the streams. Skylarks poured out their song in the blue sky, and Mr. Foster grumbled at them, and said they were ruining the farmers; but he laid his head back to watch the black speck high above, and made Emmie and Davie see it too, for the sake of dear old England.

As they drew near the town, they drove for miles past pleasant houses standing far back from the road in their own grounds. Girls were in the gardens, picking lilies and roses for Christmas, and currants and raspberries for Christmas pies. Here and there a sweet scent of hay came wafted from some English-grown-sown paddock.

'Christmas is awkward, coming just in the press,' said Mr. Foster. 'All got to go skylarking, when we ought to be pegging away.'

He took Davie to his mother's very door, and called to her, 'Brought him all right this time, you see, and I never had a better little boy. Here,' reaching down to put an envelope into her hand. 'Good day, and a merry Christmas to the young uns.'

He would not wish her a merry Christmas, this year; but he had brought her what she hungered for—her boy. And at first she thought him a picture of health and spirits, all rosy and joyful as he was; but there was a clutch in his clinging hold of her, a quiver in his little face, that spoke of something too deep for a child to feel. Then she remembered that this was his first home-coming to find no father—and to this poor little place.

The linen-baskets stood waiting, and Davie was soon very busy and important, for George had extra work to do at his master's that day, and Davie took home the clothes in a hand-truck, Lily trotting along by his side to show him the way. His mother was astonished to see how his muscles had gained in strength with the ten weeks' out-door work. She was very busy herself with her preparations for Sunday and Monday, and had little talk with him through the day. It needed a strong courage for the tired woman, with a widow's aching heart, to rouse