

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## Jacob Conner's Sympathy.

(By E. D. Bighan.)

Not long since, I was visiting in the family of an ex-Governor, and I heard him relate a story, which he gave me permission to print:—

When I was Governor, I took a little pleasure trip, going to see a special friend. His country home was near the — coal mines, and I made known my intention of visiting them. Of course my visit was known of even before I had arrived at my friend's home, and the very children along the wayside smiled up at me as I drove from the little depot to my friend's house.

The third morning of my stay, I went to the mines with a pleasant party of gentlemen. I was about to enter the shaft when I felt a touch upon my arm, and, turning, saw a girl about fifteen years of age. She was the only female to be seen, though a number of idle men were standing about, observing the Governor.

The girl was bareheaded, holding a limp-sunbonnet in her left hand. Her shoes were much broken, and her black calico dress had been washed until it was rusty. That, and the intense paleness of her long, bony face, made the big freckles very plain. I noted these things at a glance, and then my eyes looked into her—the most beseeching eyes I ever saw outside of the head of a hungry dog pushed into the cold.

'What is it, child?' I asked, everyone looking on, waiting.

'Please, sir, let my brother go home a little while,' she said. 'The sight o' him will keep mother from dying, and we can't get along without mother.'

'Who is your brother, and where is he?' I asked, though I had guessed promptly enough that he was a criminal at work in the mines.

'His name is Nathan Peel, and he's—he's down there,' she said, pointing to the shaft.

'It's nigh about killed mother, sir,' she added. 'She would take a turn for the better and get well if she could just see him at home for a while. And Nathan didn't do what they said he did, Governor. He didn't do it.'

A light that was fierce seemed to spurt up in her eyes as she spoke, and her face became mottled with color.

'He ain't that kind,' she continued. 'But the law put him down there, and he'll work faithfully. Only let him come home this once—only let him! only let him!' she pleaded.

I remember her words well, but to tell how her voice sounded is out of my power. I know it made me feel like taking the young man in question by the shoulder and hurrying him home without a moment's delay. Instead, however, I asked the questions one in a similar position would be expected to ask. I found that the family lived fifty miles away; that the girl had walked the distance alone, having heard of my intended visit; that her father was dead, and that the mother had been in bed ever since the arrest of her son.

'You are a brave daughter and sister, my girl,' I said, 'but I cannot promise to let your brother go home. I will have a look into the matter before I can promise anything, but I will see him. When I come up I will have something more to say to you, if you are here.'

She watched me hungrily as I spoke, and by the time I had finished, every atom of spirit had died out of her face. It was the

most hopeless thing I had ever looked at, and she turned from me listlessly, saying, 'Mother said you would not let him come.'

She sat down on a block of wood, and I stepped to my place and was lowered into the mine. By and by, Nathaniel Peel was pointed out to me. He and his sister were strikingly alike. He was tall and thin, and pale and dispirited, but he was working like a beaver.

'This is the first year on a sentence of ten years for assault with intent to murder,' some one told me.

I said I thought it a light sentence.

'There seems to be certain facts on his side, despite the overwhelming circumstantial evidence,' was answered. 'For one, he never could be made to admit his guilt—never has done it.'

An impulse as strong as it was sudden moved me, and I approached the young fel-

there stood the same group of idle men. I was scarcely away from the shaft before a grizzly-haired man of fifty or sixty years confronted me. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and was evidently a poor, hard-working man.

'Governor,' he said, 'we have been talking to this young gal, and, sir, if you'll write out the papers, I'll take her brother's place and do his work while he goes home to see the sick woman. I'll jest be Nathan Peel, sir, until he comes back, an', ef he never comes back, I'll be Nathan Peel until his sentence is worked out.'

Every man had pressed closer, and there was a double row of faces, white, stern, tense, before me.

'Do you know Nathan Peel? Is he a friend of yours?' I asked the old man.

He was unconsciously breaking to bits a dry twig.



### 'THE FORM OF A YOUNG MAN APPEARED WALKING BRISKLY.'

low—he was barely twenty-three. He rested on his pick a moment and looked at me.

'I am told that you say you are innocent,' I remarked bluntly.

He eyed me as he wiped his brow, and evidently thought me a meddling visitor, nothing more. Then he grasped his pick and returned to work, merely saying, 'I am innocent.'

The spiritless way in which he said it reminded me of his sister's tragically hopeless words, 'Mother said you would not let him come home.' I turned aside, feeling that a cruel wrong was breaking all their hearts, and that I would become a party to the wrong if I did not do something to redress it. But what could I do?

When I got up to the light of day again, there sat the girl on the block of wood, and

'Never saw him in my life,' he said. 'Never heard of his case till to-day. But I feel main sorry for him an' his folks, an' I believe in 'em.'

So did I feel sorry for them, and so did others, doubtless. But folks have different ways of proving their sympathy with another's sorrow, and I honored that old man's way; it counted.

'Beats the Damon and Pythias tale,' I said, turning to my friends with a smile that would not be a smile despite my effort.

Their faces did not even try to smile, but looked solemn. Their eyes seemed to nudge my heart and, before I could control myself, I had said:

'Gentlemen, will you uphold me?'

'In whatever you do,' sounded on all sides.

'Then let us hear what Nathan Peel has