

BOYS AND GIRLS

Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

(By Julia McNair Wright.)

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CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Mr. Llewellyn promptly called a halt. They were near a great stone church, and went up into the porch to be out of the way of the passers-by, while Rodney, with some hints from Rasmus, gave the main facts of the case.

"I see, I see," said the naturalist. "Dear, dear, this is a sad story. I know the paper that you should advertise in, and I'll write out an advertisement for you there. Have it put in coarse print in the editorial column, and ask other papers to copy. I have an address where my papers and letters always reach me, and we'll have news sent there, if you like. Don't be too down-hearted, man, you may find the child yet."

Rasmus shook his head hopelessly, he had been so often disappointed. When they left the printing-office he happened to see a large building not far off, and woke into animation. "See that place. There's a great hall there where they have lectures, and I went there to one two years ago—only one I ever was to. A man named Gough. He had white hair and beard. I was sort of hanging round the door looking at the folks go in, when a man takes me by the elbow any says, "Coming in, friend?" "What for is going on?" says I. "Temperance talk," says he, "by a man as knows both sides of it. Come in." "It will be werry good," I says, "I make no doubt. I've seen both sides, and I know which I tie to; but I s'pose it's pay, and I'm rayther short." "Come along in," says he, "I reckon my face is good for us both."

"So we walked in, and he give me a seat, and I vow if that very same man didn't go up before all the folks to give the lecture! The way he raged and tore round was just tremendous! Well, when he got done talkin', my, wasn't he done out, and every man there near out of his head with what he heard. You would have thought that one speaker was ten to hear him do all kinds of voices and manners. And at the end he said "whoever believed him, come sign the pledge." Well, I'd never signed no pledge. Cause why? I couldn't write; but I clean forgot that. I went up along with the rest. When it came my turn, "Here you are, my man," says he. So I says, "Guv'nor, you write it for me. It's Rasmus, and no more; but it is good for what I say. And he said a kind of a short blessin' to me, and he writ, "Rasmus," and there it stands in black and white."

This reminiscence served to beguile the passage through a long street. Then Rasmus fell back to his meditations, and Rodney and the naturalist moved on together.

"A fine, hearty chap," said the professor.

"Something the captain said about tramps, and a kind of warning made me feel a little queer about him."

"I mean always to be a gentleman, and I was wondering if I ought to walk across the country with a man like that. I'm glad you're along, sir."

"He's not a man to hurt you. An ordinary tramp would be the last person for you to make a comrade of; and to take to tramping, the last thing you should do. But a walk over the country, with good reason and good company, is as healthful and improving an experience as can come in your way, if you make use of it by observing men and things. When I have seen families taken in the summer to a fashionable watering-place—the lads exposed to the temptations of hotels, and the lack of discipline in boarding-houses, the life of their summer vacation just as artificial and stimulating as the life of all the rest of the year—I have wondered why, instead, the fathers, if the mothers cannot go also, do not take the children that are old enough, for a pedestrian tour. During the ten or eleven

months at home, they could read about minerals, flowers, birds, insects, and in the summer be prepared with keen eyes, and instructed and inspired brains, to note the wonderful things which God has made. In plain, strong clothes, with plain, wholesome food, days in the open air, health and happiness, and sound, innocent thought would be stored up. There would be less boys go to the bad, if that plan were followed. The summer resorts are often mere schools of mischief to lads, and lassies, too."

"I'm glad you think it's a good thing to do," said Rodney, "for indeed I like Rasmus; but there is no one to look after me but myself, and I'm bound to come to something, and I can't afford to begin any foolish thing."

Rasmus here overtook them. They had reached the limit of the side-walks, and come to the suburbs, where grass grew along the roads, dandelions starred the sod, and tiny chickweed flowers had come early into bloom. A little stream of clear water rippled down the wayside gutter, and on its edge, clinging near a stone, was the first blue violet. Rasmus greeted it with a shout.

"I don't know whether to pick it, or not," he said to the naturalist. "Do you suppose flowers like to live, and mind being torn off the stem, or carried away from the place where they grew?"

"At least, they were made to produce seed, and increase their kind, and if you leave that one there, next year three or four little plants may be there, blue as the sky, from the seed shed by this one. Many a heart has got a lift from seeing the first violet of spring—"

"A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye,
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky."

Rasmus listened, entranced. "Did that come in a book?" he said. "What a thing learning is! It's twelve o'clock, partners."

"How do you know?" demanded Rodney. "My watch says half-past."

"Then your watch is wrong," said Rasmus. "I know by the sun, and by that there dany-lion. He says twelve—he's my watch. I vow, I was so elevated to start off this morning, I never thought what we'd do for grub."

"I got some rolls, cheese, and an apple-pie from the steward," said Mr. Llewellyn, "and a little farther on, are some stones by the road, where there will be a warm, dry seat for us while we eat."

After the noon halt, they rambled on, and still departing from the smoky city, they found the roads wider, the houses smaller and more scattered, and all the fields in the waking beauty of spring. The air had the sharp, bitter-sweet scent exhaled by the rising sap, the sky was blue as the bloom of the myosotis; the twitter of birds and the shrill chirp of insects filled the air.

They were walking upon a smooth, wide road, from which turned, here and there, narrow lanes, to reach the farm-houses. A district school had closed, and the children were scattering homewards through the fields and by-paths. The eye of Rasmus traversed the scattered groups, and at last fixed on a child, plodding on more slowly than the rest. He quickened his own step, bent on overtaking the child. Rodney saw that this little pilgrim was a small boy, with long, light hair, a somewhat halting pace, and carrying his head in a way that suggested a deformity. The long, swinging step of Rasmus soon overtook this wanderer. "Wait a bit; stop you, my little chap!" he cried.

The little boy turned. A shadow fell over the face of his pursuer. This was not the face of Robin, photographed upon his inmost heart. But his voice still was kind, lowered from its hilarious shout. If the child was not Robin, it was still a fair-haired boy, with Robin's misfortune. "Where are you going, little chap?"

"Home—over to that red house."

"What ails your walking, my good little man?"

"Foot hurts," replied the child.

Rasmus lifted him upon the fence, carefully took off his shoe and stocking, and investigated. A tiny bit of gravel had worked again the small foot, causing it to swell and red-

den. Rasmus rubbed the foot, shook out the shoe and sock, put them on again, and said, "Now I'll set you on my shoulder and carry you home. I'll leave my bag here. You'll like to be carried."

He went off to the red house, carrying the child. When he returned Mr. Llewellyn and Rodney were standing by his bag. Rasmus looked shamefaced.

"I never can pass by a lad like that," he said, "and when I saw him ahead of me the old feeling would come back, though I've been disappointed enough to kill it dead. I thought it might be my own little Robin, but it wasn't."

"See here, Rasmus," said Rodney, "you are wrong to look for a little Robin. He will be eighteen years old by this time. Four years older than you were when you lost him; not a little child like that."

It was a terrible truth that Rasmus had never faced. He had always remembered Robin as only a little child.

"Time has moved on with him as with you," said the naturalist.

Rasmus gave a bitter cry. "Then we won't know each other!"

"I think you will when you meet," said Mr. Llewellyn. "Some way God will make you clear to each other. And he is safer perhaps as grown than as a child."

CHAPTER VI.

The Travellers Fight with Beasts.

"And twa of us will watch the road,
And other twa between will gang—
And I will go to jail-house door,
And hold the prisoner unthought lang."

"You can buy our supper," said Mr. Llewellyn to Rodney, "as I got the dinner. There comes a baker's cart."

"All right," replied Rodney; "but what shall I get?"

"A brown loaf."

"Wouldn't a white twist be nicer?"

"It would not be nearly so nourishing. The bolting and refining process which fine flour goes through, to give it its extreme whiteness, robs it of its most nutritious qualities. You will get more food by half for us three in the brown loaf, than in the white one. I often wonder at the way in which poor families, families whose living must be reduced to the minimum of expense, patronize the baker's cart. If they do not know how to make loaf-bread, or have no way of baking it, cornmeal mush, or pones, would give them five times the amount of nourishment."

"But," said Rasmus, "you'll find that most poor folks say they hate corn-meal, and won't eat it, and high-fliers must have their corn-bread for breakfast. Most poor folks take their corn in the shape of whiskey, when all the nourishment, as you call it, is out of it."

The cart came up, and Rodney bought a loaf for nine cents, which loaf Mr. Llewellyn divided into three pieces.

"We can't make a supper just on bread, can we?" said Rodney.

"We can get a drink at the next well," said the naturalist.

"But that won't help out much," said Rodney, who had been living royally on the boat, and whom Mr. Andrews had accustomed to a cooked supper.

"Now, I will tell you a good saying, which shall serve as a salad for your supper," said Mr. Llewellyn. "The wise man has always three cooks, who season his most simple dishes, sobriety, exercise, and contentment."

"Now, that I call good," said Rasmus, "but, at the same time, dad—I mean Professor—if we buy every meal, our money won't hold out. I've got seven dollars, and the boy has five, and they won't take us to New York, buying all our meals."

"And, if we don't buy what we have, how will we get it?" demanded Rodney.

"Why, pardner, ask for it. The folks along the road has a plenty. When we want a meal's victuals, all we have to do is ask for it, likewise a lodging."

"That would be begging!" cried Rodney indignantly.

"Brother, where's the harm?" said the ingenious Rasmus.