



The Family Circle.

THE INFIDEL AND HIS DAUGHTER.

[Suggested by reading a newspaper paragraph describing the scene between the brave old Ethan Allen and his daughter on the eve of her death, when she asked the stern infidel in whose faith he would have her to die—his or her mother's.]

"The damps of death are coming fast,
My father, o'er my brow;
The past with all its scenes has fled,
And I must turn me now
To that dim future which in vain
My feeble eyes desery;
Tell me, my father, in this hour,
In whose stern faith to die.

"I think I've watched the scornful smile,
And heard thy withering tone,
When'er the Christian's humble hope
Was placed above thine own;
I've heard thee speak of coming death
Without a shade of gloom,
And laugh at all the childish fears
That cluster round the tomb.

"Or is it in my mother's faith?
How fondly do I trace,
Through many a weary year long past,
That calm and saintly face!
How often do I call to mind,
Now she is 'neath the sod,
The place, the hour, in which she drew
My early thoughts to God!

My father, shall I look above,
Amid this gathering gloom,
To Him whose promises of love
Extend beyond the tomb?
Or curse the Being who hath blessed
This chequered path of mine?
And promises eternal rest!
Or die, my sire, in thine?"

The frown upon that warrior brow
Passed like a cloud away,
And tears coursed down the rugged cheek
That flowed not till that day;
"Not, not in mine," with choking voice
The sceptic made reply—
"But in thy mother's holy faith,
My daughter, may'st thou die!"

—British Workman.

YOUNG SIX-FOOT, AND WHAT BECAME OF HIM.

BY MRS. CHARLES GARNETT,

(Author of "Little Rainbow, A Navy Boy,"
"Lost and Found: A Navy Winter Tale,"
Etc.)

CHAPTER VI.—NIGHT AND MORNING.

Under the plentiful nourishing diet and clever hands of the ganger's wife, young Six-foot rapidly recovered, and in a week was able, as Ben had prophesied, to return to work. When he did so he found his friend had gone. He neither felt nor bore malice for the treatment he had received, it was not an unusual occurrence for a nipper to get "knocked about," and as young Nobby remarked, "It went in the day's work, and when a chap hasn't a father to stand up for him it's like to lie heavy sometimes;" but, as a sort of congratulatory welcome, he bestowed upon his "mate" a fox and-geese board cut purposely for him, and a large packet—his own weekly allowance—of mint "bull's eyes."

Things went on now very much as they had done before that hot day upon which Six-foot had first seen the lady. Sometimes the remembrance of those happy weeks, and of the wonderful new things he had heard then, would come vividly and unbidden back to him; but he was only a child, and therefore did not think much or long about anything. A habit, however, remained: each morning and night he knelt and repeated a little prayer which he had learnt as he wheeled the skilly tub, and he taught it also to Priss and John William.

December came, and all the lovely songs of the wooded hills were reduced to the

singing of here and there a solitary robin; and not a few bright things besides the merry whistle of birds were changed too. With its first day came a heavy fall of snow. Many men had been turned off during the last fortnight, for with the rain pouring down puddling was at an end, and now if the frost set in the concreting would be stopped. True, the Manager might have contrived the work so as to give employment to many of the men, and he suggested as much to his chief, but the Contractor who came weekly from a noble mansion, which with its miles of park he had lately bought for £120,000 from an aristocratic owner, said "he could not afford such waste, that it 'answered better' to turn the men off in winter, and cram work on in overtime in summer, and he ought to know, he'd been at it for over thirty years." Yes! he knew how to make money.

So scores of men went on tramp, and wandered for weeks and months through the bitter winter, homeless and hopeless, up and down the land, visiting, one after another, all the great public works, and hearing the same answer to their question—

"Can we go to work?"
"No, we're sacking men, not putting on."

Six-foot felt himself fortunate in still being kept at his post. Now the lodgers were decreased in numbers, his mother's services to help were no longer needed at the settlement, and her employment gradually ceased. The last person to dismiss her was the ganger's wife, and even after this was the case many a basket of provisions and many a stray sixpence found their way home by Priss.

"It wasn't to be expected they would keep me on. I can't do half a day's work now, Fred."

"No, mother." He said the words reluctantly,

"I'm going, my lad." She fondled the little hard hand in her own as she said the words.

He looked into her face, and tried to say, "Yes, mother," but somehow he could not do it.

The subject was not mentioned again, but day by day the fact drew nearer, and both of them knew it.

Sometimes on the works, playing with Nobby, this remembrance would recur to Six-foot, but as a rule he forgot it from leaving home in the morning to returning thither at night. But there, never for one hour could it be overlooked. For a week past the mother had been in bed. Mrs. Nobby had sent Selina up with an old blue-checked table-cloth, which was suspended as a curtain on one side of the bed. It kept off two or three of the draughts, but the place was very cold; the wind blowing in at numberless chinks, both in the walls and between the slates of the roof, wafted the curtain about so much that a stone had to be tied in one corner to keep it steady. The snow was falling thick and fast, and some flakes entering through the crannies under the eaves, came softly fluttering in, and fell, melting slowly, on the floor.

"Shall I make you a cup o' tea, mother?" asked Six-foot one evening.

"Yes, my boy. I'm parched with thirst."

"Mrs. Nobby gave me a drop of milk, so you'll have it nice."

The sick woman drank eagerly.
"Do eat a bit o' toast, mother. There's some more bread left."

"I'm not hungry, child; eat it yourself. I'm only thirsty. Say your prayer now and then I'll go to sleep."

An hour afterwards, as he was sitting by the small fire carefully keeping some more tea warm, she awoke, and speaking as though she had never slept asked,—

"What will you do?"

"I don't know, mother," he replied.

"There's the Union."

"Oh, mother, we could not bide there!"

"My poor little lad! Where's Priss and John William?"

"Asleep, mother, down there; where I made that straw so nice that Ganger gave me yesterday. Do you want them?"

"No, I could not see them. Light the candle."

Then she dozed off again, and the candle—their only one—guttered in the swaying breeze. At the dead of the night she awoke again.

"Fred!" Her voice was strangely distinct.

"Yes, mother."

"What did the lady say—many mansions?"

"Yes, mother."

"Room for all of us?"

"Yes, mother; I learnt it you know, it goes this way: *Jesus said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you.'*"

"For thee, and the two little ones and me we'll be all together there, Fred. She told me I must try and be patient because He were. I have tried, but only poorly, but He died to—forgive—"

She did not say any more but her eyes were very bright and, her hand held his so tightly, Six-foot stood still by her side; he seemed to have stood there a long time, then gradually his mother's eyes partly closed, and her hand grew cold. The candle flared, Six-foot withdrew his clasp from his mother's and tried to push it higher, but the last morsel of wick was spent, it flashed up and then all was dark. The small bit of fire had died out, and Six-foot well knew there was neither coal nor wood left to mend it. He felt his way back to his seat. Was his mother asleep? She did not breathe. Was she dead? The thought was unbearable, but it made him cry, and he cried so long and so bitterly that at last he lay down worn out upon the hearth and also slept.

Hours afterwards, he was awakened by hearing John William clamoring for his breakfast. He started to his feet. One look at his mother—his dear mother—oh! how still she lay!—and the little boy had rushed out of the cow-shed and away to the nearest house.

It was still early morning and daylight lingered as it crept slowly over the snowy hills; but Mrs. Thorne was astir and the breakfast preparations were going on briskly.

Six-foot rushed in.

"Come missus, to mother. I believe she's dead." And the child threw himself down, burying his face in his arms in a passion of weeping.

"Give him some breakfast, master. I know my road without you, Six-foot; you stay here."

"When did she die?" asked the ganger, not unkindly, as he placed some cold beef and a cup of tea before the boy.

"I think last night, just when the candle went out."

"Have you had no light, then?" asked the man compassionately.

"No, we'd no more coal."

"Was anybody with you?"

"Only the children and they were asleep."

"Poor little chap!"

"Whatever will they do, landlord?" asked Punch.

The men were going out, but Six-foot distinctly heard the word "Union."

"You needn't come on the dock this morning," said the ganger, looking in again.

So Six-foot sat by the fire and thought, "I'm all the man there is to look after them childer, but I'm only small. I think I could do it. Next summer I'll get two shillings more, and then we'd do nicely, and Priss 'll soon earn a living, she's going for seven, she could go out to nurse."

CHAPTER VII. CONCLUSION.

Whatever he did, for Six-foot returned to his usual work that afternoon, one word repeated itself over and over again to the little boy, "the Union."

He knew what it meant, for once, and once only, in their wanderings in search of the father, his mother had taken refuge with the children within its walls, and Six-foot never thought about the place without a shudder; far more welcome was a dry ditch or an old haystack as a sleeping-place than that dull, white ward, whose tall walls seemed to shut them out from freedom and life. Six-foot determined that nothing should ever make him go there; but then how could he bear to leave Priss and John William to enter alone? He imagined them locked up inside those great gates, and himself wandering round outside vainly trying to see them. No, he must give up his freedom rather than desert the children; and though he had told himself he could keep them, yet in his heart he felt this was impossible. He went home every night and looked at his mother, and then went away to sleep at a neighbor's house. And every day he cried, for no one could see him there, and told to those dead ears his trouble, it seemed to do him good.

A gathering, according to navy custom, was made on the works for the funeral; and though the times were hard, none there refused to help. A sad procession—but no pauper funeral—wound its way across the snow-covered fields and drifted roads from the old cow-shed to the church. Behind the coffin, carried by navvies, walked the three children respectfully dressed in mourning, and then the navy women, whose kind hands had been busy sewing for the little ones, followed. It was all very strange to the young mourners; the church, the clergyman and his white gown and solemn voice. Priss stared about with her wild eyes and John William audibly asked questions. But when they reached the open grave, suddenly the little girl seemed to understand. "Mammy, mammy!" she cried, and stretched out her hands.

"Hush," said Six-foot; "she's not there, Priss."

"Where is she, then?"

"In God's house."

"Did she say she was going there?"

"Yes, on Tuesday night, when you were asleep."

"You might have waked me and let me see her go; she might have taken me with her," sobbed Priss.

They went home to the cow-house to tea. The little place had never been so full before. On the old table were bread and butter cakes and tea, and the company were just sitting down when a stranger made his appearance.

He was a stout middle-aged man, buttoned up in a thick overcoat, and drove up in a gig, which he left under the care of young Nobby, who got in and began driving himself about, to the admiration of three boy beholders, who also were lingering outside. He did not waste much time, but came to the point at once.

"I'm the relieving officer from—" said he. "These works are in the district. I'm sure the Guardians have to thank you navvies for burying this woman free of cost to us; and I've come over to remove the children."

"Where are you going to remove 'em to?" said Nobby.

"Well, to the Union, till we ascertain their settlement, and then we shall pass them on to where their settlement is found."

Six-foot's heart was beating thick and fast as he listened.

"And what will they do wi' 'em?" asked Runner.

"Why, keep 'em in the Union till such time as they are ready to be apprenticed out."

"Nay!" cried Somerset, striking the table till the cups jingled again; "not so. A navy lad like that," pointing to John William, who with round eyes and red cheeks was munching a tea-cake, "shut up in a Work'us! I'm only a single man, but I'm ready to give a shilling a week towards keeping him from that."

"I too, mate," cried Runner grasping his old enemy's hand.

"Shut up," cried Mrs. Nobby. "Me and my partner's agreed we'll take Priss; she'll go in wi' our six. Now, Mrs. Thorne."

"Yes," said Mrs. Thorne thus appealed to; "Ganger and me's settled it to take Six-foot and the little 'un. We have none of our own, and they'll be well done to so long as they're good lads."

"Well," said the relieving officer, "just for form's sake, I'll ask the children. Will you, my boy, stay here, or shall I take you, and find your friends for you?"

Clutching Mrs. Thorne's gown eagerly, Six-foot replied, "We've got no friends master. We'll stop here, and grateful, Mrs. Ganger." He raised a face all glowing with smiles to hers.

A howl of misery broke suddenly on the astonished ears of the assembly.

"What's up, Priss?"

"Oh! I don't want to leave Six-foot and John William, I don't—oh!"

"You'll be next door, child."

"Oh! but I shall belong to Mrs. Nobby, and they'll belong to you, Mrs. Ganger. We've always had only one mother."

"No more you shan't yet, little 'un. Missus, if you're willing I am, to take the lot. What do you say? Don't let us part 'em, old woman."

The ganger stood squarely looking at his wife.

"Oh, Jack, my lad, what a good 'un you are at the bottom." No one had ever seen her do it before, but Mrs. Thorne buried her