

Mother's Hands.

I SOMETIMES ponder, one by one,
On all the tasks her hands have done—
The loaves of bread which they have mixed,
The tops and kites they've made and "fixed,"
The little frozen fingers pressed,
The bleeding cuts with cobwebs dressed,
The burning foreheads laved and soothed,
The tangled locks so gently smoothed.

What frocks and aprons cut and fitted!
What garments pieced, and stockings
knitted!

What merry poskas Monday morn
They played with clothing soiled and worn
Upon the sonorous washboard keys,
The suds all rainbow symphonies,
Then wrung, and rinsed, and starched, and
dried,

And ironed; baking bread beside—
Just those two small, brown, knotted hands!
I think that he who understands
The work that mother has to do
Could not be aught but kind and true.

If all the garments which she planned,
And cut and finished all "by hand"—
The coats, the trousers, vests and shirts,
The dresses, aprons, sheets and skirts—
Could, with her carpets, quilts and spreads,
Her pillows and her feather beds,
Be piled before astonished eyes,
I think they would obscure the skies!

Poor, knotted hands! life's sweetest grace
Can find no witchery to efface
Marks of self-bondage, which did hold
You closer than your rings of gold!
And when your countless tasks are ended,
And life's broken spots are mended,
Its ravelled ends all found and knitted,
Each dropped stitch to its neighbour fitted,
And you lie still on pulseless breast,
How will you feel the joy of rest,
Who found no time on earth to keep
An idle hour except in sleep?

—MARGARET H. LAWLESS

THE DANGER-SIGNAL NEAR
ROCKY CHANNEL.

BY EDWARD A. RAND.

"You see, Ted, this means, 'Want immediate assistance.' Put it short and it is, 'Help, now!'"

"Pretty, father!"

The colours of the pieces of cloth with which Ted Lamprey was playing were indeed pretty. They were the colours of small signal flags which John Lamprey had cut out for his boy. As a surfman, once, in the employ of the United States Life-Saving Service, he had become familiar with the signal flags kept in the life-saving station and adopted by the International Commercial Code. He had cut out a number of signals for Ted, and Mrs. Lamprey had with her ready needle worked them up into permanent shape. The ex-surfman is now explaining them to Ted. "You see, Ted, every signal has its meaning, and each is known by a certain letter. Now, a vessel is supposed to have them (every vessel ought to have them, of course). The International Commercial Code is for the use of all nations. What if I was a surfman again, Ted, and it was my watch some day, and I was up in the lookout on the roof of the station, watching the sea for any sign of distress? There I am, looking away, and suddenly I see a vessel just off shore, flying the two flags you have been handling. They are lettered 'H' and 'B.' 'Trouble,' I say.

Those signals mean, 'Want immediate assistance!' 'That is a case of distress,' I say to myself. 'I will send them back an answer at once, and tell the keeper of the station and he will send a boat.' So I pick out the two signals—let me see if mother did not make them for you! I think I cut them out. Oh, yes; one is 'H,' same as before, and the other is 'F,' and it is red, shaped like a triangle, as they say, and it has a white circle in it. 'H,' you see, is a square flag, half white and half red. I run up the little flag-staff—there on the lookout of the station—this flag 'H,' and 'F,' under it. That is, 'We are coming to your assistance.' How glad that will make the poor fellows we imagine off on the water, when, looking ashore, they see those flags 'H' and 'F'! Now, what if they get sort of impatient and they say, 'Oh! we can't wait for those folks on land!' The keeper of our station, who is doing his best to get the surf-boat down to the water, sees those people—through his glass, you know—trying to launch their boat. He sends me up to the lookout to run to the masthead the signal flags 'H' and 'F,' and those mean, 'Do not attempt to land in your own boats.' They stop where they are, and soon we get off in our boat to them. Now, isn't that a nice way?"

"Yes, father, but—but," said Ted eagerly, "s'posin'—just s'posin', you know—they didn't want a boat, but might be sick and—"

"Oh, want a doctor and medicine? They might have slip fever on board, and the crew be weak and want to get word to the shore. Well, they show 'P' and 'D,' two blue flags, one having a white square in it, and the other having in it a white circle. That would fetch us pretty quick; a doctor, too."

Ted was exceedingly interested in his signals. Out of his chamber window, facing the swift and deep river running to the sea, he threw a line and there hung his signals. Several times when his father, at work in an adjoining field, was needed by his mother, Ted ran up stairs and threw out the signals "H" and "B."—"Want immediate assistance." Ted was delighted when his father came up the field at a rapid run and then bounded over the stone wall into the garden, reporting speedily at the kitchen door. Ted's happy time with the signals; his father's delight in gratifying his only child's desire to know about the pretty flags of red, blue, yellow, green; the mother's equal joy in making the signals—was not all this a suggestion of the happiness reigning always in John Lamprey's home by the side of the river? Ah! the current of life in that home was something like the sweep of the river. When the tide was in, when the winds of the bay, as if tired, sought repose at sunset, then the river was only a glassy lake, almost without a ripple—the image of peace, a mirror in which the evening star would slung, its disk unbroken, a flower of paradise

blooming with unbroken petals. Sometimes John Lamprey's home was very peaceful. Life was a placid current. When the tide was low, running fiercely toward the ocean, running, too, against a rough wind from the sea, running through Rocky Channel, out of which protruded black, ugly ledges, then the river was a very different thing; and this turbulent Rocky Channel was sometimes the exact image of John Lamprey's home. Drink, drink, drink—this was the Rocky Channel in that home. Drink, drink, drink—this seemed to be written on the black, ugly ledges, making the stream of the home life a Rocky Channel.

And yet John Lamprey did not think he was in danger. Had he not distinctly said to Jane Lamprey, his wife, "When liquor gets me into trouble that I can see, then I will quit?"

"I can see danger, John."

John, though, refused to say anything more than this looking at all like the hope of a reformation.

One day, when Jane Lamprey was away from the home, Ted was amusing himself up in his little chamber with the signal flags his father and mother had made for him.

"I will tie some on a line, and throw the line out of the window," thought the boy. "I will make believe somebody out on the river wants help, and I'll show 'em this flag."

It read, "We are coming to your assistance."

It was tiresome work at last to throw out and draw in this signal (no matter how brightly coloured it was), since no one made a response to it.

"I'll pull it in," thought Ted, "and perhaps father will play with me."

To his proposition that the father should go off in the boat, and from the river, signal while Ted operated the chamber end of this circuit of communication, John Lamprey assented.

"Only," he added, "let me finish my work."

When his work was over he dragged his boat to the water's edge, and called out "Here, Ted, I have got my signal in here. I am going to be the shipwrecked man, you know, off in the boat, wanting assistance, and you are to be up in your chamber. But I want my oars, of course, up in the woodshed, and you best stay in the boat till I get back."

He turned, after starting, and muttered, "Boat isn't tied, but she won't stir while I am gone."

If John Lamprey had told all that was in his heart, he would have confessed that he had kept Ted in the boat, and did not take him to the chamber where he would operate his signal flags, because in the next room was a closet. In the closet was a brandy bottle. John Lamprey proposed to tip that bottle.

"I don't want my child to see me drink," he reflected. "That is good temperance caution, as they say. Guess

I'm not the worst of men; I look after my example."

For one who was fearful of setting a bad example he lingered a long time over that bottle.

"Now I'll go," he finally declared—this cautious father. He stopped one moment to look out of the window of his child's chamber.

"I want to keep that boy under my eye," said this pattern of parental prudence. He gave one look, and then started back in alarm. The boat was adrift! The rising tide had set it at liberty, and there it was, drifting toward the dreaded Rocky Channel. Ted had already thrown out the danger signal. It plainly read, "Want immediate assistance." It meant something now!

"Hark! he is screaming!" thought the affrighted father.

By this time he had thrown out a signal that also meant something—"We are coming to your assistance"—and then rushed for outdoors. He knew if the boat actually were swept inside of the rocks where the frightful channel began its violent course, he would be powerless, in all probability, to arrest the boat. There was a point this side of the Channel where a drifting boat might come within ten feet of the shore.

John was thinking and running at the same time. "If I only had a pole long enough to reach the boat just there!"

As he rushed on, he saw by the well-curb the long pole for drawing water, and carrying a hook on its end.

He seized it—almost without stopping—and flew on, rather than ran. He dared not look up and off. Without a glance he could seem to see that drifting boat. If he had thrust his fingers in his ears it seemed as if he still must have heard his boy's shouts. As long as he did not look off on the river he was at liberty to think the boat was at any distance this side of Rocky Channel. How he dashed along the water's edge and down to the point where he was to make that experimental thrust with the pole!

"Quick, quick!" screamed Ted. The turbulent waters of the Rocky Channel could be heard angrily struggling with the rocks that would confine them, savagely threatening death to any child or voyager that might come that way. John Lamprey thrust out the well-pole, and it gripped the rail of the boat! Yes, and then he lost it.

Oh, what an agonizing length of time seemed to elapse between that grip and the next clutch with the hook on the end of the pole! But that hold he lost; Drink made his hand unsteady. In agony he saw the boat drifting away again, when he heard a swift, light step behind him. He heard next a voice, "Here, Ted, take hold of this!" A mother's hand was throwing to her boy a rope, which he grasped at once, to which he clung, and the boat was drawn ashore!

"Oh, thank God, thank God!"