

THE PLAYFELLOW.

THE CROFTON BOYS.

A TALK BY HARRIET MARTINEAU.

Young readers will grieve to hear that this little tale is the last they can hope to have just now, from the wise and cheerful teacher who so kindly became their "Playfellow." In a brief preface, Miss Martineau speaks of the undertaking as begun "for a private, more than a public end. It has afforded me," she adds, "the satisfaction of feeling that I was doing something useful, while the work was light enough to suit the powers of an invalid. This light work has now, however, become too laborious; and I am obliged to bring it to a close. I speak of a close, because the four volumes of this year make a complete series; and I have no present purpose of writing again. But I do not say that I may never return to this work, nor resume the functions of a Playfellow." And that this may be, we earnestly hope. It is a hope that will be repeated, as for a personal friend, by all who have been at any time instructed or amused by the writings of this admirable woman. Nor is that cheerful and hopeful tone in the midst of no ordinary trials, the least valuable lesson of her useful life.

And the drift of this little tale is also to impress it upon the young. The Crofton Boys are a set of scholars at the Grafton School; in whose good and evil qualities and conduct there lies a miniature type of the great school of the world. The child hero, suddenly plunged into it, is made to pass through its most fiery ordeal, to be brought out at the last heart-whole. The story is told with the exquisite truth of feeling, and all the nice realities which we noticed in former volumes of the "Playfellow." The avoidance of exaggeration in every point, is quite extraordinary. Whether the generous or the selfish is dwelt upon, we never lose sight of what both retain in common. The natural is not forgotten. Watchfulness and hopefulness, are in the writer's mind always: she does not despair of the worst, and is not too confident of the best: and it is this which will make these books ever acceptable to the young.

We take one scene, from the sick-bed of the little hero. He has suffered an accident which lames him for life. His mother sits by his side, and checks the complaining which the poor little fellow cannot but fall into, when he thinks of all his hopes of travelling round the world ended for ever by this painful accident.

'Hugh, do you remember Richard Grant?'
'What,—the cabinet maker? The man who carved so beautifully?'

'Yes. Do you remember—No, you could hardly have known: but I will tell you. He had planned a most beautiful set of carvings in wood for a chapel belonging to a nobleman's mansion. He was to be well paid, his work was so superior; and he would be able to make his parents comfortable, as well as his wife and children. But the thing he most cared for was the honour of producing a noble work which should outlive him. Well, at the very beginning of his task, his chisel flew up against his wrist; and the narrow cut that it made,—not more than half an inch wide—made his right hand entirely useless for life. He could never again hold a tool; his work was gone,—his business in life seemed over,—the support of the whole family was taken away,—and the only strong wish Richard Grant had in the world was disappointed.'

Hugh hid his face with his handkerchief, and his mother went on:

'You have heard of Huber?'

'The man who found out so much about bees. Miss Harold read that account to us.'

'Bees and ants. When Hubert had discovered more than had ever been known before about bees and ants, and when he was sure he could learn more still, and was more and more anxious to peep and pry into their tiny homes, and their curious ways, Hubert became blind.'

Hugh sighed, and his mother went on:

'Did you ever hear of Beethoven? He was one of the greatest musical composers that ever lived. His great, his sole delight, was in music. It was the passion of his life. When all his time and all his mind were given to music, he became deaf—perfectly deaf; so that he never more heard one single note from the loudest orchestra. While crowds were moved and delighted with his compositions, it was all silence to him.'

Hugh said nothing.

'Now, do you think,' asked his mother,—and Hugh saw by the grey light that began to shine in that she smiled,—'do you think that these people were without a heavenly Parent?'

'O no! but were they all patient?'

'Yes, in their different ways and degrees. Would you say that they were hardly treated? Or would you rather suppose that their Father gave them something more and better to do than they had planned for themselves?'

'He must know best, of course; but it does