



WITH THE OTHER HAND

A shrewd, discriminating Study of Maternal Influence

By KATE SEATON

GODFREY CARSON, sole proprietor of a prosperous wholesale and retail stationery establishment in the city, glanced rapidly through the open circular in his hand and, with a muttered exclamation of contempt, threw it into the already overflowing wastepaper basket.

"There's no end to these begging letters!" he grumbled. "Hospital Fund—a good cause, indeed! Catch me giving my money to keep up a set of useless officials and an army of nurses and doctors who never work half as hard for their money as I do, for the sake of people who don't deserve to be helped, or who can well afford to help themselves! Eh, what's that, Jefferson!"

He turned irritably towards the man who had entered the close little den he called his office, and who now stood before him with an air of apology.

"A boy to see you, sir."

"What's he want?" asked Carson gruffly. "What's the use of keeping you fellows if I'm to be bothered with every chance boy who turns up?"

"Sorry, sir, but—he won't tell me." A flicker of a smile appeared on the man's face. "Says his business is important—he must see you. Shall I bring him in, sir?"

Carson turned to the desk with an impatient gesture which the man could not fail to understand; but, with a sudden flash of daring, he pushed open the glass door and whispering hurriedly, "Go in, youngster!" returned to his task behind the counter.

The boy stepped fearlessly in, removing as he did so, a small cap from his mass of sunny curls. His bright eyes glanced eagerly round the dingy room, then at the man who—after the first quick frown of surprise with which he had greeted his entrance—went on coolly with his writing, deliberately ignoring the boy's presence.

Presently the scratching of the pen ceased—only, after a scarcely perceptible pause, to recommence upon another sheet.

The boy stood his ground, with an air of respectful patience, only the scraping of his feet, as he rested, boy-like, first upon one foot and then upon the other, betraying the ill-suppressed eagerness with which he waited.

At last the man flung down his pen and faced the intrepid intruder with frowning brows; but as his eyes lighted fully on the childish form, and frank, open face, he started and, with a grim laugh, said curtly, "Well, my boy, and what important business can a youngster like you have with me?"

The boy drew himself up to his full height. "I know I am rather small for my age," he said apologetically; "but—I'm ten, sir, last birthday, and—I'm strong!"

"Really!" Godfrey Carson's hard face looked scornful; but as he fixed his keen eyes upon the slight, almost frail little figure, a softer expression stole into them.

"Well, and—this important business?" he asked.

"You want an errand boy, sir."

"Yes; and you have come to plead on behalf of a big brother, eh?"

The boy smiled ingenuously.

"Oh, no! I haven't got one; I wish I had. I've only got mother, and—she's only got me."

"Then what do you want? Come, I've no time to waste, boy!" Carson spoke more gruffly to hide the feeling evoked by the boy's naive disclosure.

"I want the place, please, sir."

"You want the place?"

"Yes, but only for five weeks, sir. You see it's like this," the boy took a step forward and laid his hand confidently on Carson's arm. "I've five weeks' holiday from school and—I want to earn some money very badly."

Carson eyed the boy again keenly. His clothes, though not of the best, were anything but shabby.

"You don't look in need," he said curtly.

"In need?" The boy looked puzzled.

"Yes—poor; you don't look very poor," explained Carson more bluntly.

The young face flushed, and involuntarily the curly head was poised more proudly.

"I—don't want the money for myself," he said slowly.

"Then whom do you want it for?"

The blue eyes fell.

"I—I would rather not say," he faltered. Then, raising his head, he flashed a frank look at the dark, stern eyes bent inquiringly upon him, and said, with a mysterious smile, "You see, if I did I should be telling the other hand."

Still more mystified, but interested in spite of himself, Carson smiled back at the eager child.

"Who are you?" he asked abruptly.

"Tony Harland, sir."

"Does your mother know you've come here to-day?"

"No, she doesn't, 'cause"—the young voice trembled slightly—"she's gone away."

"And left a young child like you alone!"

"She couldn't help herself!" said the boy quickly, resenting the implied reproach. "She's been ill, very ill, and now she's had to go to the seaside with a family, to help two little girls with lessons, so she couldn't take me."

"I see. Then who is looking after you?"

"Mrs. Cresswell—we lodge with Mrs. Cresswell, the lady who comes to clean your shop." The man smiled as the image of the said "lady" rose before his mental vision. "She told me you were wanting a boy, and—I wish you would take me for five weeks, sir. I'd work very hard, and I can go errands ever so quick—ask Mrs. Cresswell."

Carson remained silent, eyeing the boy doubtfully.

"Please take me, sir," said the child pleadingly.

Carson laughed.

"How much do you expect a week?"

"Only what I'm worth to you, sir," answered the boy promptly.

With a shrug of his broad shoulders, and a laugh at his own foolishness, Godfrey Carson turned to the desk again, and taking up a sealed letter held it out, saying briskly, "All right, Tony. You might as well begin now. Do you know where Cardigan Place is?"

"Yes, sir; quite well."

"Then take this, and wait for an answer."

"Yes, sir."

With a military-like salute, the boy darted off through the swing-door, and flourishing the letter before the astonished shopman, cried elatedly, as he dashed out of the shop:

"I'm your errand boy now! I've begun already!"

A sharp, imperative ring from the inner office recalled the man's scattered senses, and he promptly obeyed the summons; but he gave a somewhat divided attention to the various orders he received, and still lingered when Carson turned back to his desk with a gesture of dismissal.

"Shall I take the card out of the window, sir?"

he asked tentatively.

"The card?"

"Yes, the 'Boy Wanted,' sir?"

"Certainly not."

"I beg your pardon, sir. I thought the youngster said you had engaged him."

Carson smiled grimly.

"I have—couldn't help myself!" The man's eyes widened at the admission of weakness from his usually strong-willed employer. "I—have taken him on for a few weeks—just for the lighter errands; but, of course, I shall need a boy—the usual strong boy for the heavier work."

THAT night Godfrey Carson remained behind his usual hour, to interview the "lady" who came to do the customary cleaning at the office. She corroborated Tony Harland's statement in every particular, but confessed entire ignorance of his motive, or of the use to which his first earnings were to be put.

Each morning found the boy punctually at his post, smiling and eager as ever. With a bright nod at the men behind the counter, he would dart quickly through the shop and into the little office, where, with his cap in one hand, and the other raised in true military style, he would greet his master with his cheery, "Good-morning, sir!"

And Godfrey Carson, whose heart had so long been closed to genial, human influences, began to look forward to the entrance of the bright, boyish figure, and would smile as he answered, "Good-morning, Tony!" and gravely returned the salute.

Saturday found the youthful errand boy in possession of his first earnings.

"Sure I've been worth that, sir?" he asked doubtfully, as Carson handed him five shillings.

"Quite," assured that usually keen, astute business man, unhesitatingly.

"Then thank you, sir!" said the boy gratefully, and full of excitement he danced off with such evident delight that the shopmen looked after him with feelings of envy.

The second week saw the advent of the errand boy proper, and though, on one pretext and another, Carson kept his protege in close proximity to himself, except when out on messages, Tony eyed the other boy with increasing suspicion.

Godfrey Carson, with a feeling of disappointment, was quick to notice a change. The boy's entrance in the morning lost its old briskness, became more hesitating, and his greeting less bright and eager.

"Boy-like, he is tiring already," Carson told himself disappointedly.

But though Tony seemed to have lost the old bright eagerness, he fulfilled his little commissions with the same promptitude, and showed no lack of energy in his work.

"Well, Tony," said his employer, when the next Saturday came round; "here are your wages."

Tony looked at the two half-crowns on the desk, but did not offer to take them up. Instead, he half drew back, his face flushing painfully.

"I'm sorry, sir, but—I can't take it."

"Can't take it! Why, how now, Tony? What is the matter, my little man?" asked Carson, surprised.

"I—I thought—when you took me, that I was the errand boy, sir. I know now I'm not. Tom's the real errand boy; I'm only—only—"

His voice trailed off as he made a manly, determined effort to check the rising tears.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" cried Carson, with a feeling of relief, the tremor in the boy's voice finding a faint echo in his own. "Why, Tom is only a sort of outside porter, just to take the heavy parcels and such like things."

"He's the errand boy, sir, not me," persisted Tony emphatically.

"Now, look here, Tony; I see I shall have to explain things to you. I need you both. You—"

"You didn't use to keep two boys, sir," broke in the boy suspiciously.

"No, but—I used to often use the messenger boys; now I don't need. You are far more use to me than an ordinary messenger boy. And besides, my business is constantly growing," he went on, as the blue eyes still looked at him doubtfully.

"When I began business I had only one young man in the shop, now I have eight, as well as those at the warehouse. So why should I not keep an extra boy, if I need one?" he finished humbly.

The old sunny smile flashed over Tony's face.

"And you need me, honour bright?"

"Honour bright, I need my little messenger boy, Tony."

"Thank you, I'm glad!" The little fellow heaved a sigh of relief, and eagerly grasped the silver coins, "cause I did want the money."

The man smiled, then half sighed. Was this but the echo of the usual cry of the multitude? Did the same sordid spirit rule this apparently sweet young life? he asked himself regretfully.

"This makes ten!" said the boy, gleefully. "In five weeks it will be twenty-five, won't it?"

"It will. Why, you'll have quite a small fortune by then, Tony—if you don't spend it as you go on."

"Spend it—as I go on!" gasped the boy, in tones of indignant surprise. "Of course not. How could I—" he broke off confused. "Oh, dear, it's real hard keeping it from the other hand."

With which enigmatical speech he turned and fled, as if afraid he might say more.