

BOYS AND GIRLS

Easter Offerings.

(Laura J. Rittenhouse, in the 'Banner.')

Ben Carruthers and his sister Hannah were walking slowly along the country road on their way home from Sunday-school.

The sweet odors of early spring were in the soft air; the short grass was green and abundant; a few of the forest trees were beginning to show a haze of green. Here and there the fragrant flowers of the wild plum-trees caught the sunbeams in their white petals and clasped them closely to their pretty, brown hearts, while the daisy-like dogwoods made a lovely contrast to the purplish pink of the red buds.

The two young people became thoughtful.

'To tell the truth, I'm not sure I know what she meant yet,' Ben said meditatively. 'It's the first time I ever thought of Easter Sunday as anything but a time for colored eggs, laid by mysterious hens. The idea of it as a resurrection time is something new.'

'It isn't quite fair to mamma to say that, Ben. You know she has always taught us that Christ rose again then. Still, I own I never thought of it in the way Miss Wayne put it to-day. It seems strange to compare the awakening of the spring—the coming back of life into trees and grass and flowers—to the resurrection.'

'And yet it is like it. Just look around a minute, Hannah. A few weeks ago that old tree was bare and black, no sign of life about it; and now every twig and branch is covered with little leaves. It is scarcely a month since the earth was brown and frozen; to-day the wild-flowers are showing themselves, and the grass is as green as if it had been here always. It is, indeed, as Miss Wayne said, Nature's great resurrection time, and her glory.'

'It's the most beautiful thing I've ever thought of. Somehow it makes me feel nearer to God—as if we were a part of him. But I can't understand Miss Wayne asking for Easter offerings. She knows there is hardly a child in our Sunday-school able to give anything, and it isn't like her to ask us to do impossibilities,' Hannah said gravely.

'No, it isn't. I've puzzled over it ever since. What could we give, now?' Ben asked disdainfully. Look at us; patches and darns till we are sights to behold. If I hadn't rubbed blacking on my toes, they would be grinning now through the holes in my shoes.'

'And see this lovely hair-ribbon; an old tape string dyed in bark water,' Hannah said bitterly.

'It doesn't look badly; it isn't as horrible as feeling gritty blacking on your toes all day. But your dress is too short, sis. I wish I could buy you another.'

'And I wish I could buy you a pair of shoes, Ben; but what's the good wishing? We'll have to go on wearing our shabby, outgrown clothes till we can go out and earn new ones. The idea of asking us for Easter offerings!' and tears of indignation and wounded pride forced themselves into Hannah's eyes, hard as she tried to restrain them.

'Somehow I felt as if Miss Wayne had a double meaning in her words. Don't

you remember how emphatically she said there wasn't one of us so poor but that we might bring to the Lord an acceptable gift? That we might give up things to please him, and by so doing make ourselves happier and better? I was puzzled to understand her then, and I am yet,' said Ben, wrinkling up his forehead, as he did when things bothered him.

Hannah was silent a while.

'I give it up, Ben. Let's wait and ask mother.'

So that evening, as they sat on the porch in front of their humble home, Ben told his mother about Miss Wayne's request.

Mrs. Carruthers thought it over silently a while.

'There are so many ways of making offerings, you know, children. In olden times there was spilt blood and burnt offerings. Then gold and silver and sweet spices were offered. It was all done as a sacrifice, and at a sacrifice of personal pleasure, no doubt, just as it would be now for us to give up or deprive ourselves of things for the Lord's work.'

'Yes, mother, it's easy talking about doing without things, but what could Ben and I do without, I'd like to know? Would it do any good if Ben sacrificed his pride by leaving the blacking off his toes, and letting them show through his shoes next Sunday; or for me to tie back my hair with a white tape string instead of a dyed one? And suppose we did, we should have no gold or silver or spices to offer after all,' Hannah interrupted.

'My dear, there are gifts more precious than the ones you have mentioned. I just think Miss Wayne referred to them when she spoke of giving up things for the Master. For instance, you could give up some ugly habit, some besetting sin, and thus partially resurrected from evil, present purer hearts to the Lord next Sunday.'

'Well, of all the ideas I should never have conceived, you have struck the one, mother. Anyhow, what particularly bad habits have Ben and I?' Hannah asked complacently, very much as if she believed her question unanswerable.

Mrs. Carruthers looked at her intently, a faint smile trembling on her lips.

Presently Hannah's face began to grow heated.

'Oh, mother, I think you're a little hard on me! I know I'm hot-headed and quick-tempered, and that I'm not contented with my old clothes, even after you've half put your dear eyes out darning and mending them to make them decent; but that isn't so very bad. Other girls—'

'This is not a question of other girls, Hannah. It concerns you individually. Is your own life made better or worse by giving up to your ugly impulses?'

'Mother, you know I feel horrid every time I've had a tantrum, and I'm so hateful I know every one else must wish me in Halifax. I always want to box my own ears when I think of it afterward; but I can't see what this has to do with the resurrection and Easter offerings, after all,' Hannah said inquiringly.

'Well, see if this will make things any plainer. We will say your bad habits enclose you as the chrysalis does the butterfly. Suppose by some inward struggles you could break away from this ugly old shell of habits, and next Sunday, having

thus been born into a new life, you could present the beautiful, clean heart to the Lord as an Easter offering. Do you believe either gold or silver would be more acceptable, my daughter?'

'I'm sure they would not, mother. I believe—I've half a mind to try it, anyhow. But what is Ben to do? He never flies into tantrums and does hateful things he's ashamed of a week after,' said Hannah, as she looked at her brother fondly.

Now it was Ben's turn to feel his face grow hot and uncomfortable.

'Oh, well, sis, no fellow is perfect, you know. I—I—well, mother, I'm going to be honest and confess. I've felt like a thief every time you've looked at me for a week. The other fellows—Joe and Richard—have been teasing and guying me so dreadfully, and calling me a "Miss Nancy," because I wouldn't smoke cigars or cigarettes with them. I stood it quite a while, and told them the things you have taught me about the harmfulness of tobacco; but they only ridiculed me all the more. Then—it was awfully silly, I know—but it did seem so manly to puff smoke through one's nose, and—well, I've been trying it for a week now.'

He stopped abruptly, ashamed to meet the look of grieved surprise in his mother's face.

'Oh, Ben, I wouldn't have believed it of you! How could you?' and Hannah's tears began to flow, for Ben was her model and the pride of her heart.

'Well, you needn't go crying now, Hannah. If I were not ashamed of myself, and if I didn't intend to quit, I'd never have told you folks at all. Of course, you won't have faith in me for a long time, after I've once deceived you; but you'll be bound to have when you find I've really given it up,' Ben said manfully.

'Of course we'll have faith in you, Ben, you darling!' Hannah said, hugging him, while his mother pressed his hand reassuringly.

'My own dear boy, I'm sure I can trust you,' she said tenderly.

When the afternoon of Easter Sunday came, Ben laughed as he gave his sockless toes an extra polish.

'It isn't black beneath the skin, as you knew, and I can wash it off to-night. It seems so different from last Sunday. I believe I'm a better boy, mother; I know I'm happier.'

'And the tape hair-ribbon isn't so ugly, after all. Indeed, I don't see how mother ever made it such a pretty color,' Hannah said gratefully.

'The difference is in your own hearts, children,' Mrs. Carruthers said, smiling lovingly.

And then, with only their hands full of wild-flowers for Miss Wayne, they presented themselves at Sunday-school.

When the beautiful lesson was over, and the children were called upon for their Easter offerings, it required real effort for Hannah to rise to her feet.

'I bring to the Lord as my offering a life which I shall strive hereafter to keep free from hasty temper and all ugly impulses!' She sat down trembling, but the children did not laugh, as she had feared they would.

Ben got up, and Hannah thought him