

## THE LITTLE FOLK.

## "General, Didn't I Lead Them Straight?"

During the Egyptian War Lord Wolseley found the foe strongly encamped at Tel-el-Kebir. After a careful examination of their position he determined on a midnight assault. To insure the success of the scheme it was necessary that the enemy should be attacked in the rear as well as in the front, and the Highland Brigade was selected for this important and perilous work. In order to reach the rear, it was essential that they should describe a semi-circle, and that it should be done without the knowledge of the enemy. The great difficulty arose from their ignorance of the ground through which it was necessary for them to go. A young naval officer, named Rawson, a skilful engineer, took the bearings as well as he was able, and Lord Wolseley committed the detachment to his guidance. It was a position of great responsibility, for not only the lives of the men he was leading, but the honour and safety of the entire army, depended upon the wisdom of his piloting. As soon as the shades of night had fully concealed their movements from the enemy, the brave young fellow put himself at the head of his noble band, and, with only the stars for his guide, he led the men to the position Lord Wolseley had directed him to take. So correct had he been in his calculations that he brought his men into position at the exact time the commander wished. At a preconcerted signal our men charged on all sides, and the enemy were scattered.

They did not, however, retreat without a determined struggle. They received the charge with a deadly fire, and one of the first to fall was Lieutenant Rawson. As soon as possible the information that the brave young sailor had received a mortal wound was communicated to Lord Wolseley, and though surrounded with the excitement and responsibilities of a great victory, he left his staff and galloped to the spot where the young man was dying. The morning had broken, and the dying youth at once recognized his commander. A gleam of satisfaction and pride stole over his face as the general took his hand. Looking at him with eyes beaming with excitement, he said,—

"General, didn't I lead them straight?"

With a quivering lip Lord Wolseley replied—  
"Nothing could have been done better."

A grateful look was his only acknowledgment of the praise, and then, with a gentle sigh, he passed to a higher reward beyond.

He, however, though dead, yet speaketh, and his dying question ought to appeal in trumpet tones to every one.

Each of us is a leader, whether he will or no. "No man liveth to himself." The detachments committed to our guidance vary in number, but the Captain of our salvation has given us our position, and will hold us responsible for the right discharge of our duties. It will involve intelligence, forethought, self-denial and patient energy, but we shall have abundant reward, if, when we reach the end of our journey, we shall say of those entrusted to our care, as young Rawson did, "General, didn't I lead them straight?" Some of us are parents. God has given to our charge His most precious treasure, and their safety, for time and eternity, is mainly depending upon the guidance we give them. We may evade the duty, but we cannot escape the responsibility. We are their God-appointed guides; they are weak and ignorant, surrounded with enemies and dangers. One false step may involve eternal loss. They are like travellers landed on a hostile shore, and they will soon find that

"The world is but a wildering maze,  
Where sin has tracked ten thousand ways,  
Its victims to ensnare—  
All broad, and winding, and aslope,  
All tempting with perfidious hope,  
All ending in despair."

It will depend mainly upon us whether they

wander into these ways and so fall into the hands of the enemy, and perish, or whether they shall tread "the narrow path, which leadeth unto life."

The result will be decided not by our words, but by our actions. Their character will be formed, not by the books we give them, or the schools to which we send them, but by our lives.

What is said to them they soon forget; which is done before them becomes imperishable. Their hearts are soft as wax to receive an impression, and rigid as marble to retain it. They are born imitators, and our conduct will, to a large extent, decide their destiny. If we avoid them, they may perish from neglect; if we remain with them, not only will our tones and gestures be reproduced, but our moral characters and modes of life. Often the parent starts his children in a path which is safe at the outset, but which is full of peril farther on. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." And so it is in the guidance of our children.

Look, for example, at the use of strong drink. The father takes his single glass at night. He has done this for years. It is like a path near his own home. He imagines that "no lion shall be there, nor any venomous beast shall go up thereon." His boy treads the same path. He drinks the little that his father has left at the bottom of the glass, or a little is given him on his birthday or at Christmas. The father has led him into the path. Is it safe? Ay, safe if he stops where his father stopped; but children too often begin where their fathers ended. He thinks it is a pleasant land that opens before him that his father was over-cautions, and too particular. What is there to fear? Enemies are ever ready to cheer him on in the wrong road, and though starting in a path where there seemed no danger, he finds, when too late, that it has led into the broad road that leadeth to destruction. When the General comes, will that father be able with confident joy to ask, "Didn't I lead them straight?" Will he not rather have with sorrow and shame to say, *I meant right*. I thought it was a safe path. I did not see where it led. I have escaped, but *my charge* has perished?"

Take also gambling. The father indulges in a friendly game of cards at night, does it often, does it with his boy. He becomes a skilful player; by-and-by he goes to school by train with others of his age, and cards are introduced, at first for friendship, at last for half-pence. He then goes to business, and as his mother wishes him to have the comforts of home, every night he still uses the train, and may be found each day entering a carriage labelled "*engaged*," which means that *your* son, and other people's sons, are playing all the way to town, and all the way back again. Has he won? he is full of life and animation; has he lost? he is morose and irritable. By-and-by you will find a sporting paper in his pocket. His desire to get money without working for it has led him into the hands of sharpers. His purse is empty, and his employer's money is taken, and at last he stands in the dock, charged with embezzlement, and is sentenced to the felon's doom.

Who started him on that path? I know you did not mean him to go so far, that you would have died to save him from disgrace and ruin; but when the end comes, can you with cheerful confidence ask, "Didn't I lead him straight?"

There are others leaders beside parents. There are elder brothers and sisters. There are the foremen of shops. There are employers of labour. There are landowners, legislators. All are leaders. All are responsible for the guidance they give. All must meet their followers again in the presence of the King. Each of us will then see the full results of our life. Happy, thrice happy will that man be, who, with the light of eternity resting on the influence he has exerted, will be able to say, with humble confidence, "General, didn't I lead them straight?"

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