

Choice Literature.

GRANDFATHER'S FAITH.

BY JULIA A. MATHEWS.

I.

CHARLES STOCKTON.

"Father, what is to be done with that boy? I am in perfect despair."

If Miss Harriet Mason had known that "that boy" lay on the grass beneath the shade of the old willow whose graceful branches floated lazily in at the open window of the sitting-room, she might have been more guarded in her speech; but, despairing as her opinion of him evidently was, the boy did not seem to be much chagrined by it; and even if he had seen the expression of her tired, troubled face, as she seated herself in an arm-chair beside her father, it probably would have affected him as little as her words, for Charlie Stockton did not love his Aunt Harriet over much.

"Poor old auntie! you and I are two too many for her, Caspar," he said, with a laugh, pulling the long hair of a great Newfoundland dog, upon whose shaggy head his own brown curls were resting. "I wouldn't wonder if she ousted you yet, old boy; but if you go, I go too, that's sure, the old Tartar!"

Certainly, if Miss Harriet had seen the darkening of those clear, handsome eyes and the defiant toss of the curly head, as the speaker raised himself from his recumbent position, she would not have felt a whit less despairing of her unruly charge.

The old gentleman sitting beside her had not answered her somewhat impatient query and exclamation. He sat with one knee crossed over its fellow, the foot which rested on the floor tapping the carpet with a slow regular movement, which was as expressive of the deep thought in which he was lost as was the absorbed, quiet face which seemed to be watching the pendulum-like motions of his foot. The long fingers of the wrinkled but still sinewy hand were thrust up into the soft, white hair which covered his head, and the high, broad forehead was drawn and furrowed in anxiety. It was a fine, old face, handsome, intellectual, and, although very determined, very gentle and lovable in its expression.

Miss Harriet sat watching it for a while, her own impatient, nervous face gathering meanwhile into a dark frown, at length said sharply:—

"Well, father?"

He lifted up his white head, and turned his quiet, gray eyes towards her.

"You said that you were in despair, Harriet? I am not. I have hope still for our boy."

"Oh, yes! I suppose so," she said, in a tone of strong irritation. "You always do see hope, father, where no one else can see it. But what you can find in Charlie to build on, I cannot imagine."

"There is very much in him that is good," said Dr. Mason, mildly; "but if there were not, I should still believe that God yet means to use him for some noble end. For did I not hear his dying mother give him to God? and would He refuse the gift? Did I not hear her plead that the sin of his father might not be visited upon her innocent baby? Did I not hear her say, 'I give Thee back Thy precious gift, dear Lord. Take in Thine own strong hands this child whom my dying hands are too weak to hold, and keep him safely. I give him wholly to Thee; make him wholly Thine?' And what a peaceful light was on her face when she went home! No, Harriet: I can never despair of the boy."

His voice, which had risen to great earnestness and feeling as he repeated the prayer of his dead child, sank very low again; but his last words, though softly spoken, were firm as unshaken faith could make them. Harriet Mason was not cheered by them, but they at least stilled her fretful impatience; and she sat quietly thinking her own troubled thoughts, leaving her father to his reflections.

Fifteen years before, Mary Mason, the doctor's youngest daughter, had married, in direct opposition to her father's will and command, a young man whom she had known but a few months. From the first the doctor had disliked the stranger. His clear, honest eyes had pierced the thin disguise of respectability and morality under which the man had sought his daughter's acquaintance; and, on making immediate enquiries with regard to him, he had found his suspicions were quite correct, and that Henry Stockton was by no means a person whom he would choose to welcome to his house. But no persuasions or entreaties could induce Mary to believe the aspersions cast upon the man whom her father now found, to his amazement and dismay, to be her declared lover. And when, finding arguments and commands alike useless, Dr. Mason had forbidden Henry Stockton to see his daughter, she had married him at once, leaving her home without a word of farewell to her father.

Nearly two years after the day on which this shadow fell upon his home, Dr. Mason heard through a friend that Mary had been seen in New York; and, hastening to the city, he sought for her until he found her. Those two years had shown Mary Mason that her father had not even suspected the abyss of wickedness into which her husband had sunk. She had been dragged down into depths of misery and wretchedness such as she had never imagined, and now lay dying, with her baby boy beside her, in loneliness and poverty. But in her misery, far away from all earthly friends, she had found the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The "Brother born for adversity" had won the wandering but now penitent heart, and was leading it Home,—Home to rest and peace and joy.

Dr. Mason had not for a moment doubted but that the child whom Mary left behind her, and who had been called by his name, would be given to his care. She had besought him most earnestly to take the little one home, and bring him up as his own son; and he had promised her that he should fill her vacant place in the household. But Henry Stockton utterly refused to part with the child. Whether he really loved him with such love as he had to give, or whether he simply chose to retain him to annoy and distress Mary's family, the doctor could not tell; but he refused harshly and violently all his persuasions, and even the pecuniary induce-

ments which the grandfather hoped would be irresistible to him.

On the day of Mary's death, Dr. Mason left the house for a few hours to make arrangements to have her removed to her old home, and laid beside her dead mother. When he returned, only his daughter's still, quiet face was there to welcome him. Her husband and her little child were gone. The people in the house either could not or would not give him any information of Stockton's whereabouts; and, after searching in vain for him for many long hours, he returned home with his sad burden, hopeless of finding him.

Month after month, and year after year, there was to be seen in the daily papers of New York an advertisement stating that, if "H. S." desired to relinquish the child now in his care, he had but to state where the boy could be found, and his friends would send for him. But no answering paragraph greeted the eyes which sought it eagerly, but wearily, every morning of every passing month.

Eight years had rolled away. Years which had whitened the hair on the broad temples, and furrowed the brow of the old man; but they had neither dimmed the light of the soft, gray eyes, nor wasted the strength of the tall, erect figure. Eight years, and still that paragraph addressed to "H. S." appeared in the daily papers, and still the bright eyes watched for the answer that had not yet come.

But one morning, as Dr. Mason sat in his office, a telegram was placed in his hand. Opening it, he saw that it was signed by a Philadelphia Express Company with whom he had had some business dealings.

"A ragged boy, eight years old,—name, Charles Mason Stockton,—has been forwarded to us from St. Augustine, consigned to you, express paid. Shall we ship him to London?"

Granted at last, to my prayers and hers! My God, I thank Thee."

The doctor sat for a moment, folding the paper and unfolding it again, with hands which trembled like those of a man stricken with infirmity. Then he rose, and closed and locked the office-door. No one must come in just now. He must be alone with Him who had heard the great cry of his longing but patient heart.

After a while, his daughter Harriet, who had heard with some surprise the sudden locking of the door of the office, heard the key turn again; and the next moment her father crossed the hall with a quick step, and entered the sitting-room.

"Why, father! What is it?" she asked, going quickly forward to meet him, for his whole face was radiant.

But even before he had time to answer her the truth flashed upon her. Her face grew deathly white, and she sat down weakly in the nearest chair.

"Has it come at last, father? Has that man sent his child to us?"

"God has sent Mary's child to us, my dear."

But the tidings which had filled heart and face and voice with joy when it reached him, fell like lead on the heart of his daughter; and when he told her he had sent a telegram to Philadelphia to notify the Company that he should leave for that city by the next train, she broke out at once into the most urgent entreaties that he would not disgrace their home by bringing into it the child of such a character. Miss Harriet had never forgiven the man who had robbed her home of its brightest flower; she had never forgiven her sister for leaving that home desolate and dishonoured; she had never forgiven the poor little baby who had been so sadly born into so sad a life.

But no argument could move the calm, determined man beside her. Very tenderly he tried to soothe her, very lovingly he pitied her for all that her strong pride had been forced to suffer, very patiently he bore with her angry retorts, and menaces that she would leave the house if Henry Stockton's child were brought into it; but he never wavered in his purpose. In vain she tried to persuade him that a boy brought up under the care of such a father must be utterly unfit for the life led in their quiet home; that he might even be a thief, or, at the least, a common street-loafer.

"The lower he had been dragged down, the more he needed to be raised," the doctor answered; and when at last the idea struck her that this might not, after all, be Mary's son, but some other child of the street whom Stockton was trying to foist upon them, he simply said, with a smile,—

"I shall know Mary's child, my dear. There will be something in his face to tell me whether he is hers or no."

And then, with a kiss and a long tender holding of her in his arms, he had put her back in her chair and gone out.

Well was it for the boy that his grandfather was right in expecting that he would bear in his face some trace of his lost mother; for if it had not been for those clear, brown eyes, his mother's very own, the doctor might well have doubted whether the ragged, dirty little urchin presented to him, on his arrival in Philadelphia, as Charles Mason Stockton, could by any means be of his own blood.

In answer to Dr. Mason's enquiries as to the cause of his having been sent North, the boy replied that his father had been hurt in a quarrel in a tavern, and, fearing that he was near death, had sent him to his grandfather with the message that, bad as he was, he did not want his son to grow up in the life which he had led; a story which was confirmed a few days later by the arrival by post of a paper sent to the child by one of his father's former comrades, containing an account of the fracas, and Stockton's subsequent death.

A visit to a barber, a furnishing store, and a tailor, transformed the little street-loafer into as gentlemanly-looking a boy as Dr. Mason needed to have wished to see sitting at his side in the cars as they were whirling rapidly towards London. But alas! it was not only in appearance that the boy had sunk beneath the level of a gentleman. His very language breathed the spirit of the class in the midst of which he had been reared; and as day after day passed on, and the first shyness consequent on his new position wore off, faults of the most glaring kind began to make themselves manifest.

Aunt Harriet was in despair, most truly. Having proved that her father was absolutely immovable in his determination to bring the child to their own home, she had accepted her cross with such patience as she might, honestly resolving, and striving too, to do what she could to make the boy a blessing, instead of the curse which she feared he might prove, to the home which had so kindly received him; but her task was a very difficult and, to a woman of her impatient temperament, almost a hopeless one.

For it was not only that Charles was entirely untaught and ungoverned: if his ignorance, his violent temper, and his self-will had been his only faults, there might have yet remained a good foundation on which to build up a noble structure; but the worst point in his character was that he was utterly unreliable; his word could never be depended upon, if by dishonouring it he could gain an advantage, or escape punishment. And the most disheartening aspect of the case was that he could not be made ashamed of a falsehood; in fact, he rather gloried in it, if it had been a successful one, and seemed to think that to be so deficient in smartness as to be found out in a misdemeanour was far more disgraceful than to hide it with a lie.

So far did he carry this perverted idea that he had once gone to his grandfather in great anger with a friend in whose behalf he had exercised his powers of deceit, but who had been too honourable to avail himself of them. Dr. Mason received his story in a way which for ever silenced his boasting of a successful falsehood in his presence.

"And he was punished, after all," Charlie said, indignantly, having recounted the occurrence with a great deal of excitement and earnestness, "when I'd put myself to such trouble about it. The great spooney confessed it all, after I'd lied him out of it so beautifully."

He was perhaps too much engrossed in his recital to notice the flashing of the eyes which were bent upon him, and the gradual straightening of the tall figure, or he may have attributed it to sympathetic indignation on his account; be that as it may, the answer he received startled him.

"Lied him out of it, sir! Lied him out of it!" exclaimed the doctor, drawing himself up until it seemed to the frightened boy that he was at least two inches taller than his ordinary height. "Have you the audacity to stand before me and brag of having lied a friend out of a dilemma? Do you know that you bear my name, sir? and yet do you dare to boast to me that you have disgraced it by telling a lie?"

Charlie stood staring at him with parted lips and wide-open eyes, too much stunned even to attempt a reply. He had been used to be laughed at, and to be called smart and quick-witted when he had, through a dexterous falsehood, escaped merited punishment; and here was his gentle, tender-hearted grandfather, who had so often excused him to Aunt Harriet when seriously in fault, breaking out into such anger and severity simply because he had done what he had often been praised for in time past.

But as he sat there in silent bewilderment and dismay, his grandfather's face softened somewhat, and, laying his hand upon his head, he said very gravely, but more quietly,—

"Charles Mason Stockton, I had it in my heart just now to take from you the name which has never needed to own to a lie until now; but I will not, for it may one day lead you to a nobler ambition. Go now, my boy; but remember that a liar is the meanest thing on God's earth; nothing is so low, so vile and worthless, as the man who will save himself loss or pain by selling his honour."

The boy went out, awed and subdued. His habit of untruthfulness was too deeply seated to be rooted out at once, even by this; but henceforth he hid it most carefully from his grandfather's eyes.

But with all this, "Charlie Mason," as he was universally called in the little village of Lindon where his grandfather had for fifty years and more practised his profession, was by no means wholly bad. There was much in him on which to rest a hope that the care and love which bore with him and shielded him might in time be repaid. More than ordinarily quick and intelligent, with a joyous, sunny disposition, and an affectionate heart, full of large and generous impulses, his was certainly not a perfectly hopeless case, although he often tried most sorely not only the temper and patience, but the very faith and love of those who had given him both home and heart room in his time of need.

II.

HARLAND'S FARM.

It was not very surprising that Miss Harriet should have felt herself almost at her wits' end that morning, as she sat in the sitting-room beside her father, thinking so seriously of Charlie's misdoings. There had been for the past few weeks a series of petty robberies perpetrated in the neighbourhood, fruit and vegetables had been stolen from the gardens, hens' nests had been robbed both of fresh laid eggs and of young chickens, simply in the latter case, as it seemed, for the pleasure of stealing; for in many instances the poor little fledglings had been dropped in the public road near the gates of the yards from which they had been taken, and left there to perish.

After these operations had been going on for some time, two young farmers, who had been somewhat heavy losers by the depredations, determined to sit up all night and watch their premises; for they had noticed during the day that some of the school-boys, who passed their farm on their way to school and back, had looked with covetous eyes on an overburdened plum-tree whose heavy branches were weighed to the ground with their rich purple fruit; and had then drawn together to whisper and consult, quite ignorant of the fact that the owners of the longed-for fruit were close at hand, and watching them with very unfriendly eyes.

It was a bright, clear night; and the two farmers had not lain hidden behind the thick copse very long, when the sounds of stealthy footsteps came creeping up the road, and four young fellows, about twelve years old or more, leaped the low wall, and made directly for the plum-tree. The farmers had decided that, if the tree were first attacked by the expected raiders, they would remain in concealment until they could determine whether the boys were simply fruit-thieves, or whether they belonged to the band of marauders who had been making such havoc among the fowls. So they lay very still while the young burglars shook down the beautiful fruit, and filled four large bags which they had brought with them.

"Do you see that they don't put any in their pockets?" asked the younger of the two brothers.

"Yes. That says—eggs," said the elder. "Keep quiet now. They've got through."

The bags were all full; but, instead of scaling the wall again, the boys lifted their burdens upon their backs, and stole softly away in the direction of the barn, accompanied by a huge, black Newfoundland dog which had been silently stalking to and fro, as if on the lookout for worthier spoil,