

"OLD MR. BINNEY."

All their friends had said, when Mrs. Binney died. "Now what a good thing it would be if old Mr. Binney would marry Miss Bright!"

Miss Bright had not been without her troubles, and very hard ones they had been, too, but she bore them with a brave heart, and carried a smiling face, and had a thankful spirit within her, striving always to remember her blessings, and how much they outnumbered any evils she was called upon to bear.

Indeed, to listen to Miss Bright's showing, you would have counted her as one of the luckiest persons ever born. She had had the kindest of friends, the most comfortable of situations, and the girls she had taught were endowed with an amiability of disposition which made it a positive pleasure to be with them. The only accusation she could bring against them was that they were all in such a terrible hurry to grow up and get married, and then Miss Bright's occupation was gone, and she had to step out into the world and find a fresh field for her labors.

As years rolled on, each one adding to the score of Miss Bright's age, these hunting-grounds of instruction became more and more narrowed. Children of eight began now where girls of eighteen used to leave off, and history and geography, to say nothing of the parts of speech and grammar, were all so altered, that poor little Miss Bright had to acknowledge that at times she really did feel quite confused. "Very soon I shan't be left with anything to teach," she used to say, pathetically, and then Mr. Binney's nephew, Joe, or some other good fellow who heard her, would declare she should set up a school for wives, for there never were such wives as the girls whom Miss Bright had brought up. She had taught Joe's wife, Sally, and her sister, and though since then she had other situations, at holiday time, or whenever she was seeking employment, she always returned to the house of Dr. Brendon, their father.

When Mr. Binney dropped in, as he frequently did, to inquire after his old friends, the Brendons, he from time to time found Miss Bright there, and happening in on the occasion of one of her visits there, to bring the news that Mrs. Binney was ill, with no one whose business it seemed to be to look after her, nothing was more natural than that Miss Bright should volunteer; and a great comfort they found her.

So sprightly, yet unobtrusive was the cheery little woman, that Mrs. Binney herself was influenced in her favor, until, with an eye to their mutual comfort, Mr. Binney proposed that Miss Bright should stay with them altogether.

"Why not?" he said. "We could well afford to pay her a salary."

But this word, salary, acting like magic on Mrs. Binney, seemed to bring her to her senses immediately. She would be very glad to have Miss Bright as a visitor, as long as she liked to stay, but as to living with them altogether—no, she would not give her consent to that; she had always objected to having in her house a third party. It was then that Miss Bright's friends pulled very long faces indeed. What would she do? they asked her.

"Oh, something is sure to turn up," she would say, hopefully. "Whenever I have come to my last cbb an opening has always been made for me, and I am not going to despair now."

And she said this all the more emphatically, because, in spite of her confidence, she could not help feeling that a voice, which she could not still, kept repeating "What will you do when you grow older? Teaching will get harder than ever." That was true enough, but what else was there for her to do?

When Mrs. Binney died, which happened quite suddenly about a year before, there had been some talk as to Miss

Bright going to Mr. Binney's as housekeeper; but this proposition had been made without the knowledge or consent of the principal person concerned, who, as soon as the hint was given, negatived it.

Mr. Binney thoroughly appreciated Miss Bright, but he had lost his taste for matrimony. He remembered that he had spent forty excellent years without a wife, and, notwithstanding that he was now a widower, he could not conscientiously say that he felt his state to be so very unhappy.

Susan, the cook, respectable and staid, would, he felt sure, manage his household properly, and if it proved that she should give way to extravagance, as people seemed to say she would, Mr. Binney fancied that he could better put up with that evil than with too much of the economy from which he had suffered already.

So all the hopes, that, on the death of Mrs. Binney, Joe, and Sally, and the Brendons, had cherished for Miss Bright, were ruthlessly dashed to the ground. Evidently Aunt Binney was not to have a successor.

"If we could but have got her there as housekeeper," said two of those arch conspirators, "the rest would have been easy."

But though they returned to the attack several times, no good came of it. Mr. Binney shared in their regret at the loss of Miss Bright's pupils, wondered, as they did, what would become of her, and, his visitors gone, to make his sympathy apparent, he sat down and wrote a kind little note, with a check for £10 folded within it.

"He's an old stupid!" said Sally, "and now she is going away altogether, ever so far"—for Miss Bright had had another piece of news to tell. An old pupil of early days, had been recently left a widow; her health was as delicate as her heart was kind, and when she made the proposition that Miss Bright should come and spend the remainder of her days with her, it was not entirely of her own comfort that she had been thinking. Miss Bright had readily accepted her offer, and she had written to tell Sally that the next week she should come up and see them.

She could only stay a few hours with them when she came. The farewell visit was to be paid later.

"But I think," she said, as she was going, "that I will call, on my way home, and say good-bye to Mr. Binney, in case I might not have another opportunity."

"Do," said Sally, and away she went.

Mr. Binney was at home. He had not been quite well lately; nothing more than a cold, but it had kept him a prisoner. To-day he might have gone out, but he had not felt inclined to, and he gallantly said he was glad to be in, as he should have been sorry indeed to have missed seeing Miss Bright.

"And so you are really going to leave us?" he said, and almost regretfully, too.

"Well, you will be very much missed. I don't know what the Brendons will do."

"They will not miss me more than I shall them," and the brave little woman made an effort that her voice should not sound shaky; "but you know, Mr. Binney, I am not growing younger, am I?"

"No," he said, "that is true. I was saying the very same to myself of myself, only to-day."

"Yes, only with men it does not seem to matter, but with women the thought always comes with a little shudder that when we get old and want a little quiet and rest, and a comfortable arm-chair by the fire, there is a doubt whether we shall be able to get them."

Mr. Binney did not answer, and fearing she was saying too much about her own feelings, she altered her tone, which had been a little sad, and went on in her usual cheerful way.

"But then I ought to feel so thankful that this opening has been made for me. I told them that I knew something would come; it has always done so; I have always been so lucky."

"It's your happy disposition makes you

say so, my dear Miss Bright; a cheerful spirit shortens the longest day. I wish I could follow your example. I often feel condemned at my want of contentment—of gratitude I ought to say."

But that Miss Bright would not allow. She reminded Mr. Binney of the many kind actions he had done, and in her own quiet way thanked him for the thoughtful present he had sent to her.

"No, no, no, now you must not speak of that," Mr. Binney hastily interrupted her; and to give a turn to the conversation, he said she "must have some tea," and, ringing to order it, he hoped she could stay.

Well, yes, she thought she could spare time for that—indeed, to be plain, she was not in such a very great hurry. The fact had been that Joe had had an unexpected holiday, and she saw that, only for her being there, he had come home to go out somewhere with Sally.

"So I hope that little fib I told you will be forgiven me, for when I said that I was wanted at home, although it was quite true perhaps, I need not but for that have left quite so early. But it was so nice of Joe to come home. I do love to see husbands and wives companions to each other."

"Ah, indeed, yes; that is the object of matrimony too often, I fear, lost sight of in our day, by the young and the old, too."

But Miss Bright did not agree. "No, she knew so many united couples. There were the Brendons now—" but at this moment the tea was brought in, and Miss Bright asked should she pour it out. Her offer was accepted. "Only," said Mr. Binney, "you must take off your cloak, or you won't feel the good of it when you go; and your bonnet, too, wouldn't you be more comfortable without that?"

Miss Bright said "no," she would not take her bonnet off.

"Haven't a cap with you, I suppose?" said the old gentleman slyly.

"Yes, indeed I have—a present from Sally—and a very becoming one, too."

"Put it on then, and let me pass my opinion."

Miss Bright hastened to obey, and when she came for his inspection the smile on her face and the soft pink in her cheek made her look ten years younger.

"Well," she said, "now what do you think of it?"

"I think if you take my advice you will never wear any other."

"Really," and she laughed softly; "but it is for high days and holidays, you know!" and she tip-toed to look in the chimney glass, saying that it certainly was a very pretty cap, and then she sat down to pour the tea. "The best tea things!" she said admiringly; "I am so fond of pretty china!" And then, searching in the sugar basin, she added: "I have not forgotten that you like two lumps of sugar, you see."

Mr. Binney smiled complacently; a feeling of well-being and comfort took possession of him.

Of a certainty it was very pleasant to have a congenial somebody to bear one company—one who could talk well, listen well and hold her tongue well, if necessary. Experience had assured him of that. Miss Bright possessed each of these good qualities. When she had stayed there when Mrs. Binney was first ill, their evenings had passed very pleasantly, and recalling the things they had done, he asked:

"Do you often play chess now?"

"No, never."

"Cribbage, backgammon?"

"I have no one to play with. That is one thing in my going away," and she swallowed a sigh—"my evenings will be less lonely."

"Ah, yes; I find the time very long after dinner. I don't like to go to bed before half-past ten, although I often feel inclined to."

"And the days draw in so quickly now there is no afternoon—it is all evening, which reminds me that it is getting time

for me to go, for it takes me quite an hour to get to the station."

"Not in a cab?"

"No, but I am going to walk; it is quite fine and dry, and if I feel tired at the Conway road I shall wait at the corner for the omnibus passing."

Miss Bright began to put on her bonnet. Mr. Binney walked to the window; for a minute he looked out, then he rang the bell.

"I shall go as far as the Conway road with you."

"Oh, Mr. Binney! No, pray don't think of such a thing; it might give you a cold, and there isn't the slightest occasion—I am so accustomed to go about alone."

But Mr. Binney remained firm; his hat and coat were brought to him; and away the two set off together. They chatted pleasantly as they walked along. "I shall hope to come and see them all sometimes," Miss Bright said. "I know as long as the Brendons have a home they will take me in."

"And remember that so long as I have a house there will be room for you in it."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Binney," she said softly. "I am sure I do not know why people are so good to me."

Mr. Binney apparently was no better able to inform her, and they walked on silently until the Conway road was reached.

"Now, then," said Miss Bright, "here we say farewell," and she held out her hand, but Mr. Binney did not take it; he was engaged in hailing a cab he saw; then he drew out his purse and Miss Bright knew that he intended settling with the man for the fare. She shook her head at him reprovingly.

Mr. Binney gave the directions to the driver and then he held out his hand, hesitated, opened the door and said, "I don't see why I should not go with you as far as the station."

At the railway station they had but a very short time of waiting. Miss Bright stood near the carriage which she had chosen; nothing remained but to say good-bye and enter.

"And you will let us hear how you get on?" for she had not said she was coming up again.

"Oh, I shall often write to the Brendons and Sally. You will hear of me through them."

"And I hope very much that you will be comfortable and happy."

Miss Bright tried to smile, but her eyes filled rapidly, and to hide the tears she half turned away.

"I wish that you were not obliged to go away. Couldn't anything be managed for you?"

She shook her head sadly. "No," she said; "I tried everything I could"—and here a sob would come—"but nobody seemed to want me."

"I—I want you!" Mr. Binney was stammering out his words excitedly. "Miss Bright, can you—will you stay for me? Could you consent to become Mrs. Binney?"

"Mrs. Binney!—I!"—everything seemed to swim around her—"but, Mr. Binney, such an idea never once occurred to me."

"I am very sure of that, my dear," he said earnestly, "and it has taken some time to come to me, or I should have made the offer long ago; however better late than never—that is if you will accept me."

"Oh, but I think it is so good of you—and you feel sure that I can make you happy. What will the Brendons and Sally say?"

"Say that I am more lucky than I deserve to be for not asking you before. Now I understand why I wouldn't consent to your being my housekeeper; I was wanting you for my wife you know."

Miss Bright held up her hands in dismay.

"Oh, my!" she cried, "there's the train off—gone, I declare!"

"What of that, if it is! Another will soon follow, and while we are waiting for