

BOYS AND GIRLS

Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

(By Julia McNair Wright.)

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CHAPTER X.—Continued.

"E!" It's a queer little quirl, anyhow. No good, is it?"

"It is the most used of any letter. This is 'a.'"

'Looks like a praying beetle, or piece of an ant.'

'And this is "t."'

'Yes, pretty good fish-hook. M-e-a-n-t, m-n-e.' Rasmus held the paper close to his eyes, and bellowed like a bull of Bashan, as if nearness of sight and noise would impress his mind with the five letters. As he was naturally of good abilities, and now in earnest to learn that day's lesson, he soon had the five letters fairly mastered.

Then Mr. Llewellyn took the card, saying, 'Now, I will show you how many words can be made with these five letters, m-e-a-n-t, meant; leave off the t, and you have mean, a mean act; m-e me; a-n-t ant; a-t; at; a-n; an; t-e-a, tea; m-e-n, men; t-e-a-m, team; m-e-a-t, meat; m-a-t, mat; t-a-m-e, tame; m-a-t-e, mate, and so on. Now, all those words you got from five letters. I could find you others. I want to show you that few letters can make many words, according as they are placed. Letters are like seeds. You plant a few seeds, and how many thousands will grow up, you take one little word like m-e-a-n-t, and you can make many words out of it.'

'I couldn't write a letter out of them five, could I?' said Rasmus, looking at the cabalistic signs with intense respect.

'No; but if you will try you can soon learn all the 26; then you will before long know how to spell words with them, and can write a fair letter.'

'Now, here goes,' said Rasmus, 'I'll learn. Last night when I heard that splendid writing 'bout habits, from that little chap, sez I, maybe my little chap learned to read and write, too, for he had a head-piece on him, you know! He was as smart as they make 'em, and if so be he learned, and I found him, I'd sort of hate to tell him I didn't know letters, I would hate to shame the little chap; he had nice feelin's.'

Moved by these considerations of his 'little chap,' and by unexpressed ideas concerning the blooming Sally, Rasmus took the card, and went on studying as they resumed their way. He bawled his lesson aloud, as they do in Chinese temples of learning, but happily all the world was his school-room. On went

'A! n! t! ant!!! here's one 'long the road, lugging a little white bundle. Here's an ant-hill moving, Mr. Llewellyn! See what a string of 'em, all carrying bundles. Them bundles is baby-ants, and here they're piling of 'em round the new house, and them within-side is taking 'em down. Once, when they were doing that, I picked up three bundles on a blade of grass, and hid 'em behind a pebble some ways off, and soon they missed 'em', and when they'd carried the rest down, they scouted round till they found them three. A-n-t. T-e-a-m. Rod, what does that spell?'

'What is this coming up the road?'

'Dog? No, a team.'

'That's it, now you talk,' said Rodney.

'T-e-a-m, team? Now, stick there, team,' and he gave his head a blow with his fist. 'M-e-a-t, pork. No, meat. That's the ticket.'

Mr. Llewellyn here perceived a flaw in his instructions. At evening he gave his pupil a lesson on the sound of letters, showing him that though pork might be a form of meat, m-e-a-t could not spell pork. An adult pupil may have his advantages, but the simple docility of a child is also a happy factor in receiving the rudiments of education. Rasmus was inspired to demand why mat was spelled m-a-t, and why they did not spell it some other way, and so on. Mr. Llewellyn,

seeing that the hope of writing was the main-spring of this studiousness, taught him to write the letters as he learned them. After a week Rasmus became unhappy over his slow progress, and the distant prospects of letter-writing, though by that time he had learned all the potent twenty-six signs. Mr. Llewellyn, to encourage him, proposed that Rodney should write to Sally, asking that if her father found any fossils, not wanted by the company, he would save them for Rodney. Rasmus seized eagerly on this hint, and watched with anxiety the progress of the letter. It was a rainy evening, and they had stopped at a little country-tavern.

'I'll say Rasmus sends you his love,' said Rodney.

'That would be too steep,' said Rasmus, seriously.

'Well, in ancient times when knights lived, they used to write to the ladies, "I kiss your hand." I'll say, "Rasmus kisses your hand."'

'But I don't,' said Rasmus, 'and she'd be mad.'

'Then I'll say, "Rasmus thinks of you night and day,"' said the mischievous Rodney.

'Rod Harris! I'll choke you, sure as you're born!'

'Then, tell me what to say.'

'You say we're all well, and hoping she's the same, and Mr. Llewellyn and the rest desires their regards.'

Rasmus felt better after that letter was dispatched, and attacked his studies with new vigor. He tormented his companions to know how to spell everything, and forthwith wrote it down. He bought a long pencil, and picked up every scrap of paper he saw, to print on.

'Rod! how do you spell a cow? Dad, how do you spell leaf? Is leaves spelt the same way, eh? Why in sense do they turn out that "f" and put a "v" in? That ain't fair. I shall say l-e-a-f-s, leaves.'

'Then Sally will laugh at you,' said Rod, and that brought Rasmus to reason.

'It's a big shame I was left like this,' said the burly pupil, one day. 'I ought to been taught all this an' the figgering things when I was little. The police ought to caught me and sent me to school every day, an' the school ought to furnished my book, and towel, and water to wash my face if I was dirty. You see, in the cold an' rain I'd just took to a warm, tidy room to sit in. An' for all the poor, little hungry lads that has no dinner or breakfast, police ought to make a list of 'em, and have a kitchen where they could get a bowl of hot soup and a chunk of bread. Police stands 'bout the corners, and nabs kids for stealing, when perhaps the poor little shavers is so hungry they fair has to snatch a bite. When they gets drunk, or acts werry bad, the bobbies sends 'em to the station-house, and so to the island, an' graduveats 'em to the gallows, like George Mack's composition. Why don't they stop it before it begins? School-house is much better place for the kids than grog-shops to get warm in. Out of the school-house they'll get to a stove-pipe hat and good books. Out of grog-shops over to the island, every time. Poor kids!'

CHAPTER XII.

The Widening World.

'Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star.'

Day after day drifted slowly by, as our travellers faced the rising suns. The clover-bloom loaded the air with fragrance; the grass was almost ready for the mower. Over Rodney such change had passed, as over the ripening season; his cheek was a healthy brown; he swung along the roads with a vigorous step, he carried his load without fatigue, he no longer wondered that his two companions were untired, for he was tireless himself. If Rasmus, progressing in his reading, and writing, and ciphering, made daily positive and appreciable acquisition, Rodney did not less, for Mr. Llewellyn was an unwearied and skilful master, and few boys who have spent their years in school, become as skilled in botany or entomology, as Rodney did in his summer trip across Pennsylvania.

There were many hours, sometimes whole

days, when Mr. Llewellyn was engrossed in his painting or writing—days when the journey came to a pause, and Rasmus built a booth, and Mr. Llewellyn gave himself to some investigation, and Rasmus and Rodney, lying under the trees, with nothing particular to do, devoted themselves to each other's instruction and entertainment. It was in such days that Rodney enthralled Rasmus by beginning the tales of the Knights of the Round Table, and the Search for the San Grail.

'What's the San Grail?' demanded Rasmus.

'Well, don't you remember all I've read you Sundays about the Lord Jesus—that was born in Bethlehem—and d'ed 19. men on Calvary?'

'Who's forgetting,' demanded Rasmus, resentfully.

'And you recollect what Mr. Llewellyn read, last Sunday, about that Last Supper, and the bread, and the wine, and "when He took the cup He blessed and gave to His disciples"—you remember it? Well, you see, in the times of the Round Table and King Arthur, that I have been telling you about, they got up the idea that that cup the Lord passed round at the Last Supper, was a cup of pure gold, and that it was somewheres about in the world, and they wanted to find it.'

'I don't blame 'em,' said Rasmus heartily.

'They called it the San Grail, or Holy Grail, or Cup. Sometimes it is spelled another way, but I suppose you don't care about that.'

'Drop the spellin', pardner—I'm nigh dead of spellin'.'

'Well, all these knights of King Arthur wanted to go and find the San Grail, or Holy Cup. They thought if they found that, then they'd get to heaven, sure. And they all swore to go out and find the Holy Grail; and away they all went, Sir Launcelot, and Sir Gawain, and Sir Madoc, and Sir Bedivere and Sir Tristram, and a lot more, and Sir Galahad—and they searched all the world over for a great while.'

'Much as thirteen years—or ten years?' asked Rasmus wistfully, beginning to associate that search for the golden cup, with his search for the golden head, so well loved.

'Yes—more than that.'

'I hope they found it!'

'Yes—you shall hear. They crossed mountains, seas, rivers, sometimes together, sometimes alone. They fought beasts, and heathen knights, and giants, and dragons, and the devil. And angels helped them sometimes, and sometimes they got weary, and rested, all but Sir Galahad. He was the youngest of all, and the holiest of all, and his heart was firm set on just that one thing—the Grail. He was strong and brave, and all enemies went over before him. The poetry about him reads—

"My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

'So on he went. He prayed in every church, and by every tomb and wayside cross; he helped every poor person, redressed every wrong, and "he kept fair through faith and prayer." And he sailed in magic boats over unknown seas, and climbed enchanted hills, and when his heart was ready to despair, he heard a sweet sound, and saw a light, and in the sky beheld three angels who carried the Holy Grail, and so he knew he was on the right track. He had such a charger, or horse, as never was seen, white as snow; and his armor was white, and here is the poem I learned about it:

"A maiden knight to me is given
Such hope I know no fear;
I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven,
That often meet me here.
I muse on joys that will not cease—
Pure spaces clothed in living beams,
Whose odors haunt my dreams.
And, stricken by an angel's hand
This mortal armor that I wear,
This weight and size, this heart and eyes,
Are touched, are turned to finest air."

'And after a while he found the Holy Grail, and the angels gave him to drink from the