

Not Fit to be Kissed!

"WHAT ails papa, mother?" said a sweet little girl;  
Her bright laugh revealing her teeth  
white as pearl;  
I love him, and kiss him, and sit on his knee,  
But the kisses don't smell good when he  
kisses me.

"But, mamma,"—her eyes opened wide as she spoke—

"Do you like those kisses of 'bacco and smoke?  
They might do for boys, but for ladies and girls'  
I don't think them nice," as she tossed her bright curls.

"Don't nobody's papa have moufs nice and clean?"

With kisses like yours, mamma—that's what I mean;  
I want to kiss papa, I love him so well,  
But kisses don't taste good that have such a smell.

"It's nasty to smoke, and eat 'bacco and spit;  
And the kisses ain't good, and ain't sweet, not a bit;"

And her blossom-like face wore a look of disgust,  
As she gave out her verdict, so earnest and just.

Yes, yes, little darling! your wisdom has seen

That kisses for daughters and wives should be clean;  
For kisses lose something of nectar and bliss,

From mouths that are stained and unfit for a kiss.

In Prison and Out.

By the Author of "The Man Trap."

CHAPTER IV.—OLD EUCLID'S BOARD.

AS Mrs. Fell, leaning heavily on the arm of Bess, crept homeward, after her sorrowful visit to the pawnbroker, they saw an old man, one of their neighbours, making his way, with a shambling and limping tread, along the uneven pavement before them. The lamps were lit down the narrow and dirty street, and the light fell on the dingy figure of the old man as he passed under them with his stooping shoulders and his long, ragged locks of gray hair falling below his battered and broken hat, round which still clung a little band of black material that had not become quite brown with rain and sunshine. He was a small man, and seemed to have withered and shrunk into a more meagre thinness than when his clothes had been bought, now many years ago. The face under the battered hat was of a yellow brownness, and much wrinkled, with shaggy eyebrows hanging over his eyes. There was a gleam in these dim and sunken eyes, as if it were possible for him to smile; but the possibility seldom became a fact. He looked half asleep as he shuffled along; and in a low, husky voice he was dreamily crying "Creases," but not at all as though he expected any one of his neighbours to spend a penny on his perishable stock.

"There's poor old Euclid!" said Mrs. Fell in a tone of pity, as if she were looking at one whose circumstances were as bad, if not worse, than her own.

The old man's baptismal name was Euclid, his surname Jones; but in the multitude of Joneses his surname had long been lost, and was almost forgotten. He was the son of a village schoolmaster in some quiet spot in Wales, who had called his only child Euclid, with a vague and distant hope of seeing him some day a distinguished mathematical scholar. But the schoolmaster and his wife had both died before little Euclid had fairly mastered the alphabet, and from that time he had lived among the neighbours, now with one and now with another, passing from cottage to cottage, until he was old enough to scare crows and tend pigs. Little learning did Euclid get at these early employments. In course of time he drifted up to London, where he worked on the roads till he was disabled by an accident. He had married a wife, who bore him eight children, born and bred under every chance against health and life, and dying, all but one, just as they grew old enough to do something for themselves, after they had tested their father's love and endurance to the utmost. His wife was dead also. He had buried them all in their own coffins, unassisted by the parish, a remembrance which stirred up his downcast heart with a feeling honest pride whenever it crossed his brain. Life had brought to Euclid an enigma to

solve, stiffer and more intricate than the most abstruse mathematical problem, how to keep himself and his off the parish during life and how to get buried, when all was over, without the same dreaded and degrading aid. The problem was but partially solved yet; there still remained his youngest child and himself to die and be buried.

Euclid turned in at the same door as that to which Mrs. Fell was painfully creeping. He lived in the one attic of the house, having the advantage over Mrs. Fell in more light and fresher air, and in the quietness of a story to himself; but he possessed few other advantages. His household goods were as poor as hers had been before all that was worth pawning had gone to the pawn-shop. There was a bed on the floor close by the handful of fire, and Euclid's first glance fell upon it; but it was empty, for a sickly-looking girl of eighteen was sitting on a broken chair before the fire, cowering over it with outstretched hands. She had wrapped herself in an old shawl, and was holding it tightly about her, as though she felt the chill of the November evening; but she smiled brightly when the old man's wrinkled face and dim eyes met her gaze, as he stood in the doorway an instant, looking anxiously and sadly at her.

"Come in, daddy, and shut the door," she said cheerfully. "I'm not bad to-day; but you're late,—later than ever. It's gone six, and I thought you would never, never come."

"Folks did not care to buy creases this cold day," he answered, his husky voice striving to soften itself into tenderness; "but, Victoria, my dear, you've not waited tea for me?"

"I should think I have," she said, rising from the only chair, and compelling him with all her little strength to sit down on it, while she took an old box for her seat. "I couldn't relish the best o' tea alone at this time o' night, and you in the streets, daddy. So we'll have it at once; for it's been made, oh! hours ago,—at least, it's near an hour by the clock. That clock's real company to me, father," she added, looking proudly at a little loud-ticking clock against the wall, which seemed the best and busiest thing in the bare room.

"I ain't got no 'erring for you, Victoria," he said regretfully, "nor nothing else for a relish, nothing save a few creases, and they'd be too cold for your stomach, my dear. If you feel set on anything, I'll take a penny or two from our little store, you know. It's all quite safe; isn't it, my dear?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, a shadow flitting across her face for a moment; "you needn't never be afraid of that not being safe. I'm not set on anything, daddy."

"How much is it now, Victoria?" he inquired, his eyes glistening a little as he listened eagerly to her reply.

"It's two pound, sixteen shilling and nine-pence three farthings," she answered without hesitation. "I take good care of it."

"I think we shall do it, Victoria," he said, with an air of satisfaction; "and after that, my dear, there will be nobody but me; and I'm not afraid but I'll save enough for that. No, no; I shouldn't like any on us to die like a scamp upon the parish, and be buried in a parish coffin."

Victoria had been reaching down the two cracked cups and the loaf of bread from a corner cupboard; and now she stood for a moment looking wistfully into the fire, her pale, thin face flushed a little into almost delicate beauty. Under the pillow on which she rested her head every night, and on which it lay many a long hour of the wearyful day, there was always hidden a precious little store of money, slowly accumulating by a few pence at a time,—the fund that was to pay for her own coffin, and the other costs of her own poor funeral. She had made a shroud of coarse calico for herself, and kept it carefully ready against the time it would be needed.

There was no question in her mind, or her father's, that this fund would be needed probably before the next summer came. Her doctor, who was a druggist living in the next street, assured her that good living and better clothing and warmer lodging were all she needed; but he might as well have ordered her to the south of France for the winter. It was Euclid's chief anxiety now that the sum should grow as fast as possible, lest an unusually severe winter might hasten on the necessity for it. And to Victoria it was a matter of as much interest and care as to him, so often did she reckon up the cost of a coffin and a grave, and count over the money provided to procure them for her. She thought of it again as she stood looking into the fire, and saw as vividly and fleetly as a flash of lightning her own funeral passing down the narrow, common staircase, the children trooping after it, but only her old and weeping father following as mourner. She stooped down, and kissed him, as if to comfort him beforehand for the grief that was to come.

"Is anythink ailm' you, Victoria?" he inquired in as gentle a tone as he could lower his voice to.

"Nothin' fresh, daddy," she answered; "only you'll be lonesome when I'm gone."

"Ay, ay," said Euclid. "It'll be a dark shop without you, my dear."

He said no more, but sat slowly rubbing his legs up and down before the fire, while his memory travelled back over the twenty-five years that had passed since he was a strong man, able and willing to work hard and to live hard for the sake of his wife and children. Victoria saw him counting his children on his fingers, as he huskily muttered their names. He seemed to see them all, his boys and girls, who were gone out of this troublesome world down into the dark secret of the grave; they were all living in his memory, and his wife, too, who had trodden the same strange yet familiar road eighteen years ago. He had buried them all, and had never once taken a penny from the parish. His withered face lit up as the thought crossed his mind.

"Victoria," he said, as if this recollection had reminded him of Mrs. Fell, "there's a mort o' trouble downstairs in the ground-floor back. There's Mrs. Fell as bad off or worse than us, though she do take parish pay. There's no luck in parish money, I know; but she's dead beat, I s'pose. I saw her comin' back from the pawn-shop, and she looked like death. There's her boy David away, and nobody knows where he's gone to, and she's almost heart-broke. I took the liberty o' noticin', and there's not a scrap o' fire in their room. So, Victoria, my dear, if you didn't mind it, we might ask her up here a bit when we've done our tea. There's not enough for all, or we'd ask her to come up for her tea. But she's got no fire, and we have; and four of us will be warmer than two, if you didn't mind it."

"Mind it, daddy?" repeated Victoria. "I'd be right glad if she'll come."

Many a time had Victoria glanced longingly into Mrs. Fell's room as she passed the door, and wished she would call out, and invite her in. But Mrs. Fell had felt herself in a superior position to Euclid,—a laundress being surely of a higher social standing than a watercress-seller, to say nothing of living on the ground-floor instead of the attic,—and she had taken but little notice of Euclid's girl amid the constantly changing members who inhabited the house. Bess was better known to Victoria; and David had many a time shown himself friendly, and run errands for her when she was too poorly to go out herself. To-night she could not swallow a morsel after her father's suggestion. As soon as tea was over, and the cups and teapot put away, and every token of their poor meal, Euclid went downstairs to carry his invitation in person, whilst Victoria arranged an empty box or two to serve as seats about the fire, upon which she put another tiny shovel of coals. Her colour came and went fitfully as she heard Mrs. Fell's slow footstep mounting the steps leading to their attic, followed by her father and Bess; and she received them shyly, but gladly, at the door.

"It's very kind on you and Euclid, I'm sure," panted Mrs. Fell, with the ghost of a smile on her face, "and I take it neighbourly; and if there's any thing as me and Bess can do—"

"Please come and sit down in the chair," said Victoria, interrupting her easily; for she was still struggling for breath. She was soon seated in the chair, which was placed in front of the fire; whilst Euclid sat on one side on an old box, with Bess and Victoria opposite on another. The flickering flame of the small fire shone upon their faces, and was the only light by which they saw each other. But in a few minutes they almost like old friends.

"She's the last I've got," said old Euclid to Mrs. Fell, nodding at Victoria, who was talking to Bess. "Her mother died when she were born eighteen years ago. She were too weak to get the better on it, and she had to go. I'd five little children when she died. Victoria's got her complaint," he went on in a lower tone, "and she's the last out o' eight on them. Boys and gals, they're all gone afore me."

"It's His will as knows best, Mr. Euclid," said Mrs. Fell, with a heavy sigh.

"I s'pose it is," replied Euclid. "I hope he knows; for I'm sure I don't. I've had no time for thinkin' of nothink but how to keep off the parish. Not as I'd say a word agen a woman takin' parish pay, a poor weakly woman like you. But it 'ud be a sore disgrace for a man to come on the parish even for his buryin'."

Mrs. Fell sighed again, and sat looking into the red embers of the fire sadly, as if she was seeing again the bright days of her married life.

"I never lost nobody, save my poor David,—my husband, I mean," she said; "and by good luck he were in a buryin' club, and they gave him a very good funeral,—a hearse, and a mournin'-coach for me and the two children, and plumes! But there'll be nobody save the parish to bury me; for Bess is only a child and David's gone."

"Where's he gone to?" asked Victoria.

"He went out upon a little journey nigh upon a month ago," she answered; "and we've never

heard a word of him since he said 'Good-bye; mother.' He's never come back again. Some think's happened to him. I know; for he's always that good to me and Bess, you couldn't think! I'm frettin' after him all the while more than I can tell: it's wastin' me away. But it's God's will, as good folks say; and there's none on us as can fight agen him."

"And Bess says you've been forced to part wi' your weddin' ring," Victoria replied, with a shy look of sympathy.

The tears welled up into Mrs. Fell's eyes, and Bess bowed her head in shame. For the first evening in her life, when she had no work to do, the poor woman felt that her finger had lost its precious sign of her married life. She might almost as well have been an unmarried woman,—one of those wretched creatures on whom she had almost looked down with honest pride and a little hardness. She laid her right hand over her undecorated finger, and looked back into Victoria's sympathizing face with an expression of bitter grief.

"I'll work till I drop to get it back," cried Bess, with energy.

"I wish my-anissis were alive now," said Euclid. "I'm always a-wishin' it; but she were a good woman, and she knew summat more about God than most folks, and about Him who died for us. I never was a scholar; but she could read, ay, splendid! and she knew a mort o' things. She taught me a lot, and I remembered them long enough to teach Victoria some of 'em. Victoria, my dear, there's them verses as was your mother's favourites,—them as I taught you when you was little. I've forgot 'em myself, Mrs. Fell; but she's got them all right and straight in her head, and she says them back to me now my memory's gone. Sometimes I think it's her mother a sayin' of 'em. 'The Lord,' you know, my dear."

Victoria's face flushed again, and her voice trembled a little as she began to speak, whilst Bess fastened her dark eyes eagerly upon her; and Euclid and Mrs. Fell, with their careworn and withered faces turned straight to the fire, nodded their heads at the close of each verse, as if uttering a silent "Amen."

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

(To be continued.)

THE LAST READING.

In one of the coal mines in England a youth about fifteen years of age was working by the side of his father, who was a pious man and governed and educated his family according to the word of God.

Father and son worked together in a newly-opened section of the mine. One day the father had just stepped aside to procure a tool, when the arch above suddenly fell between them, so that the father supposed his son to be crushed. He ran toward the place and called to his son:

"My son, are you living?"

"Yes, father, but my legs are under a rock."

"Where is your lamp, my son?"

"It is still burning, father."

"What are you doing, my dear son?"

"I am reading my Bible, father, and the Lord strengthens me."

These were the last words of that Sabbath-school scholar before he was suffocated.

A GERMAN TRICK.

GERMAN children are said to be more "slow" than those of other civilized nations, but they frequently reach the mark as soon as their more rapid brothers. The following is a German idea. Try it.

Cut a strip of paper two by fifteen inches. Draw a line on both sides along the exact middle. In order to distinguish between the two sides, indicate one line by dots, the other by dashes. Paste the ends of the paper together so that the centre line will be continuous, but join the dotted line to the line of the dashes. This will give a twist to the ring. With a pair of scissors carefully cut through the middle line all the way round the ring. How many rings there will then be you will see for yourself.