

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## The Near-by Star.

Sit not blindfold, soul, and sigh  
For the immortal by and by!  
Dreamer, seek not heaven afar  
On the shores of some strange star!  
This a star is—this, thine earth!  
Here the germ awakes to birth  
Of God's sacred life in thee,  
Heir of immortality.

—Edward Mortimer.

## Rasmus, or the Making of a Man.

(By Julia McNair Wright.)

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### CHAPTER X.—Continued.

'See there!' he shouted, 'that bee has seen the dandelion's yellow sign-board, and has called for honey. Now, I'm going to see if, as you say, he pays for the honey by carrying round the dusty stuff. I vow,' he added, bending near the freebooter of the spring, 'he is all covered with yellow dust!'

'Let us have a look at the yellow dust,' said Mr. Llewellyn; 'pick several different kinds of flowers.'

They were passing along a woody district, where a brook ran between sloping banks, and made in its spring overflow wide spots of semi-marsh land. In a few minutes, from such fortunate botanical circumstances, they had secured adder-tongue, sanguinaria, bell-hyacinth, and dandelions. Mr. Llewellyn prepared his strongest microscope, and stuck a little dandelion-pollen upon a piece of glass. Rasmus watched in wonder and a half-superstitious awe as of necromancy, when successive grains of pollen from various flowers were showed him, all differing, and on the glass the simple dust became beads of carved amber, filigree of gold, chaplets of pearls, spun silver, marvels of fairy waxwork; then to learn that each of these lovely atoms was a little bag, and each sack was full of liquid, in which forever quivered a little glittering atom of ceaseless motion, as the beating heart of the plant.

'What is it?' cried Rodney.

'I do not know,' said Mr. Llewellyn; 'I can only tell you that if that atom ceased to tremble in the pollen-case, the pollen would be worthless, and would not vivify a seed.'

'What I asks,' said Rasmus, with insistence, 'is, what's life?'

'I don't know,' said Mr. Llewellyn.

'Not? Why, you're studying flowers all the time, I thought you knowed all about 'em.'

'You have lived twenty-six years,' said Mr. Llewellyn. 'Now, do you tell me what your life is.'

'Why,' said Rasmus, 'it's—being alive—not dead.'

'The wisest man you may ask,' said Mr. Llewellyn, 'will not be able to tell you much more clearly. He can only explain "life" by some word or phrase meaning the same thing. His answer can be brought down to about your terms. Life is being alive. However far and bravely we may travel on any path of knowledge, we come at last to some river too deep for us to cross, some way too high for us to scale. The man who has studied nothing, can ask a question of very simple form, too hard for any student to answer. You were angry at the operator in the telegraph-office, who, after he showed all he had to show, declined to tell you what electricity was. You made sure he ought to know what he was daily handling; he only knew how to handle it, just as you know how to take care of your life, to shield yourself from injury, and don't know what life is. What is that tree you are leaning against?'

'It's a dead ash.'

'And the one beside it?'

'It's a live ash.'

'And once, all summer, will be clothed with leaf and beauty, the other will be barren sticks, all for that difference of a word, life

or death. In all these things which we do not understand, we have only to say, "This is God acting in a way that we see and cannot explain, beyond a certain point." We reach the limit of our wisdom, "whether the chain of our knowledge is long or short, God is at the end."

'That don't make it better to me; I don't like it a bit. I am worried by it,' said Rasmus.

'In the Bible,' God's book, it tells us the way to get over that. Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace. We are not apt to be in terror of a person with whom we are on friendly terms.'

Then Mr. Llewellyn walked on; he had told Rasmus enough, and thought he should study out some things for himself. The present upshot of Rasmus' thought was, that he did not want to hear any more about God, it made him uncomfortable, and he concluded that Rodney was a much more interesting talker than the naturalist.

A day or two after, it was unusually warm, and they stopped early for their noon rest. After a while, Mr. Llewellyn fell asleep. Rasmus was lying on his back, beneath a tree, his knees drawn up, and his hands under his head. Rodney had got into the tree, and was lying on a big limb, and looking down. Rodney felt like talking; he said, 'Rasmus, I'm going to tell you a story. Once upon a time this world had no people, nor trees, nor seas, nor houses, nor animals, nor grass on it. It was a big ball of fire; red-hot melted rocks, and it went whirling round and round so fast that for all it was just melted stuff, like the melted glass in the Pittsburg works, it didn't fly off or spill round.'

'I see a man once whirl a cup of water round so fast that it couldn't spill,' said Rasmus. 'I might believe that, but that about it's being red-hot, that's yarns.'

'No, it's so. And now, this very day, it is red-hot in the middle. If you could dig clear in, you'd come to the red-hot melted rocks.'

'Yarns: cellars is dug in, and they're cooler than the house.'

'They're only dug a little way, and they're out of the sun. But there's mines, Rasmus, deep-down mines, where it is so hot the men have to pull off their shirts to work, and the sweat rolls off them.'

'Right you are, pardner; I mind now, a man told me he worked in one of them deep, hot mines.'

'Well! The world went whirling round, and it began to cool and cool, and made a crust, and a thicker crust. And there was an ocean over all of it.'

'Where did the water come from?' asked Rasmus.

'From vapor, or a kind of steam, and I can't explain where that came from, only it is made of gas.'

'You'd ought to go to college, and learn the rights of things,' observed Rasmus, with deep disdain.

'And this water was boiling hot, and sent off steam, miles and miles deep, round the world, so not a star or a sun could shine through. And when it all got cooler, and was luke-warm only, by reason of the fires inside, a moving and bubbling kept on, and some of the solid crust got lifted over the water, and that was land. And on that land things began to grow, and all the trees were moss and ferns, and that kind. What would you say, Rasmus, to moss, such as your head lies on, so tall you could not reach the top, and so thick you couldn't reach round it?'

'I should say it wasn't so,' said Rasmus, promptly.

'Well, it was so. And the ferns had stems as thick as oaks, and all the animals were giants. There were no men; but the animals, in the water and out, were the biggest things and the ugliest things ever you could fancy. There is nothing in the world so big and ugly now; great things they were, with scales and wings like bats, and long legs, and little heads, and huge teeth; all running round in a kind of warm fog, with no more light than a foggy day or twilight.'

'What became of the things?' asked Rasmus, with interest.

'O, they died. We find their bones, or their foot-tracks, and wise men put them together,

and make pictures of them, and plaster-paris models of them. And all those big ferns and mosses have been roasted into coal, and boiled down into kerosene oil, and, you see, we fill our lamps and warm our toes by those things that were once forests, where these horrid creatures ran round, and chewed up the branches, and bellowed and fought each other.'

'I'm glad such things aint lyin' round loose now,' said Rasmus. 'I'd be afraid to sleep out of doors nights; and there would be no fun in tramping about if there were no flowers small enough to pick, and no birds or butterflies that were pretty, and whenever you turned a fence-corner, you might see a horrid dragon, with its mouth wide open, tearing round at you. It would be worse than bob-bies.'

'It's a good thing you're satisfied with the world as it is.'

'O, I ain't satisfied with it, by no means,' said Rasmus. 'It is all out of kilter, I think. I wouldn't have any rich or poor in it, if I had my way. I don't think that is fair. If we hadn't been so poor when I was little, I would have had a home to be took to when I was hurt, and nobody would have carried off my little chap.'

'But you know you wouldn't have been so poor and had no home, if your father had not used up his money in drink. You would not have lived in the slums; he would have been a working mason, or a master; your mother would have stayed alive; you and Robin would have been in school; you wouldn't have been run over, and he wouldn't have been sent to the Friendless Home.'

'That's all so; but I've seen poor folks that had not spent their money on drink, real poor, too. If I had the making of the world I'd have no whiskey or beer in it.'

'What else would you have?'

'I'd empty all the stores and big houses, and divide up all things fair and even. Nobody should live in a palace, and no one should live in a cellar or a hut. Share and share alike, would be my plan. Nobody need work, and everybody should have a horse to ride. Every man should have roast-beef and garden-sass and apple-pie for dinner, and all should be as jolly as blackbirds.'

'And how long would that last?' asked Mr. Llewellyn.

'Why, forever.'

'Not six months, and I'll tell you why. When no one worked, in six months every ounce of dug coal and cut wood would be burned up; all the oil and gas and candles would be gone; and, more than that, all the food would be gone. The world is never more than six months off from famine, as a whole. If no work was done, and no man could keep or sell, or benefit himself in his work of producing food, by the end of six months all the world would have common share of—hunger. The horses every man had, would starve for lack of forage. All men being idle and pampered, would quarrel much more than they do now, and the streets would quickly be full of fights, and the wounded and dead; and, in a little time, of the starving. If you secured this beautiful state of Communism, there would be no government, and so no law, for law is no good without a government to keep it in force, and the object of government, as a great Latin writer says, is "that every man should have his own."

'Well, if I had anything to lose, I'd agree to that. If I had my own, I'd want to keep it. As I haven't anything, I cry up all things even, and you'll find that's the case generally, boss. I reckon your Latin man was rich, and wanted to keep his own.'

'I can tell you what I think a great deal better style of arrangement than you have planned. I would allow no beer, liquor, wine, or strong drink of any kind to be made. I would have compulsory education, and every child should be put to school from the time he was six until he was fourteen. And in school he should learn the Ten Commandments as well as the multiplication table. Every boy should learn some kind of a business or handicraft. I would have absolutely no idlers: for property changes hands so easily and often that idlers mean in the end paupers. I would give every man his Sunday's rest, and his night's rest. That is, he