

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THE BIG BOOTS.

The ruins of that old country school-house yet remain, a deformity by the roadside.

It had brick walls, and these are not entirely gone. A portion of the chimney, too, is still to be seen; while the old foundation-stones, and bits of lath, and broken layers of mortar, make the place desolate and forbidding. The wet, spongy farm-lot in the rear is no handsomer, nor the rude highway more attractive, than was the case forty years ago.

It would seem as if country school-houses, like country graveyards, were once begrudged the room required for them, and hence pushed into the most uninviting places.

Even now, in sleep, I sometimes dream of my school days there, and of the little boy with the big boots—the sorrowful lit le boy, whom none of us knew enough to make happy. Boys are not really more cruel than men, but their well of kindness lies deep, and they leap over it and run around it, without knowing how clear and sparkling its waters would be if drawn up.

I was a lad of eleven, the first and only winter of my attendance there. I am now more than fifty; and in the review, that single winter seems as long to me as a dozen years. The incidents of youth have a consistency like that of pure gold, and the mind afterwards beats them out, so that they cover a very broad surface.

Mr. Tanner, the master, I would know in a moment, were he to rise up before me now; and the fresh-looking girl at the desk in the corner, and the blue-eyed country beauty, whose seat was by the window, and the freckled boys, and boys with tow hair—the big boys on the back seat—and the little boys on the front bench by the stove, I would recognize them every one, could some psychological wonder bring them back to me again, with the looks that they have long since shed, atom by atom, on the road of life.

There was one little fellow about my own age, whom, on the first day at school, I remarked as having a thoughtful and somewhat troubled face, and to be poorly dressed.

It was a cold day in November, and at recess, some of the boys put on their overcoats. One of them, who had a very handsome garment of the kind, on taking it down from its nail in the entry, observed beside it an old faded coat belonging to some one else. This he rudely grasped, and with a jeering, cruel air and devious whoop, exclaimed "What rag is this?"

At the same time he threw it across the small entry and out upon the stone step.

Another kicked it as it fell, while a third caught it up and ran with it, as if it were a kite or a banner. Presently, however, it was dropped; and as the boys became somewhat scattered, I saw the little fellow of the reflective face hastily pick up the despised article and return it to the place where it hung. As he turned away his countenance was flushed, and he drew the back of his hand across his somewhat handsome eyes.

It was his coat, this was plain; and all my enjoyment of the recess was spoiled; for I thought how he must feel to be jeered at and insulted for what he could not help, and what had no doubt caused him much anxiety and mortification, even before any one had made it a subject of ridicule.

He did not put on the coat at that time, though he had worn it in the morning; but when the day was over, and all the children were making ready for home, as the bitter wind whistled past the door, he once more buttoned it around him; and I was glad to find that nothing was said, although some of the boys looked curiously at his threadbare attire, as if wondering how he could wear such clothes on the very first day of school. But I now observed that he had ill-fitting boots, much too large for his feet; and although the coat escaped attack for the time, the boots did not.

"Boots! Boots!" "What is the price of old leather?" "Who wants to take a sail in a mud-scow?" were some of the unfeeling ejaculations that he was compelled to hear, as he started out upon the road with the others, who, after the manner of rude school-boys, sauntered or ran along, pushing each other into ditches, or throwing pebbles at gate-posts and trees.

The following day was still colder, and the boy came wrapped in his poor overcoat; but this had now ceased to attract particular attention; the big boots, which really made a remarkable appearance upon feet so small, becoming the butt instead.

They made a louder sound on the school-house floor than the boots of any other boy; and the sensitive heart of young Master Robert Brown (for this was the lad's name) told him so. There were enough others to tell him so, too. O the cruelty of those sarcastic smiles and impudent glances!

One evening I told my parents of the boy with the big boots, who came from the other end of the district; and my mother replied that Robert Brown must be the son of that Mr. Brown who lived at the turn of the road, two miles off, and who, by intemperance, kept his whole family in misery.

Mrs. Brown, my mother said, was an excellent woman, and was always mending and fixing up her children's clothing; trying, in her careful, anxious way, to make something of nothing; and often, too, succeeding surprisingly well.

Robert, she added, had an elder brother, who had gone to sea; and perhaps the big boots might be a pair which he had left at home. The family had lately lost a little girl, Robert's sister, and were in affliction every way; and she hoped that I would never shew by word or look that I noticed the clumsy boots or the thread-bare coat.

And now I remember hearing Robert say to himself, solingly, one day when the big boys had treated him ill,

"O little Mamie! little Mamie! I am glad you cannot know of it!"

One day not long after the commencement of the school, two of the committee called upon some business with the teacher; and at recess some of the boys maliciously remarked that they had observed these officials smiling at

Robert's big boots, as he stood in his class or shuffled along the floor.

This was not true, but it had its effect. The idea that grown-up men could regard him with derision for his patched jacket and his poor, clumsy boots, seemed to impress him with a feeling more forlorn than aught else had done.

How many leaden thoughts fell on his young heart! He recalled his father, a drunkard; his mother, so careful, so sorrowful, so worn with work, so tender of himself; his little sister asleep under the new mound, where his own and his mother's hands placed every week ivy, mosses and circlets of the pretty creeping-jenny—for it was all that they two could do; and then, in the midst of all, how inexpressibly dreadful to his mind seemed the taunts which poverty brought upon him. The coat upon which his mother had sewed at night, hoping it might answer; the boots that she had dreaded to ask him to wear; the coarse dinner that the boys had made fun of at noon, as he took it from his pail; the thought of all these things made him feel more bitter than ever; and suddenly at that recess he was missed from among his school-fellows.

I found him stretched at full length on the damp ground, out of sight of his tormentors; and when I knelt by his side, and put my arm tenderly about him, his sobs were violent. He cried long and bitterly—all the more for this sympathy so precious, so unexpected.

Presently a number of school-boy faces peered over the fence that had hidden us from the common view; but after a moment's watching, they slunk away in shame.

I soon perceived that my schoolmates were talking earnestly among themselves, and saw also that some of the faces I had thought so cruel wore a look of repentance and sorrow.

The teacher's bell sounded, and we all thronged into school—Robert Brown the last. How sad he looked! The master asked no questions; but he must previously have observed something of the condition of things, for when school was over at night, he put his arm around Robert's neck, and asked him to remain for a few moments. Robert held me by the hand, and asked that I might remain also.

Then, when we were alone, he told, at the master's request, the story of his troubles. How simply and how frankly he spoke, and what unstudied pathos there was in his words! The schoolmaster's eyes were full of tears; and in answering the poor little boy, his voice became choked, and more that once he left a sentence unfinished. As to myself, I could not help weeping outright.

The next day Robert was absent. He had taken cold during the few minutes in which he lay on the wet ground, and as the weather was now stormy, his mother had not ventured to send him.

His absence afforded the master an opportunity of talking to the other pupils in a way in which he could hardly have done had the little boy with the big boots been present.

My schoolfellows had, however, already begun to think—begun to put themselves in Robert's place and imagine how they would feel if their mothers, who so loved them, were poor and care-worn, and sat up at night, trying to make old things answer for their dear boys, hoping that the other boys would not notice the difference, or at least would not speak of it—to consider how it would be if, when they came to school, all this anxiety, and toil, and love were mocked by unfeeling voices, and all the dear things of home were insulted through a senseless derision, by those who had the good fortune to possess parents who could buy them new coats, new mittens, and new boots. There is almost everything in thinking, and at last the boys thought.

Master Tanner spoke kindly to them on the subject. Though he could be stern at times, there was now not one atom of severity in his tones.

His heart had no room for anger; but as he spoke he became eloquent. It was a soft, winning kind of eloquence, and the most thoughtless boy in the school was affected to tears.

Whether or not Robert's mother knew what had transpired I cannot tell; but the succeeding day he came again, wearing the same coat and boots as before. But the boys saw them not, or saw them only to feel a heartache, and a new-born sympathy for the poor little fellow who would not have worn them if he could have helped it. The tide of impulse had turned.

Nothing was overdone, but there was kindness of act and tone; and the big boys shewed that they were doing what they could, in a gentle, unobtrusive way, to make Robert forget that they had ever treated him ill.

DIED THAT HE MIGHT LIVE.

In a deadfall cold winter, many years ago, an army was flying from Moscow, a city in Russia. With this army there was a German prince and some German soldiers. One by one the marching soldiers fell down by the way, and perished of cold and hunger. At length, at the end of one day, when only a mere handful of them were alive, the prince and a few common soldiers, and these were nearly all spent, came up to the remains of a hovel, once built to shelter cattle, now ruined by storm, which had blown it all to pieces. But in the wild, snow-covered waste they did not despise it; even a prince was glad of the little shelter from the sleet and wind of the coming night which this tumble-down shed could afford. And there, hungry, cold and weary, he and his men lay down to sleep. The men were rough, stern-looking fellows, yet the sight of one so delicately brought up, used to comforts which they never had known, spent heart and body, come to such want, glad to lie in such a wretched place, touched them. The sight of him asleep, no bed covering, probably sleeping his last sleep, was more than they could stand. They took their own cloaks off and laid them all on him, gently one by one, lest they should awake him. He would be warm with these. Then they threw themselves down to sleep.

The night passed. The prince awoke. "Where am I?" was his first thought. "Am I at home in bed? I am so warm!" and he turned over, and raised himself up to

look about. He was not at home. All around was snow, and all was silent save the wind which whistled through the planks and the broken shed. Where were his men? He stood up and looked, when lo! there they lay, huddled together to keep warm, yet not awake. He spoke, but they answered not. He advanced to touch them—they were dead! Without their cloaks, too! Where were their cloaks? Another glance toward where he had lain, and all was plain. The prince burst into tears. His men were dead to save him alive. Now, was not the deed, these brave soldiers' deed, a noble deed? Their hearts were gracious hearts; they graciously took upon themselves the death another should have died.—*Sunday Magazine.*

WHY IT PAYS TO READ.

One's physical frame—his body, his muscles, his feet, his hands—is only a living machine. It is his mind, controlling and directing that machine, that gives its power and efficacy. The successful use of the body depends wholly upon the mind—upon its ability to direct the will. If one ties his arm in a sling it becomes weak and finally powerless. Keep it in active exercise, and it acquires vigour and strength, and is disciplined to use this strength as desired, just as one's mind, by active exercise in thinking, reasoning, studying, observing, acquires vigour, strength, power of concentration and direction. Plainly, then, the man who exercises his mind in reading and thinking gives it greater power and efficiency, and greater ability to direct the efforts of the physical frame—his work—to better results than he can who merely or mainly used his muscles.—*Anon.*

MORE ABOUT "THE PRESBYTERY."

It is a question that may be fairly put to Professors and pastors—Have we enough distinct teaching of the principles which we believe justified our father in giving Presbyterian shape to our Church organization, and simplicity and freedom to our worship? If the members, or the hearers whom we find under our charge, readily change and make their next arrangements simply on the ground of convenience, taste, or the invitation of an influential friend, can we wonder, if we never taught them that Presbyterianism is—not an accident or an arrangement of "the Assembly"—but a structure the foundation and outline of which we find in the Bible? Do we expound the Epistles to Timothy and to Titus? Do our young people learn any better reason for their being Presbyterians than "born so"? Can we expect them to act from a principle of which the foundation has never been laid? Have we any right to ignore scriptural teaching on this subject?

"But," it will be said, "such teaching will be counted a sign of a narrow-minded and bigoted spirit." Very well, let it be so counted by those who know no better. We do not stand or fall to them. Surely we have had "Broad-churchism" enough, from Dean Stanley down—or up. We are Christ's servants, and we are no more to defer to the "Broad" about Church organization than about redemption or retribution.

But it may be said that we shall narrow the minds and impair the catholicity of our people by teaching a definite Presbyterianism. We have no fear of this. The most catholic Christians—tried by the money test, surely not the worst—are pronounced, and intelligent Presbyterians, and the least useful Christians, with some notable exceptions, are those who have been playfully described as "honorary members of all denominations."—*Dr. John Hall.*

BIOGRAPHY.

The discussion of Mr. Carlyle's *Reminiscences* and Biography suggests anew the inquiry as to what constitutes the proper history of a life in which the public is interested. The caustic character of the "sage of Chelsea's" criticisms of people in general, as this is brought to light in his *Reminiscences*, has offended the English public, inasmuch that they hesitate to pay some honours to his name they had partly made provision for. His relatives also are aggrieved, and the trustee in whose possession his papers were left is receiving no little criticism for having permitted the great man's weaknesses to be made so public. But the object of an autobiography or biography is to tell what kind of a man he was of whom it is written, and unless it do this truthfully it is without value. If it give him qualities that he did not have, or if it fail to describe him as he was and lived, it is a distorted and hence an imperfect and unworthy representation. In biographies of religious men this fault is sometimes so apparent that it becomes offensive to even the most charitable reader. The subject of it is, as the result of this stuffing and trimming, made to appear as if he had been without the frailties of ordinary humanity—a being beyond the range of human sympathy. What the public wishes to know is the truth. In other words, it wants a picture that shall be fair, shewing the man as he lived and acted and wielded his influence upon his time and generation.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE is associated more extensively with the names of distinguished personages than any county in England. The Earl of Beaconsfield resided and was buried within its borders; Milton completed "Paradise Lost" in one of its villages; Gray, in his "Elegy," celebrated Stoke Pogis; and Cowper wrote in Olney. Of eminent statesmen, Bucks was the way or rather connected with John Hampden, Temple, George Grenville, Lord William Russell, of the Rye House plot, Lord John Russell, (buried at Chertsey, the burial-place of the Bedford dual house), and Edmund Burke, who lived at Beaconsfield. At Slough Herschel erected his telescope, and at Pitstone Abbey Queen Elizabeth spent a good deal of her youth. In the same county are Stowe, the splendid seat of the Duke of Buckingham, and the Abbey of High Wycombe, belonging to Lord Carrington; and close by where the Earl rests is Bradenham House, his father's house, from which he dated his election addresses.