

BOYS AND GIRLS

Sweet Helpfulness.

There's never a rose in all the world
But makes some green spray sweeter;
There's never a wind in all the sky
But makes some bird-wing fleetier.

There's never a star but brings to heaven
Some silver radiance tender;
And never a rosy cloud but helps
To crown the sunset splendor.

No robin but may thrill some heart,
His dawn-like gladness voicing.
God gives us all some small sweet way
To set the world rejoicing.

—The 'Pacific.'

Mark's Chance.

A True Story.

(Ada M. Trotter, in the New York 'Observer'.)

'I believe in you, Mark,' said the jailer's wife, cordially. 'I've found you a place at last, and—you've got your chance—now.'

'The matron's geese,' said her detractors, were always 'swans.' Superficially, the lad addressed presented no budding wings.

Mark Brown, undersized, thin to emaciation, with a large clumsy head, ill adapted to his frail body, stood apparently indifferent to the 'chance' offered him. His face, peculiarly unattractive, wore a sullen expression, his beetle brows crowded his eyes out of sight, his thin lips showed reticence in their closed lines.

'I want a bright lad, above all, trustworthy,' read the kind woman from the letter in her open hand. 'If you can promise that of your boy, why—send him along.'

Mark's sullen expression changed for one of some surprise. His lips quivered, but speech was slow to come.

'Well?' said the matron.

'He says bright—I ain't bright.'

'Why, yes, you are. You're a real bright boy. I shall miss you at every turn, you're so quick, and I can always depend on your word.'

Mark's face did not betray the pleasure these words gave him, but he took courage to speak.

'He wouldn't take me if he know'd.'

His friend colored. She had not read aloud the whole of the letter, written in answer to her eloquent appeal to Cousin Joe, to give the boy a chance.

'The dear Lord sends us new days. Let the boy start in fresh. Don't let him know that I've told you what he's here for.'

'I don't believe in concealments, cousin,' replied Cousin Joe. 'But wife and me won't go against you. If the boy is worth anything he shall have his chance. Send him along.'

The matron had discovered Mark in her first round of the cells. He had been sent to jail nearly a year before, because the Mayor did not know what to do for him, his offence being too slight to necessitate the Reform school. The boy being homeless, had been sent back to the jail until something could be done for him, remanded, forgotten, left for months to the companionship of criminals.

Mark, an orphan at thirteen years of age, was the son of a saloon-keeper, and habituated to the poisonous atmosphere of tobacco and alcohol. From their doubtful home life, he drifted to the streets, lived by his wits by day and herded with tramps in the pine kilns outside the city by night. The theft of a frying pan in which to cook his meals brought the lad to the Mayor's notice, and the jail.

The matron found him sitting solitary and in sullen apathy among the noisy crowd. She interested herself in his case, and when he was released took him into her service at the jail. 'He must have fine latent qualities,' she argued, when he proved himself to be handy and reliable, 'else such a childhood would have spoiled him utterly.' She watched him carefully for three months, then besought Cousin Joe to take him and give him 'a chance.'

A few days after receiving the letter concerning Mark, the good woman put the lad in the

care of the conductor on the cars, and kissed him, whispering, 'God bless you, laddie,' as she hurried away.

The words, the kind embrace, affected Mark curiously. When the cars started the rumbly wheels seemed to murmur with the matron's voice:

'I believe in you, Mark. You've got your chance now. God bless you, laddie,' as she hurried away.

The words still were present in his mind when the conductor told him an hour later that this was Greenville, and he must leave the cars. The boy stood at the wayside station looking about him, forlornly enough. But suddenly a buggy drew up beside the platform, and the driver, a burly, kindly-looking farmer, called to Mark to jump in, as the horses would not stand. As Mark obeyed, scrambling clumsily over the wheel, he stared half-frightened at his new master.

Cousin Joe returned the stare with interest, certainly not prepossessed by the lad's sullen, beetling brow, and tight shut lips. He asked a few questions, receiving almost inaudible answers. Mark, nervous and inwardly excited, showed to poor advantage. This was his first peep at the country, at Nature in spring. He did not understand his own strange feelings as he breathed the fragrant air. At home in a liquor saloon, or even within prison walls, here under the canopy of heaven, with the carpets of flowers, the rustling bushes and trees about him, he was hopelessly at sea.

Mr. Burns let him alone. 'If he don't feel like talking, why, he needn't to,' he thought. So he drove on, whistling cheerily, calling greetings to passers-by, and keeping up a fire of reproofs to his skittish horses.

'You ain't got a grain of sense, Jimmy Blaine, to jump at a shadder. Ain't you 'shamed?'

Mark laughed, then, frightened at his own voice, colored, confused. Would the farmer be angry?

'So you can laugh? Good! Wait till you see Chris! He's the greatest feller to laugh and sing!'

Mark's beetle brows unbent as he looked up. Mr. Burns looked into his dark, half-puzzled eyes. He remained silent after this, immersed in thought. At length he spoke, pointing to a homestead on a distant hillside.

'Mark,' said he, 'that's my house up there on the hill—your home, too, if you do well by me from now on. I've got something to say, as I want you to put into your mind. Trust me. If you go wrong and want to get straightened out, come to me first thing. I could forgive a lad 'most anything if I knew he trusted me, and I heard from his own lips the very worst as he'd done.'

Mark looked straight ahead, his lips squeezed closely together, for there was a strange craving at his heart to blurt out:

'I've been a thief—I've stole whenever I got the chance.'

He shuddered as he thought how near he had been to speaking. The farmer didn't mean he'd forgive a sneak thief—surely not! He rubbed his hand across his brow, which broke out in sweat, as though fearing the brand of his crime must be visible then. Though he felt he had no place in this strange land, still he longed to remain. He glanced sidelong at Mr. Burns, his sullen face darkening with his resolve never to breathe a word of his former life. The kindly glance that met his eyes almost disarmed him.

'Trust my word, boy, for I don't know how to lie,' said Mr. Burns.

Still Mark closed his lips, more afraid than ever of shutting himself out of this foreign atmosphere which was so genial, so different from anything he had ever experienced heretofore. He drew a long breath of pure air, listened to the song of the birds, the lowing of cattle in the meadows, his eyes widening almost with affright as he thought how nearly he had lost it—if he had spoken. The horses galloped up the hill to the homestead. A pretty young woman stood in the porch waving greetings, and a chubby boy of three years ran to

meet them, his yellow curls blowing in the wind. Mark had never seen child so pure and fair in all his existence.

'Pick him up,' said Mr. Burns, stopping the horses. Mark obeyed, half afraid to touch this creature, all white and clean. Then, as the child made friendly overtures, he took refuge in sullen silence, making no response.

The father noticed this—it was a bad sign, he thought. An hour later Mark sat with the family at supper, for the first time in his life in a home that was neither a saloon nor a prison.

By the time that Mark had been about a month at the farm, Mr. and Mrs. Burns exchanged opinions about him.

'It's a bad sign he don't take to Chris,' was the farmer's remark.

The young wife laughed.

'Why, Joe, he'd lay down his life for the child. Chris can see where your eyes are blind. He follows him everywhere.'

Mrs. Burns was right. Mark loved the child passionately. Chris would not be pushed away. He climbed about the newcomer, hugged him with his plump arms, stroked his face and covered it with kisses taking the solitary lad's heart by assault.

One day, speaking carelessly, the mother said to Chris: 'Take this cup to brother,' meaning Mark. That moment marked an era in the boy's life. Chris dubbed him 'brother,' his name was dropped by the household after this, and he became one of the home circle.

'He's a quiet chap, but reliable,' wrote Cousin Joe to the matron. 'Wife says he's real smart. He was some scared of the animals at first, but he's got over that, and never neglects them. Chris follows at his heels, and calls him "brother," as for the matter of that, the rest of us do.'

To Mark it seemed that the new name was a key that unlocked the last of the prison shackles from his limbs. He hugged the thought that he could live in this lovely home with the rest, and that no one knew what he'd been. He learned every day how good it was to dwell with people absolutely true. From the first he was accepted at that standard—no one doubted his word. They should never have reason, he resolved, clinging to his 'chance' as a drowning man to a straw.

Gradually the sullen look vanished, the beetle brows unbent, the eyes dark, eager, full of life came into evidence. The pure air and good food began to take effect on his miserable body, and Mark grew in every way—physically, mentally and morally. Like a child, the present became the reality to him, the past a bad, evil dream. Yet sometimes Mark would read a question in the farmer's eyes, and those words he never could forget would rise and haunt him.

'I could forgive a lad 'most anything, if I knew from his lips the worst he'd ever done.'

Sometimes he'd start up in the night, thinking a voice shouted these words in his ear. Then he would resolve to tell all—everything; but the risk was too great. The more he learned how to appreciate his home and surroundings the more he dreaded to lose them.

If Mr. Burns knew he'd been a thief he would keep Chris away from him. To live now without Chris—nothing, nothing should ever make him tell!

'He's a real good boy,' said Mrs. Burns.

'He has nothing to try him,' said her husband.

'He's so reliable!'

'Still—he is a living lie. He thinks we don't know.'

December set in with frost and snow. Chris began to chatter about Santa Claus and the Christmas stocking. Mark lapsed into thoughtful mood, his one desire to get a present for the child.

Mrs. Burns took him into her confidence, told him about the tree that was to be a surprise, which brother must bring from the forest, and let him drive her into town and