

BOYS AND GIRLS

In Search Of Conquest.

(By E. Boyd Bayly, in 'Sunday at Home.')

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Harkiss sat by the kitchen window, making button-holes in the body of a pretty brown dress, spun from New Zealand wool. Warm weather had lingered late, and she had on her summer-afternoon dress of grey linen, with a black ribbon in her white cap. She could not go on wearing her widow's garb of black, except on state occasions—black dresses spoil too quickly on the dusty Canterbury plains, under the glowing sun of New Zealand. She liked a washing grey, and she wore it with a certain air, as a woman may, who has come out victorious from the struggle of widowhood with seven children and a mortgage on the farm, beholden to no one but herself and her own brave sons and daughters. She had received

dressmaking for Annie, the eldest, who was happily married to a tradesman in Christchurch. Madge had been out for eight years, and had had only two situations in all the time. She had just left the second, and was feasting on all the delights of home.

'You can't call it a holiday, exactly, if you set us all up with dresses,' said Cherry, a bright girl of fifteen, with merry dark eyes and lilies and roses which had resisted abundant exposure to sun and wind. She was working the machine while her sister cut out and tacked.

'It all seems like holiday here,' said Madge, 'when we work together. Somehow, at home the work always seems to get through, and leave a bit of time over for doing what we like.'

'Well, dear, suppose you stay here, since you like it so well,' said her mother. 'I'm sure the boys would have no objection, nor

'How is Sallie?' asked Madge.

A shadow came over John's good-tempered face. 'Not as well as she might be,' he answered. 'I did think she would have done with old Crump' (his name for her uncle Chuckers) 'when I got her home; but no—as long as he can worry Auntie, he can worry Sallie. Their girl has left again; they will never get one to stay; and there's Sallie, instead of sitting down to rest when her own work's done, going over to help Auntie, till she is done up altogether. It'll be the death of her, I believe.'

Madge looked up startled, for John's voice quite shook. It was so unlike him to make a trouble of anything; she hardly ever remembered seeing such a look of distress on his face.

'Why do you let her, John?' exclaimed Cherry. 'Sallie was always talking about your being her master, before you were married, but, really, I don't see it at all, now.'

'Well, I like a girl to have her own way in reason,' said John. 'Don't you think you will want yours, when you get married, Miss Cherry?'

'Only when I was right,' said Cherry, at which they all burst out laughing.

'You may laugh,' she persisted stoutly. 'I say a man wouldn't be worth having at all, if he couldn't make me knuckle down when I was in the wrong.'

'And when would that be?' asked John. 'When is Cherry in the wrong, Madge, by her own account?'

They laughed again, but John saw Cherry color up, and said kindly, 'And what's odd, I think she mostly is right, when her mind's made up.'

He went round the verandah to meet his mother at the back, and did not return. Mrs. Harkiss came in, looking very grave.

'I'm afraid it's serious, about Sallie,' she said, 'John says it's the shock she had with his accident, and the worry and work all those years are telling upon her now. It's not that she wouldn't stop at home, if he made her, but he is afraid the fretting would hurt her more than going. She has got Auntie on her mind; that's the way it has taken her, and she doesn't seem able to help it.'

'But how silly of her, when she knows she oughtn't to,' said Cherry; and Madge added, as her mother left the room, 'It comes hard upon John.'

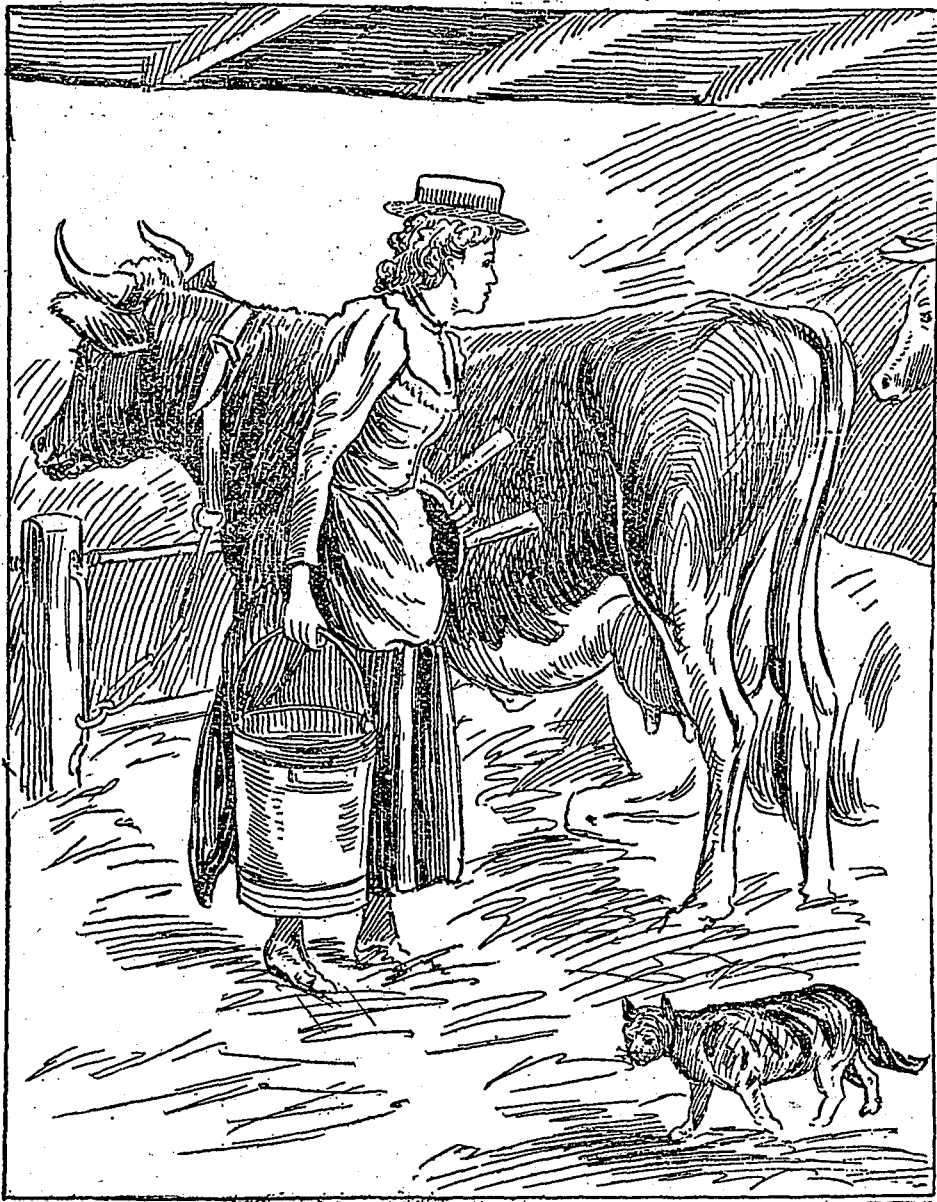
'I should think it did,' said Cherry, indignantly. 'The fact is, John is too much married, and Sallie isn't married enough.' And they sat working on, and talked over poor Sallie's errors of judgment, and the various ways in which she had shown a want of strength of mind, as even affectionate relatives sometimes will, especially when two branches of one family are established in opposite corners of a sixty acre lot.

'Is Sallie down at Chucker's now?' asked Madge, when their mother returned.

'No, she promised John she would stay quiet this afternoon,' said Mrs. Harkiss, 'but he knew he would find her quite in a way when he got home. I said I would go over and talk to her, but I've just remembered Mrs. Smallman was telling me of a girl she knew over at Riccarton, wanting to go out, and I should do more good going to see if I could get her for Mrs. Chuckers.'

'Then I'll go to Sallie. You don't want any more machine-work yet, do you, Madge?' said Cherry, jumping up in some compunction, as she thought of John's kind word.

She went by the road, and on her way met her old deaf friend, Mrs. Wren, who stopped to make inquiries. Cherry had the family



CHERRY SNATCHED UP HER STOOL AND RETREATED.

ed a great deal of neighborly kindness by the way, and had been able to return it handsomely. And now that the farm was free, and her younger sons grown into fine young fellows, able to work it without keeping John from his trade—although times in the colony were very different from the times of twenty-five years ago, and the average struggle of life had increased, she had a pleasing sense of being even with the world—able to pay her way comfortably—to have the working-party in her turn, and take a table (which means, in the colonies, to supply it) at school and chapel tea-meetings.

Her spirits were higher than usual this afternoon, because Madge, her second daughter, was at home, and they were all busy

Cherry either,' and Cherry chimed in with enthusiasm.

'It seems lazy, rather, for two of us to be at home living on the boys,' said Madge.

'You earn your keep; it all comes off the farm, nearly,' said Mrs. Harkiss, 'and you could dress-make for friends, to make a little for yourself.'

Here her cheerful face grew brighter still, for her first-born came in sight. John had been settled in his own corner of the farm with his little wife for nearly six months.

'Well, mother, what's wrong?' he asked, stopping outside the window; for she had sent him word that she wanted the carpenter.

'Something out here,' she answered, rising and turning towards the back regions.