

## The Family Circle.

### ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
How the creeping grasses grow,  
High on the mountain's rocky brink,  
In the valleys down below?  
A common thing is a grass-blade small,  
Crushed by the feet that pass—  
But all the dwarfs and giants tall,  
Working till Doomsday-shadows fall,  
Can't make a blade of grass.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
How a little seed asleep,  
Out of the earth new life will drink,  
And carefully upward creep?  
A seed, we say, is a simple thing.  
The germ of a flower or weed—  
But all earth's w. kmen, labouring,  
With all the help that wealth could bring,  
Never could make a seed.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
How the wild bird sings his song,  
Weaving melodies, link by link,  
The whole sweet summer long?  
Commonplace, is a bird, always,  
Everywhere seen and heard—  
But all the engines of earth, I say,  
Working on till the Judgment Day,  
Never could make a bird.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
How a little baby grows,  
From his big round eyes, that wink and blink,  
Down to his tiny toes?  
Common thing is a baby, though—  
All play the baby's part—  
But all the whirling wheels that go  
Fying round while the ages flow  
Can't make a baby's heart.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN  
THE BROKEN CORD.

ANNIE R. SMITH.

It was a bleak December night in London. The wintry wind was whirling great wreaths of snow down into the streets, and then, as though not satisfied with leaving it there, it caught it up again and drifted it farther along the pavement and into every crack and crevice where it could find an entrance. It was quite late, and the few pedestrians still on the street gathered their wraps closer about them and hurried homeward, trying to forget the cold and storm by thinking of home and loved ones.

In the great opera house of T—, a large crowd had gathered, and, if you could have looked into the faces of those present, you would have seen expectancy depicted in every countenance. To-night a "prima donna" was to come before them, brought out by Professor H—, who had failed in a previous attempt to introduce a singer. All eyes were turned toward the stage as the figure of a lady appeared before them. She was strikingly beautiful, and they waited with almost breathless expectation for her to commence singing. She started with a clear, steady voice, but the excitement was too great for her, and after having sung only a few lines she had to retire. Professor H— had failed a second time to bring before his audience a singer that would please.

As the disappointed people passed through the great doors and turned their faces toward home, none of them seemed to notice the forlorn figure of a little boy standing near the doorway, where he had crept in, partly for the sake of warmth, but chiefly to hear the music. He was quite a small boy, apparently about eight years old, with curling brown hair falling over his shoulders, and he clasped to his breast a violin. As he raised his beautiful brown eyes to gaze into the faces of those passing, there was a look in them so pitiful and pleading as would surely have caused the people to look at him again had they not been so much preoccupied with their own thoughts.

All had gone but two men, who

seemed to be the managers of the opera. Little Paul, for that was the boy's name, was turning despairingly away, when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned quickly, and saw one of the two gentlemen he had seen inside. The gentleman had placed his hand on Paul's shoulder and was gazing down upon him with a look of mingled curiosity and pity. As his eyes fell upon the upturned face of the child, he gave a little start; there was something so pitiful, so expressive, in the pale face and beautiful eyes that he asked, "What are you doing here, my child?"

Poor little Paul. What could he say? Had he done wrong to come in? and would the gentleman punish him, or perhaps take him away so he could never go back to the old tenement house where his dear mother lay sick, the only friend he had in all the world?

"Oh! please sir, don't be angry with me; I did not know it was wrong to come in; but I was so cold and tired, and I wanted to hear the music; I wanted to learn a new song, because I've played the old ones so often, and mother cries when she hears them. Oh! please, sir, let me go home to my mother; she's sick and she'll worry about me, but the music was so nice I forgot I'd stayed so long."

"Don't be afraid, my boy," said the gentleman, "you shall go to your mother, if you know where to find her this awful night; but first come in here where it is warm," taking the boy's hand and leading him through the inner door. "Now, my little boy, I want you to tell me about yourself; who you are, and where you come from; and why you are out on the street this stormy night?"

Won by the manner of the gentleman, who was none other than Professor H— himself, little Paul soon told his sad, sad story. His father, a German violinist, had played in an opera in Berlin, but the orchestra in which he played had come over to England. Here Paul's father, through the treachery of a so-called friend, had lost his place in the orchestra, and was in great distress. He could earn nothing with his violin, and so went to the country and worked on a farm. While there he married the daughter of a doctor who lived in a neighboring village, but he never lost his love for the violin, and it was always the dear desire of his heart to go back to his beloved motherland. At last, by dint of strict economy, they did so, but he found things changed even in Berlin. He could find nothing to do but give violin lessons, and, as there were many other teachers, he earned but little, so that it was only by hard and constant work he managed to support his wife and little son, who from his earliest childhood showed great musical talent, and the few hours free from giving his lessons the father spent in teaching his boy to play. But never being strong, the work proved too much for him, and one month ago he had died, leaving his wife and child almost penniless. Paul's mother then determined to return to England, and, by the kindness of friends, was enabled to do so, but the strain on her delicate nerves was too much, and she fell ill on reaching London. She had but little money left, and so was able to rent only a poor little room in a tenement house, and two days ago the last penny had gone. Since then she and her child had nothing to eat but a few crusts of bread.

Brave little Paul had stood seeing his

poor mother in such want as long as he could, and, to-night, while she was asleep, he had taken his dear father's violin and started quietly out to try to earn a few pennies playing on the street, but the night was so stormy no one would stop to listen, and so, cold and tired, he had crept into the opera house, where the Professor had found him.

As he finished his pitiful story the Professor wiped away the tears that would come in spite of himself, and turning to his friend, said, "Well, what shall we do?"

"I do not know," answered the other, "would he do to play in our opera next night, do you think?"

"I don't know; I've tried twice with strangers now, and I am quite discouraged, but I have a mind to try him, the boy is a genius. I can see it in his face. Come, Paul, let us hear you play."

Tremblingly little Paul took his violin and tried to begin, but his excitement was intense, and the memories of his sick mother and dead father filled his heart with pain, and he made two or three vain attempts to play the piece he wished.

"I fear you are mistaken in your genius, Professor," said the other gentleman.

"Try again, my boy," said the Professor.

Paul tried again, but this time failed worse than before.

"Oh! come on, Professor; it's getting late and he can't play," said the other.

"Oh, no, no, sir; please let me try again; I will play," said little Paul. The hope that had been rising in his heart seemed to be dying out. Oh, if he could only play well, the Professor might give him a penny. If it was only a penny it would buy some bread for the dear mother he loved so much.

He started again, and this time he played a beautiful air from one of the great musicians. As the music proceeded, the men stared, almost breathless with wonder. Then as it stopped the Professor exclaimed joyfully,

"There, did I not tell you? the boy is a genius."

"It is wonderful," said his friend. "But come, let us take him home, his mother won't know where he is. Where do you live, my boy?"

Little Paul was almost overwhelmed at the thought that they appreciated his playing, and that they were going to see his mother. Poor mother, would she not be glad?

He told where he lived and they started off and soon reached the dismal attic room. As they neared the door, little Paul gave a jump, opened it, and ran to his mother, who was almost wild with anxiety about him.

"O, mother! mother!" he exclaimed; "see, I played for the gentlemen and they came to see you."

The poor mother, at the sight of her dear boy, almost fainted, but she caught him in her arms, exclaiming, "O my boy, my boy, where have you been? Thank God, I have you once more."

The gentlemen came into the room, and, as it was getting late, the Professor at once explained the cause of his visit, and inquired into the musical education of the boy. The mother, delighted at the thought of her boy's success, told how his father had taught him, and how quickly he had learned. "Sir," said she, "I am dying, and, O, if I could only see my child provided for, I should die happy."

"Well," said the Professor, "I shall bring him before the audience in the opera house two nights hence, and if he gains success that night, rest assured his fortune is made."

"O, sir!" responded the mother eagerly, "I will gladly consent to that. I can never repay your kindness, but God will; only may He grant that I live till that night."

The gentlemen left after arranging about his practising, and next day it was published throughout the city that little Paul Kressler was to play the following evening in the opera house of T—. That day Paul went to practise with the Professor who kindly accompanied him home. As they reached the door and opened it they saw Mrs. Kressler lying quite still, with a peaceful look on her face. As they drew nearer her bedside she opened her eyes, and holding out her white, wasted hand to Paul, said,

"So you have come, my darling; the dear God has spared me to see you once more. I am dying, Paul, but I am not afraid to leave you alone now, for you, sir," she said, turning to Professor H— "will take care of my boy, will you not?"

"May God never hear me again," he said, "if I fail to do so."

"Good-bye, Paul; play to-morrow; play as father would like to have you play. Good-bye, good-bye; I am going now, but I leave you in God's care." She drew her boy close to her side as she spoke, and kissed him tenderly, and in a few moments her soul had fled.

The mother was laid away to rest next morning and Professor H— took poor, broken-hearted little Paul to his own home.

"Do you wish to play to-night, Paul?" he said just before the time to go on the stage had come. "If you do not, you may wait till some other night."

"O, no, sir, no," replied Paul quickly; "I promised mother I would play to-night, and I will."

As the time for his appearance on the stage drew nearer, Paul's face became flushed and his eyes seemed to burn with an unnatural light. The hour at length arrived—the great hall was crowded to the doors. As the curtain rose and Paul stepped out before them, the people leaned forward in almost breathless expectation—what a small child he was, how could he play, they wondered.

The air selected by Professor H— for Paul to play was from Wagner, and the young player started all right, but the thought of the crowd before him, and the parting words of his mother, "Play well, Paul; play as father would have you play," caused his heart to swell, and in his excitement he forgot the air he was playing, but still continued to play, pouring forth as it were his whole soul in the music of the violin. At first it was low and sweet and had such a soft tone of sadness that it brought tears to the eyes of many listeners. Then, as his hopes rose, and he thought, "O, if I play well, perhaps God will take me home to father and mother." The violin seemed to catch the inspiration of hope, for its music grew louder, and clearer, and seemed to pour forth the soul of one filled with an ecstasy of joy and expectation. Paul's breath came and went in quick short gasps; his head seemed to grow dizzy, and he felt so faint and tired that he had only a dim consciousness of playing. The music seemed to regain its old, sad, sweet tone and then to die gradual-