

# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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## The Building of the Ship.

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"BUILD me straight, O worthy Master!  
Staunch and strong, a goodly vessel,  
That shall laugh at all disaster,  
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!"

The merchant's word  
Delighted the Master heard;  
For his heart was in his work, and the heart  
Giveth grace unto every Art.  
A quiet smile played round his lips,  
As the eddies and dimples of the tide  
Play round the bows of ships  
That steadily at anchor ride,  
And with a voice that was full of glee,  
He answered, "Ere long we will launch  
A vessel as goodly, and strong, and staunch,  
As ever weathered a wintry sea!"  
And first with nicest skill and art,  
Perfect and finished in every part,  
A little model the Master wrought,  
Which should be to the larger plan  
What the child is to the man,  
Its counterpart in miniature;  
That with a hand more swift and sure  
The greater labour might be brought  
To answer to his inward thought.

In the shipyard stood the Master,  
With the model of the vessel,  
That should laugh at all disaster,  
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!

Covering many a rood of ground,  
Lay the timber piled around;  
Timber of chestnut, and elm, and oak,  
And scattered here and there with these,  
The knarred and crooked cedar knees;  
Brought from regions far away,  
From Pascagoula's sunny bay,  
And the banks of the roaring Roanoke!  
Ah! what a wondrous thing it is  
To note how many wheels of toil  
One thought, one word, can set in motion!  
There's not a ship that tails the ocean  
But every climate, every soil,  
Must bring its tribute, great or small,  
And help to build the wooden wall!  
Thus with the rising of the sun  
Was the noble task begun,  
And soon throughout the shipyard's bounds  
Were heard the intermingled sounds  
Of axes and of mallets, plied  
With vigorous arms on every side;  
Plied so deftly and so well,  
That, ere the shadows of evening fell,  
The keel of oak for a noble ship,  
Scarfed and bolted, straight and strong,  
Was lying ready and stretched along  
The blocks, well placed upon the slip.  
Happy, thrice happy every one  
Who sees his labour well begun,  
And not perplexed and multiplied,  
By idly waiting for time and tide!

Day by day the vessel grew,  
With timbers fashioned strong and true,  
Stemson and keelson and sternson-knee,  
Till, framed with perfect symmetry,  
A skeleton ship rose up to view!  
And around the bows and along the side  
The heavy hammers and mallets plied.  
Till after many a week, at length  
Wonderful for form and strength,  
Sublime in its enormous bulk,  
Loomed aloft the shadowy hulk!  
And around it columns of smoke upbreath-  
ing,  
Rose from the boiling, bubbling, seething  
Caldron that glowed,  
And overflowed  
With the black tar, heated for the sheathing.  
And amid the clamours  
Of clattering hammers,  
He who listened heard now and then  
The song of the Master and his men:—

"Build me straight, O worthy Master,  
Staunch and straight, a worthy vessel,  
That shall laugh at all disaster,  
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle!"

With oaken brace and copper band,  
Lay the rudder on the sand,  
That, like a thought, should have control  
Over the movement of the whole;



THE BUILDING OF THE SHIP.

And near it the anchor, whose giant hand  
Would reach down and grapple with the  
land,  
And immovable and fast

Hold the great ship against the bellowing  
blast!

And at the bows an image stood,  
By a cunning artist carved in wood,  
With robes of white, that far behind  
Seemed to be fluttering in the wind.  
It was not shaped in a classic mould,  
Not like a Nymph or Goddess of old,  
Or Naiad rising from the water,  
But modelled from the Master's daughter?  
On many a dreary and misty night,  
'Twill be seen by the rays of the signal  
light,

Speeding along through the rain and the  
dark,

Like a ghost in its snow-white sark,  
The pilot of some phantom barque,  
Guiding the vessel in its flight,  
By a path none other knows aright!  
Behold at last,  
Each tall and tapering mast  
Is swung into its place;  
Shrouds and stays  
Holding it firm and fast!

Long ago,  
In the desolate forests of Maine,  
When upon mountain and plain  
Lay the snow,  
They fell—those lordly pines!  
Those grand, majestic pines!  
'Mid shouts and cheers  
The jaded steers,

Panting beneath the goad,  
Dragged down the weary, winding road  
Those captive kings so straight and tall,  
To be shorn of their streaming hair,  
And, naked and bare,  
To feel the stress and the strain  
Of the wind and the reeling main,  
Whose roar  
Would remind them for evermore  
Of their native forests they should not see  
again.

All is finished! and at length  
Has come the bridal day  
Of beauty and of strength.  
To-day the vessel shall be launched!  
With fleecy clouds the sky is blanched,  
And o'er the bay,  
Slowly, in his splendour's light,  
The great sun rises to behold the sight.

The ocean old,  
Centuries old,  
Strong as youth, and as uncontrolled,  
Faces restless to and fro,  
Up and down the sands of gold.  
His beating heart is not at rest;  
And far and wide,  
With ceaseless flow,  
His beard of snow  
Heaves with the heaving of his breast.  
He waits impatient for his bride.  
There she stands,  
With her foot upon the sands,  
Decked with flags and streamers gay,  
In honour of her marriage day,

Her snow white signals fluttering, blending,  
Round her like a veil descending,  
Ready to be  
The bride of the gray old sea.

Then the Master,  
With a gesture of command,  
Waved his hand;  
And at the word,  
Loud and sudden there was heard,  
All around them and below,  
The sound of hammers, blow on blow,  
Knocking away the shores and spurs.  
And see! she stirs!  
She starts, she moves, she seems to feel  
The thrill of life along her keel,  
And, spurning with her foot the ground,  
With one exulting, joyous bound,  
She leaps into the ocean's arms!

## THE HERO.

"REUBEN! Reuben!"

No answer.

"Reuben, my son, it is time to get up." Nor did he feel like getting up. It was very cold. He drew the bed-clothes closer about his head, and turned over for another nap. Meanwhile his feeble old mother made the kitchen fire, pumped the water for the kettle, and went out in the ice and snow to feed the half-frozen chickens.

"Dolly ought to have been milked an hour ago," she thought. "I wonder what ails Reuben, anyhow! He gets up later and later every morning."

About an hour afterward, Reuben came slowly down the stairs to breakfast. He looked somewhat ashamed of himself. But he replied in a sullen tone when his mother spoke about the late hour for milking: "I think we could do without a cow! It is a great bother to milk her morning and night."

"I wish that I could attend to her; but I cannot do everything," said the mother, with a sigh.

If Reuben had looked up just then his heart might have reproached him at the sight of his mother's weary and careworn face. She was a widow, and he was her only son. He intended to be a good son, but he did not go the right way to work. He spent many hours in reading about boys who had done remarkable things, such as run away from home, and come back, years afterward, with fortunes to surprise their friends, and enable their mothers to live like queens! "That is what I want to do for my mother," he said. But instead of doing he sat and dreamed.

One day he took up a pamphlet that was lying on the schoolmaster's table. In it he saw a story called "The Hero."

"Hallo!" he cried. "What is this about? I want to be a hero."

The story was somewhat like this: A few years ago the traveller might have seen a charming little village—now, alas! no longer in existence. A fire broke out one day, and in a few hours the quaint little farmhouses were entirely destroyed. The poor peasants ran around, wringing their hands and weeping over their lost homes and the bones of their burned cattle.

One poor man was in greater trouble than his neighbours even. True, his home and the cows were gone; but so also was his only son, a bright boy of six or seven years. He wept, and refused to hear any words of comfort. He spent the night wandering sorrowfully among the ruins, while his acquaintances had taken refuge in the neighbouring villages.

Just as daylight came, however, he heard a well-known sound, and looking up he saw his favourite cow leading the herd, and coming directly after them was his bright-eyed little son.

"Oh, my son! my son!" he cried, "are you really alive!"