

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## A Thought and its Harvest.

By Gisela Dittrick Britt, in 'The Christian Endeavor World.'

One, two, three, sounded the big hall clock, and with a silvery tinkle the little French time-piece on the mantel echoed the warning.

'Come, Marion, it is high time we were off'; and Elsie shook out her skirts and began to draw on her gloves.

'O Elsie, won't you go without—'

'There, that'll do, Mistress Mary, quite contrary. You promised; and, as your word is your bond, you'll go with me to call on Mrs. Dunbar this very afternoon.'

Marion Sandford smiled as she laid down her book, but into her gray eyes there flashed a little look of determination.

'Elsie Dean, you're a truly "witch," or I never would have given such a promise; but I warn you, this is the last time, the

fairly becoming morbid. Mr. Dunbar thinks if he supplies me with all the new books and magazines I should have no cause for complaint, but I'm frantic to get out. Paint? O yes, a little bit; but I'm tired of that, too. I finished a lovely study in violets last week; would you like to see it? You'll have to come up to my studio. I warn you; it's up a "winding stair," up, up, up, next the roof. Will you venture? This way then.'

Up the broad, polished stairway, past the pretty sleeping-rooms with their luxurious appointments, up again, until they reached a low door, before which their hostess paused.

'Now, girls, do shut your eyes as you go through this room. It is a perfect sight, I assure you. As fast as we get through with an article or tire of it, it is relegated to this place. You won't wonder that I call it the "Old Curiosity Shop," and she threw open the door.

friends.' And she brushed from her white jewelled fingers a tiny cobweb, which seemed loath to leave them.

'Oh, better than that, have an auction, do! What fun that would be, Mrs. Dunbar! I'd bid high for that dear old Sleepy Hollow chair. It does look so "cumfible," doesn't it, Marion?'

But the question was unheeded; for Marion Sanford, standing in that shadowy room, had received a message from her Father, and was pleading silently, yet O so earnestly! with him.

O would he not take it back and spare her this once? She could not. She could not. And the color left the fair cheeks, and the heart of the timid girl began to throb painfully. She, a comparative stranger, deliver such a message to this careless, fashionable woman! She could even see the dainty eyebrows lift, and feel the surprised inflection of the soft voice.

And Elsie would be so indignant at her 'everlasting preaching,' and would turn it off with one of her merry speeches; and they would leave; and to-morrow Mrs. Dunbar would tell her callers about that 'peculiar little enthusiast,' and they would laugh, and—O, she just couldn't. She couldn't. It was too hard. And she shouldn't know how to begin. She just couldn't.

But what had she told God in that morning watch? Had she not asked him to use her this very day? Yes, but she had meant so differently.

Then she heard again her mother's sweet farewell—'Marion, precious child, "whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."'

And she did.

'Mrs. Dunbar, did you know that the old Cravens house was occupied?' Why, that was strange! She had not meant to say those words at all. But Mrs. Dunbar was replying, while Elsie looked up in surprise at the unexpected question.

'No, I did not. Why, I had an idea that that old house was given over to the spooks and bats, Miss Sandford. Ugh! it makes me shiver to think of it. What sort of an occupant can the old place boast? A miser or misanthrope, surely.'

'May I tell you about them, Mrs. Dunbar?' And Marion's earnest face, with its tender mouth and grave, questioning eyes was very sweet to look upon; and a little dawning suspicion that this girl was different from any she knew made Mrs. Dunbar give a quick assent and motion uneasy Elsie to keep quiet.

Then Marion, with one small hand resting on the old spinning-wheel before her, told her little story.

'In that old, lonely house, in the few habitable rooms, lives a mother and daughter. The mother, a gentle, white-haired woman, lies always on her bed, for she is an invalid. The daughter, just my age, goes every day to her hard work in the factory, leaving that mother all alone. It was not always so, but riches take to themselves wings sometimes and fly away; so they are here alone, poor and friendless. Susie could get steady work in the factory here, and the only place in town within reach of their slender means was the old tumble-down house by the river; and there she brought her one treasure, her dear, suffering mother, and there they live alone.

'To-day Susie said to me, and the tears rolled steadily down her thin white cheeks: "Miss Sandford, I've given her up. God knows how hard it is, for she is all I have, and oh, it will be so lonely when she is gone! but he knows best, and somehow he will help me bear it. I know it will not be many weeks that I can have her; and, oh, it



ELSIE LOOKED UP IN SURPRISE.

spell is broken.' Then her face grew grave and her voice low and earnest. 'I haven't time for such things, Elsie; I must be about my Father's business.'

'Well, how do you know he isn't sending you to Mrs. Dunbar's, just as well as over to old Mrs. Carson's?' Then, half-ashamed, half-defiant, reckless Elsie waited for the merited rebuke.

To her astonishment, it did not come; but Marion's sweet face, grew strangely bright as she turned toward her cousin.

'Perhaps he is, Elsie, I hadn't thought of such a thing,' she said, simply.

Half an hour later the two girls sat in Mrs. Dunbar's beautiful parlor, listening, as they sipped their fragrant chocolate, to that lady's lively chatter.

'It was perfectly charming of you two girls to come this afternoon. You must have known how gloomy I was. And Dr. Wilcox says I must stay in another day. Just think! I've been shut up for three weeks with this provoking old cold. I'm

The girls laughed merrily as they peeped into the long, dimly lighted room, and Elsie made speedy reply, 'Mrs. Dunbar, I will not shut my eyes. I am a lineal descendant of Fatima, and I must see the secret chamber. O—O—O! What treasures! But what are you going to do with it all?'

'Mercy, I don't know. Keep on piling it up, I guess. There are many things that we had in the old house, and—well, I suppose there's a bit of a heart left in me, after all, and it won't let me cast them off. Mr. Dunbar gets real provoked at me sometimes, and threatens total annihilation, but the pile keeps on growing. Now, this old engraving—' she turned the picture so that the winter sunlight, stealing through the high mullioned windows, rested like a benediction on the divine faces of mother and child. 'I always did like it; it somehow rested me; but of course, it's too antiquated to allow downstairs; so here it is, turned to the wall. I suppose some of these days off they'll all go to some First street shop, faithful old