

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

"THE FLOWER I LOVED IS FADED."

I.

The flower I loved is faded,
And droops its little head,
And all the charms that made it
So beautiful, are fled:
'Tis withered, crushed, and colourless,
And robbed of all its loveliness.

II.

Once 'twas the gayest flower
That smiled beneath the sky,
Or bathed in summer shower,
Or courted butterfly.
But ah! its brightness could not last,
Its little life of love soon past.

III.

Yet still from its dead beauty
A lesson it doth give:
"Those who have done their duty
Even in dust shall live."
Death has not made its fragrance less
Than in its living loveliness.

IV.

So when the good man's spirit
Has left its earthly frame,
Each gentle deed of merit
Remains to bless his name,
To others is his memory given
To cheer them on their way to Heaven.

J. BLADE.

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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

An Autobiographical Story.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD,

Author of "Alec Forbes," etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

GO TO SCHOOL, AND GRANNIE LEAVES IT.

It is an evil thing to break up a family before the natural period of its dissolution. In the course of things, marriage, the necessities of maintenance, or the energies of labour guiding "to fresh woods and pastures new," are the ordered causes of separation.

Where the home is happy, much injury is done the children in sending them to school, except it be a day-school, whither they go in the morning as to the labours of the world, but whence they return at night as to the heaven of repose. Conflict through the day, rest at night, is the ideal. A day-school will suffice for the cultivation of the necessary public or national spirit, without which the love of the family may degenerate into a merely extended selfishness, but which is itself founded upon those family affections. At the same time, it must be confessed that boarding-schools are, in many cases, an antidote to some of the evil conditions which exist at home.

To children whose home is a happy one, the exile to a school must be bitter. Mine, however, was an unusual experience. Leaving aside the specially troubled state in which I was when carried to the village of Aldwick, I had few of the finer elements of the ideal home in mine. The love of my childish heart had never been drawn out. My grandmother had begun to do so, but her influence had been speedily arrested. I was, as they say of cats, more attached to the place than the people, and no regrets whatever interfered to quell the excitement of expectation, wonder, and curiosity which filled me on the journey. The motion of the vehicle, the sound of the horses' hoofs, the travellers we passed on the road—all seemed to partake of the exuberant life which swelled and overflowed in me. Everything was as happy, as excited, as I was.

When we entered the village, behold it was a region of glad tumult! Were there not three dogs, two carts, a maid carrying pails of water, and several groups of frolicking children in the street—not to mention live ducks, and a glimpse of grazing geese on the common? There were also two mothers at their cottage-doors, each with a baby in her arms. I knew they were babies, although I had never seen a baby before. And when we drove through the big wooden gate and stopped at the door of what had been the manor-house but was now Mr. Elder's school, the aspect of the building, half-covered with ivy, bore to me a most friendly look. Still more friendly was the face of the master's wife, who received us in a low dark parlour, with a thick soft carpet, and rich red curtains. It was a perfect paradise to my imagination. Nor did the appearance of Mr. Elder at all jar with the vision of coming happiness. His round, rosy, spectacled face bore in it no premonitory sug-

gestion of birch or rod, and, although I continued at his school for six years, I never saw him use either. It a boy required that kind of treatment, he sent him home. When my uncle left me, it was in more than contentment with my lot. Nor did anything occur to alter my feeling with regard to it. I soon became much attached to Mrs. Elder. She was just the woman for a schoolmaster's wife—as full of maternity as she could hold, but childless. By the end of the first day I thought I loved her far more than my aunt. My aunt had done her duty towards me; but how was a child to weigh that? She had taken no trouble to make me love her; she had shown none of the signs of affection, and I could not appreciate the proofs of it yet.

I soon perceived a great difference between my uncle's way of teaching and that of Mr. Elder. My uncle always appeared aware of something behind which pressed upon, perhaps hurried the fact he was making me understand. He made me feel, perhaps too much, that it was a mere step towards something beyond. Mr. Elder, on the other hand, placed every point in such a strong light that it seemed in itself of primary consequence. Both were, if my judgment after so many years be correct, admirable teachers—my uncle the greater, my schoolmaster the more immediately efficient. As I was a manageable boy to the very verge of weakness, the relations between us were entirely pleasant.

There were only six more pupils, all of them sufficiently older than myself to be ready to pet and indulge me. No one who saw me mounted on the back of the eldest, a lad of fifteen, and driving four of them in hand, while the sixth ran alongside as an outsider—

times in the summer long after that. Sometimes also on moonlit nights in winter, occasionally even when the stars and the snow gave the only light, we were allowed the same liberty until nearly bedtime. Before Christmas came, variety, exercise, and social blessedness had wrought upon me so that when I returned home, my uncle and aunt were astonished at the change in me. I had grown half a head, and the paleness, which they had considered a peculiar accident of my appearance, had given place to a rosy glow. My flitting step too had vanished; I soon became aware that I made more noise than my aunt liked, for in the old house silence was in its very temple. My uncle, however, would only smile and say—

"Don't bring the place about our ears, Willie, my boy. I should like it to last my time."

"I'm afraid," my aunt would interpose, "Mr. Elder doesn't keep very good order in his school."

Then I would fire up in defence of the master, and my uncle would sit and listen, looking both pleased and amused.

I had not been many moments in the house before I said—

"Mayn't I run up and see grannie, uncle?"

"I will go and see how she is," my aunt said, rising.

She went, and presently returning, said—

"Grannie seems a little better. You may come. She wants to see you."

I followed her. When I entered the room and looked expectantly towards her usual place, I found her chair empty. I turned to the bed. There she was, and I thought she looked much the same; but when I came

the night, began to rise. My old fear of her began to return with it. But she lifted her lids, and the terror ebbed away.

She looked at me, but did not seem to know me. I went nearer.

"Grannie," I said, close to her ear, and speaking low; "you wanted to see me at night—that was before I went to school. I'm here, grannie."

The sheet was folded back so smooth that she could hardly have turned over since it had been arranged for the night. Her hand was lying upon it. She lifted it feebly and stroked my cheek once more. Her lips murmured something which I could not hear, and then came a deep sigh, almost a groan. The terror returned when I found she could not speak to me.

"Shall I go and fetch auntie?" I whispered.

She shook her head feebly, and looked wistfully at me. Her lips moved again. I guessed that she wanted me to sit beside her. I got a chair, placed it by the bedside, and sat down. She put out her hand, as if searching for something. I laid mine in it. She closed her fingers upon it and seemed satisfied. When I looked again, she was asleep and breathing quietly. I was afraid to take my hand from hers lest I should wake her. I laid my head on the side of the bed, and was soon fast asleep also.

I was awakened by a noise in the room. It was Nannie lighting the fire. When she saw me she gave a cry of terror.

"Hush, Nannie!" I said; "you will wake grannie;" and as I spoke I rose, for I found my hand was free.

"Oh, Master Willie!" said Nannie, in a low voice; "how did you come here? You sent my heart into my mouth."

"Swallow it again, Nannie," I answered, "and don't tell auntie. I came to see grannie, and fell asleep. I'm rather cold. I'll go to bed now. Auntie's not up, is she?"

"No. It's not time for anybody to be up yet."

Nannie ought to have spent the night in grannie's room, for it was her turn to watch; but finding her nicely asleep, as she thought, she had slipped away for just an hour of comfort in bed. The hour had grown to three. When she returned the fire was out.

When I came down to breakfast, the solemn look upon my uncle's face caused me a foreboding of change.

"God has taken grannie away in the night, Willie," said he, holding the hand I had placed in his.

"Is she dead?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Oh, then, you will let her go to her grave now, won't you?" I said—the recollection of her old grievance coming first in association with her death, and occasioning a more childish speech than belonged to my years.

"Yes. She'll get to her grave now," said my aunt, with a trembling in her voice I had never heard before.

"No," objected my uncle; "Her body will go to the grave, but her soul will go to heaven."

"Her soul?" I said, "what's that?"

"Dear me, Willie! don't you know that?" said my aunt. "Don't you know you've got a soul as well as a body?"

"I'm sure I haven't," I returned. "What was grannie's like?"

"That I can't tell you," she answered.

"Have you got one, auntie?"

"Yes."

"What is yours like then?"

"I don't know."

"But," I said, turning to my uncle, "if her body goes to the grave, and her soul to heaven, what's to become of poor grannie—without either of them you see?"

My uncle had been thinking while we talked.

"That can't be the way to represent the thing, Jane; it puzzles the child. No, Willie; grannie's body goes to the grave, but grannie herself is gone to heaven. What people call her soul is just grannie herself."

"Why don't they say so, then?"

My uncle fell a thinking again. He did not, however, answer this last question, for I suspect he found that it would not be good for me to know the real cause—namely, that people hardly believed it, and therefore did not say it. Most people believe far more in their bodies than in their souls. What my uncle did say was—

"I hardly know. But grannie's gone to heaven anyhow."

"I'm so glad!" I said. "She will be more comfortable there. She was too old, you know, uncle."



WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

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could have wondered that I should find school better than home. Before the first day was over, the sorrows of the lost watch and sword had vanished utterly. For what was possession to being possessed? What was a watch, even had it been going, to the movements of life? To peep from the wicket in the great gate out upon the village-street, with the well in the middle of it, and a girl in the sunshine winding up the green dripping bucket from the unknown depths of coolness, was more than a thousand watches. But this was by no means the extent of my new survey of things. One of the causes of Mr. Elder's keeping no boy who required chastisement was his own love of freedom, and his consequent desire to give the boys as much liberty out of school hours as possible. He believed in freedom. "The great end of training," he said to me many years after, when he was quite an old man, "is liberty; and the sooner you can get a boy to be a law to himself, the sooner you make a man of him. This end is impossible without freedom. Let those who have no choice, or who have not the same end in view, do the best they can with such boys as they find: I chose only such as could bear liberty. I never set up as a reformer—only as an educator. For that kind of work others were more fit than I. It was not my calling." Hence Mr. Elder no more allowed labour to intrude upon play, than play to intrude upon labour. As soon as lessons were over, we were free to go where we would and do what we would, under certain general restrictions, which had more to do with social properties than with school regulations. We roamed the country from tea-time till sundown; some-

nearer, I perceived a change in her countenance. She welcomed me feebly, stroked my hair and my cheeks, smiled sweetly, and closed her eyes. My aunt led me away.

When bedtime came, I went to my own room, and was soon fast asleep. What roused me, I do not know, but I awoke in the midst of the darkness, and the next moment I heard a groan. It thrilled me with horror. I sat up in bed and listened, but heard no more. As I sat listening, heedless of the cold, the explanation dawned upon me, for my powers of reflection and combination had been developed by my large experience of life. In our many wanderings, I had learned to choose between roads and to make conjectures from the lie of the country. I had likewise lived in a far larger house than my home. Hence it now dawned upon me, for the first time, that grannie's room must be next to mine, although approached from the other side, and that the groan must have been hers. She might be in need of help. I remembered at the same time how she had wished to have me by her in the middle of the night, that she might be able to tell me what she could not recall in the day. I got up at once, dressed myself, and stole down the one stair, across the kitchen, and up the other. I gently opened grannie's door and peeped in. A fire was burning in the room. I entered and approached the bed. I wonder how I had the courage; but children more than grown people are moved by unlikely impulses. Grannie lay breathing heavily. I stood for a moment. The faint light flickered over her white face. It was the middle of the night, and the tide of fear inseparable from