

Family Reading.

CONTRADICTION.

A spirit of contradiction generally springs from self-conceit, and surely nothing can be more ridiculous and more unlovely than self-conceit in a child;—a little one who ought to be meek, and humble, and loving, ready to hear and to obey.

Helen Mason was in many respects a good little girl. She was a pretty, merry, happy looking child, and appeared at first very pleasant in her manners. But to those who knew her well, or who lived in the house with her, Helen Mason was not a pleasant child. She had a habit of contradiction; and such a perverse will of her own, that if her mother should say to her, "Helen, go and play in the garden," she would answer, "Please, let me stay in the house." Her father and mother obliged her to obey them, but all her young companions said she spoiled their amusements by never agreeing at once to what they proposed. If they were going to play at any game, she wished for a different one; and thus much time was often lost, and what was worse, a dispute often arose.

One day Mrs. Mason desired the maid to take Helen and her sister out for a walk to the town, which was about a mile off, and to get her something which she wanted. She thought they had been gone some time, when she found they were not ready to set out.—Mrs. Mason was much displeased with the servant, as she had told her she was in haste, and the servant did not like to be blamed, so she said, "I cannot help it, ma'am; Miss Helen never will do what she is told at once; she wanted not to come out now, just because she was desired to go, and delayed me more than half an hour dressing her, because she would have a different frock. So that, if you please, ma'am I would rather leave my place, than be always blamed for her faults."

Mrs. Mason looked very gravely at Helen, who drew back behind her maid. Then she said— "No, Mary, you must not leave your place for her fault; you must tell me when she acts in this way, for if this bad habit is not corrected, she will not only be always a tormenting, troublesome child, but grow up to be a most disagreeable woman; and will have reason to reproach those who had not corrected her in time.

Mrs. Mason did not say any more, but she went back to the sitting-room she had left, very thoughtful, and as she went on with her work she reflected on what the maid had said, and resolved, if any occasion offered, to give Helen such a lesson on the subject as she should not forget; for, she said to herself, that it is well sometimes to let children punish themselves for their faults.

Not long after, a very pleasant party was proposed to Mrs. Mason, and her whole family. It was to the house of her sister, a widow lady, who lived in a pretty country place some miles distant. She had an only child, a little girl, named Julia Sandford, whose delicacy of health endeared her still more to her anxious mother. Julia had now lived to be ten years old, and Mrs. Sandford was very thankful to see her health improving. When her tenth birthday-day was coming round, she invited her sister Mrs. Mason to bring all her children to her house, to spend it with her, saying she hoped it would be a fine day, as some other young friends were invited, and they were to have two or three boats on the lake, and promised themselves a great deal of enjoyment.

Mrs. Mason began to think it very likely that some occasion would arise for giving Helen that lesson concerning her fault which might be the means of amending it. She called all her children together, and after telling them of their aunt's pleasant invitation, she said they must get some presents ready to offer to Julia. "The time is not very long," she said, "we have only ten days to prepare them; so I have put down on this paper what each of you is to make for Julia; she would not care for bought presents, so every one must make her something. I have put down here all the things that are to be made, and I have got all the materials in the house; so no time is to be lost: for whoever has not finished the work must stay at home."

Then Mrs. Mason read out what each was to do, and every one, both boys and girls, seemed pleased. Helen was the youngest; she was nearly nine years old, and when it came to her turn, her mother said, "I thought, Helen, of your making a worsted flower-mat for your cousin, but on reflection I see there is not time; and therefore you shall make her a pretty little work-bag of this silk."

"Oh, dear mamma!" cried Helen, "I should much rather work the worsted mat! Pray do let me make Julia the mat."

Mrs. Mason looked at the little girl, and said, "But, Helen, I do not think you like worsted work, and you cannot do it quickly; you did not like to do it some time ago—why do you prefer it now to making the work-bag?"

"Oh!—because it is nicer," said Helen, really not knowing what to give.

"But you cannot make the mat," said her mother; "for I have no worsteds in the house. I could get them to-morrow, certainly, but the time will be too short for you to make the mat, and the work-bag will be quickly made."

"Oh, I can make the mat soon enough too," said Helen; "and I would much rather make it."

"Very well," said her mother, "then if to-morrow should be a fine day, I shall go to the town and buy the worsteds; and now, children, remember there is to be no changing,—every one is to begin the piece of work decided upon, and no one is to go to spend the birthday with Julia Sandford unless the present is ready."

Helen longed for the next day to come; that she might go to buy the worsteds, but the next day brought a torrent of rain, and her mother could not go out. She then thought she would ask her mother to give her the silk to make the bag, for she could not bear to see her brothers and sisters at work, and she herself idle.

girl would not find difficulty in working.—Helen went with her maid, and the woman at the worsted shop showed her a simple pattern, which she thought she could easily work in nine days. Helen was looking at another, but the woman said, "You had better take this, miss, for there is much more work in the other."

"Oh! but I would rather have the other," said Helen, and so it was put up for her. When they got back, Mrs. Mason was surprised to see the pattern they brought, and asked the servant if she had given her message to Mrs. Lucas, who kept the worsted shop.

"Yes, ma'am," said Mary, "and she wished to send a simpler pattern, but Miss Helen contradicted her, and said she would rather have this."

"Well, she has got it now," said Mrs. Mason, sighing, "and she must keep it."

Mrs. Mason foresaw what would come to pass, and she was very sorry for her silly little girl; but she resolved to be firm, and not yield to her kind feelings, but allow Helen to punish herself.

I cannot tell all the misfortunes which befel Helen's work. The eight days that were to be spent over it went on very tiresomely; the pattern puzzled her, and the stitches she made had often to be taken out. At last six days of the eight were run out, and the mat was not quite half done. Helen was working away in the evening, tired sadly, and injuring her eyes. Her mother said she had better go to bed and rise very early in the morning, as she could work better by daylight; but Helen said she would prefer sitting up later, and meant to rise early also. Her mother let her take her own way. The consequence was that her eyes were heavy and tired, she did not wake until the whole family were at breakfast, and when she joined them she was in a very bad temper, and quarrelled with her sisters, saying they were ill-natured for not coming to her.

The next evening the children all came with their presents to show them, and lay them down on the parlor table for Mrs. Mason's inspection. She was well pleased with their performances, but said, "Where is Helen's mat?"

Helen had drawn into a corner, and was standing by the light of a lamp, stitching as fast as she could, but feeling very impatient.

"I shall have it finished in time," said Helen.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Mason, "for I should be sorry if you were left at home."

Helen felt vexed at hearing this, but she did not think she should be left at home even if the work were not finished. Her eldest sister came to her, and said she would ask her mother to let them sit up two hours later, and then she would sit by her, and help her to finish her work.

"It would be better to get up in the morning," Helen replied.

"But we are to set out at six," said her sister.

"No, not till eight, at all events," Helen answered, "and we can work for two hours first. I will go to bed and get up early."

"Well, Helen, you always want to do exactly what any one wants you not to do; it is no use to try to help you." So her sister left her, and Helen went to bed.

The next morning the maid came to Helen's bedside; the sun was shining brightly through the windows. "Miss Helen, it is time to get up," she said very gravely. Helen jumped up, but the maid did not answer all the questions she asked. She found her sisters and brothers had all gone down stairs, and she went down too, thinking of her unfinished mat, which she had thrown on a little table when she went up to bed the night before. She went to the room to take it, thinking she could now go on quickly with her work. The mat was there, just as she had left it, but she saw no one; on the table lay a note, and her name was written on it. She took it up, and read as follows—it was written by her mother:

"My poor child,—We shall have set out for your aunt's when you read this note. As I saw your work lying here unfinished, I knew you could not be of our party; and I was glad you did not wake in time to see us set off, as it would only have increased your pain and made us sad.—Helen, you must now spend a dull and lonely day;—what has caused you to do so?—the spirit of contradiction. Spend this day in thinking over your fault, and pray God to give you grace to conquer it."

Helen burst into a flood of tears, and ran with the note in her hand to look for the maid. "Oh! Mary," she cried, "have they really gone without me?"

Mary was a kind-hearted and sensible woman, and though she had very often been tormented by Helen's perverse habits, she was really grieved to think of the punishment they had brought upon her. She spoke very kindly to the little girl, and quite convinced her of her error.

Poor Helen spent a very sad day, and when the evening drew on, her maid said she must be tired of being alone, and that she had better go to bed, as her mother, and brothers and sisters would not come home until very late.

dear girl of a pleasure, in the hope of leading her to cure a fault.

I am happy to say that Helen was cured of perversity, and that her own family and all her friends learned to love her for a sweet, complying disposition—a disposition suited to a Christian child, who should obey and follow Christ. For "even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."

THE BETTER LAND.

A father and mother were living with their two children on a desert island in the midst of the ocean, on which they had been shipwrecked. Roots and vegetables served them for food; a spring supplied them with water, and a cavern in the rock with a dwelling. Storm and tempest often raged fearfully on the island.

The children could not remember how they had reached the island; they knew nothing of the vast continent; bread, milk, fruit and whatever other luxury is yielded there, were things unknown to them.

There landed one day upon the island four Moors in a small boat. The parents felt great joy, and hoped now to be rescued from their troubles; but the boat was too small to take them all over together to the adjoining land, so the father determined to risk the passage first.

Mother and children wept when he embarked in the boat with his frail planks, and the four black men were about to take him away. But he said, "Weep not! It is better yonder, and you will all follow soon."

When the little boat returned and took away the mother, the children wept still more. But she also said, "Weep not! In the better land we shall all meet again."

At last came the boat to take away the two children. They were frightened at the black men and shuddered at the fearful sea over which they had to pass. With fear and trembling they drew near the land. But how rejoiced they were when their parents appeared upon the shore, offered them their hands, led them into the shade of lofty palm trees, and regaled them upon flowery turf with milk, honey, and delicious fruits. "Oh! how groundless was our fear!" said the children, "we ought not to have feared, but to have rejoiced, when the black men came to take us away to the better land."

"Dear children," said the father, "our voyage from the desert island to this beautiful country conveys to us a still higher meaning. There is appointed for us all a still longer voyage to a much more beautiful country. The whole earth, on which we dwell, is like an island. The land here is, indeed, a noble one in our eyes, although a faint shadow of heaven. The passage hither over the stormy sea is—death; that little boat resembles the bier, upon which men in black apparel shall at some time carry us forth. But when that hour strikes, then we, myself, your mother, or you must leave this world. So fear not, Death is for pious men who have loved God, and have done his will—nothing else but a voyage to a better land."

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A DEED OF NOBLE DARING. The following deed of noble daring is recorded as one of the events attendant on the destruction by fire of the Imperial Theatre at Moscow.

From the suddenness of this melancholy occurrence, and from the number of employees permanently living with their families in the house, many lives were lost. Three skeletons were found in the ashes. Just at the commencement of the fire, three workmen who had been engaged in the upper stories, finding no means to descend by the staircase, so rapid was the progress of the flames, jumped out of the windows to the lower floor, which, being of iron, soon became so intensely hot that two of the unfortunate beings not capable of enduring the heat, threw themselves to the ground and were killed by the fall. The third, with more presence of mind, made his way over the protruding broad cornice to the front roof, and there remained for some minutes till the greedy element, not content with the number of its victims, made its appearance close by him. The poor man cried loudly for help. Ladders were procured, but they did not reach the height at which he stood. He saw it, and, raising his arms to heaven, he made a sign of the cross and began to approach the edge of the precipice before him. In an instant more he would have become a corpse. Thousands of people stood all around gazing with horror at the immense pile, upon which the poor man remained helpless and hopeless. Silence like that of the grave reigned among the multitude. His fate seemed inevitable. Suddenly he was heard a voice, "Stay a moment, my good fellow! pray to God Almighty, and I'll endeavour to save you!" All eyes were turned to the spot from which those sentences were uttered. A group of three men was observed, common peasants; two of them holding by the arms and shoulders a third, who was struggling hard to break from the hold of his friends. "Let me go, my lads," said he, "my heart burns within me; I cannot bear the sight of a christian soul thus perishing!" And with a powerful effort he broke loose and darted forward. The dense crowd made way as he ran to the burning building, pulling from himself and at the same time throwing away his shawl (sheep skin) and his hat. In an instant he was at the foot of the ladder; here he took off his boots, attached a rope round his waist; and seizing an oven fork, which happened to be close by, he began to ascend the ladder, which did not reach at the utmost to two-thirds of the height at which stood the victim. Having attained the upper footstep, the generous man took hold of the rungs. Apparently it was not a very safe means of ascent, as it bent and rattled under his weight. But the man was resolved; and began to climb up. A cloud of suffocating smoke whirled around him; the flames were fast approaching; burning timber, red-hot sheets of roofing-iron were falling down; but what to him was all this? His heart was burning within his breast; he could not bear the sight of a christian soul thus perishing.

It was a frosty day; the rain-gutter was cold as ice; his warm, sweaty palms and fingers stick and freeze to the iron tube; it tears them off, leaving bloody marks at every hold and ascends higher and higher till he puts his foot on a projecting cornice. From hence, by means of the oven-fork, he handed the rope to the poor man above him. "Tie

it fast to the hook which supports the gutter. That's right—now descend." And he held the other end of the rope, and preceding the man, still supporting him down the gutter, placed him on the ladder. The man was saved.

During all this time the multitude stood breathless; but when they saw them both out of danger, all hats were taken off, and a loud shout approved the act of generosity. Every one pressed forward to see the hero of this scene. The first who approached him, an officer in the army, gave him twenty-five roubles silver. The example was followed—noblemen, merchants, peasants, took out their purses; some gave golden, some silver coin; some three into his hat a few copper coppers; all gave what they could. "God bless you, noble friend!" was heard from every side.

The name of this generous man is Basil Marria, a native of the government of Tarsoloff. Being a roofer by trade, he for many years lived in St. Petersburg pursuing his vocation; but afterwards engaged himself as a boiler-maker at the government foundry of Kolpino. Last year he took leave of absence and visited his native village. Having spent a few months with his friends, he was returning to St. Petersburg by way of Moscow, to avail himself of the railways. He came to the ancient capital the day before the fire; and, not having caught the train, was obliged to remain till the next day. As this was his first arrival in Moscow, he took the opportunity of seeing the Kremlin, the old fortress, and to visit its venerable cathedrals. There, from some passers by, he heard of the fire, and he hastened to the spot, where he so nobly distinguished himself.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day he took his seat in a railway carriage. On the 13th of the same month he reached St. Petersburg, and again enlisted himself in the number of workmen at Kolpino. In two days he was summoned to the office of the police-master of the capital, where he was told that the Emperor desired to see him. He was accordingly taken to the palace. His Imperial Majesty received Marria in his cabinet, and was pleased to say to him when he entered, "I thank you for a good action—embrace me and relate how you did it!" In simple words Marria told his story; and when he finished, the Emperor dismissed him saying, "Now you may go, but in case of need come to me at any time." Soon afterwards Marria was rewarded with a medal and a sum of one hundred and fifty roubles silver.

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Professor of Mnemonics, lecturing in schools. While engaged in the course of his life, and having married, and become the father of a young family, he bequeathed himself of looking after the profits of his percentage of the Marchioness of Bath had told him many years before, and having obtained them, and with them a more definite clue to his descent, he followed out the course of his inquiries. At length he called on Sir John Smyth, whom he acquainted with the nature of his claims, and who acknowledged their validity and gave him a £30 note, but was so agitated by the receipt of the money, that he followed out the course of his inquiries. After Sir John's death he went on prosecuting his researches,—still pursuing his calling as a lecturer,—and eventually had a deed sent to him by railway, by an attorney's clerk in London, which had been executed by Sir Hugh in the year 1823. In this deed Sir Hugh acknowledged his son by his first marriage, whom he had thought dead for some time; but having since had reason to believe him still alive, and likely to return to England, he now revoked the will which he had made in favour of his second wife, and employed his brother to endeavour to secure the return of the son Richard, and to assist in putting him in possession of his rights. A similar document, dated 1822, was afterwards discovered in the possession of a member of the family of Lydia Reed, his nurse in infancy. Pursued with all these proofs of the validity of his claim, he went in quest of legal advice, but could get no solicitor to undertake the case, except on terms to which he could not agree, until Mr. Cayley Shadwell, brother of the late Vice-Chancellor, who had been made acquainted with the facts, recommended him to Mr. Catlin, by whose assistance he brought the case into Court at Gloucester, on Monday last.

Such is, in brief outline, Sir Richard Hugh Smyth's story, as told by himself. In support of it he produced in Court, besides the two deeds, a declaration of his rights, an old Bible, apparently belonging to the Vanderbergh family, of the year 1806, which contained attested entries both of his marriage with Sir, then Mr. Hugh Smyth, and of his subsequent marriage with Mrs. Hugh Smyth in his first wife's name, and an old painting of his father, with the name written on the back; a miniature of his mother, similarly endorsed; a brooch, with the name "Gookin" engraved on it, and rings with the name of Sir Hugh Smyth left by the claimant's mother. In support of the documentary evidence, a number of highly respectable witnesses were called, who identified the various signatures,—that of Sir Hugh Smyth on the two deeds, that of the two Clergymen who had respectively performed the marriage ceremony, and baptised the child, in the family Bible,—and those of most of the attesting witnesses. Notwithstanding the absence of Sir Fitzroy Kelly, the plaintiff's leading Counsel, who had at the last moment sent word that he could not attend, and the refusal of his junior Mr. Keating to go, and in the absence of his lawyer, the case was proceeding under the able management of Mr. Bovill, with a strong predominance of evidence in the claimant's favour, until his cross-examination by Sir Frederick Theagar, the counsel for the defendant, in the course of this cross-examination, which commenced on Monday, and was continued all Tuesday, and part of Wednesday, besides a variety of anachronisms, inconsistencies and improbabilities in the plaintiff's story, it was ascertained that the plaintiff was in the habit of doubling his consonants, and more particularly it was noticed that he had spelt the words "set aside," in some words acknowledged to be his "set aside," the same words being misspelt in the same way in the two documents purporting to be executed by Sir Hugh Smyth. In the further discovery that on a steel-plate which the plaintiff had caused to be engraved for himself in the course of the present year, the last word in the motto of the Smyth family—"Qui capiti capiti," was spelt "capiti," and the same misspelling was discovered on the seal of the two deeds, and on that of the letter to the claimant's mother. These and other circumstances were being to weigh heavily against the plaintiff, when a telegraphic message received from a jeweller in London, who had read the account of Sir Hugh's proceedings in the public journals, enabled Sir Frederick Theagar to ask the plaintiff whether he had procured the engraving of the name on the brooch, and the crest on the rings, at a certain shop on January 24th, 1823. The plaintiff, in cross-examination, was obliged to admit that he had done so,—a confession which at once put an end to the case, his counsel throwing up his brief.

But the singularity of the story does not end here. From some of the questions asked by Sir Frederick Theagar, in cross-examination, it would appear that in his earlier years Doctor, afterwards "Sir Richard Hugh Smyth," was tried, and narrowly escaped being hanged, for treason, under the name of Provis, the son of the carpenter, in whose house his alleged mother is said to have been born, and he died; while other circumstances connected with the case would seem to indicate that there really was some mystery about his birth, and that he was, not improperly, the son of the man whose property he claims, either illegitimate, or the result of a secret marriage.

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