

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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A Queer Boy.

He doesn't like study, it "weakens his eyes,"
 But the right kind of book will insure a surprise,
 Let it be about Indians, or pirates, or bears,
 And he's lost for the day to all mundane affairs;
 By sunlight or gaslight his vision is clear;
 Now, isn't that queer?

At thought of an errand he's "tired as a hound,"
 Very weary of life, and of tramping around;
 But if there's a band or a circus in sight,
 He will follow it gladly from morning till night,
 The showman will capture him, some day, I fear,
 For he is so queer.

If there's work in the garden his head "aches to split,"
 And his back is so lame that he can't dig a bit;
 But mention baseball, and he's cured very soon;
 And he'll dig for a woodchuck the whole afternoon;
 Do you think he plays 'possum? He seems quite sincere;
 But— isn't he queer?

THE BOY DISCIPLE.

BY

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON.

CHAPTER V.

A good-sized hut was built against the hillside, where the shepherds might find refuge. Buz pointed it out to Joel, then he turned the donkey into one of the sheds, and started homeward on the run. Joel shuddered as a blinding flash of lightning was followed by a crash of thunder that shook the hut. The wind bore down through the trees like some savage spirit, shrieking and moaning as it flew. Joel heard a shout, and looked out to the opposite hillside. Buz was flying along in break-neck race with the storm. At that rate he would soon be home. How he seemed to enjoy the race, as his strong limbs carried him lightly as a bird soars!

At the top he turned to look back and laugh and wave his arms,—a sinewy little figure standing out in bold relief against a brazen sky.

Joel watched till he was out of sight. Then, as the wind swooped down from the mountains, great drops of rain began to splash through the leaves.

The men crowded into the hut. One of them started forward to close the door, but stopped suddenly, with his brown, hairy hand uplifted.

"Hark ye!" he exclaimed. Joel heard only the shivering of the wind in the tree-tops; but the man's trained ear caught the bleating of a stray lamb, far off and very faint.

"I was afraid I was mistaken in my count; they jostled through the gate so fast I could not be sure." Going to a row of pegs along the wall, he took down a lantern hanging there and lit it; then, wrapping his coat of skins more closely around him, and calling one of the dogs, he set out into the gathering darkness.

Joel watched the fitful gleam of the lantern, flickering on unsteadily as a will-o'-the-wisp. A moment later he

heard the man's deep voice calling tenderly to the lost animal; then the storm struck with such fury that they had to stand with their backs against the door of the hut to keep it closed.

Flash after flash of lightning blinded them. The wind roared down the mountain and beat against the house till Joel held his breath in terror. It was midnight before it stopped. Joel thought of the poor shepherd out on the hills and shuddered. Even the men seemed uneasy about him, as hour after hour passed, and he did not come.

Finally he fell asleep in the corner, on a pile of woolly skins. In the gray dawn he was awakened by a great

that he had done anything more than a simple duty.

Joel, who felt uncommonly hungry after his supperless night, thought he would mount the donkey and start back alone. But just as he was about to do so, a familiar bushy head showed itself in the door of the sheepfold. Buz had brought him some wheat-cakes and cheese to eat on the way back.

Joel was so busy with this welcome meal that he did not talk much. Buz kept eyeing him in silence, as if he longed to ask some question. At last, when the cheese had entirely disappeared he found courage to ask it.

"Were you always like that?" he said

It was just at the close of the evening meal. Nathan ben Obed rose half-way from his seat in astonishment, then sank back.

"How old a man is this friend of yours?" he asked.

"About thirty, I think," answered Phineas. "He is a little younger than I."

"Where was he born?"

"In Bethlehem, I have heard it said, though his home has always been in Nazareth."

"Strange, strange!" muttered the man, striking his long white beard thoughtfully.

Joel reached over and touched Phineas on the arm. "Will you not tell Rabbi Nathan about the wonderful star that was seen at that time?" he asked, in a low tone.

"What was that?" asked the old man, arousing from his reverie.

When Phineas had repeated his conversation with the stranger on the day of his journey, Nathan ben Obed exchanged meaning glances with his wife.

"Send for the old shepherd Heber," he said. "I would have speech with him." Rhoda came in to light the lamps. He had her roll a cushioned couch that was in one corner to the centre of the room.

"This old shepherd Heber was born in Bethlehem," he said; "but since his sons and grandsons have been in my employ, he has come north to live. He used to help keep the flocks that belonged to the temple and that were used for sacrifices. His has always been one of the purest of lives and I have never known such faith as he has. He is over a hundred years old, so must have been quite aged at the time of the event of which he will tell us."

Presently an old, old man tottered into the room, leaning on the shoulders of his two stalwart grandsons. They placed him gently on the cushions of the couch, and then went into the court-yard to await his readiness to return. Like the men Joel had seen the day before, they were dressed in skins, and were wild-looking and rough. But this aged father, with dim eyes and trembling wrinkled hands, sat before them like some hoary patriarch, in a fine linen mantle.

Pleased as a child, he saluted his new audience, and began to tell them his only story.

As the years had gone by, one by one the lights of memory had gone out in darkness. Well-known scenes had grown dim; old faces were forgotten; names he knew as well as his own could not be recalled; but this one story was as fresh and real to him as on the night he learned it.

The words he chose were simple, the voice was tremulous with weakness; but he spoke with a dramatic fervour that made Joel creep nearer and nearer, until he knelt, unknowing, at the old man's knee, spell-bound by the wonderful tale.

"We were keeping watch in the fields by night" began the old shepherd. "I and my sons and my brethren. It was still and cold, and we spoke but little to each other. Suddenly over all the hills and plains shone a great light,—brighter than light of moon or stars or sunshine. It was so heavenly white we knew it must be the glory of the Lord; we looked upon and we were sore afraid, and hid our faces, falling to the ground. And, lo! an angel overhead spoke to us from out of the midst of the glory, saying, 'Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.' And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger."



AN EASTERN SHEPHERD AND LAMB.

abruptly, motioning to Joel's back and leg. Somehow the reference did not wound him as it generally did. He began to tell Buz about the Samaritan boy who had crippled him. He never was able to tell the story of his wrongs without growing passionately angry. He had worked himself into a white heat by the time he had finished.

"I'd get even with him," said Buz, excitedly, with a wicked squint of his eyes.

"How would you do it?" demanded Joel. "Cripple him as he did me?"

"Worse than that!" exclaimed Buz, stopping to take deliberate aim at a leaf overhead, and shooting a hole exactly through the centre with his sling. "I'd blind him as quick as that! It's a great deal worse to be blind than lame."

Joel closed his eyes, and rode on a few moments in darkness. Then he opened them and gave a quick, glad look around the landscape. "My! What if I never could have opened them again," he thought. "Yes, Buz, you're right," he said aloud. "It is worse to be blind; so I shall take Rehum's eyesight also, some time. Oh, if that time were only here!"

Although the subject of the miracle at Cana had been constantly in the mind of Phineas, and often near his lips, he did not speak of it to his host until the evening before his departure.

shout. He got up, and went to the door. There stood the shepherd. His bare limbs were cut by stones and torn by thorns. Blood streamed from his forehead where he had been wounded by a falling branch. The mud on his rough garments showed how often he had slipped and fallen on the steep paths.

Joel noticed, with a thrill of sympathy, how painfully he limped. But there on the bowed shoulders was the lamb he had wandered so far to find; and as the welcoming shout arose again, Joel's weak little cheer joined gladly in.

"How brave and strong he is," thought the boy. "He risked his life for just one pitiful little lamb."

The child's heart went strangely out to this rough fellow who stood holding the shivering lamb, sublimely unconscious