

BOYS AND GIRLS

To-day.

Upon John Ruskin's writing desk
A slab of chalcedony lay,
And on it, cut in careful script,
The word 'To-day.'

Honored of all, a wondrous man,
And held a prophet in his way,
He let 'To-morrow' hide its time,
And used 'To-day.'

Upon the tablet of the will
How good to write, the self-same way,
Putting to-morrow's uses by,
The word 'To-day.'

—Harriet Prescott Spofford.

A Month of Servitude.

(Mary Sweet Potter, in 'American Messenger.')

'See here, Jane, wouldn't this cure sore eyes if we had 'em? That old debt to Raymond is paid, as well as one month's rent in advance, and here are twenty-five dollars to do what we please with.' Jane Hanley drew a long breath.

'Oh, Jack! it seems too good to be true.'

'But it isn't. And I have a week's vacation, besides, to rest out in.'

Jane was glad her face was in shadow, for she did not want Jack to see that she was not pleased to hear of the vacation. Not that she would have begrudged Jack a needed rest, far from it, but—

'You don't know how I have wanted several things that I can get now, Jack, and you need some things, too. With twenty-five dollars we can get them all and have enough left to get a batch of groceries to last till the next pay day; but it will take it all, every cent.'

'Well, that is what we work and earn the money for, little woman; no use hoarding it.'

'Oh, yes, Jack!' protested Jane; 'we must begin to hoard soon, or else we will have nothing to keep us when we are old or sick.'

'Oh, well, time enough for that,' said careless Jack. 'Now, let us have some supper, so I can run down to the village a few minutes before bedtime. I won't be gone but a little while. I declare it seems good to think I need not get up at four o'clock to-morrow morning.'

Down, down, down, sank poor Jane's heart till it could sink no lower. She had been the wife of Jack Hanley only one short year, but that was long enough to learn his failings.

Patiently she had waited for this time to come, when she could feel free to buy some much needed household articles and garments for Jack and herself, and for very shame, it seemed to her, she could not have gone without them longer. And now Jack would give her all the money she needed.

Jack kept the money in his own pocket, however, and carried it away down the street with him.

Jane had gently suggested that he had better leave it at the house for fear some one might rob him; but he had replied that burglars would be far more likely to enter the house and take it from her during his absence, making her blush with the humorous twinkle of his eye that told her he had read her thoughts aright.

That was a never-to-be-forgotten vacation week for poor Jane. Jack rose at breakfast time and drank a cup of coffee each morning, then started for the village and remained there till night, when he returned, ate a few mouthfuls of food, went unsteadily to bed and dropped into a drunken stupor that lasted till a late hour next day. This was repeated again and again till the vacation week was nearly

over, and she felt certain that his pocket-book was nearly empty.

Jack had not given Jane any money, and she, meek soul, had not asked him for any, but cried her pillow wet with tears each night, while he slept, and looked and acted her own mild, sweet self when his guilty eyes met hers in the morning.

On Saturday a neighbor dropped in.

'Your house-cleaning is all done, I see,' she remarked. 'So is mine. Mrs. Halloran hasn't begun; she says she isn't going to do it herself and will pay a woman a dollar a day to work a month for her and do all her cleaning. I guess she's the only woman in the village, except the doctor's wife, too good to do her own house-cleaning, or help do it anyway. My! you ought to see her nose fly up and hear her talk.'

'I don't want to,' said Jane, before she thought. Not for the world would she have Mrs. Dennison know what was in her mind.

She turned the conversation in another direction and kept it there, and when the neighbor went away, she began hastily to dress to go to the village.

'She has got my money; she shall give it back to me,' she said, over and over. 'Jack has earned it once and would not give it to me, now I will earn it again, for I must have it to buy the things we need.'

So, just before the dinner hour, the high-headed, over-dressed wife of Jim Halloran, the principal saloon keeper of the town, was summoned to meet Jane Hanley, wife of one of her husband's best customers, before whom her brazen face lost a trifle of its color and assurance.

What could Jane Hanley, of well-known temperance principles, and member of the only church in the immediate vicinity, want with her. There was no need to fear, however.

'Do you want some one to do your house-cleaning?' inquired Jane's mild, musical voice. 'I heard so.'

'Yes, I do,' replied Mrs. Halloran, still wondering.

'I will do it for you; I know how. I used to help do it at home and have done my own since I was married.'

Up went Mrs. Halloran's flag of independence again and she regarded poor Jane Hanley patronizingly.

'Why, I s'pose you can have the job if you want it. I'd just as soon pay you for doing it as anyone else. I won't do it, if it's never done,' she said, with uplifted chin. Jim Halloran is able to support me without me doing the dirty, hard work and he's got to do it. He don't work himself.'

Jane ignored all Mrs. Halloran's speech except that which indicated the affirmative to her request for the privilege of doing her house-cleaning.

'When do you wish me to begin?' she asked, quietly, and rose instantly and unpinned her hat when she was informed that she might begin work that very hour if she wished. Poor Jane was very anxious to get started upon her month of labor to earn back the money, and her face flushed with pleasure when she found there was to be no delay.

'Begin in the bar-room, Mrs. Hanley; everybody sees that and I want it to look nice in there. So much pleasanter for customers, you know,' she added, in her affected way.

Poor Jane winced, but wasted no words of assent or comment, but went straight at work washing windows and woodwork in the bar-room, her mind partly filled with conjecture regarding the likelihood of Jack's waking up

and coming to the saloon while she was at work there. But he did not.

Night came and Jane prepared to go home and get supper for Jack.

'Before I go, I will have an understanding with Mrs. Halloran about wages,' she thought, and so she did, finding that Mrs. Dennison had not misinformed her.

'There, I have earned half a dollar,' said Jane, showing her delight in spite of herself.

'Yes, and here it is,' replied Mrs. Halloran, watching with a strange sensation, the look of eagerness with which Jack Hanley's young wife took the half dollar, the very coin he had paid her that morning for drinks for himself and a friend.

And all that evening the saloon keeper's wife went about with an air of deep thought which sat upon her shallow face unnaturally.

Jack refrained from taking his trip to the village again that day, for he felt that he must recruit himself a little in order to begin work the following Monday morning; besides, his money was all gone.

His last half-dollar (now reposing in his wife's purse) had been paid out Saturday morning, and he knew he would no longer be welcome at Halloran's.

And so, on Monday morning, Jane rose earlier than usual to get Jack started early, that she might also get to her work of house-cleaning for Mrs. Halloran.

Not one word of her engagement there had she spoken to Jack, though it was difficult in the extreme to keep a secret from him. She was resolved, however, to gain back the precious money Jack had wasted, and would run no risk of losing the privilege.

The month wore on. Jane was always on hand to wash dishes, cook, scrub and 'clean house' for Mrs. Halloran, and she some way managed to do her own work also so that Jack missed none of the comforts he had been accustomed to, and always found his trim little wife in her place waiting for him when he came from his work at night.

Mrs. Halloran, inclined at first to domineer over her scrub woman and general servant, soon found that she could not do it. She found herself sending her home early and offering her refreshments and other kindnesses, all of which were politely and gently, yet positively declined by Jane Hanley. She would work her full time, and she would have nothing in return but what was due her; that she took without demur each night.

Between her husband and herself there had never a word been spoken concerning the wasted money. Jack felt too guilty and Jane too sensitive to stir up the disgraceful affair, so with one accord they ignored it.

Jack worked steadily and so did Jane, doing a double portion and growing pale and thin under the burden to which she was so unused.

The end of the month drew near; Jane had worked twenty-six days, and at the end of the last day she was to work for Mrs. Halloran she walked wearily but triumphantly homeward, her latest earned dollar clinched tightly in her hardly calloused hand.

She looked at the sun in anxiety, poor child; it was very low and she feared she would be late home, and Jack would have to wait for his supper, which would be too bad when he had worked hard all day. Of herself she never thought, though she had not tasted a morsel since morning, and had worked harder in proportion to her strength than had her husband.

She hastened in at the gate and raised her foot to the first step that led up to the door