

## \* \* The Story Page. \* \*

### Children's Companionships.

BY MARY WOOD-ALLEN.

A handsomely dressed little boy stood looking wistfully out of the window of an elegant house, at the play of three barefooted children in the yard of a small cottage across the street. "O, do let me go and play with them," he cried; "they have such fun."

"I really don't see, Robbie, why you want to go and play with those rude children. They have no nice toys like yours. Why can't you play with your express wagon or rocking-horse?"

Robbie glanced contemptuously at the beautiful toys and replied, frowningly: "They don't need playthings; they have each other. O, mamma, let me go; they are such beautiful children."

Mamma, looking out of the window, saw only three noisy urchins "tooting" horns, playing drum on a tin pan, hallooing, climbing fences, tearing clothes and occasionally squabbling among themselves, and she did not enjoy the thought of Robbie looking and behaving as they did, so said, quietly but firmly: "I can't let you go to play with them, but I'll play with you."

"O, mamma," said Bobbie, despairingly, "you don't real play, you only play play."

What a keen insight into facts this little outcry displayed, and what a longing for true companionship! It ought to have touched the heart of the mother with a new revelation of Scripture that "It is not good for man to be alone," be the man six year old or twenty-six or sixty.

As the adult man must live with his kind, so the child-man should live with his kind, and in the varying phases of child life learn to adjust himself to the demands of society. The one child among a family of adults does not learn the social virtues. How can he? He is in a world not made for him, not suited to him, and he is debarred from the world where his interests and opportunities are. He may be taught the superficialities of good manners, but there is nothing to develop within him the emotions, thoughts and desires which would engender the truest politeness. He does not seem selfish, it may be, because no demands for generosity are made of him. He is not learning the property rights of others, because no one wants his possessions. He is not receiving lessons in yielding to the wishes of others, for in important matters he obeys commands; in his plays he has his own way.

A fond mother had brought up her only child in the most select solitude. His nursery was filled with everything that money could buy, his clothing was beautiful, his nurse constant in her efforts to amuse him, and yet the child manifested a depraved desire to run away and mingle with the ordinary children who played in the street. His father, a traveling man, was on one occasion home long enough to observe these facts, and said to the mother: "This boy must go out among his kind and learn some rugged virtues. He's a regular molly-coddle. He cries at the slightest hurt and whines over everything. If he were out there with other boys he'd get that knocked out of him."

The mother shuddered. "O," she exclaimed, "you wouldn't turn him out with those rough children! He would learn so much rudeness. I want him to be a gentleman."

"And I want him to be a man," replied the father. "He must learn to be strong before he can be truly gentle. Weakness is not gentleness. If he will grow up not to lie or be a sneak, I can put up with the rudeness, which will be polished off as he mingles with refined society, but if he grows up not knowing how to be a man among men, he'll never amount to much no matter how much polish he may have. I don't want him to associate with loafers or boys who are immoral, but the mere rudeness of our neighbors' boys is only the innate savagery which means the possession of strength and life. Our boy has this by nature and, if allowed to get rid of it by attrition with other children, will come out all right, but I fear if he is cramped and thwarted now, he will be either a fool or a knave when he grows up."

The language was strong, but there is food for thought in it. Children need children, their peers, as companions. They need not be left to their barbarous instincts untaught and unguided, but they should have opportunity through their association together to develop in each other their gregarious instincts, that later they may understand life and know how to live the social life of the world, of business or of pleasure.

I knew a child who, brought up alone, did not know how to behave when other children came in to visit her. She would look at them timidly and then, perhaps, run to the piano and pound on it and sing at the top of her voice, or she would run up and down the room shouting loudly. Her mother could not understand why the child did not play with her little visitors, but the truth was she did not know how. The presence of another child elated

her, and, as she knew no way to play with other children she tried to entertain them by making a noise of some kind.

Observant parents can learn more of their children's true character by watching them in their play than in any other way, and, if they are wise, can use the knowledge thus obtained in helping the child overcome his defects and strengthen his character. Even children may have character, but they can only attain it by mingling with their kind. If taught self-control, truthfulness, honor, fair-dealing and purity in childhood, not by seclusion, but by meeting the problems of child life under the sympathetic and not too obtrusive guidance of their parents, they will be fitted to meet bravely the problems of adult life when they are perhaps deprived of parental counsel and sympathy.

In excessive fear that their children may be injured by evil influences, parents lose sight of another fact, namely, that children may be taught to become positive moral forces for the influencing of their companions.

"He's not a good boy for you to play with," said a mother to her little son.

"But, mamma, I'm a good boy for him to play with," was the reply of the child, who consciously recognized his own moral worth.

This is suggestive. Why should not the child be taught that he is to be a moral power, taught that instead of being afraid of being led into wrong he is to be a conscious leader into righteousness. As he grows older he will meet evil in its various forms, and it may be that through negative training he will fall an easy victim to temptations, whereas, if he had been taught the positive side of virtue, had grown up with the consciousness of his own divinity and his obligation to lead others into paths of right-doing, evil would have had no power over him.

Child hermits are no more to be desired than adult hermits, but because children are immature of judgment their companionship must be left to chance, nor must it be without supervision. The methods by which his associations shall be regulated must be left to the wisdom of the parent, but companionship of his peers the child must have if he is to grow naturally into the social life of the world, be it in business, pleasure, intellect or religion. —Congregationalist.

### \* \* The Pebble Under the Wheel. \* \*

BY ELIZABETH P. ALLEN.

Mrs. Sproul had heard the maid opening the shutters, and she roused up from her light morning slumber. "What was I dreaming about?" she asked herself. "Oh—yes, I remember. I was riding my wheel up hill, and it came to a dead stop against something that turned out to be a very small pebble. How silly dreams are!"

Just then the blind opposite the bed flew up. "There, Jane!" Mrs. Sproul cried, "how often have I told you not to flare that light in my eyes! You have no more memory than a cow!"

Jane could make no retort, of course; but all the more she resented her mistress's tone, and being compared to a cow! Jane was not feeling well; she had sat up most of the night with a sister's ill child. Nevertheless she had gotten up promptly, and was trying to do her tasks faithfully, when this cross speech slapped her in the face and discouraged her good intentions, making all the rest of the day harder for her, and, consequently, for her mistress.

It was a little thing, perhaps you will say. People are often out of sorts when they first wake in the morning. Jane should not have been so easily upset. Nor would she, if a good night's rest had restored the wear of the day before; as the wheel in Mrs. Sproul's dream would have bounded over the pebble on a down grade or even on a level. But Jane was pushing her wheel up hill that morning, and it came to a most unceremonious halt against that one cross work.

Are we not bound, dear house-mistress, to be on the lookout for wheels going up hill? If your young daughter is sick, if she only feels drowsy, she comes straight to your side to say so. You darken the room and bathe her brow, and softly fan her cheek, asking for every detail of her condition. No doubt Jane, too, knows that when she is really sick you will be good to her; but she also knows that if she would prove herself a valuable servant she must not tax your kindness too often; she must hold up and hold out, and say nothing about it, many a time when head and knees and back are aching for rest. It is at such times that the wheel goes hardly up the hill of the day's work, and a very little pebble carelessly thrust under proves a cruel strain.

When your husband is in trouble, you divine it before he tells the story, the lines of his face are an open book to your anxious, loving eyes, and while waiting for a chance to hear what is the matter, you instinctively smooth the path before him. You do not pick that time

to tell him that the lard is out, as Marion Harland says! You check the child voice that suggests a rasping subject. A true woman, a true wife, keeps the atmosphere clear for John at such a time.

But these silent members of your family are often in sore distress. They are mostly from an ignorant and unwise class; their philosophy is small; their religion is not very enlightened; their circumstances are, oftener than not, hard; indeed, it is generally adversity that has driven them into service; and the keen edge of trial, in one shape or another, presses frequently upon them, when pride, or diffidence, or suspicion of you, keeps them dumb. There are the days that they push the wheel wearily up hill and need your considerate care. Do not scold them on such days if you can avoid it; save correction until your maid is stronger to cope with the temptation "to fly to pieces."

"But how was I to know that Jane had been sitting up over night?" Mrs. Sproul asks querulously.

Well, my dear, it would be a safe rule for you never to fling out a rebuke before you fairly opened your eyes in the morning! And your eyes being open, use them.

When a carpenter takes up his tool for a day's work, he runs his horny thumb against its edge, to test it; you yourself, embarking on some delicate piece of embroidery, will set your needle point against your pink palm, to see that it is in order for working your dainty scarf; and will you snatch rudely at the most finely tempered, but most easily dulled, of all instruments—a human being—expecting perfect results?

Let us go back to our first figure—to Mrs. Sproul's dream—may, friends, to the Word of God: "That no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way."—Zion's Herald.

### \* \* The Herod of Scotland. \* \*

Now when the soldiers came near to the huddled cluster of bairns, that same little heart-broken bleating which I have heard the lambs make, broke again from them. It made my heart bleed, and the blood tingle in my palms. And this was King Charles Stuart making war! It had not been his father's way. But the soldiers, though some few were smiling a little, as at an excellent play, were mostly black ashamed. Nevertheless, they took the bairns and made them kneel, for that was the order, and without mutiny they could not better it.

"Sodger man, will ye let me tak' my wee brither by the hand and dee that way? I think he would thole it better!" said a little maid of eight, looking up. And the soldier let go a great oath, and looked at Westerha' as though he could have slain him.

"Bonny wark," he cried, "deil burn me gin I listed for this!"

But the little lass had already taken her brother by the hand. "Bend doon, bonny Alec, my man, doon on your knees!" said she.

The boy glanced up at her. He had long, yellow hair. "Will it be sair?" he asked. "Think ye, Maggie? I houp it'll be no awfu' sair!"

"Na, Alec," his sister made answer, "it'll no be either lang or sair."

But the boy of ten, whose name was James Johnson, neither bent nor knelt. "I hae dune nae wrang. I'll just dee this way," he said, and he stood up like one at drill. Then Westerha' bid fire over the bairns' heads, which was cruel, cruel work, and only some of the soldiers did it. But even the few pieces that went off made a great noise in that lonely place. At the sound of the muskets some of the bairns fell forward on their faces, as if they had been really shot, some leaped into the air, but the most part knelt quietly and composedly. The little boy, Alec, whose sister had his hand clasped in hers, made as if he would rise.

"Bide ye doon Alec," she said, very quietly, "it's no oor turn yet!"

At this the heart within me gave way, and I roared out in my helpless pain a perfect "growl" of anger and grief. "Bonny Whigs ye are," cried Westerha', "to dee without even a prayer. Put up a prayer this minute, for ye shall dee, every one of ye."

And the boy, James Johnson, made answer to him, "Sir, we cannot pray, for we be too young to pray."

"You are not too young to rebel, nor yet to die for it!" was the brute-beast's answer. Then with that the little girl held up a hand as if she were answering a dominie in a class.

"An' if it please ye, sir," she said, "me and Alec canna pray, but we can sing 'The Lord's My Shepherd,' gin that will do. My mother learned it us afore she gaed awa'." And before any one could stop her, she stood up like one that leads the singing in a kirk.

Then all the bairns stood up. I declare it minded me of Bethlehem, and the night when Herod's troopers rode down to look for Mary's bonny Bairn. Then from the tips of babes and sucklings arose the quavering strains:

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