

BOYS AND GIRLS

When Evening Shadows Fall

by the Author of 'Last Year's Wind,' in 'Sunday Companion.'

It was Saturday afternoon, and as John Ferriss sat waiting his turn to pass into the inner office to receive his modest weekly salary his thoughts were far away.

He was again in the pretty village where he had passed his boyhood, and once again he heard voices which had long been silent. He could almost smell the fragrance of the pinewood as he walked up the long, winding road which led to the summit of the hill. He thought of the rabbits, sporting fearlessly amid the tall bracken, and he fancied he heard the music of the wind amid the tops of the tall trees.

From the side of the hill could be seen the quaint, ivy-clad church, nestling amid the trees in the valley, and the sound of bells floated on the air across the silvery stream, which wound in and out between the green banks like some beautiful serpent.

John's thoughts went back to the day when he had walked away from that church with his newly-made wife, and fancied himself the happiest man in all creation. Well, they had been happy, and the love which had been born in that green valley had never faded nor faltered through the stress and burden of life.

The manager glanced up as the old clerk entered, and there was a look of pity upon his face.

'Well, Ferriss, I am sorry to say we shall not require you any more,' he said gently, as he handed John a little packet. 'You will find a month's money instead of notice. A fortnight's notice would have been sufficient, of course, but we are sorry to lose you, and have no wish to be hard.'

John thought he had not heard aright.

'You will not need me any more?' he repeated.

'No. We are making many changes, as you know, since ill-health has compelled Mr. Lenton to retire, and we shall only be able to keep the younger men. You are not so young as you were, Ferriss; you will get an easier post.'

'I—I have tried to do my duty, sir.'

The old man's voice faltered, and the hand which held the packet containing his money shook visibly.

'Oh, yes, certainly. We have no complaint whatever; but the fact is we want young blood in the concern. Ours is to be a go-ahead policy in future—it must be!—and there will be no room for you. I am sorry, Ferriss; but, really, it is time you took things a little more quietly. You've been here a long time, and you've had your innings.'

The old man turned away without another word. He could not have spoken. He stumbled blindly as he left the office. He had had his innings. What had he won?

Thirty long years he had given the best of his powers to work in that gloomy office. He had done his duty. He had been a model of exactitude and punctuality. Every morning on the first stroke of the clock he had hung his hat up on the peg from whence he took it now mechanically.

He would never hang his hat up there again—never again! He glanced up at the peg as though it had been an old friend. He even put up his trembling, wrinkled fingers and stroked it.

He glanced at the young faces of the junior clerks as he passed out. They would

have been surprised had they known that, in the midst of his own sorrow, a great wave of pity surged up in his heart for them.

'They will work on for thirty years, and then—then they will have had their innings!' he muttered.

The streets were thronged with men of all ages, many of them clerks like himself, and they were hurrying home, eager for the brief spell of rest which the week-end brought.

John Ferriss walked homeward slowly. He had never realized before how old and weary he had grown. The manager was right; he was getting an old man—an old man; he had had his innings.

In one of the two tiny rooms which they called home John's wife was lying upon the

the mother thought—faces that would welcome her at the journey's end.

One daughter had lived to grow up, but ten years ago she had come home from her situation—come home to die—and then there had been only John and his wife left.

Then Margaret herself had become a helpless invalid, and all their scanty savings had been swallowed up in the expenses which followed. How was it possible for them to save, when John's salary was so small and there was medicine to pay for?

John had never complained. He had worked on bravely, and Meg's eyes filled with tears as she thought what a hard struggle her husband had had, and how brave and patient he had been.

She wiped away her tears, and put on her



'WE'LL HAVE OUR READING TOGETHER, DEAR,' HE SAID. 'I'M TIRED, AND I WON'T LEAVE YOU.' SO WITH HUSKY VOICE JOHN READ WORDS FROM THE BOOK THEY LOVED.

shabby old couch. She was old and wan and feeble. She had never been very strong, and theirs had been a hard life—a constant struggle to keep the wolf from the door.

Her thoughts had gone back to other days, as John's own thoughts had done; and as she lay there listening for the sound of her husband's footfall the memory of other days was strongly with her.

How foolishly happy, how full of hope they had been, that day when John had taken her to the tiny house which he made so pretty for his bride! They had been happy, in spite of their poverty, and in spite of the grief which had wrung their hearts when their little ones had been taken away. There were three little graves in a distant cemetery, but it was of three angel faces

smile with which she always greeted her husband as she heard his step upon the stair.

He came in slowly, and her quick eyes noted his pallor and weariness.

'Poor old man!' she murmured lovingly, as he bent to kiss her, 'you are tired and hot.'

'Yes,' he said; 'it is hot, Meg, and I really think I am tired. It is as you say I am getting old—getting old.'

She looked at him anxiously.

'It is the weather, dear,' she said, softly. 'You must rest now.'

John stifled a groan as he remembered how easy it would be to rest, since he had no work to go to; but he would not tell her, he would not make her more unhappy by