

BOYS AND GIRLS

Miss Lorrimer's Class

(Miriam Baxter, in the New York 'Observer'.)

Everyone said it was the model class of the school.

Alice Fairchild sits at the end of the seat and is the eldest of four bright girls. She is a tall, graceful girl, with dark eyes and dense masses of black hair coiled high on her head. You see at a glance that she has character, and strength, too—one of those rare faces full of such possibilities as make you tremble for the future. Alice has no Christian training at home, for her mother died in her early infancy, and her father is an outspoken infidel.

Janet Noble sits next to Alice on the bench. A sweet, thoughtless, unconscious kind of face she has, as if she had never had an idea deeper than the fit of the exquisite glove which she is just now smoothing so carefully on her slender hand. Janet has a Christian mother, but one so engrossed in worldly cares that she has given very little thought to her child's soul up to this time. So long as Janet attends church once a Sunday, and goes to the Sunday-school regularly, she feels an easy consciousness that things are going on just as they should, and so she gives herself very little solicitude about Janet in any way.

Next to Janet comes Cora Seldon, and she is the least attractive of the four girls. It is a discordant sort of face—you feel at a glance. She is not more than sixteen, yet there are hard cynical lines around the mouth already, and a little twist between the delicately pencilled brows that speaks of fretfulness and discontent; not at all an amiable character is this girl's, and she needs strong influences in the right direction or she will make fatal mistakes.

The last one on the bench is the youngest girl in Miss Lorrimer's class, and different entirely from the other three. Betty Carew is her name, and she does not belong quite to the same social grade with the other three. Her dress is plainer. All the other girls can see at a glance that Betty's hat was worn last year, and that her kid gloves have been carefully mended; but they all love her nevertheless. There is such a winning smile around the sweet lips, such a trusting look in the brown eyes, that very few people pass her by without a second look. There was in this young childish face a serene expression, a tranquil brightness that spoke of a heart at peace with itself and with its God.

There, have I made you see the girls in Miss Katherine Lorrimer's class? Suddenly their whispered conversation is hushed, and every face smiles a welcome as a graceful, elegant looking young lady comes swiftly down the aisle, and drops into the chair before them.

To say that these four girls love their teacher would very feebly express it. They almost idolize her. Everything she does and says is perfection. Her style of dress, the peculiar way in which she wears her hair, her voice, her accent, those lovely blue eyes, and soft, fluffy curls on the white forehead, the small hands so daintily gloved—every detail is absolute perfection in the eyes of these four girls, for they love her with that instinctive hero-worship that is wrapped away in every girl's heart and must have some object.

Miss Lorrimer is lovely and accomplished. She is a graduate of 'Vassar,' and is very bright and intelligent, and to the girls in her class she is thoroughly fascinating.

The one slight flaw is that the young lady is not a Christian herself; but that fact never presented itself to her mind as being at all in the way of her taking a class in the Sunday-school, and she had had now for nearly a year the training of four immortal spirits entrusted to her care.

It seems an anomaly for one to be trying to show the road to any place while one's own feet are turned quite in another direction; but this view of the matter had evidently never presented itself to the mind of the young lady herself, and as to the responsibility about the souls of those four girls sitting on the bench before her, Miss Lorrimer seemed never to have had a thought.

Mr. Foster, the superintendent, had only had charge of the school a few months, and had not felt at liberty so far to make any changes. One thing he could and did do—he carried that particular class and its teacher constantly to a throne of grace, but his heart was always heavy when he looked toward Miss Lorrimer's class.

And yet the young lady taught the lessons thoroughly and exhaustively. I doubt if there was another class in the school half as well instructed in the geography and topography of Palestine. She had a year or two before made the tour of Europe and of the Holy Land, and when she launched out into vivid descriptions of places and scenes she had herself visited, the four girls leaned forward in their seats and hung upon every word with breathless interest.

Lesson; the lesson this morning is the parable of the wheat and the tares. The girls have read over the lesson, and answered the regular questions in the lesson-paper, and now the teacher is talking to them. See the eager, bright young faces, leaning quite close to her own, so as not to lose one word; and it is not strange that they do listen, for Miss Lorrimer is a genuine word-painter. She has a quick, artistic temperament, too, and knows how to make her sentences glow like the colors on a canvas. She makes them see it all: the soft sunshine lighting up the pale blue of the Sea of Galilee, relieved by the dense, dark shade of the mountains beyond; the rude little fishing boat rocking idly with the slight swell of the waves; the group of disciples gathering close about the Master, and the waiting multitude on the shore pressing nearer and yet nearer to hear the wondrous voice. You see it all, as with swift, graphic touches, the young teacher describes the scene: Peter's strong, restless face; John's full of unutterable love and holy calm; Thomas, eager and full of questionings; you recognize them all, and so real does she make the scene that you could almost fancy that you catch the low splash of the waves against the rocky bank. Then follows a brief but comprehensive description of the soil and products of the richest and most fertile valley in all Palestine; of the primitive way of tilling the land and sowing the seed, the various other minor points, all very instructive to a student of ancient history,

but the whole containing not one word of the awful fact of individual responsibility about sowing quite another kind of seed—not one thought on her part that she herself, with the precious seed in her very hands, was sowing rapidly, but alas! not the good seed, but only tares.

The superintendent's bell tapped, and the lesson was over.

'Oh! I am so sorry the time is up. I wanted to hear more,' said Alice Fairchild; and Janet, who had actually forgotten to look at her dress or settle her ribbons for a whole half-hour, spoke up quite rapturously for her:

'Oh, Miss Lorrimer! you do make it so plain; I declare, I feel 'most as if I had been to Palestine myself.'

'Never mind, girls; we will talk more about this lesson next Sunday,' whispered the smiling teacher, as she turned her chair and prepared to listen to the closing exercises.

If Katherine Lorrimer had only known that to one, at least, of that bright young class she had given her last lesson—closed her record as a Sunday-school teacher—I fear she might not have worn such a smiling, placid face as she sat awaiting the close of the school.

The following Sunday morning Alice Fairchild was not in her place. 'A little unwell but nothing serious,' her friend Janet Noble said.

During the week Miss Lorrimer called twice to ask after Alice, carrying once a basket of rare flowers to cheer the sick girl. The thought that Alice might die had never once crossed her mind. She was by far the healthiest and strongest girl in her class, looking, beside small, fragile Betty Carew, much like a gorgeous tropical flower alongside of a pale little snow-drop.

Before Sunday came again, Miss Lorrimer was quite shocked at receiving a hurried note from Mr. Fairchild.

'Will you come at once to my house with the messenger who will bring you this?' it said; 'my daughter is extremely ill, and begs constantly that she may see you. Her physician assures me that there is no danger of contagion, or I would not ask it, but I implore you to come to my motherless child who loves you devotedly.'

A few minutes later Miss Lorrimer was in Mr. Fairchild's beautiful home. The father met her at the door, looking aged and haggard.

'Come with me, there is no time to lose, for her mind may wander again at any moment,' was all he said, and she followed him silently to her pupil's room.

The shock of seeing the girl drove every particle of blood from the teacher's face, and she trembled in every limb as the father led her to the bedside. Was this the beautiful, radiant girl who had sat before her in the fulness of health and promise two short weeks ago?

Alas! upon the rich tropical flower the cruel blight had fallen swiftly. Wasted to a shadow of her old self, with the scarlet flush of fever burning on one thin cheek, while the other was white as death, great dark lustrous eyes staring at vacancy, while the small hot hand waved restlessly to and fro—this was what Miss Lorrimer took in at one glance.

'Alice, my child, your teacher is here;