

# The Saturday Reader.

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## MABEL'S PROGRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

From "All the Year Round."

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

Continued from page 240.

### CHAPTER XII.—CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES.

For some three weeks after her husband's funeral, Mrs. Saxelby continued to reside at Jessamine Cottage. A tenant was found for it, who would take the lease off her hands, and purchase the greater part of the furniture at a valuation. Mrs. Saxelby submitted to all the arrangements with a mild resignation that seemed to utter a constant protest:—against what or whom, it was impossible to discover. Yet she was not ungrateful. But she always supposed that people did not form an adequate idea of what she had to endure: of the hardship to her, in all these changes. And though she was not angry at this fancied want of appreciation for her sorrows, she cherished a soft and submissive sense of injury.

Miss Fluke was very busy and stirring in these days, appearing at all sorts of unexpected hours in Jessamine Cottage—"Snatching," as she said, "an occasional minute from the heat and burden of the day, to visit the widow and her children." Miss Fluke's "occasional minutes" fell out in a strangely erratic manner. Several times she came to Jessamine Cottage before Mrs. Saxelby was down in the morning, and even before the little servant maid had opened the shutters. And once she startled the whole household, just as they were retiring to rest, by a violent peel at the bell at about half-past ten o'clock on a very wet night, when she stalked into the parlour with her umbrella glistening with rain, and her black gown tucked up under a waterproof cloak, of some crackling material that diffused a pungent odour all over the house.

"I came up part of the way by the 'bus," said Miss Fluke, "and shall catch the last one to take me back to town by eleven."

"Is anything the matter, dear Miss Fluke?" asked Mrs. Saxelby.

"Thanks be to God, nothing whatsoever," returned Miss Fluke, in an impressive manner. "No; there is nothing the matter. I have brought Mabel good news. Most excellent news. Here is a letter I received by the evening post from a Christian friend of mine to whom I wrote about Mabel. He has a cure of souls in Eastfield, and he tells me that he thinks he can place Miss Earnshaw in a school there; but here is the letter; you can see it."

Miss Fluke turned herself askew to pull from her pocket—as if she were drawing a cork—a note which ran as follows:

"My dear Friend,—In reference to the matter you have been urgent about, I am glad to say that I think I can place the young lady, Miss Earnshaw, in a school here as a pupil teacher. The establishment is conducted on principles of the strictest piety, and Mrs. Hatchett is a person enjoying the confidence of many highly respectable families in the neighbourhood. Miss Earnshaw would be required to instruct seven junior pupils in music, to hear them read, to superintend the condition of their wardrobes, and to assist the French governess in her conversation class (you tell me Miss Earnshaw is well acquainted with the French language). In return, she would be allowed to profit in her leisure moments by the instruction of the masters who attend the school. And Mrs. Hatchett would consent to give a salary of ten pounds *per annum* to begin with. Let me know your friend's deci-

sion as soon as possible, for if she accepts, she would be required to enter on her duties without delay. Remember me to your father and sisters, and believe me always, my dear friend,

"Yours faithfully,  
"B. LUBDOCK."

Poor Mrs. Saxelby's face grew very long. "Dear me," she said, dolefully, "it's a miserable sum to offer."

"Mrs. Saxelby!" exclaimed Miss Fluke, making the waterproof cloak crackle loudly in her energy, and shaking a little shower of rain over the carpet. "My good soul, consider the advantages! All the different professors' lessons, and strict piety!"

"Mamma," said Mabel, taking her mother's hand, "indeed it is quite as good as I looked for."

"Ten pounds a year!" urged Mrs. Saxelby. It seems to me worse than nothing at all."

But Mabel thought that even ten pounds a year was decidedly better than nothing at all; and after some further conversation, it was agreed that she should at least make the trial, and that Miss Fluke should write to thank her friend, and say that Mabel would be ready to go to Eastfield by that day week.

"That will give me a few days at Hazlehurst, mamma, to see you and Dooley comfortably installed in the cottage."

In spite of her courage, her heart sank within her; but she spoke cheerfully and hopefully. Then Miss Fluke said "Good night," and went to the front garden-gate to wait for the omnibus. As soon as its wheels were heard in the distance, and long before it came within sight, looming through the wet murky night, Miss Fluke planted herself at the edge of the footpath, and hailed the driver by calling out "Stop!" in a loud threatening voice, suggestive of highway robbery. So she got in, and was driven away back to Hammerham, leaving Mabel and her mother to rest with what peace of mind they could under their altered circumstances.

The week passed away very quickly, unbroken in its busy monotony by any incident. The family at Bramley Manor, though not so active in their manifestations of friendship as Miss Fluke, had yet been kind. Mrs. Charlewood had written a note—or rather Augusta had written it at her mother's request—to say that she would abstain from intruding on the widow for a while, until she should be settled in her new home, but she would drive out and see her in a few days, and that they all sent love to Mabel, and best wishes for her prosperity.

"I wonder though," said Mrs. Saxelby, that none of the family should have come over to say good-bye to you."

Mabel said no word; but the recollection of Penelope Charlewood's insinuation made the hot blood rush into her face. The sudden calamity had naturally diverted Mabel's mind from dwelling on Miss Charlewood's words; but now, her thoughts reverted to them with much unpleasant feeling, and she began to debate with herself whether it were possible that she could have been mistaken as to their purport?

"It does seem so utterly absurd," said Mabel, using almost the self-same words as those in which Clement had characterised a similar accusation. "And yet Penny must have had some meaning. Had it been Augusta, I should have thought nothing of it, but Penny is not apt to talk at random. Can they, any of them, seriously suppose that I—, and the thought which she would not even mentally put into words, made her heart beat, and brought tears of anger and mortification into her eyes.

As Miss Charlewood's keen observation had taught her, Mabel Earnshaw was intensely

proud. Hers was no aggressive haughty arrogance that strove to override or trample upon others, but it was a silent self-sufficing pride, the existence of which was little suspected by many who knew her. And the thought of being subjected to such a suspicion as Penelope had hinted at was intolerable to her. Fortunately, occupations for the present, and plans for the future, prevented her mind from dwelling morbidly upon it.

The family from Jessamine Cottage removed to Hazlehurst with such modest store of furniture as was absolutely necessary. Mrs. Saxelby was installed with a small servant-girl from the village, as her only attendant, and Dooley had already plunged with delight into all the mud-diest places within reach. He had been told that his sister must go away for a time, and had appeared to take the information quietly: holding his mother's hand clasped tightly in his small fingers, and looking steadfastly into her face with compressed lips. But that same night—the first of their sojourn at Hazlehurst—when Mabel was putting him into his little bed in his mother's room, he flung his arms around her neck, and burst into a passion of sobs and tears.

"Darling Dooley, my pet, my dear dear boy," said his sister, holding him to her breast, "what is the matter, my own little brother?"

"Oo—oo is doin' away," sobbed Dooley. "Mamma said so. And papa is gone. Oh, Tibby, Tibby!" The little soft arms clasped themselves convulsively round his sister's neck.

"My sweet little one," said Mabel, with streaming eyes, "hush your sobs, you will fret poor mamma. Don't grieve mamma, Dooley. Remember, she has been so sorry for papa.

"Es," returned the child, struggling against his emotion with an intelligent resolution surprising in such a baby. "I w—won't k'y, Tibby; not out loud, I won't. But will 'oo ever tum back again? Papa won't ever tum back again? Nurse said so."

"Yes, my pet, my darling; I will come back to you and to dear mamma. And I will write you letters, Dooley; such beautiful letters! And mamma will read them to you, till you are big enough to read them yourself."

Dooley smiled through his tears, and made a nestling movement of his head on the pillow, expressive of satisfaction. "But," said he, with a catching of his breath—the ground-swell of the subsiding storm of weeping; but will de postman know dey is for me?"

Being assured on this important point, Dooley gradually dropped into a slumber: holding the forefinger of his sister's right hand against his tear-stained cheek, and probably seeing in his dreams bright visions of the postman coming up the road with a large letter in his hand, which he (the postman) would know was for Master Dooley Saxelby.

"Oh, Dooley," thought Mabel, looking down at the sleeping child, "oh, Dooley, Dooley. Perhaps all our pains and sorrows seem as small and transient to the powers above, as yours are to me!"

### CHAPTER XIII. ADIEU AND AU REVOIR.

Sunday came—the last Sunday that Mrs. Saxelby and her daughter were to pass together for some time. Mabel's departure was fixed for Monday morning, all preliminary arrangements having been despatched by the combined help of Mabel's good will to disregard obstacles which affected only her own comfort, and of Miss Fluke's prodigious energy. That remarkable lady appeared to have annihilated time and space during the three days which intervened between Mrs. Saxelby's removal to Hazlehurst and the Monday on which Mabel was to go to Eastfield. It seemed as if Miss Fluke's water-