

Choice Literature.

GRANDFATHER'S FAITH.

BY JULIA A. MATTHEWS.

III.

A STRONG PURPOSE WELL-BROKEN.

The morning sunlight fell softly down through the waving branches of the old willow, hour after hour; the doctor, after keeping his appointment with James Harland, and making good to him the losses which he had sustained at the hands of his grandson, went out on his long round of visits. Aunt Harriet left the sunny sitting-room, and sat down with her work in the more shaded library; the sun rose higher and higher in the cloudless sky until it was full noon, and still Charlie lay beneath the window, thinking. Caspar, after many vain attempts to rouse him, had trotted off long ago in search of amusement, for he found his playmate's usually agreeable society exceedingly dull in his present mood, and yet Charlie lay, his hands clasped beneath his head, thinking. And the burden of his thoughts—thoughts deeper, fuller, more strongly moving than any which had ever busied heart and brain in all the thirteen years of his life—ran incessantly on those words of his grandfather,—"I can never despair of the boy."

If he had not seen him as he had seen him on the past night, bowed and broken beneath the terrible feeling of shame which he, in his own utter want of that keen sense of honour which made a false word or act a thing so abhorrent and debasing in Dr. Mason's eyes, could not even comprehend, those words, and the firm tone of strong faith and reliance in which they were spoken, might not have made so great an impression upon him. But having been a witness to the intensity of his grandfather's grief over his sin, the strength of his brave faith in him, touched the boy as nothing else could possibly have done.

By-and-by, lifting his eyes as an inquisitive little sunbeam peeped right into his face between the green branches beneath which he lay, he noticed for the first time that the morning was passing quickly by.

"High noon!" he said, looking up to the sky in amazement. "Why, what a dream I've been in, to be sure. And the next thing, dinner will be ready, I suppose; and then there'll be Aunt Harriet to face with her Sunday-go-to-meeting look on, as starchy and stiff as a Shaker's cap. I'll be off."

Springing from his couch of soft turf, he flung aside the drooping boughs and stepped out upon the road, giving a low, musical whistle for his dog as he glanced around, missing him from his side. Miss Harriet heard the whistle, and came to the library window as Charlie sauntered past that side of the house.

"Charlie! Charlie!"

The boy walked on regardless of the call.

"Don't go away, Charlie. It is almost dinner time."

Still he went on as if he were deaf, without noticing his aunt in any way, until he had gone quite out of the reach of her voice. Miss Harriet turned back to her work with a heavy sigh; and he, when he was quite sure that he was out of sight and hearing, sat himself down on a great stone on the bank of the brook to which his wandering feet had led him, and began to pick up the pebbles which lay around him, and fling them into the water with almost vicious force.

"Dinner!" he muttered, at length, when he had for some moments been exercising his restless energies in this way. "I don't want to see any dinner for a month. Old pest! I wish her dinner would choke her."

And then he laughed at his own violence; and then—then he turned his face and hid it in the grass for a long, long while; and even Caspar, who had rushed to find him at his call, could not induce him by any canine demonstrations of affection to raise it. No, not even Caspar must see it now, for Charlie was a proud little fellow, and he felt himself, at thirteen years old, almost a man.

The sun had passed the meridian, and was moving toward the west when the boy lifted himself up again. A great change had come over the face which had laid hidden from sight for those two long hours. When it had bent itself to the friendly shade of the long waving grass which received it so tenderly, hiding its weakness, its pain, and its irresolute desire with a soft, fragrant veil, and whispering to no living ear of the briny dew which fell fast upon its slender blades, it had been the face of a doubtful, troubled, anxious child; when it was raised to the light once more, it bore the impress of a fixed, strong purpose,—a manly, brave determination.

He sat very still for a while; then rising to his feet, he said, "Come, Caspar, let's go and tell Hattie;" and set off with a brisk step in the direction of London Hill.

His own home was situated in the village, Dr. Mason's practice making it necessary for him to be as near as possible to the centre of the large district in which he was the favourite practitioner; and the Hill lay about a mile to the westward of London village. But the two friends were not long in crossing the distance which lay between them and the place of their destination.

Passing in through the open gateway—for the beautiful grounds of the Hill were free to all visitors, the gates being unclosed from sunrise until twilight—Charlie walked quickly up the main road, and was passing on directly to the house, when far away on his left, through the branches of a trailing honeysuckle which threw its long tendrils over a rustic arbour that opened on a narrow footpath, he saw the gleam of something white, and instantly diverted from his purpose of going to the house, turned his steps that way, morally certain that the object of his search would be found there.

There was not a sound to be heard within the arbour as he approached it, and laying his hand on Caspar's collar to prevent him from springing forward and startling the quiet occupant, he went up the footpath, and looked in at the open arch. It was a pretty picture that he saw, so pretty that he did not care to disturb it by a motion or a word.

Curled up on the rustic seat, one slender foot peeping out from beneath her white dress, her head, supported on her hand, bent low over a book which lay in her lap, with flushed cheeks and parted lips, and rapt, unconscious face, Hattie Raymond was indeed a pretty picture.

"Hattie," Charlie said, at last; "Hattie."

Still she did not look up. He had spoken very softly, but now he laughed his merry, ringing laugh, and in a moment the book was thrown down, and she sprang up to welcome him.

"Oh, Charlie! Did they send you down here? I thought they didn't know where I was. I came off by myself to have a good time with the 'Heir of Redclyffe,' and didn't tell anyone where I was going to hide myself. But I'm glad you found me out. Have you read it?"

"Yes, I read it last winter when I sprained my foot, and was keeled up for a fortnight. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, I remember. Isn't it perfectly lovely? But they make Guy die, and I think that's a shame."

"How do you know they do? You're not a quarter of the way through the book."

"Oh, I looked at the end. I can't help it," she added, with a laugh at the expression of Charlie's face. "I never can stand reading an interesting book through without looking to see how they all come out. If I don't, I grow so excited over it, and my face is red, and my hands are cold, and I feel all shaky and trembly; it's perfectly horrid. But when I look at the end, and make my mind comfortable about my people (for they almost always turn out all right, you know), then I can go on with some comfort, and I have time to notice all the pretty little thoughts in the book, and enjoy them."

"But there's no interest in it when you know how it closes," objected Charlie.

"Oh, yes, there is. I know that all this trouble between Guy and Philip ends in peace and friendship, but I want to find out how it is brought about, and I know that Guy succeeds in controlling that awful temper of his, and I am just as interested as can be to read how he struggles and fights with himself. O, Charlie, I do think it is splendid for anybody to fight it out with such a dreadful fault, and come off conqueror! I think it's grand, even in a book!"

Her face was all aglow with her young enthusiasm, but Charlie only stood and looked at her; he did not attempt to speak. Something in the expression of his face caught her attention, and she moved quickly forward, and laid her hand on his arm, as she said,—

"What is the matter, Charlie? You haven't looked like yourself since you came in; and now—What is it, Charlie, boy? tell me. Don't stand looking at me like that. It makes me want to cry."

"No, don't cry," said the boy, as a premonitory quiver in her voice warned him of danger. "There's nothing to cry about, or at least, not for you. I came up here to tell you something, Hattie; a plan of mine that nobody else knows anything about; and you must keep it a secret."

She looked him straight in the face before she answered him. Apparently what she saw there satisfied her, for she said slowly,—

"Go on, Charlie."

"And you will not tell anyone; nor speak of it, even to Grandpa?"

"Not if it is as good a secret as your face seems to say it is. And if it is not, I will never tell anyone but him."

"I am going to run away from home."

"Why!—Charlie Mason!"

She fairly gasped the words. To tell her such a secret as that when she had just warned him that she could hide no wrong-doing from his grandfather! What could he mean? And yet he looked so bright, and strong, and brave, as if he felt that he was right, and nothing could move him; as her hero, Guy Morville, might have looked when, with resolute, undaunted purpose, he had determined to call in every power and force of his whole nature to combat the great, overmastering fault of his character.

He did not answer her exclamation of surprise, but stood as if waiting for her to speak again.

"I don't understand," she said, after a moment's silence. "Sit down here, and tell me what you mean. Why, Charlie, you'd break our dear old doctor's heart if you ran away from home."

"I shall break it if I stay here, that's certain, if I haven't done it already. I suppose you haven't heard about last night?"

"No, did you fall into trouble with Aunt Harriet again?"

"I fell into trouble with everybody. Aunt Harriet is the least part of it. She's been looking daggers at me every time I gave her a chance, since she heard it; but I don't care for her. Grandpa is all my trouble; and if you'd seen his face last night, you wouldn't wonder."

She knew Charlie well enough to be quite sure that he had been engaged in some very serious piece of mischief. Mr. Raymond and Dr. Mason were the closest and most intimate friends,—and these five past years had made the daughter of the one and the grandson of the other almost as dear to one another. Hattie's friendship had been no small blessing to Charlie, nor had Charlie been alone the gainer by their intimacy. The nervous and excitable girl had learned calmness and self-control from the quiet, common-sense view taken by the boy of matters and things around them; and the little lady, with her refined manners and delicate perceptions, self-possession and pretty ways, was the best of all companions for the rough, untutored lad who had suddenly been placed in the position of the son of a gentleman. She was very fond of him, and very sorry for him, appreciating far better than did Miss Harriet the difficulties which beset his path. Watching his face now, in its pain, her own grew grave, and tender too, and laying her hand on his shoulder, she said,—

"Tell it all to me, Charlie. It will do you good."

So he told it all, honestly and faithfully, hiding nothing. The story of the night expedition, and of his own share in it, of Harland's accusation, and his bold denial; of his grandfather's searching question, his false answer, and Dr. Mason's consequent distress. Not even the doctor himself could have recited the whole occurrence more truthfully. Then he looked up into Hattie's pale, shocked face, and waited for her comments upon his tale. It was very little that she said in words, only,—

"Oh, Charlie, dear! I thought you had grown up far above this long ago."

And then her voice broke, and she laid her head down on his shoulder, and cried so bitterly that it was very hard work not to help her a little.

But after a while she lifted up her wet face, and dashing off her tears, said, "Tell me the rest, Charlie,—about your running away, I mean. Why should you do that?"

"Because," said Charlie, determinately, "in spite of

Grandpa's feeling so awfully last night, he half trusts me yet. I heard him tell Aunt Harriet this morning that he could never despair of me! 'Never,' he said, 'never.' And I tell you, Hattie, he shan't either. I've often thought I was sorry for being bad before, but I never knew what sorry meant until this morning, not even last night. To think he'd hold on to me, even when his heart was most breaking over me! Never despair of me! I'll just wager he shan't! I'm going off to-night, Hattie, and I shall never come back until I've made a man of myself; a true, honourable gentleman; a man he'll be proud to call his grandson; a man whose word shall be as good as his bond. He shall never need to ask me again, as he did last night,—'What is your word?'"

He had left her side, and was walking excitedly up and down the arbour. As he ceased speaking, she rose and joined him. Linking her arm in his, she walked with him, gradually quieting him by the touch of her hand on his arm, and by her slower movements, until he had grown calm again. Then she said, in her grave, womanly little way,—

"I'm very glad and proud for you, Charlie; very glad and proud that you have made this grand resolution. But it seems to me that it is a great mistake for you to leave home in this way. It will be twice as hard for you to do right, fighting on all alone and forsaken, than if you were at home with your grandfather. He will be such a help to you."

"So he would if he were the only one there; but, Hattie, I can never do right with Aunt Harriet near me. She's at me from morning till night, poking at me to make a good boy of me, and I can't stand it. And she makes such a fuss over everything. Why, if I leave my hat on a chair in the hall, instead of hanging it on the hat-rack, she makes as big a row over it as Grandpa would over—my telling a lie," he added in a low voice, after a moment's hesitation.

"It isn't a bit of use," he went on, after a pause, "for me to try to do anything with her around. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of seeing me try to be a better sort of fellow, in the first place; I wouldn't if I could, but I couldn't any way. I know, Hattie, for I've tried it. Bad as I am, I have tried some to please Grandpa; and no sooner do I get ahead a little, than she's got to prate about it, and if I make a slip, take notice of it, and say I don't seem to be trying much, after all, or something like that. You don't know anything about it; for I do think she really hates me. You're her namesake, and she cares for you; but even so you know she half bothers your life out of you when you come down to our house. Now, don't she?"

"Why, of course she's fidgety and fussy," said Hattie, with a laugh. "But she's good to me for all. And she's good to you, too, Charlie. Nobody could be more careful for your comfort."

"Oh, no! I suppose not," said Charlie, rather irritably. "She keeps the buttons sewed on, and the stockings darned, and all that sort of thing neat and comfortable. But—It's no use talking about it, Hattie. I'm going to run away. I must do it, if I ever mean to learn to do right."

"And you will never learn to do right if you begin by doing wrong," replied the girl, very gravely. "Do you expect to comfort your poor grandfather's aching heart by hurting him again? you will be doing him a great injury, Charlie."

She was only a year older than himself, but her influence with him was very strong, and for the first time since he had come into the arbour, his determined look changed to one of doubt and irresolution.

"Shall I tell you what I would do?" she asked, as she saw the momentary hesitation in his face. "I would go right to Dr. Mason and ask him to send me to boarding-school, and to send me at once."

"To boarding-school!" exclaimed Charlie, in dismay, for this was his especial horror. "That is just what Aunt Harriet would like. It's what she's been putting Grandpa up to ever since I came here. I wouldn't go for anything."

"Then you are less in earnest than I thought," said Hattie quietly.

"Do you mean to say that you don't think I'm in earnest in wanting to make a true, honourable man of myself?" exclaimed Charlie, with a sudden flash of temper.

"I mean to say," replied Hattie, gently, "that if you are quite determined to make your grandfather happy, you will not begin by doing him a cruel wrong. If you go away from home without his knowledge, you must of course work for your own support, and you will have no time to educate yourself, and fit yourself."

"Other fellows have grown up from mere working boys into the greatest men that ever lived," Charlie interrupted triumphantly. "Why shouldn't I?"

"They grew up into such noble men because they made the most of all their advantages, while you want to throw yours all away, and begin to try to raise yourself by sinking yourself lower. Oh, Charlie, dear, I don't want to discourage you, I want to help you; but this plan of yours is all wrong, I know it is. Why won't you go right home and tell the doctor all about it?"

It was rather hard. It had seemed such a grand exploit to march off alone, and, taking the world by storm, earn such a name for himself as would fill his grandfather's heart with pride and joy when, years hence, he should come back to him, a man of noble fame and honour. And what was this new plan which Hattie offered in its stead? A tame, commonplace life in a boarding-school, toiling slowly day by day up the ladder of learning, striving there to do all the work within himself which he had intended to do grappling hand to hand with the world. It was a terrible fall. But, after all, was not Hattie right? He sat and thought and thought, the girl resting silent beside him the while, and at last,—being thoroughly in earnest, poor boy! in his great desire to be worthy of his grandfather's faith and trust in him,—turned his averted face toward his companion, and laid his hand in hers.

"I'll do it, Hattie," he said; "but I tell you, it's just the toughest job I ever did in all my life. And, oh!" with a great sigh, as if the loss came home to his very heart, "I'll have to give up Caspar too."

"Will you let me keep him for you?" said Hattie, as if the matter were entirely settled.

"Oh! will you keep him? Aunt Harriet does bother him so, and I shan't be there to stand up for him, you see."

And then, feeling that he did not care to trust himself to talk much more, Charlie said "Good-bye" more gently than was his wont, and walked slowly down the hill towards home.

(To be Continued.)