

THE CHILDREN'S WAITING.

THE day had been wild and stormy
And the night fell chill and gray,
And the air was keen and frosty
As I went my homeward way.
Down by a rock in the roadside,
Hiding away from the storm,
I found two little children
Muffled in garments warm.

"Why are you here?" I asked them
As they smiled up at me,
Through the dusk and the falling snow flakes
Their shunning eyes I could see,
And I wanted to hug and kiss them,
The roguish little lives,
As sweet—why there's nothing sweeter
Than their own little laughing selves!

"We're waiting for papa," they answered,
"It's time for him to come.
We always come here to meet him
And kiss him welcome home.
You know that papa'd be sorry
If he didn't find us here,
For you can't think how he loves us!
He don't know, does he, dear?"

Then the motherly little darling,
Who may have been eight years old,
Pulled her brother's cap down closer
To keep out the wind and cold.
"No, he doesn't know," he answered,
And laughed at the wind in glee;
"Oud ought to see how much papa
Sinks o' Dolly an' me."

A step in the road behind me
I heard in the twilight gray;
And "Papa is coming, brother,"
I heard the little girl say.
A shout of glee and greeting,
A jubilant "Papa's tum,"
And both of them ran to meet him
And kiss him welcome home.

Bless the dear heart of the children
Waiting for papa to come.
The love of the dear little darlings
Is a beacon to light him home.
I never have crossed the threshold
Where the household fire burns bright,
But I know 'tis a happy kingdom
Where love holds court at night.
—Eben. E. Rexford.

A SUCCESSFUL FAILURE.

YOU would not have said that John Hammond looked in the least like a hero, a square shouldered, rough-handed fellow of fifteen, wearing a very happy-go-lucky checked shirt and blue overalls. Those blue overalls had seen service, as their irregular patches bore witness; driving the cows through the morning dew, hoeing, milking and tramping the fields, they and others exactly like them had been of John's wearing apparel for as many years as he cared to remember. But though John was a country fellow, with rather a steady and monotonous round of work before him and no very brilliant prospects in the future, as far as eye could see, he had, like all boys worth anything, ambition of his own.

His father was a hard-working man who had as a boy lived on the large, rather barren farm which he had at last been able to purchase with his jealously treasured "savings," and held naturally the belief that his son would work and improve the same land after he had grown old, died and left it.

John had other thoughts; he felt in himself an ability for pursuits different from the one his father chose. That was well enough. Boy as he was, he saw it to be a noble and dignified thing to till the ground and make it fair with orchard and garden, but all men were not intended by nature for the same work. He had a genuine love for mechanical pursuit and there was a cunning at his fingers' ends which seemed to promise a real bent toward

making and fashioning. It was better to be a carpenter even than a farmer, but best of all would be engineering; the building of stupendous bridges and laying out of long lines of railroads.

His mother knew all these longings. Most mothers do find out their boys' inclination, I fancy, in the right kind of family. "I wish you could have all the learning you want, Johnnie," she said one morning, fondly patting the rough head that lay on her ironing table. Then, getting a fresh iron from the stove and skilfully "trying it" with her finger, she went on: "But I don't think it would do any good to talk it over with father. He wouldn't hear to it, because he thinks farming's good enough for anybody. And besides that, you know, there isn't any money."

"Yes, I rather guess I do," said John, dolefully. Then catching the troubled look of his mother's face, he said bravely: "But don't be bothered, I can stand it anyhow." There was a good deal of real tenderness between his mother and himself. That night as John was bringing in the wood to fill the great box by the kitchen stove an idea struck him; such a bright idea that he stopped short and nearly fell an armful of kindlings. "I'll do it!" he said aloud. "No, nothing, mother, I was only talking to myself," as Mrs. Hammond came out in time to hear the exclamation.

Just after dark John might have been seen going up the neatly kept walk that led to the minister's trim little house. His only concession to the importance of making a call all by himself consisted in brushing his hair very smoothly and polishing his square, determined face with soap and water until it shone again. It would not have done to put his best clothes on for, aside from the fact that they made him ill at ease, he had been careful that no one at home should suspect his absence on any unusual errand. Yes, the minister was at home and would be glad to see John alone. The boy's heart beat loudly as he was ushered into the study; ministers were in his mind inseparably connected with churches, sermons and funerals, and nothing but the importance of his present errand could have induced him to encounter one alone. Mr. Burns was a hearty, jovial-looking man.

"Glad to see you, John," he said warmly, rising from his study table and greeting him. John thought proudly, just as if he were a grown man. "Now this is nice to have you come by yourself for a call."

"I wanted to ask you a question," said John, choking a little in his awkwardness, choosing the extreme edge of his chair. "I want to go to school and have a real business, different from farming, and I thought you'd know better about such things than anybody here. We haven't got any money and I want to know what to do." It seemed a very long speech to the boy when he had finished and his heart beat alarmingly at his own daring.

"Ah!" said the minister, rubbing his chin and eyeing the boy sharply. "So you want a profession. Have you talked with father?"

"No, sir, but mother knows about it. I thought it wasn't any use to speak to father until I could see a way to do it. He'd say no, unless he could see some real sense in it."

"Yes, I understand, and it is wise of you to think of it. Do you want to go to college, or haven't you got as far as settling that?"

So John, encouraged by the kind tone and apparent interest of his listener, went on to talk of his plans more freely than he had ever told them to any one. The minister listened, put in a word now and then, and at the end gave a nod of approval.

"I think something must be done for you, my boy," he said, heartily. "But I can't say a word until I've thought it all over, and when I have, I'll either send for you or go up and see your father. Will that do?"

It would do beautifully, John thought, and he went away delighted beyond reason. And in the days which followed he did very little but whistle and toss his cap up into the air at uncertain intervals, rousing in his mother homely fears that "John wasn't well because his appetite was so poor."

But after waiting, the day came when the minister called and asked to see his father. John on his way from a neighbour's saw the two in close conclave near the kitchen window, and, in a ridiculous desperation, ran into the barn to hide on the highest hay-mow of all. No one came to find him, a fact not to be wondered at considering that the hay-mow is not a common resort for families in general, however well the boys may know its fragrant, dusty corners. Finally he crept out and went into the house, rather shamefaced, but very conspicuously unconscious of out-of-the-way occurrence. His mother, rather flushed and excited, was laying the supper table; his father, by the window, was reading the *Belbrook Gazette* upside down.

"So you want to go to school," said the father rather gruffly. "Why didn't you come to me about it first?" John's heart sank into his boots at the tone.

"I thought Mr. Burns might know best whether it was foolish or not, and—"

"Oh, tell the boy, father," broke out his mother. "It's a shame to keep him waiting. And don't you see, he's ready to cry?"

It all came out then, and I am not sure good as the news was, that John did not cry after all. He was to study with the minister that winter, mathematics and general English branches, and the next fall enter the institute of technology. His father would mortgage the river pasture or perhaps sell it for the money necessary for the first year's expenses; they could not plan beyond that. Perhaps, then the boy's ability would have proved itself worth the borrowing of money if he cared to pledge himself for its payment when he had gotten to the point of earning it himself. How John worked that winter at books and "chores" no other boy without an object in life would ever believe. And when summer came, a little tired, but still enthusiastic, he was all hope for the coming fall term at school. Mr. Burns praised his scholarship and ability without measure, and the father, at first agreeing to the plan under protest and because the minister declared it to be the best thing, grew prouder than ever of his boy and willing that he should make his way in the world, let the farm pass into what hands it would.

There came a morning—and I am

sorry to tell this part of the story—when the little household was all in confusion and the village doctor was looked for with as much anxiety as if he carried the keys of life in his black case. Mr. Hammond had had a stroke of paralysis and the doctor could only say, pityingly, that there was no immediate danger of his death, but that he must be a helpless man always. The farmer moaned and tried to speak. The good doctor's voice had not been low enough and from outside the door the verdict had reached the sick man's ears. John was close by his father's side, half-terrified by his drawn face. The moan came again and he put his own face down to translate the half-articulate sound. "The farm? the work?" he questioned. The eyes brightened with assent.

"Oh, father, don't bother about that. I shall stay at home. I'll take care of the farm just as you would." And he kept his promise.

Sick people through weakness and pity of themselves cannot always be generous, and it is a question whether farmer Hammond ever quite understood the sacrifice his son made for him. His mind became a little clouded by bodily illness, and as no one ever reminded him that John had hoped for a different life, he forgot the fact altogether.

Do you know how a hard blow some times hardens character and changes the boy into the man in the space of days? It was so with John. He put his own plans resolutely aside and took on his shoulders the burden of his father's work, hiring when it was necessary, but bending all his energies toward making the farm pay. And it did, as farms go; there was never much ready money in the family purse, but there were fields of grain, a cellar stocked with vegetable beauties and thriving live-stock as witnesses of success. Beyond that his father had been made as happy as a man so disabled ever could be.

When, after years, the father died, it was too late for the accomplishment of John's boyish purpose. If you should ask him to-day how he regards his life, it is probable he would tell you that it seems a failure, but his townsmen tell a different story. Cheery, helpful and brave, he never fails a friend and has made the very best of the place duty seemed to mark out for him. I could show you a score of intelligent articles from his pen on various agricultural subjects. I could recount dozens of his brave deeds, but the story of his life dwindles down to the one moral—that, although circumstances may deny a man what he longs for most, he can succeed in becoming good and great at heart in spite of them. And after all character is the only thing worth striving for.

TELL a boy that he is a dunce, and he will soon be one. Tell a girl that she is fretful and disagreeable; she will soon be such. Helping, and not hindering, is what humanity needs. A half-drunken man went into a temperance meeting in Chicago which was led by women. He signed the pledge. The next morning, as he was about to drink, he found the pledge-card in his pocket. "Did I sign that last night?" he said, reading his name. "Well, if Mrs. R. thinks I can keep it, I can," and kept it he has for nearly ten years.