

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria [[by the author of "The Linwoods," "Poor Rich Man," "Love Token," "Live & Let Live," &c.]. "The Deformed Boy" in *Stories for Young Persons*. New York: Harper & Brothers, pp 9-38.

THE DEFORMED BOY

“THE great Basil mentions a certain art of drawing many doves by anointing the wings of a few with a fragrant ointment, and so sending them abroad, that by the fragrancy of the ointment they may allure others unto the house whereof they are domestics.”

We would borrow a hint from the artifice of the ingenious bird-catcher, and record, for the benefit of some of our young friends, a few acts of particular goodness that have chanced to fall under our own observation, in the hope that their love of virtue may be augmented by contemplating its lovely aspects and certain results.

The example of gratitude which we are about to record, though it is derived from one of the very limited means and in humble life, will, it is hoped, serve to illustrate the duty so often and so ably enforced by our benevolent philosopher Franklin, the duty of looking upon our fellow-beings as all children of one parent—members of one family; so that, if we receive a favour from one individual which we cannot return, we should bestow it on some other member of the family, and thus, to use the doctor’s own expression, keep it “going round.”

[10]

Much occurs to us to say on the uses and felicity of a grateful temper, but we are so well acquainted with the habits of our young friends, that we know they will skip the general remarks to get at the story, as nimbly as a little squirrel will leap over a heap of rubbish to grasp a single nut. To the story then.

In one of the small cities of Hudson there lived a Mrs. Aikin; a lady eminently blessed with affluence and happiness, and one who gratefully acknowledged the truth “freely ye have received,” and faithfully obeyed the admonition “freely give.”

On a bright but bitter cold morning in January, Mrs. Aikin’s family were assembled in the parlour to breakfast; a fine fire of hickory blazed on the hearth, and seemed to crackle defiance to the terrors of the cold, if indeed there was a crevice through which the cold could enter this snug and nicely calked parlour.

The family had just risen from their morning devotions; the servant was bearing in a tea-tray loaded with the hissing coffee-pot, tempting sausages, and a plate of buckwheat pancakes, when a violent ring at the door, thrice repeated, called everyone’s attention.

“Run, William, and open the door quickly,” said Mrs. Aikin; “I would not keep a dog on the outside of my door this morning.”

William obeyed and immediately returned, followed by a little fellow who ran, or, rather, waddled in after him. The child had short legs, a body disproportionately large, and a hump on his back. His head, though rather overgrown, was well formed, his hair light and curling, his skin very fair

[11]

his eyes a deep clear blue, and his whole expression that of infantine sweetness and innocence. Such a head and face surmounting a deformed body looked somewhat like a beautiful fruit on a gnarled stalk. The boy seemed almost stiffened with the cold; but, regardless of himself, and apparently impelled by instinct, he ran up to Mrs. Aikin, and, grasping her gown, he said, with a voice so tremulous as to be almost inaudible, “Oh, ma’am, do come and see what ails mother!”

“Why, who is your mother, child? And who are you?” asked Mrs. Aikin.

“Oh, do come and see ma’am—now—quick. I am afraid mother will burn the house up, for she is lighting the fire with all our clothes; she does not act like mother; do—do come and see what ails her.”

Little Lucy Aikin, a rosy-cheeked, kind-hearted little girl, was at first impatient at the delay of her breakfast; but she soon forgot herself, and, apparently with the expectation of comforting the child, took a sausage, and, wrapping it nicely in a buckwheat cake, she offered it to him.

“No, no,” said he, bursting into cries that expressed impatience and grief, “no, I am not hungry. I was hungry last night, and we were all hungry. Mother said so; and she began to cry, but she isn’t crying now!”

“There is something very urgent in this case,” said Mrs. Aikin, turning to her husband. “Let William serve you and the children, and I will go with the child.”

Mr. Aikin assented, for he perceived the boy’s distress was deep and unaffected—how should it be

[12]

otherwise! he was not, apparently, more than five or six years old.

Mrs. Aikin threw on her cloak, and, taking the child’s hand, he led her through a lane, which, running by the corner of her house, formed the communication between the street she lived upon and a street in the rear of that, where there were several one-story houses, or rather hovels, which had been erected as temporary habitations for the poorest class of people. Into one of the most wretched of these Mrs. Aikin followed her little conductor, and there she beheld a spectacle of misery that sufficiently explained the poor child’s distress. His mother sat on the hearth, with a pale, half-famished-looking infant in her arms, crying piteously, and seeking

nourishment at her breast, where, alas! there was none. She was deliberately tearing up cotton frock, and throwing it, piece by piece, on the few embers that lay in the fireplace.

She rose on seeing Mrs. Aikin, as if from habitual good manners; and after looking round for a chair, she smiled and said, "Oh! I remember, they took my chairs; but pray be seated, ma'am. I have been trying," she continued, "to kindle a fire to warm my baby and me; but my stuff is so light it goes out directly, and we don't seem to get warm, ma'am."

Mrs. Aikin perceived at a single glance at the poor woman's burning cheeks and parched lips, that she was in the delirium of a fever. She approached her, and offered to take the child.

"Oh no," she said, "not my baby; you know, when they took all the rest, they promised not to take my baby."

[13]

"But let me try to quiet her for you."

"No, I thank you ma'am; she is only fretting for her breakfast." She put the infant again to her breast; the child seized it with the eagerness of starvation, and then redoubled its cries.

"I make but a poor nurse," said the mother, smiling faintly; "I think it does not agree with me to live without food. Do you think that can be reason my baby does not thrive, ma'am?" and she raised her eyes to Mrs. Aikin, as if appealing for her opinion. The tears of compassion were streaming down Mrs. Aikin's cheeks, and the poor woman, apparently from pure sympathy, burst into loud sobs. The little boy threw himself on a bed in a corner of the room, and, burying his head in the bedclothes, tried thus to suppress his cries.

Mrs. Aikin, aware that the wants of these sufferers would not justify a moment's delay of the succor they needed, called the boy to her, and despatched him to her husband with a note, which she hastily wrote with a pencil on the back of a letter. While he was gone she had leisure

to observe the extreme wretchedness of the apartment, in which there was not an article of furniture save a straw bed and its scanty covering. There were shreds of the garments strewed about the floor, the “light stuff” the poor crazed woman had been burning to warm her infant.

“Have you been long sick, my friend?” she asked, with the faint hope of obtaining a rational answer.

“Sick! Sick!” replied the mother; “yes, a good while—I have been sick a trifle—the intermittent and the typhus—but I believe I am getting the better of it all, for yesterday I felt quite hungry.”

[14]

“And did you take anything?” asked Mrs. Aikin.

“Oh yes,” she answered, drawing near to Mrs. Aikin, and whispering with an air of great self-complacency, “I did indeed take something—all I had in the house—an excellent thing to blunt the edge of one’s appetite—laudanum—you know ma’am, it is doctor’s stuff and the doctors know how to cure an appetite.”

“God help you, poor woman!” exclaimed Mrs. Aikin.

“God help me!” reiterated the poor creature, with a piercing cry; “there is no help for me;” and she sunk on the side of the bed and wept freely. Mrs. Aikin was sensible that in this returning consciousness of her miseries there was a dawning of reason; she knew that her tears were a natural expression of feeling, and would afford her the quickest relief; and she permitted them to flow on without interrupting her.

In the mean time Mr. Aikin arrived, accompanied by a woman-servant laden with necessaries and refreshments, and a boy with a barrow of wood; a fire was kindled; nourishment was provided for the baby, and food offered to the deformed boy, who, now that he saw a relief

at hand for his mother, ate ravenously. Cordials were administered to the mother; a physician was summoned, and a nurse provided for her; and, in short, everything was done that could be done, where there was benevolence to devise and ability to execute.

The lapse of a few days found Mrs. Shepard (for that was the poor woman's name) quite recovered from the delirium into which she had been

[15]

driven by sickness and extreme misery. She related to her benefactress the few particulars of her melancholy history. It was not an uncommon one, and we shall not detail it at length, for we would not cloud the cheerful faces of our young readers with unnecessary sadness.

Mrs. Shepard was the daughter of a respectable farmer; the youngest of a numerous family. She was married when very young to one of those miserable beings who are always meeting with disappointments and bad luck, those sure plagues of the idle and shiftless. Her husband had health, a good trade, and abundance of friends; but, as the proverb says, "Who can help those who won't help themselves?" Shepard changed one branch of business for another; he moved from place to place, but he never left behind him the faults that caused the failure of all his enterprises.

He went in the beaten track from idleness to intemperance and to bad company; and finally, lost to all sense of duty, he abandoned his wife and little ones in a strange place, after a sheriff had stripped his wretched dwelling of the little wreck of furniture he possessed.

But Mrs. Shepard was not left to perish. In her greatest extremity, when there seemed no help, and sickness and the sight of her starving children had driven her to distraction, Heaven directed to her relief a kind and efficient friend. Mrs. Aikin's discretion and good sense equaled her benevolence. She thought that as God is his kind providence had seen fit to exempt her from

the sore evils of life, she was bound to testify her gratitude by doing all in her power to mitigate the sufferings of others.

[16]

She remembered that our Saviour was familiar with our sorrows and acquainted with our griefs; and as it was not with her passing desire, but the rule of her life, to imitate him, she did not content herself with sending a servant with an inquiry or a gift to the poor, or with subscribing to charitable societies, but she visited the sick and the afflicted, and listened patiently to their very long, and often, to her as well as to others, very tiresome stories. She would enter with benevolent sympathy into the history of their cares and wants, and would even forget she had nerves while she gave her ear to the details of a loathsome sickness; in short, she never forgot the common people who have minds and hearts, and that often a more essential charity is done by fainting an influence over them than can be effected by pecuniary relief. We entreat our young friends to believe that, they will have treasures of kindness to impart far more valuable than Aladdin's lamp. Fortunatus' cap, or any gift of fay or fairy.

But we are digressing from our story—not uselessly, however, if we are strengthened the love of goodness in the breast of a single reader. Mrs. Aikin visited her humble friend every day till she was restored to comfortable health. It was then necessary that some means should be adopted for her permanent relief. She could be received with her children into the almshouse, but she preferred making any struggle to being dependant on public charity; “for that,” she said to Mrs. Aikin, “was what nobody took pleasure in giving, and no one was thankful for receiving.”

[17]

After many consultations with her benefactress it was determined that she should hire a small cheap apartment, and take in sewing. Mrs. Aikin promised her constant aid, and performed

more than she promised; and Mr. Aikin, who was one the aldermen of the city, obtained for her a small weekly stipend from the corporation, who find this a much better mode of aiding the industrious poor than removing them from the excitements and pleasures of their own homes to public institutions.

Mrs. Shepard's health was infirm, and her means were scanty, but she was so diligent and economical that she maintained her children with decency.

With the present she was not only contented, but grateful; the past she had borne with fortitude and patience. "Many a time," she said to Mrs. Aikin, "when I have been reduced almost to despair, those words, 'Put thy trust in the Lord, he will never leave nor forsake thee,' have come to my remembrance, and I have taken courage and gone on again. When Richard, my poor little crooked boy, was born, I had two children older than he: they were both sick with the whooping-cough; the baby, that is, Dick, took it; I was myself in a weakly way; we had none of us the necessary medicines nor food; both my boys died; my poor baby was neglected; he mastered the whooping-cough, and fell into the rickets, which ended in making him the little misshapen thing you see. But it seems as if God had tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, for a better, or, in the main a happier child there never was than Dicky."

The good mother was not blinded, as fond moth-

[18]

ers sometimes are, by partiality to unfortunate children; for Richard, or Dicky as he was familiarly, or rather Ducky as he was most commonly called, in an allusion to his short legs, Ducky was a perfect philosopher. Not a single crook of his little body had twisted his temper, or given one wrong turn to his disposition.

How much of his philosophy he owed to the faithful care of his mother, we leave to be

estimated by those of our young readers who are so blessed as to possess parents who are continually watching over their morals and happiness. Mrs. Shepard was a poor woman, but she had received a good common education, the birthright alike of rich and poor in New-England, where she was brought up. She seldom found time to read a book herself; but devoted mothers can do that for their children which they cannot do for themselves; and Mrs. Shepard found, or made time to teach Richard to read before he could walk.

She would tie her baby into a chair beside her while she was washing, or ironing, or mending, and, at the same time, teach Dicky to repeat hymns and stories in verse which she had learned in her childhood. It was really a pleasing, and, at the same time, an affecting sight to see the little fellow, deprived as he was of the of the active pleasures usual at his age, sitting curled up on his chair, with his head unnaturally drawn down on his bosom, fix his bright, eager eye on his mother, repeat the words after her without missing a syllable, and chuckle with delight when he had mastered a couplet. Oh! who, when they see calamities thus mitigated, can help recalling that sentiment of

[19]

Scripture, “He remembereth our infirmities and pititeth us, even as a father pitieth his children.”

But how did Dicky escape the fretfulness of temper which so often attend deformity? Surely not by learning hymns. No; though this occupation lightened many an hour, we cannot attribute such power to it. He had naturally a sweet and cheerful temper, but this would probably have given place to the irritability that so often attends and aggravates disease and privation but for the unceasing watchfulness and patience of his mother. If he ever got into a pet (as what child does not sometimes?), her rebuke was mildly spoken; and if the pet amounted to a passion, it was

soon subdued by her firm, tranquil manner. The sound of her low gentle, and tender voice operated like oil thrown on the stormy waves, which is said to smooth their surface wherever it touches them.

Mrs. Aikin suggested to Richard's mother that she might give him a useful occupation by teaching him to knit. She immediately improved the hint; Dick was delighted with his new employment, and soon became such a master of the knitting-needle that he might have rivalled almost any old woman in the country. He was sitting one day on his mother's door-step, protected from the sun by the shadow of a fine elm-tree, finishing a pair of suspenders which Mrs. Aiken had bespoke for her son, when a company of boys came marching in military procession up the street.

The young soldiers were equipped with wooden muskets; their hats were garnished with cocks' tails for plumes; half a dozen pocket-handkerchiefs tied together, decked with white paper stars and

[20]

attached to a stick, formed their flag, their "star-spangled banner," and was as proudly carried by its bearer as more magnificent colours have been; a tin-kettle served for "a spirit-stirring drum," and a "shrill fife" was blown by a sturdy little fellow, whose lungs seemed as inexhaustible as the windbags of old Æolus.

When they arrived opposite to Mrs. Shepard's door, a proposal was made to halt under the elm-tree till their captain, Frank Hardy, should join them. "And, in the mean time, gentlemen," called out mischievous little urchin in the rear, "let us give a salute to Miss Ducky Shepard, knitter to the light-infantry."

"Hurrah for Miss Ducky!" shouted the boys, and the soldiers lowered their muskets, the

standard-bearer waved his colours, and the little drummer beat a flourish. Dicky had at first entered into the sport, but now his countenance fell, he resumed his knitting which he had laid down, but his eyes were blurred with tears, his hands trembled, and his stitches dropped.

“Ah!” cried out the lieutenant, Miss Ducky don’t like your salute; never mind, Dick, Miss Ducky you shall be no longer. Gentlemen, fellow-soldiers, all who are for electing Miss Ducky captain, *pro tem.* will please hold up their right hands.” Fifty right hands were instantly elevated,” and another shout of “Hurrah for Captain Dick!” made the welkin ring.

As soon as the sounds had ceased, “Advance, Corporal Seation,” said the lieutenant, “and help me escort the captain to the head of his company.” The two boys took the unresisting child in their

[21]

arms and placed him at the head of their corps. “Turn out your toes captain,” said the lieutenant, touching Dicky’s short bow legs with his musket; “there, gentlemen, is a fine leg for a march!”

“Hold up your head, captain,” said the corporal; “there’s a captain to scare the enemy!” But poor little Dick could not hold up his head, and the tears that he had manfully repressed now gushed from his eyes and rolled down to his bosom.

At this critical moment there was a sudden movement in the ranks. “What is all this? said the real captain, Frank Hardy, springing on his lieutenant and corporal, and laying them on their marrow-bones. “Coward’s play, boys -- coward’s play; here, Dick, my little man, take my hand; brush away your tears, and I’ll see you righted.” Dick grasped the friendly hand that was extended to him, and Frank, after replacing him on the doorstep, instituted an inquiry into this cruel sport.

The eyes of the company were now turned to their popular commander, and all were

preparing to trim their vessels whichever way he should cause the tide to set. He soon satisfied himself that the offence demanded an exemplary punishment; and, ordering his company to form into a hollow square, he made them a speech, full of eloquence and feeling, on the merits of Dicky and their own demerit, or, rather, the demerit of their ringleaders, for he skillfully contrived to make them the scapegoats, and to bind the offences of all the culprits on their backs. After the speech he proposed that the lieutenant and corporal should be degraded from their high command to the private ranks, and should be sentenced to pay a fine to Dicky of six cents each.

[22]

The sentence was passed by acclamation; the captain saw the decision enforced. The money which had been carefully husbanded for a treat after the day's drill, was sullenly delivered into the commander's hand, and reluctantly received from him by Dicky; reluctantly, for out little simple friend did not quite comprehend how "might made right;" and his feelings had been too deeply wounded to admit of consolation in this form. He was, however, in a degree comforted by the interposition of Captain Frank in his behalf; he felt that it conferred consequence on him, for Frank Hardy was a universal favourite among the boys; stout and active, good-humoured and kind-hearted, he was the champion of all the oppressed, and the corrector of all the wrongs in his neighborhood.

When the company marched away, poor Richard's sorrows broke out afresh, and, running to his mother's room, he threw the knitting on the floor, and said, in a voice half suppressed with sobs, "I never will touch that work again."

"Why, what is the matter with you Dicky?" asked his mother; "I never saw you in such a flurry."

Richard recounted, as well as he was able, the story of his wrong, and Mrs. Shepard

listened with all a mother's patience; and, when he concluded, she tried in vain to remove the impression from his mind that it was his "girl's-work" that had been the cause of his mortification. "Hurrah for Miss Ducky, knitter to the light-infantry," still sounded his ears, and drowned every argument she could urge. Shame, that most unpleasant feeling, was ever after most indissolubly associated

[23]

with his work. The most obedient of all good boys, he would resume his knitting in compliance with his mother's commands, but he never took it up voluntarily--never again relished it. Thus was this poor little fellow deprived of an innocent and useful pastime by a company of unfeeling boys. Perhaps we ought rather to say inconsiderate, for young people are more apt to be thoughtless than cruel; and we believe that those who laughed loudest and longest at Dicky's drool little figure, would have wept with the ingenuous sorrow of childhood if they could have known the pang their laugh inflicted.

Our young readers may have heard of the philosopher's stone; there is an art that far exceeds the power ascribed to that gem of the alchemist: the art by which a good person extracts instruction from every event, however adverse, is certainly superior to that which transmutes base metal into gold.

The incident we have related made Mrs. Shepard fully aware of Richard's susceptibility to the mortifications to which his deformity rendered him liable, and henceforward she constantly endeavoured to arm him with fortitude. It is unnecessary to recount all she said and did to accomplish this purpose. Perhaps it would not make much figure in print, for Mrs. Shepard was so quiet and simple in her way, that one would as soon expect (provided there was neither experience nor knowledge on the subject) a tree to grow from an acorn an any great effect to

proceed from her efforts. She had good materials to work on, docile disposition and sweet temper; and so completely successful

[24]

was she, that Richard, as he grew older, bore all sorts of jibes and jokes without wincing. His sweet, enduring temper disarmed mischief of its sting, and converted ridicule into respect. At the Lancaster school, where he was monitor of a class composed of boys of every disposition, some much older, and all a head taller than himself, he was treated with as much deference as if he had been six feet high, and had had the limbs of Apollo.

Since the memorable day of the training, he had maintained a constant friendly intercourse with his champion, Frank Hardy. Dick would do anything on earth to serve Frank, and Frank was sword and shield to Dick. But, notwithstanding this strict alliance between them, they were in some respects widely different. Unfortunately, those good principles had not been instilled into Frank that prompted Richard to do right, as well from duty as from impulse. Frank's mother was a widow, and he was her only child; and she indulged him excessively, or restrained him unreasonably, according to the humour she happened to be in, without any regard to the right of the case or his ultimate good.

Frank was what everybody calls a warm, good-hearted fellow with a bright, sunny face, and a merry disposition, that won his way to all hearts. He loved pleasure extravagantly, as was natural, for he was on all occasions contriver of the sport and master of the revels. On one fourth of July, he had planned a sailing excursion to a village in the vicinity. Each member of the party was to contribute half a dollar to the expenses, and poor Frank was in utter consternation when, on apply-

[25]

ing to his mother, in the confident expectation of obtaining the money, she denied it to him. He entreated and expostulated, but all in vain; she was out of humour, and if she had been a Midas she would not have given him the half dollar. Frank left her disappointed and mortified; he knew that his companions were awaiting him, and, ashamed to meet them and explain the cause of his inability to meet them and explain the cause of his inability to join them, he went in quest of Dick to bear his errand to them. He found him at a huckster's shop, where he was in the habit of going in his leisure time, and making himself useful by performing small services.

Richard was alone in the shop, busily arranging some fruits which were to be placed in the window as specimens. "Oh!" he exclaimed, on seeing Frank, "what a royal day you have got for your sail.

"A royal day, indeed," replied Frank, looking up wistfully to the bright, cloudless sky.

"You had better make haste, Frank, for the boys will be waiting for you. Jim Allen and Harry Upham went along half an hour ago. Jim bought twelve oranges of Mr. George, and Mr. George lent Harry his flute; two merrier fellows I never saw; and they told me, if I saw you, to hurry you on."

"I am not going at all, Dick."

"Not going at all!" exclaimed Richard, struck by the words and by the sorrowful tone in which they were uttered. "Are you sick, Frank?" he asked, looking with great concern in his friend's face.

"No, not sick," replied Frank, and half ashamed

[26]

that he had betrayed so much feeling on the subject, he averted his eye, and it fell on a newly-coined, glittering half dollar which was lying on the counter. "Oh if that half dollar were mine,"

was his first, and, certainly, most natural thought. He turned again to the door--all the military of the town were out in honour of the day--drums were beating merrily, colours flying, and everybody, old and young, seemed to be animated with the spirit of the day. Frank looked down the street; he saw two or three of his young associates running towards the river. He again turned his eye to the tempting half dollar. Richard's back was towards him--temptation pressed--opportunity favoured; one moment more of reflection, and he would have resisted, but he did not allow himself that moment; he grasped the half dollar, and, when Richard again turned, he was gone.

Richard wondered a little at the singular manner of his friend; but he was too intent on the task of his friend; but he was too intent on the task that had been assigned him to think much of it, till, his work being finished, he looked for the money, which had been left on the counter, in payment for a brush he had sold in the absence of George Sutton, the clerk, who had gone on an errand to the next street.

The poor child was trembling with the discovery of the loss when the clerk came in. "So, Dicky," he said, "you have made a sale in my absence. I met Mrs. Lincoln's servant with the brush. Where is the money, Dick?" he continued, unlocking the money-drawer, and standing ready to put in the half dollar.

"I have not got the money, Mr. George," Richard replied, with a trembling voice.

[27]

"Not got it!" exclaimed Sutton; and a suspicion darted across his mind which he could not bear to harbour for a moment. "Not got it!" he repeated. "What does this mean, Dick; where is it?"

"I cannot tell," said Richard, faltering so much that the words were scarcely articulate.

George Sutton sprang over the counter; took the poor child, who now shook like an aspen leaf, by the arm, and, looking steadily in his face, which blushed crimsons, he exclaimed, "What can have tempted you to steal that money?"

Richard started back --his face became pale as death--his little crooked form was drawn up to an expression of dignity, for it expressed truth and innocence. "Steal! Mr. George," he said, and he now spoke with a firm voice; "you know I would not steal one penny for the whole world."

"I don't think you would, Dick- I can't think you would," replied George, touched by the child's appeal, and more than half convinced by his fair, direct look. "I have always found you honest, boy, and true as the sun. But where is the money? Has any one been in the shop since the man bought the brush?"

Richard's countenance again fell- again his voice faltered. "Oh do not ask me; I cannot tell you, Mr. George," he said.

"But you must tell me, Dick, or you must never come into the shop again."

"Then I never will come into it again," replied Richard, "for I never will tell;" and, bursting into tears, he ran out of the shop, leaving the clerk utterly at a loss what construction to put on his conduct.

[28]

George Sutton, though not the proprietor of the shop, was the sole manager of its concerns. His master was engaged in another branch of business; and, knowing his clerk to be perfectly trustworthy, he confided the affairs of the shop entirely to him. Thus trusted, young Sutton felt the obligation to be very exact in the performance of his duties. His first determination was to expose the affair to his principal; but he had one of the kindest hearts in the

world; he really loved poor little Dicky; and, believing him innocent, he could not bear to expose him to the bad opinion of a stranger; he therefore paid the half dollar out of his own pocket, and said not a word to anybody on the subject.

Richard returned home with his heart full. He passed without notice all the gay parade of "Independence" -- and there was enough of it to satisfy patriots and charm boys -- and entered his mother's humble dwelling; and there he would probably have yielded to the inquiries she would naturally have made into the cause of the disturbance--for what boy of nine years could withstand the sympathy of a tender mother--but Mrs. Shepard was in no state to observe his agitation. She had been seized that morning with pains and agues, which were, as she well knew, the prelude to violent sickness.

Richard was instantly despatched for a physician, who came, but could not avert a terrible fever, which raged for four weeks, and then left this afflicted woman in a hopeless consumption.

Mrs. Aikin had removed the previous spring to the country; but, before her departure, she had ta-

[29]

ken care to recommend Mrs. Shepard to some of her friends, who were humane and active in their charities, and Mrs. Shepard's wants were soon known and relieved, as far as benevolence could relieve them. Mrs. Aikin was informed of her humble friend's situation, and she wrote her a kind letter, enclosing some money, and telling her to spare herself all anxiety about her little girl, for she would take her into her own family, and provide for her so long as she should want a home. Thus relieved from solicitude concerning her youngest child, all Mrs. Shepard's anxiety centred in Richard. He was too young to be apprenticed to a trade and there was no person whom Mrs. Shepard had the right or the courage to ask to provide for him in the mean time.

Our young readers are, we trust, quite inexperienced in the sorrows of life: when they learn them, as learn them they must, may they have that spirit in which they can be borne--even the sorest of them--poverty, sickness, and death.

Better than many a long sermon on resignation and trust in the goodness of God--far better would it be if we could present to the mind's eye the humble apartment of this Christian woman, when, conscious of the fast approach of death, and that this was perhaps her last opportunity of prayer with her children, she had, in the energy of her feeling, raised her weak and wasted form from the pillows which supported her. Richard and little Mary knelt by her bedside; she held their hands in hers; her raised eye gleamed brightly, for

“The immortal ray
is seen more clearly through the shrine's decay;”

[30]

and, making a last effort, she uttered in a low but perfectly distinct voice, “My father in heaven, to thee I commit these little ones.” She paused, and closed her eyes--once more she opened them, smiled on her children with an expression of ineffable peace, and murmured in a low whisper, “God will provide;” her face was then slightly convulsed, she let go of their hands, and sunk back on the pillow.

The physician had stood unobserved in the door way; he now moved towards the bed, and exclaimed involuntarily, “She is gone!” Poor little Richard had never seen death before, but he knew what it all meant; he locked his arms around his mother's neck, and sobbed out, “Mother--mother--mother!” till he could speak no longer; and his little sister, crying because her brother cried, repeated again and again, “Mother will speak to you when she wakes up, Dicky--do stop crying.”

But we must pass over this scene and the two sad days that followed. The little girl was removed to the house of a friend of Mrs. Aikin, and was sent to that lady by the first conveyance that offered; and, without Richard's knowledge, arrangements had been made for his being transferred to the almshouse immediately after the funeral.

There were but few persons who followed the remains of Mrs. Shepard to the grave; but if the hearts of those few had been laid open; it would have been seen that there was more honour paid to her humble, unquestionable virtue (if human esteem confers honour), than is rendered by many a sweeping procession, that attracts the eyes of multitudes with its unseemly parade. Among these

[31]

few followers was Frank Hardy; since the 4th of July he had never spoken with his little friend. He had some times seen him in the street; but conscience, that most uncomfortable companion to the guilty, conscience had led him to avoid Richard. Hardy had accidentally heard of Mrs. Shepard's death, and his good feeling prevailing over every other, he went to the funeral and returned from the grave to the house, anxious to know how Richard was to be provided for. The physician and the clergyman also went home with the child; and, after consoling them as well as they are able, they told him that he was to go to the almshouse for the present.

“To the almshouse!” he exclaimed. “Oh, don't take me to the almshouse.”

“But where will you go, Dicky?” asked the doctor.

“I have nowhere to go,” replied the child; “I will stay here; I an't afraid to stay alone in mother's room.”

“You cannot stay here, my poor boy; this room is not yours, you know; what objection have you to the almshouse?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I hate the almshouse. Everybody hates the almshouse;” and the poor little fellow turned from his friends, laid his head on his mother’s pillow, and wept bitterly. Frank Hardy stood aside, listening with concern to every word that was uttered; he now drew near to Richard and whispered “Why don’t you go, Dicky, and speak to Mr. George Sutton? He was always a friend to you.”

“He is not my friend now,” replied Richard, in

[32]

a voice which, though scarcely audible, reached Frank’s heart.

“What makes you think so, Dick?” asked Frank, so agitated that he hardly knew what he said. Richard raised his head from the pillow, and fixed his eye on Frank. “Frank,” he said, “Mr. George thinks that it was *I* that stole the half dollar from him last Independence.”

These few words revealed the whole state of case to Frank. He perceived that Richard had been suspected, and had voluntarily, magnanimously borne suspicion rather than betray him; his tenderest feelings had been awakened by the desolate condition of the afflicted child; and he now looked at him a sentiment of awe, for his little crooked body really seemed to him to contain a celestial spirit. “Oh, Dicky! You have been too good to me,” he exclaimed; and, unable to endure or repress his feelings, he ran out of the house.

The gentlemen told Richard that they could wait no longer for him, and he prepared to accompany them; but when he looked round upon his home for the last time, it seemed as if his heart would burst. If our young friends will consider what it is they love in their homes, they will not wonder at Richard's grief. It surely is not a great house nor fine furniture; but it is the voice of kindness, and the unwearying, unchanging love of parents; the sports and caresses of brothers and sisters, and all the endearments that make a happy home a picture of Heaven. The doctor soothed, the clergyman wiped Richard's eyes; and at last, succeeding in quieting him,

[33]

they led him between them to the almshouse, and, after many kind expressions of good-will, they left him there. The poor child slunk away into the corner of the large desolate apartment into which he had been conducted; he looked around upon the sullen, discontented faces of the strange throng that filled it, each taking his or her evening meal at a solitary board; he thought of the nice little cherry table at which he had been accustomed to participate the simple meal with his mother and sister, their hearts filled with thankfulness and cheerfulness, and their faces lit up with smiles. He did not, perhaps, institute precisely the comparison we have made, but it was the change--the change--that struck upon his heart. "I can't--I won't stay here," he said to himself; "I had rather starve in the street than stay here." Some supper was offered to him, but he declined it; and a little time after he stole unobserved into the passage, groped his way into the yard, run into the street, and was out of sight long before he was missed.

He knew not whither to bend his steps; scarcely knew where he was, till, looking up, he perceived that he was close to George Sutton's shop; the recollection of the young man's former kindness darted a ray of hope upon his darkened mind. It was perhaps more his pressing need of

pity than any defined expectation of relief that made him ascend the steps; but there his heart failed him, and he sat down. He was wearied and exhausted; it was a frosty night early in November, and he was shivering with the cold. He felt utterly forsaken. He looked up to Heaven; the moon

[34]

was shining brightly; he thought of his mother; he remembered that he had seen her, when in the deepest distress, kneel down and pray to God, and rise up again comforted. He recollected her last words, "God will provide;" and he repeated the Lord's prayer. He who feedeth the young ravens when they cry unto him, heard and answered the helpless child. Richard had scarcely said "Amen" when he was startled by the opening of the shop-door, and, rising on his feet, he saw Frank Hardy coming out of the shop.

"Oh Dicky, is that you?" he exclaimed. "Come in, come in; I have told everything to Mr. George, and he likes you better than ever, now; and I am sure," he added, putting his arm around Richard's neck, "I am sure I love you better than all the world besides."

Richard was astounded; he knew not what to say, but he followed Frank into the shop. "Is that you, my good boy Dicky?" exclaimed George Sutton at the first glimpse of him; and, grasping his hand, he said, "you are an honest boy and a noble boy, Dick, and I always believed you were, in spite of appearances; but now Frank has made all clear, and, if he had known everything, he would have done you justice long before this, Dicky: reparation wipes out offences, and I'm sure you will forgive and forget all, especially when you see how Frank repents the past; bitterer tears has he shed than any that have dropped from your eyes, my poor boy."

“That I have, indeed,” said Frank; “and, till this evening, I have never had one such real happy hour since Independence as I had before; but

[35]

I’m sure, Dicky, I never had a thought of the trouble I had brought you into. I have read on many a tombstone ‘an honest man’s the noblest work of God;’ but, for my part, I think an honest boy and such a little boy as you, Dick, that will bear to be suspected rather than expose a friend, is something nobler still.”

How long Frank would have run on thus, we know not, for happiness is very talkative; but he was interrupted by Richard. The sudden change from the outcast feeling with which he had sat on the door-step, from the solitude and the stillness of the night, to the lighted shop, friendly voices, and cheerful looks, overpowered him with a confused sense of happiness; he burst into tears; “I don’t know what it is makes me cry *now*,” said he, “for I feel very glad.”

“You have been tried too much to-day, Dicky,” replied George Sutton. “Sit here by the fire with Frank, while I go and bring you some supper; and then you shall go to bed, in the little back room, and in the morning we will see what can be done. I am not afraid,” he continued, as he opened the shop-door, “for all that has come and gone, to leave you and Frank in the shop together.”

When his kind friend returned, Richard ate his supper heartily; and when he snuggled down in bed alongside of George Sutton, he thought again of his mother’s last words, and fell asleep repeating to himself “God will provide.”

[36]

Eighteen months subsequent to the events we have related, Mrs. Aikin paid a visit to the place of her former residence. One of her first inquiries was for Richard Shepard. She was informed that she might hear of him at the store of George Sutton. She immediately went there, and found Mr. Sutton established in a well-furnished store of his own. As soon as she had introduced herself and made known her errand, Sutton called "Dicky;" and Richard came waddling into the shop as fast as his little legs could bring him, and delighted beyond expression at the sound of Mrs. Aikin's voice. His eyes glistened, and his face brightened and smiled all over. After she had made many inquiries of him, had drawn from him a particular account of his mother's last hours, and had told him that, with Mr. Sutton's permission, she should take him into the country to pass a little time with his sister, she dismissed him.

When he was gone she inquired of Mr. Sutton if he continued as good a child as he had been.

"As good, ma'am? There can be no better; he is worth his weight in gold to me. He understands the shop business almost as well as I do myself; and he is so good-natured and obliging, and has such pleasant ways, and is, withal, such a droll-looking little chap, that he brings many a customer to the store."

Mrs. Aikin thought, as she looked in Sutton's honest, frank, and benevolent face, that he did not stand much in need of aid to attract good-will to the shop. "I understand," she said "of Richard's account of himself, that he has been with you ever since his mother's death. I do not quite see

[37]

how you could provide for him all that time; for I think you did not begin for yourself till last Spring.”

“I did not, ma’am; and I found it difficult to save enough out of my small wages to pay the boy’s board, though I got him boarded for a trifle. But I did make it out, without any miracle; it was only working a little harder and faring a little harder, and you know that is nothing, ma’am, after it is past.”

“But how,” asked Mrs. Aikin, “could you, in such circumstances, think of assuming such an expense?”

Sutton seemed for a moment greatly embarrassed by this question. He blushed deeply, and his eyes filled with tears. “I could not help it, ma’am,” he replied; “when I was five years old, my parents died, and left me, as I may say, on the street. Some kind people took me in, brought me up, and provided for me; and when this poor little motherless child came to me, I seemed to hear a voice saying, ‘Remember what was done for thee; go thou and do likewise.’”



This is the real instance of that efficient gratitude which makes a favour “go round,” alluded to in the beginning of our story. It is neither exaggerated nor embellished by fiction; and we hope we have not misjudged in deeming it a fact worthy of being rescued from the oblivion that is too apt to pass upon the good as upon the bad actions of men.

One word more, and this humble tale is finish--

ed. Frank Hardy reaped all the benefit that is to be derived from virtuous associates. The friendly counsel of Sutton induced him to fix himself in a regular employment, and his subsequent upright conduct fully expiated his single offence. He never ceased to feel and manifest affection and gratitude to Richard; and he has been heard to say, that he was sure, if Solomon had known Dicky, he would have pronounced that, instead of four, “there be *five* things upon the earth which are little, but they are exceeding wise.”

We scarcely need add, that Richard was allowed the gratification of a visit to his sister; but our readers may have some pleasure in being told, that when the brother and sister again parted, Mrs. Aikin presented each of them a breastpin containing their mother’s hair, and on their reverses was inscribed, “God will provide.”