

Literature, &c.

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THE MERCHANT CLERKS.

BY MISS C. H. BUTLER.

"Truth severe—by frolic Fiction dressed."

Two young men are about leaving their native village to seek employment in a large city.

"My son," said the father of Arthur, "you are now to enter upon an entirely new sphere of action. I would impress upon your mind at this starting point of your life, as it may be termed, the importance of setting forth with a determination to make for yourself a character and a reputation which will ensure you the love of your friends and the respect of your fellow men. To do this, aim to be faithful, honest, industrious. Never lose sight of your duty to God, or of your duty to your parents. Let no considerations ever lead you aside from the path of rectitude—how great soever the temptation be not tempted. Be faithful to your employers, and let their interest be yours also. New pleasures, new associates will now surround you—it depends upon yourself whether they are such as may aid you to a life of usefulness and virtue, or point you to that downward path which leads to disgrace and misery. God bless you, my son, and forget not my words."

The father of George leans back in his elbow chair, takes his pipe from his mouth, gives one or two long drawn complacent whiffs, and then, with half-closed eyes, begins:

"Well, George, a fine time you'll have of it in the city. I only wish I was young and stood in your shoes! New York is a grand place, plenty of amusement, everything going on to keep one alive; no place after all like a city for a merry, happy life! However, boy, you must not play all the time. There is something due to your employers, of course, but don't let them grind you down. Dress well and appear like a gentleman—a great deal depends upon appearances. I would rather want a dinner than a handsome coat. By the way, George go to church. It looks well. You will soon find out which they call the most fashionable, where the gentry go, I mean—maybe to worship God, maybe to worship fashion—no matter. There I would advise you to be seen regularly. Don't be afraid of anything or any body. Nothing will push you through the world like impudence. Get up a reputation for being a fine dashing fellow, and you will be sure to get along."

And Arthur and George, bidding farewell to kindred and friends, turned their backs upon their native village.

These two young lads were the sons of near neighbours, both farmers in easy circumstances, yet preferring, like many others, to seek the bustle and the turmoil of the city to remain in their own pleasant glades. If one half the young men who may daily be seen thronging the doors of our warehouses in vain hope of employment; lounging the streets where idleness opens the way of temptation, and temptation gradually enticing them on to folly if not to crime; would they but turn to the plough and in the healthful labours of the farmer's life, healthful both for mind and body, seek a livelihood, then would vice and wickedness find less foot-holds in the world.

I have always thought it impossible for a man to be very wicked in the country. How can he be, with all the glorious beauties of Nature spread out before him, through which so forcibly the love and kindness of God are exhibited? How can he turn to crime amid all that is pure and lovely in the world? There is Spring with her balmy air and gentle budding leaf; Summer with her bright and beautiful flowers and fields of yellow grain; and Autumn coming in robes of more than regal splendour to cast at his feet her golden fruits. Then, even as gracefully as the snows of age adorn the man whose Spring, whose Summer, and whose Autumn of life has been passed in works of usefulness and virtue, even so does hoary winter crown the last days of the brave old year with beauty. Amid such scenes can man turn to crime?

Those whose days have ever been pent within the city walls, whose ears are ceaselessly dinned by tumult and disorder, whose nights are illumined by the incendiary, or made still darker by the cries of murder and rapine, little know they of the holy lessons which nature teaches in the varying beauty of her peaceful valleys, in the soothing murmur of her fountains and streams, or in the unwritten music on the wide page of harmony with her waving woods attune.

From the serenity of such a life, then, the two young adventurers proceeded to New York, taking with them no fortune save the parting council of their parents, which, however excellent, too often weighs but lightly with the young in the scale with their own self-confidence. In the present case, however, Arthur and George profited, each in his own way, by the very opposite advice given them. They were soon so fortunate as to obtain good situations in mercantile houses, and entered upon their new duties with equal zeal but with very different views. That they had both their own interest at heart is true, but while Arthur looked also to the advantage of his employer as well as his own, George, on the contrary, thought only of self; making a great show of duty, and bustling hither and thither to attract favourable notice to himself to the disparagement of the other clerks. For a time

his ruse was successful, but his employers could not long be duped. The shallowness of his professions were soon detected, yet, as he was really industrious, and always respectful and pleasant, he was retained in the situation, though with neither the respect of his employers nor the love of his fellow clerks.

Arthur kept steadily and quietly on in the performance of those duties to which he bent himself. He was up early and late, and in any emergency or press of business was ever to be relied upon. His fidelity and promptitude gained him the confidence of the firm, and his forbearance, coupled with his ever cheerful willingness to oblige, the good will of his fellows.

The acquaintance and friendship formed in early life between the young men continued for some time unabated. Although their dispositions had so little in common still their early home, the remembrance of the far distant peaceful valley where their days of childhood were passed, lent their powerful links to unite them. Old associations cling closely around the most careless hearts. There is a holy flame kindled at the parental altar which, though it may wax dim as man speeds on his after career, yet never wholly dies. And thus George who was daily becoming more intoxicated with the allurements of the city, never saw his friend without a pleasing thought given to the old roof tree. By degrees, however, their intercourse lessened. Arthur now rarely found his friend at home when he called to see him, and his visits were for the most part unreturned.

A liberal salary placed it in the power of George to follow to the letter his parent's injunction. Economy was a virtue he knew not of, the improvement of his mind, a waste of time and money, so to the utmost farthing did he lavish out upon 'appearances.' He wore the finest broadcloth, his beaver was of Costar's highest finish, and on Sundays he sported white kids and a fancy cane, and might be seen with too many other of the same calibre, who pay for the privilege of picking their teeth upon the steps of some fashionable hotel, picking up the crumbs of grace from some fashionable pulpit. Hovering thus like the silly moth around the blaze of fashion, his vision became so wonderfully dazzled that he could scarcely recognize his old friend.

Among his companions, who knew their game, he soon got up the character of being a 'fine dashing fellow,' who knew a thing or two; yet unfortunately, as his fame in that quarter brightened, his star, in the house of Dicken's & Co. paled rapidly. By the advice of his new friends he took lodgings in a stylish boarding house, and *selon les regles*, made violent love to the fair Priscilla, Madam's only daughter, a languishing, die-away, sentimental young lady, one who would faint if a spider sprawled its unseemliness over her robe, yet was a perfect stoic should she chance to meet a poor, wretched, half starved child; would scream at the sight of blood, yet vowed it would be delightful to have a duel fought for one's love; who could smile divinely in the parlor surrounded by one of her dozen of boarder beaux; all nice men, yet frown and rave up stairs if mamma would not purchase the dress, the hat, or the opera ticket, upon which her desires were fixed.

Like young Rapid in the play, George determined to 'push high,' so he gave himself out as the son of a wealthy landed proprietor, and in that character, soon distanced all other competitors for the favor of this interesting young lady. Very different was the life which Arthur led. Every hour which could be spared from his duties was devoted to study or some useful pursuit, so that his salary was increased to him ten fold in the value by the good use he made of it, his mind was enriched, and all the best purposes of his heart were strengthened.

One day he met George in the street, the latter with a tailor's unpaid hundred on his back, the former with a respectable suit of his own. There was true cordiality in the pressure of Arthur's hand as he exclaimed: 'How are you, George? It is months since we have met.'

'Is it indeed?' was the careless reply, 'faith, I'd forgot. What's the news?'

'From home do you mean?' answered Arthur; 'you know the Blakelys are in town, I suppose; I am just going to call upon them. Will you go with me?'

'Not I, excuse me; these country friends are the most annoying bores.'

'We do not think alike, I am sorry to say, George. The Blakelys were our nearest neighbours, you remember, and most worthy people.'

'Oh hang your worthy people; give me flash and fun and the sparkle of a merry eye. You may enjoy their delectable society yourself Arthur, if you choose; talk about pigs and poultry and last year's grass; give them your arm to the Museum, but excuse me, ha, ha, ha! The very idea of walking Broadway with a country gawky on each arm would justify suicide. Good bye, Arthur; don't forget to take them to see the *Eccleobion*, the newest method of hatching chickens, ha, ha, ha.'

'Stop a moment, George,' said Arthur, 'where are you boarding? You have left the old place, I hear; although you have not inquired for me for a great while as I can learn, I shall still take the privilege of old friendship to come and see you.'

'Right my good fellow. The fact is, I cut the old Quakeress long ago—not the sort of thing—all hum drum. I am now at—Thirteenth street, capital house, first rate set of fellows. I have it all my own way there.'

'How much do you pay a week?' inquired Arthur.

'Well it is rather a high price to be sure—seven dollars a week—but it is a capital place; besides there is a lady in the case—eh, Arthur!'

'A love affair, George?'

'N-not exactly, it's all on one side, 'pon my soul. I say many tender things to be sure to the fair Priscilla, merely to indulge her in her penchant for your humble servant. Poor thing, she is fond, very fond. I humour her, that's all. You understand; but good bye, don't forget the hatching machine, ha, ha!'

Arthur proceeded to the lodgings of his country friends at one of the large hotels and, sending up his name, walked into the parlor.

An elderly gentleman, apparently deeply absorbed with the contents of a newspaper, was its only occupant. As Arthur entered the old gentleman looked up over his paper and deliberately surveyed the person of the newcomer. Arthur Stanley was now nearly twenty-one, possessing a fine open countenance, glowing with health and cheerfulness, a good figure, rather above the medium height, with a frank and pleasing address. Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny the old gentleman at length dropped his eyes, muttering 'Very good; none of your fops, that's plain,' but whether this sentence was the coinage of his reading it would puzzle a looker on to determine.

In a few moments Mr. Blakely, with his wife and daughter, entered the drawing room, and the joyous laugh and hearty welcome which the old man gave Arthur would have repaid any sacrifice. Yet in the present instance there was no sacrifice. Arthur thought little and cared less for the exterior so that the heart was warm and true. Mr. Blakely was a rough farmer, never visiting the city except to dispose of the produce of his well tilled acres, and now brought down his wife and daughter for the first time in their lives to see the sights of the great city. Mrs. Blakely was a notable body in her own peculiar sphere, priding herself upon her dairy, her knowledge of herbs, her currant wine and root beer, yet more than all did she pride herself upon her very pretty daughter Fanny, an amiable, artless little girl of sixteen. Arthur was unaffectedly glad to see his old friends, receiving and returning the cordial kiss of the good lady, and also that of the blushing Fanny with a heartiness truly enviable.

'Good,' quoth the old gentleman in the corner, with his eyes still on the paper.

'Bless me boy, how you have grown,' said Mr. Blakely, turning his young friend round and round, 'why it can't be you're the same little fellow that used to ride, plough and drive the cows to pasture. Why, I can't believe my eyes.'

'Nevertheless I am the same,' replied Arthur, laughing, 'the same little chap to whom you once gave sixpence for running a race with old Jowler.'

'And how smart you are, to be sure, Arthur,' interrupted Mrs. Blakely, 'but you needn't have put on your Sunday best just to come down and see old friends like us. Why I declare you look as smart as Squire Glover on town-meeting days. You don't remember Fanny here, I guess. Well, what a place this New York is, to be sure. I declare I wouldn't live here for all the world.'

Arthur now stopped all farther remarks of the good lady by enquiring affectionately after his parents, while to the voluble replies he eagerly listened, his eyes suffused with those tears which would not disgrace a hero.

'Well Arthur,' said Mr. Blakely, 'your father is getting old, and the old lady begins to fail, but then they're dreadful smart for their years. Why your father must be nigh on to seventy. Well, well, I ain't a boy myself, ha, ha.'

'Do tell what has become of George Wheeler,' asked Mrs. Blakely; 'why his folks don't know nothing about him; it is ever so long since they heard a single word from him.'

Arthur replied that George was well and had an excellent situation in one of the first jobbing houses in the city.

'Well, it is strange that he don't write his folks,' continued Mrs. B.; 'anyhow we must see him before we go, and I guess I'll give him a good piece of my mind.'

Arthur now offered his services to take them to any part of the city they wished to visit.

'Well, you're mighty good,' answered Mrs. Blakely, smoothing down her apron, 'and I don't care if Fan and I go with you. I promised Fanny a new gown and some notions, so if you can take us to a good shop, I guess I'll trade.'

'That's right, Arthur,' said the old man, 'you take the women in tow, I've got to go down to the canal boat to see about my grain. I'm glad you're come, for I reckon they'd be kinder lonesome here in the house.'

Mrs. Blakely and Fanny were soon equipped for their promenade. A straw bonnet, whose fashion dated back some six or eight years, a gay flowered calico gown and blanket shawl, together with an enormous velvet bag from which protruded the corners of a yellow bandanna, completed the dress of the elderly lady. Fanny wore a white cambric which had once done honourable service to her mother, but was now altered to fit the neat little waist of the daughter, a pink gauze scarf, and blue silk hat adorned with a large bunch of full blown roses.

Arthur might have been pardoned for feeling a little reluctance at facing the fashionable throng without, but if such a thought did for a moment pass through his mind the pleasure of being it in his power to be of service to

his country friends overbalanced all other considerations, so cheerfully giving an arm to each amid the half suppressed titter of waiters and cab-men, he escorted the ladies forth into Broadway.

All this time the old gentleman with the news-paper had stealthily watched the proceedings of Arthur—now apostrophizing the ceiling, then nodding and smiling at his paper as if taking it a party concerned—until, as the three left the room, he sprang from his chair and rubbing his hands briskly together, exclaimed:

'There—there's a fine fellow for you; there's a pattern, there's a lad with a heart, and a sound one. I honor him! Then ringing the bell:

'What is the name of that young gentleman that just left the house?' he inquired of the servant.

'Which one, sir? there are so many.'

'The one with two ladies.'

'He, he, he! him with the queer looking—'

'No impudence here, my lad—quick do you know his name?'

'Well, if that's the chap you mean, he sent in his name as—Stanly; yes, Arthur Stanley that's it.'

The old gentleman took out his memorandum-book and inscribed it therein with evident satisfaction.

It was evening and with the fair Priscilla leaning languishingly upon his arm George Wheeler sauntered down Broadway.

'My charmer, you will be fatigued, I fear,' he gently whispered; 'suffer me to lead you into—saloon and refresh yourself with an ice, perhaps you would prefer sherbet.'

'Oh, neither George I am positively so *abattue* that I cannot enjoy anything,' drawled Miss Priscilla.

At that moment the band at the American Museum struck up a lively air.

'Just for the novelty of the thing suppose we look in here for a moment,' said George.

After some little hesitation the young lady consented although she declared it was really shockingly vulgar, and she hoped none of her fashionable friends would chance either to see her either going in or coming out; she was sure if they did she should expire with mortification.

To his utter consternation the first person George saw as he entered the Museum was Arthur Stanley with Mrs. Blakely on his arm, closely followed by the old farmer and Fanny. Most devotedly did he wish them in regions unmentionable, or that he was any where else but where he was, and was about to feign sudden indisposition or a forgotten engagement to draw off from the scene, when Arthur turning round immediately recognised him with a bow.

'Lord! do you know them smart people?' inquired the old lady.

'Why that is George Wheeler. I see he has grown out of your knowledge as well as myself,' said Arthur laughing.

'Now you don't! Sakes alive—why Tom (addressing her husband) that young fellow over their is George Wheeler, and instantly the honest farmer and wife crossed the hall, and in spite of the frigid manner of George, showered down upon him a thousand questions, wonders and reproaches, at the same time treating him to various little domestic details of home, which he hoped might blister their tongues in telling, especially within hearing of his fastidious companion. The whole scene would have been a rich subject for Cruikshank. The horror and disdain expressed in the countenance of the fashionable fair one—the confusion and haughty air of George, vainly endeavouring to break away from the friendly grip of the old man's hand, and then poor Mrs. Blakely every now and then pausing in her rapid utterance to eye curiously fashionably dressed companion, who she his was sure beat anything she ever seen! When afterwards speaking of this scene, she remarked, 'I could not tell what ailed the girl, but she made awful faces, and rolled up her eyes till I could not see nothing of them.'

Arthur with Fanny now joined the group, at sight of whose pretty blushing face George became greatly mollified. Fanny Blakely indeed had narrowly escaped being a perfect beauty. Her complexion was very fair, a rosy pair of lips with small even teeth, eyes a light blue but beautifully large and expressive, and her hair, which was very fine and silky, the palest shade of auburn.

George mentally resolved for her sake to cultivate the acquaintance of these 'half savages,' as he had already declared them to the ear of Priscilla, and from the cold insolent manner he had first assumed, passed into a free and easy chit-chat with the old people; nay, so far did he carry his condescension that, unmindful of the displeasure manifested by the pouting lip and lowering brow of the amiable Priscilla, he offered his disengaged arm to Fanny coolly leaving Arthur to escort the old lady.

The Blakelys remained a week in the city, to whom Arthur devoted every hour which was not required in the counting-room. George, too, but for more selfish reasons, let no day pass during their stay without calling at the hotel, discreetly choosing those hours when he knew Arthur would be otherwise engaged, yet never compromising his dignity by appearing in public with them. To the artless Fanny in particular he strove to make himself agreeable, and it is no wonder that his crafty address, so specious and insinuating, succeeded in its object. Soon the blush and timid glance betrayed too well the interest he had awakened in her innocent bosom.