

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

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## THE CITY HOME.

BY MARY MAY.

"WHERE did you get this water, Lucy dear?" asked a pale, middle-aged woman, who sat working with a cup of water by her side, in a neat small room, in a narrow unhealthy court, turning from a street in a large city.

"Does it seem fresher, mother?" returned a delicate girl of seventeen, who was also working. "The young man who lodges here, Owen Langton, fetched it when you fainted. I was going for some, and was terrified to leave you lying there, when he met me, and said he'd got it: and he said he'd bring me water any time."

"Did he? he's a quiet, steady sort of young man, I think," musingly replied the mother, gazing on her pretty girl with melancholy satisfaction.

Mother and daughter sat working on in silence through the afternoon hours of that bright summer day; the stillness of the room only broken by the rapid click of their needles in doors, and children's voices at play or at feud, or it might be their mothers' noisy fault-finding or gossip in the court below. Summer in their dwelling, and such as theirs, only betrayed itself by removing the need of constant firing, casting a yellow gleam at certain hours aslant the house-tops, and making the rooms oppressively close, while at the same time it rendered the surrounding atmosphere absolutely poisonous. About five o'clock, little footsteps were heard stamping up stairs, and the door of the room was opened, after a little rattle at the handle, by a sickly-looking, though fine and pretty girl of five or six years, who entered, followed by a pale boy of eight. "Shut the door very quickly, Charlie," exclaimed the little one; "shut the door to keep out that nasty smell, that mother mayn't smell it. Ah, mother," she continued, as she ran forward and threw her arm round her mother's neck, "you can't think what a nasty smell there is in the court!—a deal worse than it ever was before—it makes me sick."

"Yes, it's enough to make any body sick," said Charlie, advancing slowly, and laying down some school books on the table. "You mustn't go into the court, mother, else you'll be ill again."

"It's of little use to stay up here for that," said Lucy with a sigh; "it's nearly as bad as down below—and mother has been ill; and so, darlings, you must be very quiet to-night; and now you've come, we'll have tea, Charlie; and you'll get it, dear, that I mayn't be disturbed from my work."

The boy came round, and kissed his sister quietly, and then began to prepare the tea, for he was accustomed to perform every domestic service in his power, in order to spare the precious time of his mother and sister.

"Poor mother!" said the little one, softly stroking her mother's face, yet careful in her baby endearments not to interfere with the motions of the needle. "This is a nasty place for you to live in, and for all of us—why don't you go home again, mother? I don't like to stay in this town at all. Will you go home again, mother, and take us too?"

"This is our home, Annie," replied her mother, with a glance of deep sorrow on her little child.

"And must we always stay here then?" asked Annie, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"Yes, now," interrupted Charlie. "But you must not talk any more about it, Annie dear; some day, perhaps, we may go and live in the country again;—if it please God, mother?"

"Yes, if it please God, my children," was the mother's answer; but there was little hope in the tone.

"Tea is ready now," Charlie announced, after a time, during which Annie had been standing in a mournful reverie at her mother's side, looking up through the bright window to the little bit of smoke-shaded sky visible; and the party gathered round their evening meal. They had finished, and Charlie had washed and put away the humble tea service, and was learning a lesson by the window, while Annie, seated on the floor, was detailing the school history of the day, when some one knocked at the door.

"Who can that be?" exclaimed Annie; and in answer to Lucy's "Come in," entered Owen Langton, the young artisan previously introduced to the reader.

"I've come to see how Mrs. Hanham is by this time," he said respectfully to Lucy; "and to see if I can do anything for you. Shall I fetch you a drop of water to-night again? it's a far way for a young thing like you to go for it."

"Yes, it is indeed," replied Mrs. Hanham. "I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Owen. I'm sure Lucy will be very thankful to be spared the labor, especially as she has no time to lose. Will you sit down a bit?"

Owen readily acceded to this invitation, which he had desired ever since the first arrival of the Hanhams, (who had moved here in the preceding summer from rather a superior part of the town,) but they were very reserved, and although courteous and obliging to all, were intimate with none, holding themselves aloof from all their neighbors. Pride, this reserve was generally called; but the Hanhams had belonged to the class of respectable small

farmers, and their ideas and habits were superior to those of the class into which they were now thrown. Owen Langton never thought them proud, though he could never, till this day, advance further than a civil greeting to Lucy in passing; somehow, he could not make acquaintance with her as he might have done with other girls he saw.

"Is the water never fit to drink here?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, yes, it was tolerable till about two years back," replied Owen; "but the drain broke into the well, and since then we've been forced to fetch our water. In winter we get it nearer hand, but in summer the folks are afraid of their wells going dry, so we have to go farther."

"And isn't there any one to put the pump right again?" inquired Mrs. Hanham.

"Oh, as for that, I don't know," replied Owen, with a smile. "It's somebody's business, no doubt;—but then you know, what's everybody's business is nobody's—so the well goes on as it is."

"And is the court always bad in hot weather, as it is now?" asked Lucy, anxiously.

"Pretty much the same always in summer," answered Owen. "I don't know what the matter with it. There's one thing, that great rubbish heap at the end makes things worse, though they'd be bad enough without; but when folks find bad smells will come in spite of 'em, they get tired of trying to keep clean, and get lazy about things altogether."

"Yes, indeed," sighed Lucy, turning her eyes languidly on the dusty, dismal looking houses opposite; "it takes the very life out of one to live here."

"Ay, it does indeed," returned Owen; "it's bad enough for those who're born and bred here, and much worse for such as you, who've come from the country fields; but there's places a deal worse than this in the town."

"I don't think there can be more nasty places to live in than this," interrupted Charlie, vehemently.

"Ah, you've been used to the country; you don't know town yet; but there are worse places where there's fever for ever—and where people who're not used to the place can't go in without being sick; you'd hardly live a week there."

"It's a marvel how any one does," said Lucy.

"It is a marvel how many do live in this great place," replied Owen, emphatically.

A little further conversation ensued, and then Owen, having brought in a fresh pitcher of water, took leave: and shortly afterwards the pallets were prepared, and the little ones laid to rest; but midnight passed ere the weary sempstresses paused in their toil.

Owen Langton had now accomplished his great desire in the commencement of an intimacy with the sweet simple girl who had fascinated him from her first arrival; and he was not slow in improving his opportunities. He regularly brought a supply of pure water amply sufficient for all the family uses: for the Hanhams could not, like their more hardened neighbours, use the loathsome water of the court-pump for cleansing purposes; making clean with such impurity!—the very thought was mockery. Owen had also found other ways of being useful to his new friends; he spared Lucy many a painful walk to deliver her finished work, or obtain a fresh supply; and in his leisure hours his ingenuity contrived several small but useful additions to their scanty stock of furniture. Then he always came in to tell Mrs. Hanham the news; and besides, frequently brought a book to read to them, a little to beguile some weary hours of their almost ceaseless labor. It was no wonder that Lucy loved him, as she soon did with affection equal to his own; and though not one word had Owen breathed to her of his love, both felt that there was a holy bond between them.

Yet, though Owen's heartfelt and unwearied kindness was a sunbeam on the little home, dark shadows were gathering over it. It was impossible that persons should be removed from a pure country air to such an abode of noxious effluvia, without severely suffering from the change; and all the Hanhams suffered. In the mother the evil influence of her new situation was less apparent; with Lucy, the insidious poison worked fatally, though slowly; Charlie looked ill, but he was, perhaps, in reality the least injured; poor little Annie, the darling of all, was the most visibly affected. She grew cross and pettish, feeling wretched, yet knowing not of what to complain. Here Owen's kindness was invaluable; he would frequently take the children to the nearest places where they might receive some pure air, and enjoy exercise; and he taught Charlie the ways, that he might constantly take his little pale fretful sister. Often and often Owen tasked his powers of persuasion to tempt Lucy forth for a little necessary stroll; but vainly he tempted; she dared not leave her work. On Sunday, the blessed day of rest, she did indeed enjoy a little sight of the glorious works of God: and this respite, from the wretchedness of ordinary days, seemed to make the truths she heard in the sanctuary still more holy and happy.

On one Saturday, Owen came with pleasant tidings for the little ones. He had arranged such a happy plan, if he could but win over Mrs. Hanham and Lucy to join in it. He proposed to take them all out into the country—really into the country—to a village at least four miles off, where they might feel themselves again among fields and hayricks; he knew a man who lived there and had seen him and his wife at market that very day, and they should all drink tea at his friend's house. Annie positively screamed with joy, and sprang

up from the floor, her face so radiant with delight, that she looked almost like her former self. Lucy's pale cheek, too, crimsoned with pleasure; but prudent Charlie sorrowfully interposed—"It would be eight miles—that is too far for us, Annie dear." Lucy's color faded, and Annie's eyes filled with tears, as both acknowledged the force of the objection. But Owen had foreseen, and provided: a country family was coming in to evening service on the next day, (the day named for the excursion,) and was to be driven home in a fly. The driver who was engaged, Owen knew, and he had promised that all Owen's friends should ride home for nothing.

"Oh, now Charlie—now!" exclaimed Annie in a burst of triumph—"it is not too far now, and we shall go!" and clapping her hands, she rushed out of the room, impatient to tell the good news to the children in the court, with whom she usually held little communication, but she was too happy now to confine her raptures within the narrow limits of her mother's room.

In a short time she returned, and came creeping up to her mother's side, looking as though she had some request to prefer.

"What is it my pet, my pretty one?" asked the mother, bending her head so as to kiss the upturned brow.

"Do you think Sally Jones might go with us?" murmured Annie, coaxingly.

"Oh, no, I think not, indeed," replied her mother in some surprise; "but why do you wish her to go?—I thought you did not care for any of the children here?"

"And I don't, neither," returned Annie, half pouting. "only I want Sally to go this time, if she might."

"But why, darling?" asked Lucy.

"Because I want her to see some fields, Lucy."

"Oh, mother, what do you think?—she doesn't know what grass is!—she doesn't really;—she stared so when I told her where I was going; she didn't know what I meant at all. Isn't it odd, mother? but I wish you'd take her and show her some grass."

"God help the poor children!" softly exclaimed Mrs. Hanham, with a sigh; then she said to Annie, "poor little Sally can't go with us now, my child; but you might take her some day to see grass nearer home, could you not?"

"Yes, so I can if I may," replied Annie, thoughtfully, and disappointed; "only I wish she could go with us now; but I'll bring her some grass home, and some flowers too;—oh, do you think we shall see flowers, Mr. Owen?"

Owen assured her she would, and shortly after took leave, when the children immediately went to bed, that Sunday might come the sooner. Lucy spared the last hour of the night from her work, (in consideration of having a meal for nothing the next day) not to indulge herself in a little more of the rest so sorely needed, but to effect some improvement in Annie's faded dress.

Sunday came, as bright as Sunday could be; and the sound of bells, and the going to church, pleasant always, were still more pleasant this day to the Hanhams. After their hasty dinner, the whole party set off, impatient to leave the town. They walked on merrily for a while, but before long began to lag; they were not now accustomed to much exercise. Lucy made her mother lean on Owen's strong arm, and herself led on the two children, encouraging them, and drawing their attention from the heat, and their increasing weariness, talking cheerfully, and smiling so gaily, that none but Owen—not even her mother—observed her paling cheek, and the decided languor of her step. When within a step of their destination, Annie began to cry, she could walk no farther; but Owen, laughingly, lifted and carried her to her journey's end. Fatigue seemed vanished, or forgotten, when once they were arrived in "the dear country," as Charlie termed it. The mother sat to rest in the arbor of the cottage garden, and Lucy sat near, but rather behind, the better to conceal her extreme weariness, which betrayed itself in the cold damp on her forehead, and the ashy whiteness of cheek and lip. Owen saw it though, but he made no remark.

Happily the evening passed. After tea in the arbor, the children, with one or two belonging to the cottage, rambled away through the fields to gather flowers, while the elder party sat and talked. Then, on the children's return, the Bible, which had before been in use, was again opened; and there they sat reading, and talking, when it grew too dusk to read, until past nine o'clock, when an open fly rolled up, stopped, and the driver dismounting, opened the door of his carriage, and then coming to the arbor, disturbed the happy group, by saying, that the city folks must return directly. The adieus were hastily made; and little Annie, delighted with the prospect of the ride, ran forwards, exclaiming—"I shall be in first."

"Stay, Annie, let me help you in," cried Lucy, hastening after.

"Oh, no, no," returned the child, impatiently, and exerting all her speed, she reached the fly, and clambered up the steps in triumph. Just as she gained the top, the horse made a forward movement, Annie lost her balance, and fell to the ground, backwards, her foot lying just under the wheel. Lucy opened her shriek; but happily the horse stood still, or it had been too late to save her, as Lucy rushed on and caught her up in an agony of terror.

"Are you hurt, my darling?" she cried.

"My back hurts," sobbed the little one.

They were soon surrounded by all the rest of the party; but it was thought that Annie was not greatly hurt; she had not fallen far; and she seemed herself to be somewhat of the same opinion, though she repeated that her

back was hurt. However, all mounted, and set off homewards, their pleasure rather damped by Annie's accident: though she seemed to suffer little, and in a very short time recovered her former gaiety.

Several weeks elapsed without bringing any change to the Hanhams, visible change at least. Lucy felt daily more weary, more incapable of exertion; but as her weakness increased, so did her efforts to conceal it. Annie occasionally complained that her back hurt her, yet though she received affectionate condolence, her complaints attracted no permanent attention: but she grew thinner, and paler, and more fretful continually, until her mother's anxiety was at last painfully aroused by the burning touch of her little hand, and the appearance of a crimson flush upon her wasted cheek. Instantly, without consideration of the expence, a doctor was consulted. He examined the child, asked where she lived, and shook his head as the place was named. "It is almost certain death to keep her there," he said. "She is suffering from fever, induced by the air she breathes," (he knew nothing of her fall.) "Can you send her into the country?"

Mrs. Hanham's voice trembled, and her lip quivered as she replied in a low tone, that they could hardly get their daily bread.

"Then we must do what we can for her here," replied the doctor. "Perhaps you might move?"

"The better places are so dear, sir," was the reply.

"Well, well, I don't know what to advise—those courts are all nearly bad alike; more's the shame and the sin," he added. "Yours is by no means the worse. Get this physic made up for her, and let her keep out of doors in the open squares of the city, or in the fields if she can, as much as possible."

The mother took her baby away, and endeavored to follow the directions, mourning in secret anguish over her inability to give her child the pure air she so much needed. Charlie was kept from school to take Annie out and amuse her, while mother and daughter worked unremittingly to obtain little delicacies for the dainty appetite, depriving themselves of all beyond the food actually necessary for life. But day after day passed, and week after week, and Annie only grew worse. She could not walk out now; Lucy would leave her work in the morning, and painfully carry the emaciated infant to some seat in a public place, or the grass in some open square, where she would leave her with Charlie by her side, until she, or perhaps Owen, would fetch her home again. Gradually she could not bear to be carried out; her back became very painful, and she lay all the day restlessly writhing on her bed in suffering, which those around could not alleviate. Then the doctor was summoned; and he came into this hot-bed of fever armed with strong aromatics and disinfectants, and covering his face with his handkerchief as he passed into the room, that he might not be sickened by the effluvia below. He declared that poor Annie had received a severe injury in her fall, trifling though the fall had seemed; and that her constitution had been previously so much enfeebled as to give cause for serious anxiety. He said that her only hope of life, humanly speaking, lay in removal; medical skill availed nothing, while she remained exposed to the influences of the malaria, and concluded by asking, if from some friend could not obtain an admission to the infirmary. "We are alone in the world," was the mother's half-stifled reply. "We have no friend—but I will try."

"You ought to go," said the doctor, taking Lucy's thin hot hand, and placing his fingers on the pulse.

"It is impossible," she answered, in a calm low tone, as a bright red spot rose to the centre of her cheek, and looking anxiously towards her mother. But the mother had not heard; she was bending over Annie's bed. "It is quite impossible," she repeated with a sad smile; "pray say nothing about me."

That evening Mrs. Hanham went out to one of the most frequented walks in the neighborhood, and, with a beating heart, asked each passer-by for the charity of an admission to the infirmary. What at another time might have seemed impossible, now appeared easy; she thought only of her dying child; and as she turned homeward, after having spent hours in the endurance of insult, or careless neglect, she felt nothing of what in other circumstances might have bowed her to the earth; all feelings were absorbed in the anguish of her unsuccessful effort. But help was near. During the next melancholy day a lady came; she was a visitor of the free school which the little one had attended; she had noticed, and had been interested in them, and now came to inquire the reason of their long absence; she had been absent too, or she would have come before. Her sweet sympathy seemed to comfort the poor mother, even when she gave no hint of help; but when she asked if the child would not be better in the infirmary, and offered an admission, the mother's tears burst forth, and she could not for some moments reply. Charlie looked up with a timid smile of gratitude, and softly said, "Mother prayed for that, ma'am."

All was soon arranged, and on the following day the little sufferer was conveyed to the blessed refuge of poverty in sickness, and felt an immediate species of relief in the lightness and comfort of all around her.

Days went by, and Annie slowly yet certainly improved, and her mother looked forward with hope to the restoration of her darling, and bright visions rested on her prospects for the future. She had a son, a little younger than Lucy; he, at his father's death, had been taken into the shop of a general dealer in a large country village, and now he wrote joyfully to