

Literature, &c.

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BLIND WALTER.

A TALE FOR THE YOUNG.

You are all doubtless aware that Greenwich may be reached both by railway and steamer; and if you were there a few years ago you might have remarked, near the steam-boat pier, the hero of this narrative. He was then a pale, slight youth of sixteen, good-looking, but with that peculiar expression of countenance—half-resignation, half-anxiety—which belongs to the blind. He was quite blind—stone-blind, and had been so from his birth. He had for about two years played the fiddle daily at the corner of a certain street. Every morning he was brought to his post by an old woman with whom he lodged, or sometimes by a little girl, her grandchild, who also brought his dinner at one o'clock, and fetched him home to tea at six. He never asked for money; but at his feet lay a small basket, into which halfpence poured pretty freely. There was a quiet, uncomplaining manner about him; he was so neat and clean, that in the neighbourhood he was a favourite, and all strangers admired him. But what was curious and pleasant to see was the respect shown him by all sailors, watermen, and old college-men. Though he could not see, they always touched their hats to him, and said 'Sir' when they wished him good morning or good evening. But then Blind Walter was the son of a captain in the royal navy who had left him without a father at six years old. He had had a mother, but she is what is rarely found in this world, as I dare say you all know—a bad mother; and that is the worst thing that can fall to the lot of a child. She was not what the world calls wicked, but she was so really. She neglected her blind boy; she let him pick up his education how he could; and but for the kindness of an old musician, who took a fancy to him, and when his mother was out, fetched him to his house, he would have known nothing.

The musician was a poor old Italian, a gentleman in habit and feelings; and he taught the boy to speak Italian, to be tidy and clean, and to play the violin. Walter became passionately fond of music, which, when his mother made the discovery, rather warmed her feelings towards her child. She had him more neatly dressed than before, and took him wherever she went as a prodigy. Walter, who was an intelligent and pleasing lad, was universally liked. He was petted and taken notice of, and soon acquired the manners of the society to which he was now introduced. The importance of early training and education, which perhaps just now may not be exactly pleasing to some of you, was demonstrated in the case of Blind Walter. When he fell into other circumstances he never lost his graceful manners, his soft tone of voice—the surest marks of good breeding and good company; and he gained largely by it. But his fall was sudden and unexpected. His mother the portionless daughter of poor, proud people of good family, whom Walter's father had married for her beauty, died deeply in debt; and the poor boy found himself alone in the world with nothing but his violin, saved from the creditors with much difficulty.

They had been two years in Greenwich when this happened; and the father having been much liked by his crew—some of whom were now in Greenwich hospital—these old pensioners held council. They would have liked to send the boy, now their child, to sea, but his blindness was a serious drawback; they then advised him to try his fortune with the violin, and Walter, who had no other friends—his father having been an orphan, protected by one now dead—followed their kind advice.

His first day's trial was wondrous in its result. All the college men came by quietly without saying a word, and threw in their halfpence; and Walter Arnott thanked God in his heart, while he thought gratefully of the poor Italian musician, some time dead, who had been the instrument of Providence in giving him the means of earning his livelihood.

He took a neat, clean but cheap room in the house of an aged widow, with an orphan grandchild, a girl of thirteen years old; and after paying his way, giving little presents to Alice, and keeping himself in decent clothes and clean linen, put the rest in the savings' bank in the name of a clerk in the hospital, who regularly gave him twopence every week out of affection to the memory of his father.

Scarcely any of those who had been friends of Mrs Arnott ever noticed Walter, except to give him a sixpence in a patronizing way; but Walter wanted not their aid. He was independent and happy.

He seldom went out in the evening. He would get Alice to read to him books which a friend had purchased for him—chiefly naval histories and tales—and lives of celebrated musicians and emperors.

He did not, however, forget what was useful to her, and their education went on together with wonderful success. Alice was soon passionately fond of reading; and as no occupation is at the time so pleasing and useful, if you avoid bad books—the worst poison on earth—their evenings were delightful.

During this time Walter did not neglect his Italian; he pronounced and spoke it well.

He bought a grammar, dictionary, and some Italian books, and by dint of perseverance soon trained Alice to study the language with him.

The old grandmother left them to their own course. She already looked on Walter as the future husband of her child, though he solemnly and firmly declared he would never be a burden to any woman, if one could be found generous enough to marry the blind fiddler.

About two years had passed, and Walter was between eighteen and nineteen, while Alice was a pretty girl of fifteen.

The blind youth had learned to read and write. He had made remarkable progress too in music, and began to be asked to go to balls and even concerts. He had a beautiful collection of violins, once the idols of the poor Italian, and this went greatly in his favor.

One afternoon he was playing some exquisite pieces of Italian music to a silent crowd, when a youth about his own age, in the dress of a midshipman, pushed forward, and stood with a blank and astonished air gazing at him.

Presently Walter finished; and the crowd, after showering halfpence upon him, moved away. But the midshipman remained.

'Walter Arnott!' exclaimed he in astonishment.

'Ah, Frank Prescott,' cried the blind youth with genuine satisfaction. 'Is that you? How kind to notice me now.'

'Notice you now!' exclaimed the midshipman. 'What! the son of the former captain of our ship. Good Heaven, this is shameful—this is dreadful.'

'Not at all, Frank: I am very happy—I assure you I could not be more so,' replied Walter.

'Nonsense; you could and shall. Just put your fiddle under your arm, and come and dine with me at the 'Greyhound.' No denial. I must tell you my story and you must tell me yours. I wanted a friend in Greenwich, and I've found one.'

Walter could not resist such hearty kindness; and after bargaining that they should call at his home, that he might leave his fiddle, and have thus an excuse for explaining his departure from his post, they walked arm-in-arm up town.

A hearty greeting did the middy get from every sailor and invalid he met, every one was pleased to see the blind fiddler taken notice of, and Alice was quite proud when, handing her his violin, Walter told her where he was going.

The middy ordered a very good dinner, after which he informed the young musician that he had an uncle in Greenwich whose daughter he was very much in love with; that being poor, with very small prospects, he concealed his affection from his uncle, who wished his cousin to marry some one her equal in point of fortune.

To Gertrude he had not spoken distinctly—he was too young for that; but he was sure she responded to his affections. He was now however about to leave England on a three years' cruise, and he was in a state of great uneasiness of mind. He knew not what might happen in the interval. He could not write to the young lady, as he knew she would decline carrying on a clandestine correspondence—and he loved her the more for her delicacy. But still he wanted some friend to give him news of her, and her news of him.

Blind Walter readily volunteered to do this by the hand of Alice, if he could at any time pick up intelligence of interest. But Frank Prescott had a better plan than that—he would get his uncle and cousin to patronise him: next evening there was to be a quiet dance, and he must come and play. And Walter did so, and the evening was twice as pleasant as it otherwise would have been.

The blind musician entered into the spirit of the affair; played as long, and as often as they liked; was a general favorite with the ladies especially with Gertrude Prescott; and pleased everybody so much with his playing, that he soon found his engagements multiply.

From that day he abandoned his station in the street. He played at some of the concerts evening parties, he gave lessons, and all without neglecting his education, or that of Alice.

During the stay of Frank Prescott the young people were inseparable; the midshipman was delighted with his old acquaintance, and they parted attached friends.

Blind Walter actually loved Frank, for with him kindness was irresistible. There are some natures which cannot resist the influence of affection, who will love a person who gives them a flower, a word, a look; and Walter was one of those.

When Frank was gone, he transferred his affection to Frank's future wife, without forgetting his dear Alice.

Miss Prescott came often to see them; and when she found that the young girl was a good Italian scholar, asked her home and took lessons of her.

Proud indeed was Alice of her having studied and read, for Walter was much pleased, and she found a sincere friend in Gertrude.

Things went on in this way for nearly two years, when Gertrude reached the age of twenty. Suitors now came round in earnest, and Mr Prescott desired Gertrude to choose among the several competitors. But she could not make up her mind, she said—not daring to avow her affection for Frank. But her father insisted, and himself selected a Mr Charles Williams, a young barrister of good prospects.

One evening Gertrude was very unhappy: Alice was by her side, and Blind Walter was hourly expected. Miss Prescott was very dull and low spirited, and nothing her humble friend could do could rouse her.

'What is the matter?' asked Alice earnestly, 'why not avow your affection for your cousin Frank?'

'Because my father long ago forbade me to think of him. Frank has nothing but his profession, which is not lucrative enough to please papa.'

'I do not know what to advise you to do. I wish Walter were but here; he will tell us.'

At this very instant the door opened, and the servant announced in a loud voice—'Sir Walter Arnott.'

They rose astounded, and in walked Blind Walter, leaving at the door a servant in rich livery, who had led him up. He was fashionably dressed, but his smile was as gentle and as sweet as ever.

He advanced to a sofa, took the hands of his two friends, and sat down between them. His story was very brief. Seven lives which had stood between his father and a baronetcy of twenty five thousand pounds a year had all lapsed, save one, long ago; and about six months previously the last survivor, a descendant of his grandfather's eldest brother, had died without issue and intestate. A week before that evening the solicitor traced out Blind Walter as the next of kin. He had kept his secret until all was settled, passing off the solicitor as a pupil; and this day he had been put in possession of his property, the lord chancellor having appointed trustees for the three months he wanted of being of age.

'But you seem in trouble,' said Sir Walter when he had finished his story—for he always observed the slightest difference in the intonation of voice.

Alice, who was overwhelmed at what she had heard, timidly explained.

'I see only one remedy,' observed the blind young baronet, after reflecting for some minutes.

'And what is that?' asked Gertrude anxiously.

'You must let me court you for the next four months. I have this day—for I am influential now—sent Frank his leave of absence for twelve months, begging him to come home. It seems I am indispensable in a certain county where ministers want to keep their supporters in, and so they can refuse me nothing.'

'Good Sir Walter!' exclaimed Gertrude and Alice.

'Blind Walter still with you! But listen: until Frank returns I will keep off all suitors. Say nothing, only let us be always together—us three, I mean,' said the quick-eyed young man, as he caught the sound of a little sigh from Alice; and your father will give me six months at least to think of it. But my dear friends listen to me. I must marry now. In whom else, now that I have such heavy trusts and duties, can I confide than a wife? Twenty five thousand a year wants somebody who can see to attend to it. Had I remained poor, no woman should ever have had such a burden imposed upon her. There is but one girl in the world who can ever be my wife. While I was poor I studiously concealed my feelings; but now, dear Alice, my riches, my rank, are vain indeed if you refuse to be mine when Frank returns.'

'I, Sir Walter!' cried the amazed girl, pale with a feeling more like alarm than anything else—a poor girl like me. What will your rich friends say?'

'Alice, you have for years been my devoted sister; we have studied together, thought together, learned together: let us now, if your heart can reconcile itself to a blind husband, love one another. I am not fit to be alone; but if you will not be the poor blind boy's guardian angel, I must trust myself to some hired servant.'

'Walter, Walter,' cried Alice, sobbing aloud, 'I have always loved you dearly, and had you remained poor, had always meant to beg you to take me for your wife—your guide; and you would; for when mother dies you shall be alone: but now I dare not accept.'

'You have accepted,' exclaimed Gertrude placing their hands one in another; and as Alice could not speak, the betrothal was over. After a minutes' silence they discussed their plans, and were in the midst of them when Sir Walter entered hurriedly.

'Sir Walter, I am proud to congratulate you. I am highly honored by your making your first call here.'

'I have to apologise for taking the liberty of coming so unceremoniously. Hours suited to the musician become perhaps unsuitable now.'

'Sir Walter, pray consider my house your own,' said Mr Prescott warmly, half from genuine pleasure at the good luck of one he liked, as all did, and half from the reflection that £25,000 a year, even with a blind baronet, was perhaps a very splendid prospect for his daughter.

From that day all suitors withdrew before the young baronet. Everybody looked upon the affair as settled. Miss Gertrude and he, with Alice for a companion, drove out together, went to parties together; and what other result could be expected? But not one word did any of the two say that could be construed into deceit. Mr Prescott allowed matters to take their course, not even sounding Gertrude on the point he had so much at heart.

One morning Sir Walter called formally upon Mr Prescott, and demanded the honor of an interview. That gentleman bowed his

young friend into the drawing room, and his heart beating rather more quickly than usual, he sat down after handing Walter to a chair.

'What, my dear Sir Walter,' said Mr Prescott with a bland smile, 'can I do for you?'

'I come,' said Walter, with almost the only trace of sarcasm on his face which ever appeared there—'I come to speak to you of your daughter.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Mr Prescott, with a very harmless attempt at playing astonishment in his tone.

'You will be very much surprised, my dear sir, at what I am going to say,' said Walter timidly.

'Perhaps not,' said papa knowingly. 'I fancy.'

'You have fancied wrong, Mr Prescott,' said Walter firmly, 'if you have supposed that I have courted your daughter on her own account. Listen to me first and be angry if you will afterwards. I have courted for another—for a young man who loves, and whom she loves—a lieutenant in the navy, on whom I settle, the day he marries, the sum of twenty thousand pounds, which I have raised by selling timber, which was far too luxuriant on my estates.'

'But!' exclaimed Mr Prescott, quite mollified at the words 'twenty thousand pounds,' and who was, besides, a very good hearted man at bottom—but pray who is the gentleman?'

'Your nephew Frank,' said Walter, moving to the door as readily as if he could see.'

Mr Prescott burst into a laugh: he saw at once the whole conspiracy; and when the next minute Frank and Gertrude entered, and he tried to scold, it was of no avail, he was obliged to laugh anew, and when Frank went over every detail of the plot from beginning to end, he laughed still more. A happy dinner party was there that day at Mr Prescott's table. There were Frank and Sir Walter, and Gertrude and Alice. Frank demurred a little at the generosity of his friend, but Walter asked what his riches came for but to make his friends happy; and the sailor was obliged to yield, as Mr Prescott declared that his consent was given only conditionally.

And they were all four married a month later. Frank retired from the service at the request of Gertrude, and accompanied Sir Walter and Lady Arnott on a tour in Italy, where the latter wished to improve their knowledge of the language, while Sir Walter felt genuine joy on visiting the land of the poor musician, to whom he owed everything. Frank, on their return, settled near the baronet's estates, and is still as devoted a friend as man can wish for; and Alice, whose grandmother still lives in a beautiful cottage built for her in the Park, is an ornament to the class to which she has risen. Her mind, refined by education, study, and thought, she is quite equal to her station: and oh! what joy is hers now, when the oculists have declared that in time Sir Walter may be brought to see. She has children; but her blind husband is her first child. She is ever by his side; she watches his footsteps, his very glance; and no steward ever was so careful of his masters wealth as Alice is of her husband.

From H. W. Herbert's 'Captains of the Old World.'

HANNIBAL AND NAPOLEON.

Scarcely any one at all familiar with history can have failed to observe the extraordinary parallelism between the campaigns, the military conduct, and the fortunes of Hannibal and Napoleon. That parallelism is thus strikingly touched upon by Arnold. 'Twice,' he says, 'in history has there been witnessed the struggle of the highest individual genius against the resources and institutions of a great nation; and in both cases the nation has been victorious. For seventeen years Hannibal strove against Rome; for sixteen years Napoleon Bonaparte strove against England; the efforts of the first ended in Zama, those of the second in Waterloo. The extraordinary similitude of the genius, conduct, and military character of these two giant in arms, is far from ending with this general resemblance. Almost from point to point, their destinies are similar. At the age of twenty six, Hannibal was elected to the supreme command of the Carthaginian armies, and thenceforth to the close of the war he disposed at his will the resources, and held in the hollow of his hand the councils, of his country. At the age of twenty six, Napoleon assumed the command of the whole of the army of Italy, and from thence his fortunes and his will were those of France. The scenes of the glory of both were the Alps and Italy. Both had the faculty of seeing at a glance where the blow must be plucked which should cripple the enemy; both delivered that blow instantaneously and irresistibly. Both had the same reliance on their cavalry as an arm of service; Hannibal winning by it all his greatest victories, and Napoleon insisting to the last that cavalry in equal force, equally led, must conquer infantry. Both vanquished every leader in the field, whom he personally encountered, save the very last, and there is probably no one so prejudiced as to assert at this day that either Hannibal or Napoleon found in his conqueror a superior in strategy or in military genius. Nor does the similarity end even here; for both found their final vanquishers in generals made in Spain by conflicts with their own lieutenants, who were in no wise superior to other eminent leaders of their enemy; and both ultimately