

YOUNG PEOPLE'S COLUMN

THE SKEPTIC SUBDUED

I cannot feel as you do, I wish I could, but I was born a skeptic, I cannot help my denials; other people swallow down these visional things, but as for me I can't. I do not believe there is a God, and if there is, what He has to do with us particularly I can't see. Nature has her laws, and whoever breaks them will bring evil upon his own head, that is about all that I can see."

Thus spoke an eminent politician as he walked with a Christian friend through the blackness of a winter's night. It was bitter cold, and the snowflakes powdered the rich fur coat wrapped about him, and whitened the thick clusters of raven hair that peeped out from beneath his cap.

Yes, John Hunter was a skeptic. A man of rare intellectual powers, wielding a mighty influence, and yet no God! No hope for the future—walking in the darkness satisfied, contented.

Almost everybody had given him up. He parried reason skillfully and calmly, and to all human appearance, it seemed impossible to make an impression on the rocky soil of his heart.

But one friend had never despaired of him; they had been boys together, sat on the same form at school, played at the same games. Manhood opened to both invitingly.

Ambitious of worldly honor, and feeling what it is, the power to sway men to his will, John Hunter early entered the political arena, and it was not long before his fellow-countrymen applauded to his heart's content. He was a successful man.

The other, Jasper Schumann, was a quiet unobtrusive man, a humble mechanic, supporting his family by his daily labor. He was a cheerful, happy Christian man; and though so widely apart in the journey of life, these two men, Hunter and Schumann, were still friends whenever they chanced to meet; and when absent on his political circuit, John Hunter was always remembered as Jasper Schumann gathered his loved ones around the family altar.

It chanced on this particular night, Jasper Schumann had been pressing the matter of personal religion on the attention of John Hunter, and now his only reply was:

"God has more power over your heart than you have, John; and, I mean still to pray for you."

"Oh, I'm willing that you should do that, if it is a comfort to you, go on; but I shall never change. I've read more books about Divinity than most ministers. I've about as much as I can do in this world and must run the risk of another. However, let's change the subject. Whew! how the snow flies! Here's a restaurant; let's stop and order supper."

How warm and pleasant it looked as they entered! The bright gas light streamed over the glitter of cut glass and silver, fell into the hearts of the flowers lavishly strewn over the richly tinted carpet, while splendid mirrors and marble tables reflected the waves of light dazzlingly. Goodly viands were placed before them, and their conversation had been genial and pleasant. John Hunter was on the point of rising, when a strain of soft music came through a half-opened door a child's voice. Passionately fond of music, the politician stopped to hear.

"Sweet, isn't it?" and his eye caught Jasper Schumann's.

"We've no time to hear you now, out of the way!" cried the waiter; and the little voice was hushed.

"But I want to hear him," said John Hunter, "let him in here."

"It's against the rule, sir."

"Very well, send him to the reading-room," and the two gentlemen followed a small slight figure in patched coat and torn hat.

The room was quiet. John Hunter walked to the opposite side and motioned the little boy to his side.

Timidly the child looked up; his cheek was brown, but a flush rested there, and out of the thinnest face, under the arch of a massive forehead deepened by masses of soft brown hair, looked two eyes, whose softness and tenderness would have touched a heart harder than was John Hunter's.

"What do you sing, my boy?"

"I sing German or English," was sweetly answered.

"Why, child, what makes you tremble so, are you sick?"

As if unheeding the question, the child began to sing. His voice was wonderful, and simple, and common as were both air and words, the power and purity of the tones drew many of the gentlemen from their tables. The little song commenced thus:

"I'm but a stranger here,

Heaven is my home;

Earth is a desert drear,

Heaven is my home

Dangers and sorrows stand

Round me on every hand;

Heaven is my father land,

Heaven is my home."

The tears were in John Hunter's eyes, and his voice was tremulous.

"Look here, child, where did you learn that song?"

"My mother taught it to me."

"And do you suppose there is such a place?"

"I know there is. I'm going to sing there."

"Going to sing there?"

"Yes, sir; we shall all sing in Heaven, father and mother both said so."

"Where does your father live, child?"

"In Heaven."

"Your mother?"

"She went too, last spring," while the tears dropped over the thin cheek.

John Hunter was silent, his eyes were brimming over.

"Who do you live with?"

"I live with grandma now, but it won't be for long."

"Why so? What makes you talk so?"

"I have just such a cough as mother had.—When she went she said it would not be long. There won't be any pain up there, sir."

"How do you know?"

"The Bible tells us so."

John Hunter had a praying mother; his heart traveled backwards. Once more he knelt at her knee, a simple-hearted child. Where was the mother now? Years ago she had gone to her rest, her last breath fluttering out in a prayer for her only son.

The little boy turned to go.

"Child, have you been to supper?"

"Grandma will be waiting for me."

"Have you no overcoat?"

"These are all the clothes I have, sir."

Along the snowy streets, down in the dark alleys walked John Hunter, a little trembling child's hand in his.

At an old dingy tenement they stopped. Up broken creaking stairs they climbed.

"Here we are, and here is grandma," as the

door jarred on its hinges; and an old woman tottered across the room.

"Oh, Harman, has anything happened to you?"

"Only this kind gentleman came home with me," and again the slight body was racked with that terrible cough.

"Poor child! poor child!" and the grandmother held out her arms to the little sufferer.

John Hunter had taken it all in, the want and care that had driven the parents to their graves. It was no place for him; "I'll see you again soon," and he groped his way downstairs.

He did not forget his promise. All that money could do was done; but it was too late, Harman was dying of disease, the grandmother, of want and misery.

The winter had not gone when we find John Hunter and Jasper Schumann again walking the streets together. No longer in a fashionable square, but through lanes and alleys till they came to the gloomy building where lived Harman Stein. They had not seen his face at the window, and it looked gloomier than ever as they mounted the stairs.

A slight rap at the door did not arouse any one. The room was not empty as they had at first thought. Harman lay on the bed; the cold clammy sweat standing on his forehead while his cheeks were crimson.

"I was in hopes to find you better, child."

"Oh, no sir! I did not expect to get well; Mother said we should all meet up there."

The eyes of the two gentlemen met, and it would be difficult to say which felt the most deeply.

"You have been so kind I should like to sing for you, but I can't sing for you any more, it hurts me—it won't be so there."

"Is there any one else you expect to meet there?" asked John Hunter's friend.

"The blessed Jesus! I shall meet Him, mother said; He loves little children."

"And you love Him?" asked Jasper Schumann with a trembling voice.

"Love Him when He has taken care of us ever since they went away! Some days grandma and I had nothing to eat, but we knew He would not forget us; and at night when we could not sleep for the cold, we could think of Him.

"We talked about Heaven and the angels. Mother said it was such a beautiful place, more beautiful place, than anything we had ever seen." The blue eyes closed wearily.

"There is something in this," said John Hunter, "children are not led away by their imaginations, and if there is a Heaven where will my portion be?"

"You love Jesus?" said Harman, addressing the hardened skeptic. "Everybody that loves Jesus will be there. Oh, I am so happy."

With a little sigh the eyes again closed.

"Are faith and hope nothing?" asked Mr. Schumann, pointing to the face taking on such a strange beauty.

"To feel as that little boy does, I would gladly give all I possess," was the broken response.

"And this you can have without price. Yield your stubborn will, your skeptical doubts, and accept the offer of mercy."

There was no answer, the shadow of death rested over that little room.

The physician Mr. Hunter had called came in, and shook his head; it needed no great skill to see that the messenger was near.

"Oh, there is Jesus; and there are the angels,—they are coming for me!"

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