

Planting Himself To Grow.

Dear little bright-eyed Willie,
Always so full of glee,
Always so very mischievous,
The pride of our home is he.

One bright summer day we found him
Close by the garden wall,
Standing so grave and dignified
Beside a sunflower tall.

His tiny feet he had covered
With moist and cooling sand;
The stalk of the great tall sunflower
He grasped in his chubby hand.

When he saw us standing near him,
Gazing so wonderingly
At his babyship, he greeted us
With a merry shout of glee.

We asked our darling what pleased him:
He replied with a face aglow,
"Mamma, I'm going to be a man;
I've planted myself to grow."

Family Circle.

A CHRISTMAS EVENING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

"What did he mean?" said Clarissa, her damask cheeks perceptibly paler.

Patty came to the rescue. "It's in the second book of 'Paradise Lost,'" said she—"a sort of allegory."

Clarissa's color slowly returned, and she laughed. "It had an ugly sound," she observed; "but I should not have thought Master Tom made such shrewd observations. What did he say about the others, child?"

"I think it's scarcely fair to ask," whispered Patty.

"Leave me alone," said the impatient beauty. "Quick, child! Tell me what he said!"

"He did not speak about many," answered Lotty.

"But what did he say about *any*?" pursued Clarissa, giving her a little shake.

"He said he liked Cousin Bella best," said Lotty in despair.

Clarissa shrieked with laughter. Meggy giggled, and even Patty smiled.

"And didn't he say any more?" asked Clarissa, when she was able to speak.

"Yes," said Lotty; "he said her face was like an angel's, and he should put her in his picture of Elijah in the Wilderness."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Clarissa, dragging the crimson Bella before the looking-glass. "Look up, look up, my dear, and behold the face of an angel! I wish you joy of your first conquest, Bella. Actually an angel, Bella! And, upon my word, it was no bad comparison!"

There the hard voice lowered, and the bold face softened, and if Tom had seen Clarissa then, she would not have recalled "Satan's beautiful daughter, Sin," for at that moment her own good angel came close to her, and whispered to her heart, "You, too, might have looked like that!"

Bella Kerr stood before the mirror. She just raised her eyes to her own shadow. Her lips were trembling, her eyes moist, her cheeks flushed, but there was a glory all over her—the rosy dawn of her nobler nature.

Bella and Lotty were to sleep together, and when they were both in bed Patty came in for the candle, and after she had kissed her sister she went round and kissed her cousin. And Bella drew her head down and kissed her on both cheeks.

Bella Kerr went to London with the Verdens, and spent three months in their elegant, worldly home in Bloomsbury. The little country girl did not like it at first. After the conversation in her uncle's crowded saloon, her evening prayer and chapter were strange and uncongenial. But, alas, as night after night she never reached her chamber till after midnight, and then with fagged mind and feverish body, the simple devotions were first curtailed, and then forgotten. And soon, in her secret heart, Bella shrank from the godly, humble ways in which she had been reared. And cousin Ned and some other gentlemen said she would be such a charming girl when she had outgrown all the Methodistical cant with which the parsons kept down the good people in the country.

She saw Tom Graham only thrice during that long stay. First, he was waiting at the coach-office when she arrived, but so was Ned Verdon. And Ned hooked her arm through his, and did not ask Tom to accompany them. Next time she saw him at his own home. She spent the day there. Ned left her in the morning, and called for her at night. It was such a gloomy, poky place—in a back street in Finsbury. Bella thought Tom must have a hard time of it, especially now his sister

Patty had gone to her first situation, and all the household comfort depended on the repining mother. She was glad to go out with him—away to St. Paul's Cathedral and the Tower. And Tom was so considerate and pleasant, and somehow so much politer than Ned and Lawrence, with all their West-End polish.

But once more she saw him. One Sunday evening he actually presented himself at the Verdens, to ask if his cousin Bella would like to hear that famous preacher, George Whitefield, in his new chapel at Moorfields. Aunt Verdon began to make excuses; but Bella said she would go, for there was something in Tom Graham's quiet eyes, that brought up her own godly home so vividly to her, that she could have cried to feel herself alone in the midst of that gay, thoughtless family.

They had to hasten in order to arrive at the chapel in time. Bella never forgot that night, though she lived to try to forget it. She never forgot the hymn—a new one, which Tom whispered was written by one of those brothers Wesley, at whom the world was just beginning to wonder.

Bella had heard much beautiful music since her arrival in London; but for her none had such a mystic charm as that burst of voices, with the one voice beside her clear and sweet, although so low. The very thought of her cousin's obscure, patient life—the vague, tender yearning of her woman's heart over the paths of his quiet face—all softened and attuned her spirit for the sermon, so that the voice of George Whitefield seemed like the voice of God in her own soul.

When they left the chapel, it was a rough and stormy night, and they had enough to do to hold their cloaks round them and keep up the umbrella, so there could be little conversation. But Bella spoke so warmly of the enjoyment she had, that Tom ventured to ask if she would like to go again next Sunday, because if so, he would gladly call for her. And Bella promised. They said good-bye at the Verdens' door, and in the flare of their flambeau, Tom Graham's face looked so bright and happy.

Alas, alas! Bella had not reckoned on the light fire of persecution she was called to endure through the week. Ned made himself very agreeable, though he never missed an opportunity to throw in a spice of mockery about the last Sunday evening. And then for the next Sunday evening, he got invitations for a *soiree* at the house of a literary lion of noisy fame; and Bella was so charmed by the celebrated names that would be there, that the echo of George Whitefield's voice grew faint, and at last she consented to leave an excusing message for poor Tom.

More than once, amid the hollow compliments of the gay assemblage, she thought of him trudging through the frost from Finsbury, only to receive a cold apology from a half-insolent lackey. She knew exactly how he would look when he found she had failed him, how he would bow his head and go away, and perhaps stand silent amid the joyful praises at Moorfields. She thought she would write to him in a day or two.

But next Tuesday there came a command for her to return home. Handsome Ned looked so sorry, and was so grave all the day after. And in the twilight he caught Bella alone in the library. And there he told her that tale which makes the duldest woman's heart beat faster,—how he loved her,—how he could never love another in the same way. How she had taught him, more respect for religion than he had ever known before (poor vain child! how could she believe him?), and how he thought she could make him anything she liked, if she would only take him in hand. The end of it was that Bella Kerr left London with a ring on her finger, and an assured promise of speedy return.

Hornton Farm again. But the grandfather and grandmother were gone, and Meggy Mee was mistress there, a maiden lady, as Clarissa had prophesied. A happy, useful woman.

There were two visitors on that New Year's Day. At least, a lady and gentleman arrived, but the gentleman only stayed to change his travelling dress for evening costume, and then went away. They were London people, and had journeyed in considerable state.

Meggy Mee led the lady into the tea-parlor, where a comfortable meal was provided. But the town madam seemed weary and ill-at-ease, and presently asked for her room, declining Meggy's company there, or any attendance beyond her own maid's. And even the maid was not kept long in waiting. As soon as she had unfastened her mistress's hair, and robbed her

in her flowered dressing-gown, she was dismissed. Yet the lady seemed in no hurry to retire to rest.

She was still a young woman, not more than forty, and the haggard wanness of her face was by no means that of years, or even sickness. It gave the idea of constant indulgence in paints and similar pernicious adornments, of late hours and irregular diet, of strong whims, strongly thwarted. Carefully dressed and pleasantly excited, she might still be a handsome woman. But sitting there in careless loneliness, she was only a ruin.

She awaited the tardy return of her lord and master, gone to some heavy dinner among the hard-drinking squires of the neighborhood. Such complaisance was no wifely habit on her part. But she did not know how his degradation might be received by the steady servants of that regular family. She felt the time hang heavy on her hands, and looked around for something to lighten its passage. There were only one or two books, and the lady read their titles and dropped them wearily—the Holy Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress had nothing to do with her. She sauntered round the room, carrying her candlestick in one delicate hand, and absently passing the other over the carved fronts of the tall cabinets. Suddenly she paused. At the end of the room farthest from the dainty white-draped toilet table which had been prepared for her, stood another, bearing an ancient mirror. The light which she carried fell full on her face, and she saw her own reflection. But why should it make her start and shudder? Why?

Because, as if the ghost of her own youth had suddenly looked over her shoulder, she saw beside that passionate, hollowed visage, the memory of a fresh, fair face, which to one had seemed even as the face of an angel! Because suddenly in front of that old mirror Bella Kerr, and what she might have been, stood face to face with Mistress Edward Verdon, and what she was.

She sat down, and covered her face with her hands, and thought over that night when last she slept in the grim old chamber. The fifty who had gathered under that roof-tree then, where were they now?

What of Clarissa Verdon, with that strange, strong beauty which does not fade?—Clarissa, overwhelmed with that terrible flattery, which is only the mask upon a death's head—poor Clarissa, none the less a lost woman, because she was a prince's favorite!

What of her brother Lawrence? A Sybarite who shivered in the summer breeze, and might only feel the softest, and taste the finest that wealth could buy. Why did he lay up no love for himself in those times? And Bella shuddered to think of the cell in Bedlam, and the rustling straw and the roaring curse!

And what of handsome Ned? Bella's head bowed lower. This was he who had said she might make him anything she liked, if she would but try—this sordid, bestial man, who sometimes made her wonder whether God gave everybody a soul, or made some just to fill the world, and then perish. But Bella did not think that just now—she thought of him as he looked in the Bloomsbury library twenty years before, and of all the aspirations she then had for his sake, and all their miserable failures. He had loved her better than she had ever loved him, and in his breast there still lingered a maudlin fondness, while she had only a quiet contempt. Poor Ned! poor Bella!

"Best to be dead!" she cried in her agony of remembrance and remorse. And as she so cried out, she thought of a grave not very far off where Tom Graham waited for the resurrection morning. A lowly, lonely grave, with just a name upon it, and an old date, nearly twenty years ago.

"He was the last one who cared for my soul!" cried Bella, as in one flash of unspeakable anguish the dead lad's face smiled on her; and the very sound of the Moorfields hymn rung in her ears. None of her bitterest memories brought such an exquisite pang as that; but then the blessed tears came too.

Presently she grew calmer, and when her sobs ceased she crossed the room and rang her bell.

"Willis, have I not heard the name of Graham since I entered this house?"

"Yes, madam, that's the young person as sits with Miss Mee."

"Give my compliments to Miss Mee, and tell her I shall be eternally grateful if she will allow Miss Graham to come to me."

Miss Graham made no delay. She was but a slight woman of thirty, and wore a white muslin apron. But the stately lady rose, and opened her arms, and kissed her. "You are my cousin Lotty?" she said.

"Yes, I am Lotty," said the other.

"And do you remember when we were in this room together before?" asked Bella.

"Yes, indeed, I do," she answered, a smile breaking over her sweet face. "I remember it as though it were yesterday!"

"There have been great changes," said Bella.

"Yes, indeed," said Lotty.

"Do my uncle, and aunt, and Patty still live?" inquired the lady.

"Yes, and my mother enjoys good health," said the young woman. "Patty met with a severe accident in saving the life of one of her lady's children; and so my lady kindly allows her a pension; and she lives with my parents. My poor father has been fit for nothing since poor Tom was taken. You know that Tom is gone, ma'am?"

"Yes," faltered Bella, "I heard of his death; but—but I was travelling at the time—it was just after my marriage, I remember he was always delicate. Was he long ill at the last?"

"No he gave up work only a day or two before he died," she replied. "The pencil fairly dropped out of his hand. Ah, there never was anybody as good as Tom!"

"It was hard that he should die so young," said Bella. "Did he cling to life?"

"I can scarcely say," answered Lotty. "He had seemed rather sad for some time—as if something troubled him. Patty says there was a far-off look on his face, as if he were waiting for something."

"Did he feel sure he would go to heaven?" whispered Bella.

"He had heaven safe in his own soul," said the sister.

"And I suppose he never deserted Mr. Whitefield's ministry?" queried the other.

"Never," replied Lotty; "he was at Moorfields the last Sunday before he died."

"Did he finish—" and Bella paused, with a choking in her throat—"Did he finish a grand picture that I saw him begin at Finsbury—a picture of Elijah and the angel?"

"Oh, yes," answered Lotty, with reverent delight at this recollection. "He finished it: but he never thought so himself. He was always touching it up. It was not sold until after his death."

"I suppose he never spoke of me," said Bella, in a subdued voice.

"No," replied the other, venturing to take the white jewelled fingers, "I've often wondered over that; for I never forgot you, cousin Bella. I thought you were so very beautiful."

They sat silently, hand in hand, for some time. Then Bella gently rose, and Lotty Graham withdrew.

That night there was joy in heaven over a sinner that repented!

Oh, it is hard to repent!—hard, hard, to find our souls suddenly torn from all the ties we have linked about us. Hard to climb the heavenward path over the ruins of old habits and associations. But the grace of God has strength for hard things.

The change began the very next day, so that cousin Mee thought she had been wrong in her first impressions of her visitor Ned Verdon, too was almost startled by his wife's gentleness; indeed, it half-sobered him.

Bella went back to London, with two daisies gathered from a grave, folded in her Bible. She did not look at them often.

She showed them to her husband, and spoke of their dead cousin. And Ned Verdon listened quietly, and then slipped his arm round her waist, and kissed her.

But it was up-hill work. God's mercy is infinite; but He does not always choose to lift our self-made burdens from us. With patient devotion Bella might rekindle the torch of her married love, until Ned absolutely preferred a quiet evening with her to the jolliest club-dinner. But she could not make their hearts and lives one.

It came to an end at last. Ned was carried into his own house, thrown from his horse almost at his very door. Like a dead man, he lay for days; and like a dead woman, his wife walked to and fro. Was this to be all? No last word for a pledge to keep through the solitude afterwards? Kneeling in the middle of the room where lay the unconscious body, she asked this of her Father. And at the very last, her prayer was granted.

"God bless you my Bella?"

And that was all.

Long years after,—years of quiet, solitary duty,—Missess Verdon slept once more in the old room at Hornton. And the chamber was strangely chill, and the servants went and came softly,—as if a foot-fall could disturb one whose only awakening would be the trump of God!

There came one gentle old woman—very aged, though she was years younger than the dead. She drew the covering

from the calm face, and held it aside while she gazed. Then she tenderly put it back and whispered: "She looks like an angel once more; and now she is one."

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