

The Children's Friend.

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SELECTED STORY.

FROM THE CHATTERBOX.

NOBODY'S CHILD.

CHAPTER I.—POLLY'S INTRODUCTION.

"Well, I never! if there isn't that child sitting again on the steps, when it isn't ten minutes ago I told her I really could not have it."

The speaker, Mrs. Kellick, tapped sharply on the window pane, and a small figure rose quickly from the door-steps outside and hurried away into the gloom of a damp November evening.

"I cannot think," continued Mrs. Kellick, "why Mother Furmedge always locks her out. She is not a mischievous child, leastways I have never found her so; and if Mother Furmedge doesn't like leaving the door open, I could keep the key if the child could not. I almost wish sometimes as Kellick would not keep the old body on. Not but what the poor old soul pays regular enough, but them dust heap people are such a queer lot. When Mr. Smithers set up his heap, Kellick and me agreed we never would have any of the dust-people in the house; and sure enough, for some time, we kept our word, and always thought that was why our house looked the neatest in the Gardens. Then Mr. Jones, Smithers's overseer, took our first floor, and when poor old Mrs. Partridge died, as come with us from the City-road, and the back kitchen stood empty ever so long, Kellick said he was not rich enough for that to go on, so we took in old Furmedge and his wife; specially as Mr. Jones said he thought they wasn't much to look at, they were steady going, honest old folks, that we might trust for the rent. That is nearly eight years ago! Deary me, how the years do run on, to be sure! Why, Mary, that was the summer you and Joseph Moon met in this very room. But you are not going yet?"

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Kellick," answered Mary Moon, a bright-looking young wife and mother. "I must get home; it is pretty nigh six o'clock now, and I like to get baby and Joey in bed, and the place tidied up a bit, before Joseph comes in. You'll be sure and step in on your way to church Sunday! It don't seem natural-like if we don't meet then, and Joseph always likes his chat and walk to church with Mr. Kellick." So saying, Mrs. Moon wrapped her baby in her shawl, said, "Good night," and turned her steps briskly to her own house, some few streets off, leaving Mrs. Kellick to wash up her tea things, and have all ready for her husband's return.

But all the things were not washed up. A basin was taken down from the cupboard, and the last drain from the tea-pot and milk jug put in, which, with some boiling water made a hot, if not a strong draught. Then a good hunch of bread was cut from the loaf, after which Mrs. Kellick opened the door and peered down "the Gardens," with a half grumble to herself of "How foggy it is

to be sure! I wish I had not sent that child off!" Finishing more cheerfully with "He, there! is that you, Polly?"

"Yes, mum, its me," answered a shrill voice, and a small, brisk person came out from the darkness into the line of light thrown from the gas lamp across door-step. It was difficult to decide at a glance whether Polly was a woman or child. The large boots and the long tattered dress, the waist of which came nearer the ground than you somehow expected, and flapping black bonnet, made you think she must be some tiny old woman, till your ideas were suddenly upset by (what was to the wearer, a sadly worrying and frequent occurrence), the falling back of the big bonnet and the appearance of a pale chillish face, with anxious dark eyes, and a mat of black hair.

Polly was ten years old and small of her age. Why, she was not much above halfway up the railing round Mrs. Kellick's area; but then, you see, spending a good deal of time on door-steps, and a great deal of uncertainty as to food, are not the best things to make little folks grow strong and tall.

"Are you very wet, Polly?" asked Mrs. Kellick.

"Not so very, mum," answered Polly: "I would have stayed at the bottom of the stairs by Grannie's room, only it got so dark, I was a bit afraid I might chance to drop off asleep, and I thought Mr. Timaius might fall over me when he came in from work; and the last time he was that angry he told me next time he caught me at them games he'd brake every bone in my body. So I thought, seeing as how you did not like to see me littering about on the door-steps, I'd just take a look round some where, where there was a bit of shelter, till it was nearer Grannie's coming home. She's a bit late to-night, but I dar's say she won't be very long now."

"I suppose your boots are thick with mud," said Mrs. Kellick, looking at the large pair on the child's small feet. "Well, never mind, give them a good scraping and a rub on them two mats, and just step in here and have a warm, it is a raw cold night."

Polly stepped in, and was soon seated on a low stool in front of Mrs. Kellick's fire.

"Oh! how comfortable it all was to be sure!" Polly thought; and, "fancy, too, her sitting in a real parlor, all so bright and clean, and by such a large fire, too, eating and drinking like a queen, while Mrs. Kellick was washing up and behaving just like a servant to her!" She had often looked in at the door when Mrs. Kellick asked her to run errands, but she had never thought till now what a cosy room it was. What a beautiful red and green carpet it had! and how glad she was Mrs. Kellick had laid a bit of sacking for her to put her dirty boots on!

But silence was not much in Polly's line when she had any one to talk to, and when fire, tea and bread, had warmed her small

person, she plucked up courage to say, "Well, I never did taste such bread as this afore; you never get it at White's, mum?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Kellick, pleased at Polly's relish for her repast. "Mr. Kellick and me have dealt at White's this many a year; and White has served us well, I must say that for him."

"Then its 'firsts,'" answered Polly, smacking her lips.

"I don't believe as how I ever tasted *firsts* afore; they are just about nice! Grannie always has *seconds*, but they isn't fit to hold a candle to this. But how dear everything is to be sure! Why, meat is risen that high poor folks can't taste a bit from week's end to week's end. How I did wish I had fourpence just now to be sure! I went round by Trotman's just for something to do, and gave a look round, and there was a bit of meat ticketed five and a half pence; it would just have done for Grannie's Sunday dinner. Trotman himself was standing there, and when he sees what I was looking at he says, 'Polly, you shall have that ere little bit for four pence.' I thought it were that kind of him I could have cried, and he too with such a lot of little children and a sick wife! But I had no fourpences or twopences, so I was obliged to say, 'No, thank you, Mr. Trotman,' but Grannie is not come back yet, she may have stepped in somewhere and got a bit of something."

Mrs. Kellick, who had finished tidying up, and for the last few minutes had been watching the child, put her hand into her pocket.

Slight as the movement was, Polly's quick eyes caught it; and jumping up from her seat she exclaimed, while the color rushed into her face—"Please, mum, don't do that! I did not mean to ask you for anything when I said that about 'twopences;' me and Grannie is that comfortable we don't want for nothing; but somehow what with the tea and fire, it seemed as if you were kind of friendlike, and I went a-talking too much and forgot it wasn't manners to go a-staying like this."

Mrs. Kellick smiled and said, "You have not stopped too long, Polly, but I think I hear the master, putting his key into the door so, suppose you roll up the sacking and see if Mr. Furmedge has come in."

Polly did as she was bid; and making a bob-curtsey as she left the room, slipped out into the dark passage, while Mr. Kellick was wiping his feet. She was quickly down the stairs and at the back kitchen door which she found open, and 'Grannie' inside the room, striking a match to light her candle.

"Grannie," or more properly speaking, Mrs. Furmedge, had just succeeded in lighting her candle, when Polly entered, and the pale flame of the dip threw a flickering light over the old woman's person. What a strange old face her's looked to be sure! with all the wrinkles marked out strongly by being filled with the dust she had been sifting all day.

And now she has put the candle on the small three-legged table, you can see she is short and a good deal bent, and that her ragged skirt has above it a man's coat, and that her grey locks—which will straggle out—are covered by a black bonnet, the very ditto of the one which hangs down Polly's back.

"You are allays out of the way just as I wants you!" was her first greeting to Polly. "Now do bustle about and get a bit of fire; I'm downright parching for a drop of tea! and don't go breaking your bones over the sifter!"

Polly's bonnet is off now and hung on a peg in a corner of the tiny room, and she looks quite ready to bustle about, as she moves Grannie's big sieve away from the old woman's feet to its place behind the one low chair by the fire.

The light from the candle was after a bit added to by a faint glow from the fire-place, and then what a room became visible! small, damp, untidy, wretched!

The greater part was filled by a low stump bedstead, with no bedding, but the sacking was covered by the remains of a tattered quilt. Close at its foot stood the three-legged table, between which and the fire and Grannie's chair there was just room to pass, and no more. The rest of the fittings were, a box turned bottom upwards, a tea-pot and a few cups and plates.

Polly bustled about, filled the kettle, and put on the tea-pot, while Mrs. Furmedge opened a basket, and produced a small packet of tea, a loaf and a paper of peri-winkles. "Winkles, Grannie," cried Polly, when they were shaken out on a plate. "How nice! why its ever so long since we had any!"

"I was down at the heap in good time this morning," replied the old woman, "and had a run of luck. Got two finds—a tortoise shell and a white—which brought me in two shillings. But I had a bit of a wait to get my money, as the dealers were late, most of 'em, and when I had done with them, I was only just in time to stop the winkle man. But what are you looking like that for, Polly?"

No wonder Mrs. Furmedge asked such a question. Polly was standing with the kettle in her hand, while her eyes wandered from point to point of the tiny room.

Had her visit to Mrs. Kellick's comfortable parlor opened her eyes to the defects of her own so-called home? Had the cleanliness and comfort of that showed her the dust, dirt and wretchedness of Mother Furmedge's back kitchen?

Perhaps it had, and Polly's poor little heart felt a touch of envy at what seemed to her the grand comfort of the front room up stairs.

Grannie's voice called her back to herself, and she was soon seated at the table busy picking out her *winkles* with a brass pin, and talking away bright as over to the old woman of her day's adventures. "I never see such a heap of things in a room afore, and Mrs. Kellick was that kind I could have gone and kissed her,

if I had only been a bit clean and tidy-like;" and Polly paused to take a survey of her small black hands. The inspection did not appear to affect her appetite in any way, as she was soon at work again on her labors with the pin, till she stopped short, exclaiming: "Why, Grannie, you've eaten nothing but the very little ones yourself, and are a-piling up my set with the big ones."

"That's my lookout, I suppose," said the old woman, who, for the last five minutes had been watching the child's pleasure with a strange look on her hard o'd face. Was it possible that within that oddly clad person there was a loving heart? or was there a tear standing in the deep-sunk eyes, and ready almost to make a path down the dusty old cheek, when she looked at her small companion?

"You always had a liking for winkles, even when you was no higher than the master's knee! Bless him! afore he was took bad, many and many's the half penny, as he said to me coming home, 'Let's buy a winkle or two for the little maid.' As I was going to the heap this morning, it all of a sudden come into my mind that this were the very day you came to us, and I says to myself, Polly shall have a winkle by hook or by crook; and sure enough the very first thing I clapped my eyes on were that tortoise shell.

(To be Continued.)

SING MORE.

Cultivate singing in the family. Begin when the child is not yet three years old. The song and hymn your mother sang, bring them all back to memory and teach them to your little ones, mix them altogether, to meet the similar moods, as in after life they come over us so mysteriously sometimes. Many a time and oft, in the very whirl of business, in the sunshine and gayety of Fifth Avenue and amid the splendor of the drives in Central Park, some little thing wakes up the memories of early youth, the old mill, the cool spring, the shady tree by the little school house, and the next instant we almost see the ruddy cheeks, the smiling faces, and the merry eyes of schoolmates, some gray-headed now, most "lie mouldering in the grave." And anon "the song my mother sang" springs unbidden to the lips and soothes and sweetens all these memories.

At other times, amid the crushing mishaps of business, a merry ditty of the olden time pops up its little head breaks in upon the ugly train of thought, throws the mind into another channel, light breaks in from behind the cloud in the sky and a new courage is given to us. The honest man goes singing to his work, and when the day's labor is done, his tools laid aside, and he is on his way home, where wife and child and tidy table and cheery fireside await him, he cannot help but whistle or sing.

The burglar never sings. Moody silence, not the merry song, weighs down the dishonest tradesman, the perfidious clerk; the unfaithful servant, the perjured partner.—Hall's Journal.