

# The Children's Friend.

VOLUME I.

OXFORD, N. C., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10 1875.

NUMBER 10.

## SELECTED STORY.

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FROM THE CHATTERBOX.

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NOBODY'S CHILD.

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CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.

The memory of her husband softened the hard look in her face, and she sobbed again, so that she frightened the two elder children who clung to Polly, and asked in whispers what made 'mammie so bad.'

'She will be better soon,' answered Polly, trying to soothe the frightened little things, though she herself was well-nigh as bad as they were, and she felt much inclined to sit down and cry too. But crying was never much in Polly's way. Her short, hard life had given her many reasons for tears, but she had found them of no use, and she had learned to think that as she was 'Nobody's Child,' so nobody much cared whether she was happy or sad, and also that she was happiest serving others.

Polly's poor little heart ached for her sad companion, but what could she do to help her in any way? She had no bread, no money to give, and no friends to send her to for help.

But an answer to Polly's wishes for help for Jane Rankin was closer at hand than either of them thought. As the former hesitated as to what she should next say, faintly through the ill-closed window stole in the chiming of a church-bell, and as its notes reached her ear, returning hope cheered her heart and brightened her face.

'What a stupid I am to be sure!' she suddenly exclaimed, 'never to have thought of that before.'

'What?' asked Mrs. Rankin, struck by the change in the child's voice.

'Why, now look here,' said the child, 'there's the bell up at Christ Church just struck up for the five-o'clock service, and if you will just put on your bonnet, we will take the children and go. It is warm there. Why many's the time when I have been well-nigh perished with cold, I have heard that bell calling me to go in and get warm and comfortable. I used to go regular there on Sunday nights when Grandfather was alive.'

'Why, my clothes are not fit to go in,' replied Mrs. Rankin, looking down on her tattered dress.

'Oh, that don't matter,' replied Polly; 'people don't notice you a bit, and there's not such a many as on Sundays. We will get a seat close by the stove, and it is so warm and quiet. They have the prayers just the same as Sundays, and hymns too. Now if they would only sing "Guard us walking," I'm sure you would like it. They help poor people there too, after the prayers are over. Why, I have often seen a dozen or more waiting, and they go into the vestry, and see the parson, and they get money, and tickets on the shops. I daresay they would help you, if you was to go and tell them how bad off you are.'

By this time the party were ready to start, and though the

bell had stopped before they reached the church, they slipped in and took their places by the stove.

To the poor, broken-spirited woman, the peace and quiet of the church were more resting than aught else could have been just then. In earlier years, church-going had not been an unknown thing to her, but when her pretty face had begun to attract attention, carelessness and flattery had made her forget all else. Of late, care had taken the place of carelessness, and some such thoughts as, 'What's the use of my going? I have so much on my mind, I can't pay attention,' had made her give up church-going.

For some minutes she sat with her face buried in her hands, feeling nothing but that she was quiet and warm, and that others round her were joining in such words, as, 'We have erred and strayed like lost sheep,' 'But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,' and by-and-bye, 'Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses.' Could it all be real? Did God really think of the like of her? Work brought her bread: could God have anything to do with sending her and her little ones food, or the work which brought it?

And then her thoughts traveled far away to work, and trouble, and Joe, till they were again recalled by the voices of the choir, singing again and again that 'His mercy endureth for ever.' Was there mercy then for her? and would that mercy help her to keep the little ones by her side from starving? Would it forgive her wicked thoughts of putting an end to her miseries, and would it bring back her Joe? Ah! I think she never in after-life forgot that 136th Psalm; or ever heard it without its recalling to her mind, how, on this same evening, when the day's lessons had been read, and more quiet prayers said, she felt her sleeves pulled, and heard Polly whisper, 'It is the very one I wanted.' Neither could she ever forget the look of her small companion's face, as with clasped hands (all black and toil-stained) she followed, in her quavering child's voice, the choir as they sang—

'Guard us waking, guard us sleeping,  
And, when we die,  
May we in Thy mighty keeping  
All peaceful lie.'

Soon, however, they were again in the streets, with home-ward-bound steps, and brighter faces and lighter hearts, for had not Mrs. Rankin after prayers told her story in the vestry, and received a shilling and an order for coals to help her for to-night, and had, what were as good almost, kind words and a promise that some one should come and see her on the morrow?

'I tell you what, Polly,' said she; 'we will just cross over to White's for a loaf, and then the coal-place will be only a few doors off, so we will bring in the order and ask the man to bring round the coals as quick as he can. Just catch hold of Janie, she is so thoughtless in the streets, and I will bring Tommy along with me.'

Polly turned quickly to where

Janie the moment before had been trotting by her mother's side, and talking in her lisping way of where she had been, but she had wandered on, and now stood some ten or twelve yards in advance smilingly awaiting them in the roadway of a side street. A moment more and there was a shout, and both Mrs. Rankin and Polly saw a cab turn sharply into the street where Janie stood. A cry of terror burst from the lips of both, and one, if not both, sprang forward.

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How quickly a crowd gathers even in unfrequented parts of London, and how quickly too any evil tidings fly! Ere three minutes have passed there is a general notion halfway down the main thoroughfare and through the length and breadth of the side street, that there has been an 'accident,' that 'some one has been run over.' Heads appear at windows, doors open, and people run quickly to the street corner.

When we last looked, there was only a smiling child standing there. Now there is a pushing crowd of men, women, and children, and on every hand may be heard such words as, 'Stand back,' 'Send for a doctor,' or 'She is bad hurt by the looks of her.' There is no lack of women anxious to give help, but a roughly-dressed man seems to have made himself head nurse, and to take upon himself to order what shall be done. 'Yes, bring a shutter,' he said quietly, 'we must take her to the hospital. Then stand back, and some one roll up my jacket to go under her head. Now forward quietly, and keep step.'

And so forth from the midst of the crowd was carried the senseless form of 'Nobody's Child,' while on the pavement stood Mrs. Rankin, clasping closely her own saved Janie, but with eyes fixed on the poor crushed body being borne from her, and on the man's form so quietly tending it. 'Could it be that *that* was her Joe?' and had Polly thus been the means of giving her back, not her child alone, but also her child's father?

## CHAPTER V.—POLLY'S REST.

I can't say more than I know, can I? I asked both Mr. Stuart, the house-surgeon, and Mrs. Lamb, the nurse in the Abraham ward, and all they told me, was that No. 40, which I suppose is the 'Polly' you are asking after, is very bad, though she was conscious when they passed her at dinner-time. It is no use you asking to see her! There's particular days when patient's friends are admitted, and this isn't one. Why, if people was to be let in just whenever they asked, there would never be no peace in any of the wards, and an old man like you ought to know better than to go bothering to be let in! I have done all I can, and I have told you all I could find out about No. 40, so just you go home. She is no relation of yours, you said?

'No, sir,' humbly replied Polly's old friend, Mr. Tapp, for he it was, who for the last three days had been seeking tidings of 'Nobody's Child,' from the porter at St. Lazarus Hospital.

He had missed her the morning after the accident, and when

noon, afternoon, and early evening passed without bringing his little friend and helper, he had become so anxious that he closed his small shop, and ventured forth in quest of news. I think Polly, if she could have seen him, would have been surprised at her old friend. He had always to her looked such a big, grand 'old gentleman,' sitting in his tiny abode, and she would hardly have known him in the bent, ill-clad figure, that took its way so slowly along the streets, and looked so shrunk and small. At Mrs. Kellick's he learnt all about the accident, and also to what hospital the child had been taken, and, though he returned to his 'lean-to' home, it was only to turn over in his mind the thought of how dull his life would be, till his jug and farthing were again carried away of a morning by his trusty little messenger, and to plan how he would himself go the next morning to the hospital where she was, and if possible see for himself how she was getting on.

The first day he could only glean from the porter that it was not a visiting day, and he 'wasn't sure which case Polly was, as three accident cases had been brought in the night before, but he would find out.'

This was not much, but Master Tapp, with nought of love to make his life lovely save this poor child's daily visits, was not to be daunted at once. He went the next day, but only to learn that 'No. 40 hadn't said much, but must be the child Polly he was after,' and that 'it was no use his waiting to see her, as only near relations were allowed to see cases where perfect quiet was necessary.'

The third day's news for the old man was that at the beginning of this chapter, which was not delivered in a very amiable tone of voice, for St. Lazarus' porter was cross and tired of answering inquiries, especially about No. 40.

'Why, whatever is it about No. 40 that makes such a lot of people want to know about her?' he had asked Mrs. Lamb, the Abraham head nurse, when she passed down to dinner. 'I can't make out as how many of them are her relations. I've had an old man twice asking, to say nothing of a dirty old woman, as said she *ought* to go in, seeing as how the child belonged to her, and that man as brought her in, who comes with a young woman that looks like his wife. Then to-day I had two new people asking, both very respectable. An old woman who said the child lived in her house; and another, a good-looking young woman, with a light-haired little girl, who said they knew her very well.'

'Well, Mr. Porter,' replied Mrs. Lamb, 'I don't wonder at it; I always was fond of children, and have had pretty much to do with them, and though this poor little thing has not been more than half

conscious, yet there is something about her that draws you out to her; she is the patientest little thing as I ever saw, and the doctors say she must suffer awful. There's no bones broken, but it is one of those internal injuries that give such dreadful suffering.'

Let us go up with Mrs. Lamb when she returns to the Abraham ward, and see little Polly under these new circumstances. The ward is like all other wards, a bright long room with rows of neat beds, most of them tenanted. It is the accident ward of the hospital in the women's wing, and Polly over yonder in the bed in the corner is the only child-patient there is.

She looked very small for her years as she lay in the blue covered bed with closed eyes and tightly-clasped hands, and clasped much as they were when she last sung her favorite hymn, the night of the accident. Then they were black and toiled-stained with work for others, and the action was one of unconscious reverence; now they have been tenderly bathed by others, and are clean and fair and child-like, and are clasped tightly to help her to bear her pain. They have done their work for others, and are only wanted now a little longer for their owner's use. She has been a little easier to-day, and has smiled faintly at good Mrs. Lamb, and ventured even a dreamy "Thank you, sir," to Mr. Stuart, the house-surgeon, when he came to her this morning. Mrs. Lamb is a cheery, gentle soul, and her motherly stroking back of the dark hair, and kind account of who had been to ask after her, soothed the little maid, and made her stretch out one poor little hand to be held by her nurse.

Suffering had taken all the womanly independence from her, and left her only the little child, pleased even in the midst of her pain at the things around her, the bright picture of the Good Shepherd over the mantelpiece, the bunch of chrysanthemums in a jing hard by, sent by Mrs. Lamb's daughter in Kent, and even the pink and white cup she has her toast-and-water in.

My story is well-nigh ended, but I must ask my readers to come once more with me to the Abraham ward in the St. Lazarus hospital.

Two more days have passed over it, one of them has a 'visiting day,' and Polly has had a visit from 'Grannie,' so cleaned up for the occasion that she had hardly known her, and also one from Mrs. Rankin, whose tender words of pity and thanks have puzzled her somewhat. 'What had she done to deserve them? if she hadn't run forward the cab would have gone over Janie, and it would have been far worse for such a little thing to have had the pain.' She was a bit weary during the end of the visit, and had but a misty idea of the story, which as she related it made Mrs. Rankin's face look so bright.

'And fancy, Polly, all that day I had been grumbling and crying so, help was really close at hand, for Joe's job was finished, and he and his mates were come back to London, and been at the "Crossbow," for two days or more, as he said he could not find courage enough to come, and look me up, without making some inquiries first in the neighborhood for fear he should find me and the

(Continued on fourth page.)