

Preface

"Of all the paper I have blotted, I have written nothing without the intention of some good. Whether I have succeeded or not, is for others to judge."

—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE.

THE minds of young people are now manufactured like webs of linen, all alike, and nothing left to Nature. From the hour when children can speak, till they come to years of discretion or of indiscretion, they are carefully prompted what to say, and what to think, and how to look, and how to feel; while in most school-rooms Nature has been turned out of doors with obloquy, and Art has entirely supplanted her.

When a quarrel takes place, both parties are generally in some degree to blame; therefore if Art and Nature could yet be made to go hand-in-hand towards the formation of character and principles, a graceful and beautiful superstructure might be reared, on the solid foundation of Christian faith and sound morality; so that while many natural weeds would be eradicated, and many wild

flowers pruned and carefully trained, some lovely blossoms that spring spontaneously in the uncultivated soil might still be cherished into strength and beauty, far excelling what can be planted or reared by Art.

Every infant is probably born with a character as peculiar to himself as the features in his countenance, if his faults and good qualities were permitted to expand according to their original tendency; but education, which formerly did too little in teaching the "young idea how to shoot," seems now in danger of overshooting the mark altogether, by not allowing the young ideas to exist at all. In this age of wonderful mechanical inventions, the very mind of youth seems in danger of becoming a machine; and while every effort is used to stuff the memory, like a cricket-ball, with well-known facts and ready-made opinions, no room is left for the vigour of natural feeling, the glow of natural genius, and the ardour of natural enthusiasm. It was a remark of Sir Walter Scott's many years ago, to the author herself, that in the rising generation there would be no poets, wits, or orators, because all play of the imagination is now carefully discouraged, and books written for young persons are generally a mere dry record of facts, unenlivened by any appeal to the heart, or any excite-

ment to the fancy. The catalogue of a child's library would contain Conversations on Natural Philosophy,—on Chemistry,—on Botany,—on Arts and Sciences,—Chronological Records of History, and travels as dry as a road-book, but nothing on the habits or ways of thinking, natural and suitable to the tastes of children; therefore, while such works are delightful to the parents and teachers who select them, the younger community are fed with strong meat instead of milk, and the reading which might be a relaxation from study becomes a study in itself.

In these pages the author has endeavoured to paint that species of noisy, frolicsome, mischievous children, now almost extinct, wishing to preserve a sort of fabulous remembrance of days long past, when young people were like wild horses on the prairies, rather than like well-broken hacks on the road; and when amidst many faults and eccentricities, there was still some individuality of character and feeling allowed to remain. In short, as Lord Byron described "the last man," the object of this volume is to describe "the last boy." It may be useful, she thinks, to show, that amidst much requiring to be judiciously curbed and corrected, there may be the germs of high and generous feeling, and of steady, right principle, which should

be the chief objects of culture and encouragement. Plodding industry is in the present day at a very high premium in education; but it requires the leaven of mental energy and genius to make it work well; while it has been remarked by one whose experience in education is deep and practical that "those boys whose names appear most frequently in the black book of transgression would sometimes deserve to be also most commonly recorded, if a book were kept for warm affections and generous actions."

The most formidable person to meet in society at present is the mother of a promising boy, about nine or ten years old; because there is no possible escape from a volume of anecdotes, and a complete system of education on the newest principles. The young gentleman has probably asked leave to bring his books to the breakfast-room,—can scarcely be torn away from his studies at the dinner-hour,—discards all toys,—abhors a holiday,—propounds questions of marvellous depth in politics or mineralogy,—and seems, in short, more fitted to enjoy the learned meeting at Oxford than the exhilarating exercise of the cricket-ground; but, if the axiom be true, that "a little learning is a dangerous thing," it has also been proved by frequent and sometimes by very melancholy experience, that, for minds not

yet expanded to maturity, a great deal of learning is more dangerous still, and that in those school-rooms where there has been a society for the suppression of amusement, the mental energies have suffered as well as the health.

A prejudice has naturally arisen against giving works of fiction to children, because their chief interest too often rests on the detection and punishment of such mean vices as lying and stealing, which are so frequently and elaborately described that the way to commit those crimes is made obvious; while a clever boy thinks he could easily avoid the oversights by which another has been discovered, and that if he does not yield to similar temptations, he is a model of virtue and good conduct.

In writing for any class of readers, and especially in occupying the leisure moments of such peculiarly fortunate young persons as have leisure moments at all, the author feels conscious of a deep responsibility, for it is at their early age that the seed can best be sown which shall bear fruit unto eternal life; therefore it is hoped this volume may be found to inculcate a pleasing and permanent consciousness, that religion is the best resource in happier hours, and the only refuge in hours of affliction.

Those who wish to be remembered for ever in the world—and it is a very common object of ambition—will find no monument more permanent than the affectionate remembrance of any children they have treated with kindness; for we may often observe in the reminiscences of old age, a tender recollection surviving all others, of friends in early days who enlivened the hours of childhood by presents of playthings and comfits. But above all, we never forget those who good-humouredly complied with the constantly recurring petition of all young people in every generation, and in every house,—
"Will you tell me a story?"

In answer to such a request, often and importunately repeated, the author has from year to year delighted in seeing herself surrounded by a circle of joyous, eager faces, listening with awe to the terrors of Mrs. Crabtree, or smiling at the frolics of Harry and Laura. The stories, originally, were so short, that some friends, aware of their popularity, and conscious of their harmless tendency, took the trouble of copying them in manuscript for their own young friends; but the tales have since grown and expanded during frequent verbal repetitions, till, with various fanciful additions and new characters, they have enlarged into their present form, or rather so far beyond it, that

several chapters are omitted, to keep the volume within moderate compass.

Paley remarks, that "any amusement which is innocent is better than none; as the writing of a book, the building of a house, the laying out of a garden, the digging of a fish-pond, even the raising of a cucumber," and it is hoped, that, while the author herself has found much interesting occupation in recording those often repeated stories, the time of herself and her young readers may be employed with some degree of profit, or she will certainly regret that it was not better occupied in the rearing of cucumbers.

It may add something to the interest, and yet more to the usefulness of those scenes and circumstances relative to the return from abroad and premature death of Frank Graham, to mention that they are not fictitious; and the author is mournfully touched by the consciousness that some tears of juvenile sympathy have fallen from eyes that never saw him, for the early fate of a brother deeply loved and deeply lamented. With every endearing and admirable quality of head and heart, few ever held out a brighter promise of excellence than he who, being restored, as is here described, for a few weeks to his family, dying, resigned himself without a murmur to the will of God, and

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has long slumbered in a premature grave, his name being thus commemorated on a tombstone in the churchyard of Hackney:—

In Memory

OF

LIEUTENANT JAMES SINCLAIR,

AGED 20,

WHO WAS ARRESTED BY THE HAND OF DEATH
ON HIS WAY HOME,AFTER AN ABSENCE OF SOME YEARS, DURING WHICH HE LOST HIS
HEALTH ON SERVICE AGAINST THE BURMESE,

20TH JUNE, 1826.

"It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."
"For I know that my Redeemer liveth."

To Lorina, Alice and Edith Liddell¹

Facsimile: Sotheby Catalogue, April 3, 1928, lot 335

Christmas 1861

Little maidens, when you look
On this little story-book,
Reading with attentive eye
Its enticing history,
Never think that hours of play
Are your only HOLIDAY,
And that in a HOUSE of joy
Lessons serve but to annoy:
If in any HOUSE you find
Children of a gentle mind,
Each the others pleasing ever—
Each the others vexing never—
Daily work and pastime daily
In their order taking gaily—
Then be very sure that they
Have a Life of HOLIDAY.

¹ This acrostic, in Dodgson's own hand, appears on the front inner cover of a copy of Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839, 2nd ed. 1856). On the fly-leaf Dodgson wrote: "L. A. and E. Liddell/a Christmas gift/ from C. L. Dodgson."