Family Circle.

The Mother's Last Gift.

OR THE VALUE OF A SINGLE PENNY.

Thirty years ago there was seen to enter the city of London, a lad about fourteen years of age. He was dressed in a dark frock, which hid his under apparel, and which appeared to have been made for a person evidently taller than the wearer. His boots were covered with dust from the high road. He had on an old hat with a black band, which contrasted strangely with the color of the covering of his head. A small bundle, fastened to the end of a stick, and thrown over the shoulder, was the whole of his equipment. As he approached the Mansion House, he paused to look at the building, and seated himself on the steps of one of the doors. He was about to rest awhile; but the coming in and going out of half a dozen persons, before he had time to finish untying his bundle, made him leave that spot for the next open space, where the doors were in part closed.

Having taken from the bundle a large quantity of bread and cheese, which he seemed to eat with a ravenous appetite, he amused himself by looking at the building before him, with all the eager curiosity of one unaccustomed to see similar objects.

The appearance of the youth soon attracted my curiosity, and gently opening the door, I stood behind him without his being the least conscious of my presence. He now began rummaging his pockets, and after a deal of trouble brought out a roll of paper, which he opened. After satisfying himself that a large copper coin was safe, he put it back again, saying to himself, in a low voice,—"Mother, I will remember your last words: 'A penny saved is twopence earned.' I shall go hard with me before I part with you, old friend."

Pleased with his remark, I gently touched the lad on the shoulder. He started and was about to move away, when I said:—

"My good lad, you seem tired, and likewise a stranger in the city."

"Yes, sir," he answered, putting his hand to his hat. He was again about to move forward.

"You need not hurry away, my boy," I observed. "Indeed, if you are a stranger, and willing to work, I can, perhaps, help to find what you require."

The boy stood mute with astonishment; and coloring to such an extent as to show all the freckles of a sunburnt face, stammered out:—

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to know," I added, with all the kindness of manner I could assume, "whether you are anxious to find work, for I am in want of a youth to assist my coachman."

The poor boy twisted his bundle about, and after having duly placed his hand to his head, managed to utter an awkward kind of an answer, that he would be very thankful.

I mentioned not a word about what I had overheard with regard to the penny, but inviting him into the house, I sent for the coachman, to whose care I entrusted the new comer.

Nearly a month had passed after this meeting and conversation occurred, when I resolved to make some inquiries of the coachman regarding the conduct of the lad.

"A better boy never came into the house, sir; and as for wasting anything, bless me, sir, I know not where he has been brought up, but I really believe he would consider it a sin if he did not give the crumbs of bread to the poor birds every morning."

"I am glad to hear so good an account," I replied.

"And as for his good nature, sir, there is not a servant among us that doesn't speak well of Joseph. He reads to us while we sup, and he writes all our letter for us. Oh, sir, he has got more learning than all of us put together; and what's more, he doesn't mind work, and never talks about our secrets after he writes our letters."

Determined to see Joseph myself, I requested the coachman to send him to the parlor.

"I understand, Joseph, that you can read and write."

"Yes, sir, thanks to my poor, dear mother."

"You have lately lost your mother, then?"

"A month that very day when you were kind enough to take me into your house, an unprotected orphan," answered Joseph.

"Where did you go school?"

"Sir, my mother has been a widow ever since I can remember. She was a daughter of the village schoolmaster, and having to maintain me and herself with her needle, she took the opportunity of her leisure moments to teach me not only to read and write, but to cast up accounts."

"And did she give you that penny, which was in the paper that I saw you unroll so carefully at the door?"

Joseph stood amazed, but at length replied with emotion, and a tear started from his eye.

"Yes, sir, it was the very last penny she gave me."

"Well, Joseph, so satisfied am I with your conduct, that not only do I pay you a month's wages willingly for the time you have been here, but I must beg of you to fulfill the duties of following clerk to our firm, which situation has become vacant by the death of a very old and faithful assistant."

Joseph thanked me in the most unassuming manner, and I was asked to take care of his money, since I had promised to provide him with suitable clothing for his new occupation.

It will be unnecessary to relate how, step by step, the poor lad progressed with the confidence of myself and family, nor how the business we had undertaken to pay a penny, and which we gladly became, in the end, by hands no more than he absolutely wanted, even to a penny. At length he had saved a sufficient sum of money to be deposited in the bank.

It so happened that one of our chief customers, who carried on a successful business, required an active partner. This person was of eccentric habits, and considerably advanced in years. Scrupulously just, he looked to every penny, and invariably discharged his workmen if they were not equally scrupulous in their dealings with him.

Aware of this peculiarity of temper, there was no person I could recommend but Joseph; and after overcoming the repugnance of my partner, who was unwilling to be deprived of so valuable an assistant, Joseph was duly received into the firm of Richard Laird & others & Co. Prosperity attended Joseph in this new undertaking, and never suffering a penny's difference to appear in his transactions, he so completely won the confidence of his senior partner, that he left him the whole of his business, as he expressed it in his will, "even to the very last penny."—*Christian Register.*

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