

The Watchman and Southron.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 5, '94.

One Little Life.

BY ANNIE L. HANNAH.

Robin sat on the steps of his aunt's pretty cottage, scowling. The birds were singing deliciously overhead; the sky was as blue as the sky of a perfect June day ought to be; the little brook which went dancing across the bottom of the garden filled the air with its gentle murmur, as it whispered sweet secrets to the violets and ferns growing close to its side. But in spite of all the beauty Robin scowled.

Somebody coming up the road from the pretty station caught sight of the peevish discontented expression, and shook his head meaningly. It was the young clergyman who was taking charge of the little stone church across the way, and who was spending the summer, like Robin himself, with Aunt Tilly, though he went very frequently into town to visit the poor people among whom he worked in the winter. He had grown fond of Robin during the weeks which they had already spent together, but for that very reason he could not but feel the more sorry about one great fault which, if not conquered, was going to overshadow all Robin's life, the fault of peevishness and discontent; and that too, in the midst of great blessings.

As for Robin, he thought that there was no one like Mr. Clifton; and, as the minister opened the gate and walked slowly up the path, the cloud on his face slightly lifted.

"Well, Robin," said his friend, sitting down beside him, and taking off his hat, that the sweet breeze might cool his forehead, "this is a beautiful day, is it not?"

"A horridly hot day," said Robin rather grudgingly, "and as stupid!"

"Hot," repeat the minister, "you would not call it so here if you had been where I have to-day, Robin; and why stupid? didn't you take your drive this morning?"

Robin nodded. "Had a swim in the river?"

"Yes, Mr. Clifton."

"Any tennis?"

Down came the cloud blacker than ever.

"Only one game; Aunt Tilly wouldn't let me play longer; she said the sun was too hot after my headache yesterday, and mother was three thousand miles away; as though that would make any difference about my head!" scornfully, "She's awfully fussy, Aunt Tilly is; she won't let me do anything, and it's horrid!"

Robin's face grew brown down good, he was not allowed to over-heat himself, Robin was making himself miserable—quite forgetting all the good things which he had to enjoy, quite willing that this one little speck should blind him to the loveliness about him, and to the many other pastimes of which he might avail himself if he would.

Mr. Clifton glanced at the strong healthy body, and handsome face beside him, then away to the blue hills; and there was a strange expression in his own face.

"Robin," he began presently, "in the city, in a little room close up under the roof of a tenement house, lies a soldier waiting his Captain's order."

"A soldier," interrupted Robin, looking up with interest; "is he an old man? was he in the war?"

"Not in the war that you mean; he is fighting his 'good fight' now, and he is not a man at all, but a boy about your age."

"I don't understand, sir," said Robin, looking puzzled, "I thought you said he was a soldier."

"Aye, and so he is, Robin, a 'good soldier of Jesus Christ,' and so noble, so true, so brave a soldier, that I hope that I will be a better man for having known him. Listen. His room is very small, with only one tiny window, and hot! Well, you can imagine what it must be. His bed is hard, very, very hard, and he lies upon it all day and all night. He is never out of pain, and the greater part of the time he is alone, for his mother goes out to work. I went up to see him to-day, Robin; you think it has been warm here, you should have felt the air of that little room."

"I'm afraid you are very uncomfortable, Willie," I said, sitting down beside him, "it is a very hot day."

"It is pretty warm," he answered, "but," quite cheerfully, "I very often have a breeze if the door is set open, sir."

"So I set the door open and the breeze came in after a while; but O, such a poor little ghost of a breeze! and it had not passed over roses and lilies," glancing over to where the flowers were bending their lovely heads. Then he went on to tell me how many things he had to be thankful for. "It was so good of God to let me have a room with a window," he said, "for you know the inside rooms don't have any." And then he drew my attention to a tree which rose just above his tiny window.

"It is such company—I watch it always. In the winter—we came here last winter—the branches and stems are so beautiful; and when they are covered with snow or ice

you should see them. Then the buds began to come, and then the leaves; and now, on these hot days, or when the pain is very hard to bear, I look out and make believe I'm in the woods. I've read about them, sir, and they must be, oh, so beautiful, when one tree can be so grand. And then when the wind blows, the leaves make a nice sound that sometimes puts me to sleep, and you know there's nothing like going to sleep when the pain is bad."

And then he went on to tell me how, before he 'got so bad,' he used to go to Sunday school, and of his teacher who had taught him that his lameness was the cross which was his to bear, and now, by-and-by, if he carried it patiently, he would lose it and find his crown. "That means go to heaven—dying, you know, sir; and I am trying to bear it very patiently, for you know He suffered a great deal more for us. But sometimes I forget, but Miss Katy said—she's gone to heaven herself, sir—that He knew how hard it was to remember always, because He had had a great deal of pain and sorrow Himself, and so would forgive us for forgetting. Do you think He will let me go up there pretty soon? Mother says that she is willing, and it would be so very nice not to have pain or be thirsty any more. But I am willing to wait if He wants me to."

"I told him I did not think he would have to wait much longer; but as I looked about the poor, miserable room, and then at the wasted little body almost worn out by pain, the thought of this brave little soldier striving to fight his fight manfully to the end against such fearful odds, brought the tears to my eyes, Robin."

They were there now, and Robin turned his own head suddenly away. When he looked back again he was alone. The sun sank lower and lower casting long shadows over the sparkling waters of the brook, and with his chin in his hand, Robin sat with new strange feelings working in his boyish heart. Never in his life before had he thought of being thankful for those "every-day blessings" to which he had become so used. And then the beautiful color on his brown cheeks grew deeper as he recalled how the greater part of that beautiful day had been spent in "sulking"—for it was nothing less—over one small disappointment; he who had so much, so very much for which to be thankful, how did his conduct compare with that of the little hero of whom he had just heard?

There was some trace of all this in his face when aunt Tilly came to call him to supper, and Mr. Clifton, glancing at it, felt that his story had not been told in vain. Nor had it. But you must not for a moment imagine that a life-long habit was cured in one afternoon. By no means, Robin was simply awake to the fact that it was there to be cured; his fight was all before him.

But at his own request the minister took him to see the little "soldier," and time and time again when his own was wrinkling into a scowl, the memory of the hot little room under the roof, and of the patient brave face, helped him to remember that he had entered on that fight. Then, for he had a truly tender heart, Robin did not feel that he could do enough for the boy. It was too late to move him, the Dr. said, and so they could only make him as comfortable as possible; and as he picked the fruit and gathered the flowers with which he kept the child supplied, Robin's young heart grew more open to sweet and beautiful thoughts, for we cannot water without ourself being watered. And when finally one day Mr. Clifton brought the news that the Captain's call had come, and the little soldier had gone to put on his crown, he thought, as he looked into Robin's face, that the beautiful little life had not been lived in vain, that, in spite of pain and suffering, in spite of its having been shut away from the world, it had influenced at least one other life, for Robin would be a better, nobler man because it had been lived.—Living Church.

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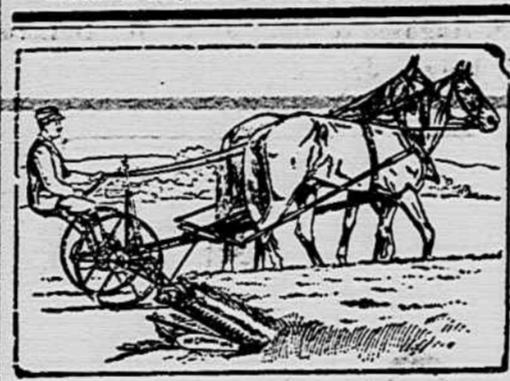
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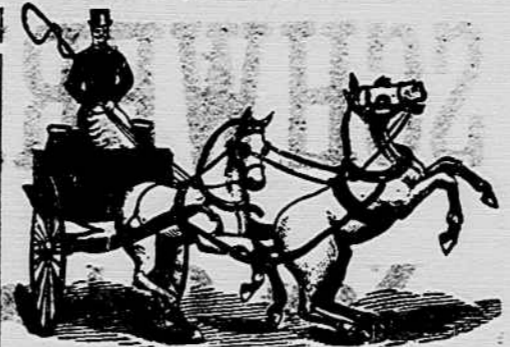


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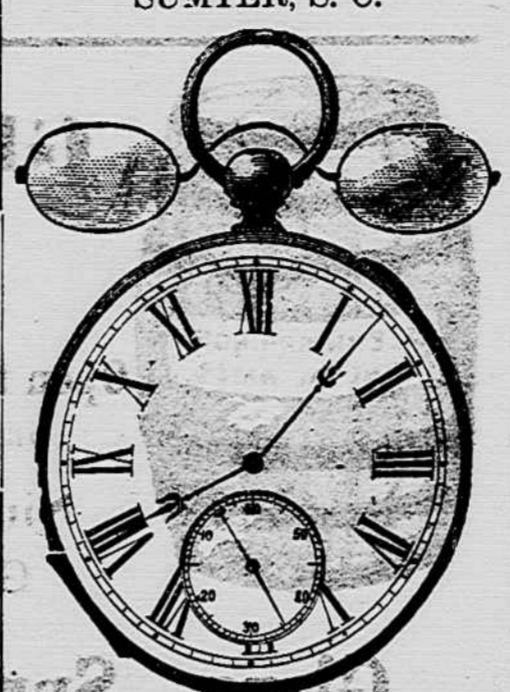


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