

My Girls

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ONCE upon a time I wrote a little account of some of the agreeable boys I had known, whereupon the damsels reproached me with partiality, and begged me to write about them. I owned the soft impeachment, and promised that I would not forget them if I could find any thing worth recording.

That was six years ago, and since then I have been studying girls whenever I had an opportunity, and have been both pleased and surprised to see how much they are doing for themselves now that their day has come.

Poor girls always had my sympathy and respect, for necessity soon makes brave women of them if they have any strength or talent in them; but the well-to-do girls usually seemed to me like pretty butterflies, leading easy, aimless lives when the world was full of work which ought to be done.

Making a call in New York, I got a little lesson, which caused me to change my opinion, and further investigation proved that the rising generation was wide awake, and bound to use the new freedom well. Several young girls, handsomely dressed, were in the room, and I thought, of course, that they belonged to the butterfly species; but on asking one of them what she was about now school was over, I was much amazed to hear her reply, "I am reading law with my uncle." Another said, "I am studying medicine;" a third, "I devote myself to music," and the fourth was giving time, money, and heart to some of the best charities of the great city.

So my pretty butterflies proved to be industrious bees, making real honey, and I shook hands with sincere respect, though they did wear jaunty hats; my good opinion being much increased by the fact that not one was silly enough to ask for an autograph.

Since then I have talked with many girls, finding nearly all intent on some noble end, and as some of them have already won the battle, it may be cheering to those still in the thick of the fight, or just putting on their armor, to hear how these sisters prospered in their different ways.

Several of them are girls no longer; but as they are still

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unmarried, I like to call them by their old name, because they are so young at heart, and have so beautifully fulfilled the promise of their youth, not only by doing, but being excellent and admirable women.

A is one in whom I take especial pride. Well-born, pretty, and bright, she, after a year or two of society, felt the need of something more satisfactory, and, following her taste, decided to study medicine. Fortunately she had a father who did not think marriage the only thing a woman was created for, but was ready to help his daughter in the work she had chosen, merely desiring her to study as faithfully and thoroughly as a man, if she undertook the profession that she might be an honor to it. A *was* in earnest, and studied four years, visiting the hospitals of London, Paris, and Prussia; being able to command private lessons when the doors of public institutions were shut in her face because she was a woman. More study and work at home, and then she had the right to accept the post of resident physician in a hospital for women. Here she was so successful that her outside practice increased rapidly, and she left the hospital to devote herself to patients of all sorts, beloved and valued for the womanly sympathy and cheerfulness that went hand in hand with the physician's skill and courage.

When I see this woman, young still, yet so independent, successful, and contented, I am very proud of her; not only because she has her own house, with a little adopted daughter to make it home-like, her well-earned reputation, and a handsome income, but because she has so quietly and persistently carried out the plan of her life, undaunted by prejudice, hard work, or the solitary lot she chose. She may well be satisfied; for few women receive so much love and confidence, few mothers have so many children to care for, few physicians are more heartily welcomed and trusted, few men lead a freer, nobler life, than this happy woman, who lives for others and never thinks of any fame but that which is the best worth having, a place in the hearts of all who know her.

B is another of my successful girls; but her task has been a harder one than A's, because she was as poor as she was ambitious. B is an artist, loving beauty more than any thing else in the world; ready to go cold and hungry, shabby and lonely, if she can only see, study, and try to create the loveliness she

worships. It was so even as a child; for flowers and fairies grew on her slate when she should have been doing sums, painted birds and butterflies perched on her book-covers, Flaxman's designs, and familiar faces appeared on the walls of her little room, and clay gods and goddesses were set upon the rough altar of her moulding board, to be toiled over and adored till they were smashed in the "divine despair" all true artists feel.

But winged things will fly sooner or later, and patient waiting, persistent effort, only give sweetness to the song and strength to the flight when the door of the cage opens at last. So, after years of hard work with pencil and crayon, plaster and clay, oil and water colors, the happy hour came for B when the dream of her life was realized; for one fine spring day, with a thousand dollars in her pocket and a little trunk holding more art materials than clothes, she sailed away, alone, but brave and beaming, for a year in England.

She knew now what she wanted and where to find it, and "a heavenly year" followed, though to many it would have seemed a very dull one. All day and every day but the seventh was spent in the National Gallery, copying Turner's pictures in oil and water colors. So busy, so happy, so wrapt up in delightful work, that food and sleep seemed impertinencies, friends were forgotten, pleasuring had no charms, society no claims, and life was one joyful progress from the blue *Giudecca* to the golden *Sol de Venezia*, or the red glow of the old *Temeraire*. "Van Tromp entering the mouth of the *Texel*" was more interesting to her than any political event transpiring in the world without; ancient Rome eclipsed modern London, and the roar of a great city could not disturb the "*Datur Hora Quietis*" which softly grew into beauty under her happy brush.

A spring-tide trip to Stratford, Warwick, and Kenilworth was the only holiday she allowed herself; and even this was turned to profit; for, lodging cheaply at the Shakespearian baker's, she roamed about, portfolio in hand, booking every lovely bit she saw, regardless of sun or rain, and bringing away a pictorial diary of that week's trip which charmed those who beheld it, and put money in her purse.

When the year was out, home came the artist, with half her little fortune still unspent, and the one trunk nearly as empty as it went, but there were two great boxes of pictures, and a

golden saint in a coffin five feet long, which caused much interest at the Custom House, but was passed duty-free after its owner had displayed it with enthusiastic explanations of its charms.

"They are only attempts and studies, you know, and I dare say you'll all laugh at them; but I feel that I *can* in time *do* something, so my year has not been wasted," said the modest damsel, as she set forth her work, glorifying all the house with Venetian color, English verdure, and, what was better still, the sunshine of a happy heart.

But to B's great surprise and delight, people did *not* laugh; they praised and bought, and ordered more, till, before she knew it, several thousand dollars were at her command, and the way clear to the artist-life she loved.

To some who watched her, the sweetest picture she created was the free art-school which B opened in a very humble way; giving her books, copies, casts, time, and teaching to all who cared to come. For with her, as with most who *earn* their good things, the generous desire to share them with others is so strong it is sure to blossom out in some way, blessing as it has been blessed. Slowly, but surely, success comes to the patient worker, and B, being again abroad for more lessons, paints one day a little still life study so well that her master says she "does him honor," and her mates advise her to send it to the Salon. Never dreaming that it will be accepted, B, for the joke of it, puts her study in a plain frame, and sends it, with the eight thousand others, only two thousand of which are received.

To her amazement the little picture is accepted, hung "on the line" and noticed in the report. Nor is that all, the Committee asked leave to exhibit it at another place, and desired an autobiographical sketch of the artist. A more deeply gratified young woman it would be hard to find than B, as she now plans the studio she is to open soon, and the happy independent life she hopes to lead in it, for she has earned her place, and, after years of earnest labor, is about to enter in and joyfully possess it.

There was C,—alas, that I must write *was!* beautiful, gifted, young, and full of the lovely possibilities which give some girls such an indescribable charm. Placed where it would have been natural for her to have made herself a young queen of society,

she preferred something infinitely better, and so quietly devoted herself to the chosen work that very few guessed she had any.

I had known her for some years before I found it out, and then only by accident; but I never shall forget the impression it made upon me. I had called to get a book, and something led me to speak of the sad case of a poor girl lately made known to me, when C, with a sudden brightening of her whole face, said, warmly, "I wish I had known it, I could have helped her."

"You? what can a happy creature like you know about such things?" I answered, surprised.

"That is my work." And in a few words which went to my heart, the beautiful girl, sitting in her own pretty room, told me how, for a long time, she and others had stepped out of their safe, sunshiny homes to help and save the most forlorn of our sister women. So quietly, so tenderly, that only those saved knew who did it, and such loyal silence kept, that, even among the friends, the names of these unfortunates were not given, that the after life might be untroubled by even a look of reproach or recognition.

"Do not speak of this," she said. "Not that I am ashamed; but we are able to work better in a private way, and want no thanks for what we do."

I kept silence till her share of the womanly labor of love, so delicately, dutifully done, was over. But I never saw that sweet face afterward without thinking how like an angel's it must have seemed to those who sat in darkness till she came to lift them up.

Always simply dressed, this young sister of charity went about her chosen task when others of her age and position were at play; happy in it, and unconsciously preaching a little sermon by her lovely life. Another girl, who spent her days reading novels and eating confectionery, said to me, in speaking of C,—

"Why doesn't she dress more? She is rich enough, and so handsome I should think she would."

Taking up the reports of several charities which lay on my table, I pointed to C's name among the generous givers, saying,—

"Perhaps *that* is the reason;" and my visitor went away with a new idea of economy in her frivolous head, a sincere respect

for the beautiful girl who wore the plain suit and loved her neighbor *better* than herself.

A short life; but one so full of sweetness that all the bitter waters of the pitiless sea cannot wash its memory away, and I am sure that white soul won heaven sooner for the grateful prayers of those whom she had rescued from a blacker ocean.

D was one of a large family all taught at home, and all of a dramatic turn; so, with a witty father to write the plays, an indulgent mother to yield up her house to destruction, five boys and seven girls for the *corps dramatique*, it is not to be wondered at that D set her heart on being an actress.

Having had the honor to play the immortal Pillicoddy on that famous stage, I know whereof I write, and what glorious times that little company of brothers and sisters had safe at home. But D burned for a larger field, and at length found a chance to appear on the real boards with several of her sisters. Being very small and youthful in appearance they played children's parts, fairies in spectacles and soubrettes in farce or vaudeville. Once D had a benefit, and it was a pretty sight to see the long list of familiar names on the bill; for the brothers and sisters all turned out and made a jolly play of "Parents and Guardians," as well as a memorable sensation in the "Imitations" which they gave.

One would think that the innocent little girls might have come to harm singing in the chorus of operas, dancing as peasants, or playing "Nan the good-for-nothing." But the small women were so dignified, well-mannered, and intent on their duties that no harm befell them. Father and brothers watched over them; there were few temptations for girls who made "Mother" their confidante, and a happy home was a safe refuge from the unavoidable annoyances to which all actresses are exposed.

D tried the life, found it wanting, left it, and put her experiences into a clever little book, then turned to less pleasant but more profitable work. The father, holding a public office, was allowed two clerks; but, finding that his clear-headed daughter could do the work of both easily and well, gave her the place, and she earned her thousand a year, going to her daily duty looking like a school girl; while her brain was busy

with figures and statistics which would have puzzled many older heads.

This she did for years, faithfully earning her salary, and meanwhile playing her part in the domestic drama; for real tragedy and comedy came into it as time went on; the sisters married or died, brothers won their way up, and more than one Infant Phenomenon appeared on the household stage.

But through all changes my good D was still "leading lady," and now, when the mother is gone, the other birds all flown, she remains in the once overflowing nest, the stay and comfort of her father, unspoiled by either poverty or wealth, unsaddened by much sorrow, unsoured by spinsterhood. A wise and witty little woman, and a happy one too, though the curly locks are turning gray; for the three Christian graces, faith, hope, and charity, abide with her to the end.

Of E I know too little to do justice to her success; but as it has been an unusual one, I cannot resist giving her a place here, although I never saw her, and much regret that now I never can, since she has gone to plead her own cause before the wise Judge of all.

Her story was told me by a friend, and made so strong an impression upon me that I wrote down the facts while they were fresh in my mind. A few words, added since her death, finish the too brief record of her brave life.

At fourteen, E began to read law with a legal friend. At eighteen she began to practise, and did so well that this friend offered her half his business, which was very large. But she preferred to stand alone, and in two years had a hundred cases of all sorts in different courts, and never lost one.

In a certain court-room, where she was the only woman present, her bearing was so full of dignity that every one treated her with respect. Her opponent, a shrewd old lawyer, made many sharp or impertinent remarks, hoping to anger her and make her damage her cause by some loss of self-control. But she merely looked at him with such a wise, calm smile, and answered with such unexpected wit and wisdom, that the man was worsted and young Portia won her suit, to the great satisfaction of the spectators, men though they were.

She used to say that her success was owing to hard work,—

too hard, I fear, if she often studied eighteen hours a day. She asked no help or patronage, only fair play, and one cannot but regret that it ever was denied a creature who so womanfully proved her claim to it.

A friend says, "she was a royal girl, and did all her work in a royal way. She broke down suddenly, just as she had passed the last hostile outpost; just as she had begun to taste the ineffable sweetness of peace and rest, following a relative life-time of battle and toil."

But, short as her career has been, not one brave effort is wasted, since she has cleared the way for those who come after her, and proved that women have not only the right but the ability to sit upon the bench as well as stand at the bar of justice.

Last, but by no means least, is F, because her success is the most wonderful of all, since every thing was against her from the first, as you will see when I tell her little story.

Seven or eight years ago, a brave woman went down into Virginia with a friend, and built a schoolhouse for the freed people, who were utterly forlorn; because, though the great gift of liberty was theirs, it was so new and strange they hardly understood how to use it. These good women showed them, and among the first twenty children who began the school, which now has hundreds of pupils, white as well as black, came little F.

Ignorant, ragged and wild, yet with such an earnest, resolute face that she attracted the attention of her teachers at once, and her eagerness to learn touched their hearts; for it was a hard fight with her to get an education, because she could only be spared now and then from corn-planting, pulling fodder, toting water, oyster-shucking or grubbing the new land.

She must have made good use of those "odd days," for she was among the first dozen who earned a pictorial pocket-handkerchief for learning the multiplication table, and a proud child was F when she bore home the prize. Rapidly the patient little fingers learned to write on the first slate she ever saw, and her whole heart went into the task of reading the books which opened a new world to her.

The instinct of progression was as strong in her as the love of light in a plant, and when the stone was lifted away, she sprang up and grew vigorously.

At last the chance to go North and earn something, which all freed people desire, came to F; and in spite of many obstacles she made the most of it. At the very outset she had to fight for a place in the steamer, since the captain objected to her being admitted to the cabin on account of her color; though any lady could take her black maid in without any trouble. But the friend with whom she travelled insisted on F's rights, and won them by declaring that if the child was condemned to pass the night on deck, she would pass it with her.

F watched the contest with breathless interest, as well she might; for this was her first glimpse of the world outside the narrow circle where her fourteen years had been spent. Poor little girl! there seemed to be no place for her anywhere; and I cannot help wondering what her thoughts were, as she sat alone in the night, shut out from among her kind for no fault but the color of her skin.

What could she think of "white folks'" religion, intelligence, and courtesy? Fortunately she had one staunch friend beside her to keep her faith in human justice alive, and win a little place for her among her fellow beings. The captain for very shame consented at last, and F felt that she was truly free when she stepped out of the lonely darkness of the night into the light and shelter of the cabin, a harmless little girl, asking only a place to lay her head.

That was the first experience, and it made a deep impression on her; but those that followed were pleasanter, for nowhere in the free North was she refused her share of room in God's world.

I saw her in New York, and even before I learned her story I was attracted to the quiet, tidy, door-girl by the fact that she was always studying as she sat in the noisy hall of a great boarding-house, keeping her books under her chair and poring over them at every leisure moment. Kindly people, touched by her patient efforts, helped her along; and one of the prettiest sights I saw in the big city was a little white girl taking time from her own sports to sit on the stairs and hear F recite. I think Bijou Heron will never play a sweeter part than that, nor have a more enthusiastic admirer than F was when we went together to see the child-actress play "The Little Treasure" for charity.

To those who know F it seems as if a sort of miracle had been wrought, to change in so short a time a forlorn little Topsy into this intelligent, independent, ambitious girl, who not only supports and educates herself, but sends a part of her earnings home, and writes such good letters to her mates that they are read aloud in school. Here is a paragraph from one which was a part of the Christmas festival last year:—

“I have now seen what a great advantage it is to have an education. I begin to feel the good of the little I know, and I am trying hard every day to add more to it. Most every child up here from ten to twelve years old can read and write, colored as well as white. And if you were up here, I think you would be surprised to see such little bits of children going to school with their arms full of books. I do hope you will all learn as much as you can; for an Education is a great thing.”

I wonder how many white girls of sixteen would do any better, if as well, as this resolute F, bravely making her way against fate and fortune, toward the useful, happy womanhood we all desire. I know she will find friends, and I trust that if she ever knocks at the door of any college, asking her sisters to let her in, they will not disgrace themselves by turning their backs upon her; but prove themselves worthy of their blessings, by showing them Christian gentlewomen.

Here are my six girls; doctor, artist, philanthropist, actress, lawyer, and freedwoman; only a few among the hundreds who work and win, and receive their reward, seen of men or only known to God. Perhaps some other girl reading of these may take heart again, and travel on cheered by their example; for the knowledge of what has been done often proves wonderfully inspiring to those who long to do.

I felt this strongly when I went to a Woman's Congress not long ago; for on the stage was a noble array of successful women, making the noblest use of their talents in discussing all the questions which should interest and educate their sex. I was particularly proud of the senators from Massachusetts, and, looking about the crowded house to see how the audience stirred and glowed under their inspiring words, I saw a good omen for the future.

Down below were grown people, many women, and a few men; but up in the gallery, like a garland of flowers, a circle of

girlish faces looked down eager-eyed; listening, with quick smiles and tears, to the wit or eloquence of those who spoke, dropping their school books to clap heartily when a good point was made, and learning better lessons in those three days than as many years of common teaching could give them.

It was close and crowded down below, dusty and dark; but up in the gallery the fresh October air blew in, mellow sunshine touched the young heads, there was plenty of room to stir, and each day the garland seemed to blossom fuller and brighter, showing how the interest grew. There they were, the future Mary Livermores, Ednah Cheneys, Julia Howes, Maria Mitchells, Lucy Stones, unconsciously getting ready to play their parts on the wider stage which those pioneers have made ready for them, before gentler critics, a wiser public, and more enthusiastic friends.

Looking from the fine gray heads which adorned the shadowy platform, to the bright faces up aloft, I wanted to call out,—

“Look, listen, and learn, my girls; then, bringing your sunshine and fresh air, your youth and vigor, come down to fill nobly the places of these true women, and earn for yourselves the same success which will make their names long loved and honored in the land.”