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THE BOARDING-OUT SYSTEM

Forty years ago or thereabouts, we happened to make a visit to an hospital for pauper orphan children in a large city. It was a dismal spectacle. The little creatures, seated on forms, and dressed in a poor garb, had a woe-begone appearance. Their faces were pallid, and a number of them had sore eyes. The sentiment which arose in our mind was that the whole affair was unnatural, and morally and physically unwholesome. Here was a spacious mansion kept up for the accommodation of some hundreds of poor children whom destiny had deprived of their parents. Treated well, as it was thought, according to regulations, they were evidently unhappy, and pined for that species of freedom which is only to be obtained by children brought up within the domestic circle.

Since that time, so far as Scotland is concerned, there has been a considerable revolution in the matter of juvenile pauper management. The plan of immuring a horde of orphan pauper children in large buildings under the charge of nurses and teachers is pretty generally abandoned, not so much on the score of economy as of common-sense. Nature has clearly ordained that children are to be reared, instructed, and familiarised with the world under the direct charge and responsibility of their parents. That has been the way since the beginning, and it will be so till the end of time. The family system is the foundation of everything that is valued in our institutions. Our whole structure of society rests on it. Any attempt to rear children artificially on a wholesale principle, is necessarily defective, will prove abortive, and be attended, one way and another, with bad effects.

Unfortunately there are exceptions to a sweeping rule. There can be no family system where parents are removed by death, or what is more dreadful, where the parents are so grossly dissolute as to be unfitted for their appropriate duties. In either case arises the question as to what is to be done with children who are so haplessly thrown on public charity. An answer to this brings us to the root of the matter. If at all possible, we must find foster-parents who will do the duty of real ones to the children assigned under proper precautions to their custody. We are aware that this may not be always practicable, and where it is not, the grouping of children in some kind of asylum must still be perpetuated. Some countries appear to be more favourable than others to the plan of boarding out children with foster-parents. For the plan to have a chance of success, there must be a prevalent intelligence, with a sense of moral responsibilities, and that special condition as concerns means of livelihood which would induce a family to board a child alien to them in name and birth.

In certain parts of Scotland, the plan of boarding out pauper children has been so peculiarly successful, that we purpose to give some account of it. The children so treated are not all orphans; some are children deserted by worthless parents; some are the children of sick, infirm, or lunatic parents; some are the children of parents who are in prison or are convicts. In all cases, deep considerations of humanity have guided the poor-law authorities in dealing with them. Throughout Scotland at 1st January 1875, the number of pauper children boarded out was 4512, among whom there was nearly an equality of boys and girls. The cost of each did not exceed ten pounds per annum; that is to say, for the sum of about four shillings a week a child is respectably brought up in the house of a foster-parent. This sum covers cost of bed and board, school fees, and extras of all kinds. The child participates in the ordinary meals of the family; it goes to the nearest school with its companions, plays about with them, and acquires a knowledge of country life along with a love of natural scenery. Instead of being confined in a dull mansion under a dismal routine of discipline, with the chance of

acquiring bad or at least narrow notions, the boarded-out child grows up a stout country lad or lass, and is endued with such general intelligence as is likely to pertain to the class amidst whom he or she moves. By these means, the boarded-out pauper children cease to be paupers. Forgetting their unfortunate origin, they drop insensibly into the general population. The catastrophe of orphanism or deserted infancy is robbed of its horrors. Surely, this must be deemed one of the greatest triumphs of humanity.

Of course, the thing could not be done unless under a scrupulous system of management and general supervision. The parochial board, with whom rests the administration, needs to exercise the greatest vigilance in selecting families to whom children may be assigned. Agricultural labourers and small shopkeepers in country villages are, we believe, considered to be eligible, should character and everything else bear investigation. Nor, though boarded out, are the children lost sight of by the poor-law authorities. They are subject to the visits of Inspectors, who report on their condition. In a number of cases, the children are boarded with relatives, who may be supposed to take some special interest in them, and are not disinclined to accept a lesser board than would have to be paid to strangers. Yet the parochial boards do not appear to view with favour the practice of boarding children with relatives who are perhaps aged and infirm, or are in receipt of parochial relief on their own account. The person thoroughly suitable should be in middle life, engaged in active duties, and fit to act the part of a foster-parent. For the success of his endeavours he should be aided in every reasonable way. The child put under his charge must not wear clothes bearing the pauper stamp, but be dressed like the other children in the place. An Inspector reports on the good effects produced by the removal of pauper uniform. 'The hang-dog look of pauperism gradually disappeared from the faces of the children – they saw themselves treated as other children, and soon became as others.'

In the Reports of the Inspectors generally, we have many pleasing instances of the social value of the boarding-out system. The significant fact strongly brought out is that the children do not return to pauperism. 'When they leave school, the boys learn trades or become farm-servants, and the girls go to service like other country girls, and many of them get respectably married. When the children go to service, the family relationship is still kept up, and they return to their foster-parents as other children do to their homes, bringing at term-times, when they get their wages, presents of tea and sugar, articles of clothing, and other tokens of affectionate regard.' We learn that in some cases the children adopt the name of the family with whom they are boarded, and as a rule they are not distinguishable from the younger members of the family. Did our space permit, many valuable particulars could be added. Those who take an interest in this important question in social economics may be referred to an able and handy digest, 'Pauperism and the Boarding-out of Pauper Children in Scotland, by John Skelton, Advocate' (Blackwood and Sons, 1877). The system, it is to be observed, bears no resemblance to that vicious practice of farming-out children, which has been productive of so much demoralisation and infant mortality. In the boarding-out of pauper children as described in the work of Mr Skelton, and now very general in Scotland, the care that is taken in selecting foster-parents, and the constant supervision to which they are subjected, give to the system its peculiar value. Whether such a system would be applicable to all parts of the United Kingdom is perhaps doubtful. It is at any rate important to know that in Scotland it has been eminently successful, and is the theme of praise by authorities on the subject. The Inspector of the poor of Glasgow tells us that it has been in use in that city for upwards of a hundred years. How suggestive is this remarkable fact – how curious to find that in this as in some other valued public institutions, a thing may flourish and be spoken of approvingly for upwards of a century in one end of Great Britain, and yet be hardly known in another, or if known, be only treated with scepticism and indifference.

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XXVII. – PHILIP

I arrived at the Grayleigh Station about seven o'clock in the evening, and walked slowly and enjoyably across the fields, altogether forgetting my dress-troubles as I watched the effects of the red sunset, a more than usually beautiful one. 'I must treat myself to just one look at the dear old beeches, in this light,' I murmured; forgetting fatigue and every other discomfort as I turned from the stile and went down the lane towards the woods. I was standing in mute contemplation of the sunset effects upon the different trees. The air was calm and still; not a leaf moved, as the sunlight stole amongst the majestic trees, crowning one, and robing another from head to foot with its red glory. I was accepting the rebuke with bowed head and clasped hands, when suddenly a sweet, low, girlish laugh – Lilian's laugh – rang out in the stillness, near me.

'There! I told you how it would be. I am not artist enough for that!'

'Try again,' returned a man's voice, clear and strong and in its way as musical as her own.

Whose voice – whose? For a moment I felt as though I were transfixed to the spot where I stood; then with trembling hands, softly parted the thickly covered branches which intervened between me and the speakers. Philip! My heart had already told me that it was he; and one swift glance shewed me that it was the Philip of my dreams – so improved as to bear only an ideal resemblance to the boy-lover I had parted with. He had developed grandly during the nine years we had been separated. Taller and larger in figure, his handsome bronzed face adorned with an auburn beard, whilst his gray eyes retained their old frank kindliness of expression, he looked the personification of manly strength, physical and mental.

Impulsively I advanced a step or two, then shyly and nervously shrank back again, clinging to the low outspreading branches of the tree. Presently, when my foolish heart did not beat quite so wildly – presently.

'Yes; that is better. Now a few bold strokes athwart the horizon. Have you not a coarser brush?'

'Yes. I will run in and fetch one.'

'Cannot I, Miss Maitland? Allow me.'

'O no; auntie could not tell you where to find it.' And away she ran, in the opposite direction to where I stood.

Without a moment's pause, in my anxiety for our meeting to take place whilst he and I were alone, I stepped hastily forward. He was examining Lilian's drawing, when he caught the sound of my footstep and looked up. His eyes met mine – ah Philip! ah me! – with the grave calm gaze of a stranger!

I stood utterly powerless to move or speak; and perhaps I looked more than ever unlike my past self in that moment of bitter anguish. But suddenly the truth flashed upon him.

'Great heavens —*Mary!*' he ejaculated, catching me in his arms as I swayed towards him.

I was still speechless; and looking down into my face, he added gently, it seemed to me sorrowfully: 'My poor Mary!'

'Am I so changed as that, Philip?' I murmured in a low broken voice.

'I – I fear you have gone through more than you would allow me to know about,' he replied, reddening. Adding a little confusedly: 'How was it that I did not find you at home, Mary?'

'I did not expect you quite so soon as this,' I stammered out quite as confusedly. 'You said a month or six weeks, and it is only three weeks since I received your letter.'

'I – found myself free sooner than I expected; and of course set my face homewards at once. I arrived at Liverpool last evening, and travelled all night, in order to be here in good time in the morning.'

'Did you get here this morning?'

'Yes; you had only left half an hour or so when I arrived. I should have met you, they told me, had I not taken the wrong turning from the stile.'

'Had – you a pleasant voyage?' I asked, terribly conscious that this was not the kind of talk which might be expected between him and me at such a moment.

I think he was conscious of this also. He stood a moment without replying, then every line in his face seemed to grow set and firm, and he said gravely: 'How is it that your friends here do not know that I have come to claim my wife, Mary?'

'I put off telling them from time to time,' I replied in a low voice; 'but I fully intended telling them this evening.'

'Let us go in at once,' he said hurriedly.

He drew my hand under his arm, keeping it firmly clasped in his own, and we went silently towards the cottage. Lilian was turning over the contents of a box in search of the brush she wanted, and Mrs Tipper was nodding over her knitting, fatigued with her day's exertion. Neither saw us approach, and both looked up with astonished eyes when we entered the room; and without a moment's pause, Philip introduced me to them as his promised wife.

'We have been engaged for the last ten years,' he said hurriedly, 'and I have just been taking Mary to task for not having told you so.'

'Dear Mary, dear sister, when you ought to have known how much good it would have done us to know!' said Lilian with tender reproach.

'Better late than never, my dear,' cheerfully put in dear old Mrs Tipper, eyeing me rather anxiously, I fancied.

The ground seemed to be slipping from beneath my feet and everything whirling round. I suppose I was looking very white and ill, for Philip gently placed me on the couch, and Lilian knelt by my side, murmuring tender words of love, as she chafed my hands, whilst Mrs Tipper was bending anxiously over me with smelling-salts, &c. But I shook my head, and tried to smile into their anxious faces, as I said: 'I am not given to fainting, you know – only a little tired.'

'The truth is, you have sacrificed yourself for us all this time, and it is now beginning to tell upon you!' said Lilian. Turning towards Philip, she added: 'We have all needed her so much, and she has been so true a friend to us in our time of trouble, that she has forgotten herself, Mr Dallas.'

He murmured something to the effect that he could quite understand my doing that.

'But of course it will all be very different now,' said Lilian. 'It will be our turn; and we must try what we can do to pay back some of the debt we owe to her. – Now, don't look fierce, Mary; it's not the least use, for petted you will have to be.'

'Then I am afraid fierce I shall remain,' I replied, trying to speak lightly.

'That is more like yourself, dear. You are feeling better now, are you not?' asked Lilian.

'O yes, quite well; only a little tired from walking farther than I need have done,' was my reply.

'To think of my talking "Mary" to you all day without knowing you were more than friends!' said Lilian, looking up smilingly into Philip's face. 'I know now why you bore the waiting so patiently, and why we got on so well together. – I felt at home with Mr Dallas at once, Mary. I think we both felt that we two ought to be friends. – Did we not?'

He bowed assent.

'And you must please try to like me more than an ordinary friend, Mr Dallas, or I shall be jealous. Mary is my sister, you know, or at least you will know by-and-by; and we cannot be separated for very long; so you must be considerate.'

'Philip knows more about you than you do about him, Lilian,' I put in.

'I am glad he knows about me, of course, Mary; but it will take a little time to quite forgive your reticence about him. – Will it not, auntie?'

'Auntie' thought that forgiveness might just as well come soon as late, in her simple placid way. Then, to my great relief, a diversion was caused by tea being brought in. If Philip had not won the heart of his dear little hostess before, he would have won it now by his hearty appreciation of the good things set before him. I quite understood why, for the first time since Becky had been at the cottage, her mistress had some cause to complain of her awkwardness. Becky's whole attention was concentrated upon Philip; and she placed things on the table in a somewhat hap-hazard fashion, gazing at him the while with curious speculative eyes.

Afterwards they commenced asking Philip questions about his voyage and so forth; and the conversation became less personal. He gave us an amusing account of his passage, humorously describing the peculiarities of life on board ship. Then as night drew on, Mrs Tipper very earnestly pressed the hospitalities of the cottage upon him. Of course he would be her guest – a room was already prepared, and she knew that she need not apologise to him for its homeliness. She had, I found, arranged to give up her own room for his use, and share Lilian's. But he explained that he was going back to an hotel in town, having arranged to stay there for the present.

'I am afraid I shall very frequently trespass upon your kindness nevertheless, Mrs Tipper. You will only get rid of me by giving up Mary, now.'

At which Lilian laughingly replied, *that* would be paying too dearly for getting rid of him. 'The better way would be to put up with you, for Mary's sake, and so secure you both.'

In truth, Lilian was a great deal more cheerful, I might say merry, than I had seen her for many a long day, in her unselfish rejoicing over my happiness. And the sweet, girlish, modest freedom – the freedom which is so diametrically opposite to fastness – of her manner with Philip, was so pleasant to witness! It was the kind of playfulness which is so charming in a sister towards an elder brother, and which so well became her.

When at length Philip was obliged to take his departure, in order to catch the last up-train from Graybrook, he bade me, in the matter-of-course way which seems so delightful in those we love: 'Come out and set me on my way, Mary; just as far as the stile, if you feel rested enough.'

Yes; of course I felt rested enough. I went out with him into the starlit lanes, walking silently on by his side, happy in the belief that *his* thoughts also were too deep for words. How could words express *my* proud humility – the deep tender joy – the love half-afraid of its own strength which I felt! Would he *ever* know the heights and depths of my love? Would a lifetime be long enough to express it? With it all, I was conscious of a shyness and awkwardness of manner, born of the indescribable feeling which accompanies, and gives a tinge of pathos to, great happiness in some minds. What was I, to be so blessed? What other women find their ideal fall short of the reality, as I was doing? Noble and true as I knew him to be, I had not hitherto, I think, sufficiently appreciated the geniality of Philip's temperament and his keen sense of humour. I do not know whether it was more noticeable in contrast with Robert Wentworth, who certainly impressed one with the idea that he was older than he was; whilst Philip seemed younger than his age. His fine physique too. How very handsome he was, in the best way, and how grandly careless about it! The most cynical observer could not have detected the slightest trace of conceit or self-consciousness in his tone or bearing. In fine, his was the rare combination of physical and mental power. Whilst he possessed the *gaieté de cœur* almost of a boy, an appeal to his intellect would call forth the cool vigorous reasoning of a well-informed thinker.

He had won his way to wealth by dint of intelligence, persistence, and temperate living, in a climate which gives some excuse for, if it does not foster, all kinds of excess, and returned strong in mind and body to reap the fruits of his labour. Moreover, he had not been tempted to continue accumulating wealth for its own sake, nor acquired the huxtering spirit which self-made men so frequently do acquire.

'I think I must not go any farther, Philip,' I said, as we reached the stile. 'You have only to cross the two fields, and turn to the right when you get into the road – that leads direct to the station.'

For a moment he made no reply, and something, I hardly knew what, brought vividly back to my mind the remembrance of another who had stood there on such a night as this, silent beneath the stars – a remembrance which struck upon my happiness as might a sudden sword-thrust upon an enraptured dreamer.

He gathered my hands into his own, and looking down into my face, said in a low earnest voice: 'There can be no necessity for delay between you and me, Mary. When will you let me take you away from here?'

'Take me away from here?' I repeated, rather startled by the suddenness of the proposal.

'I mean, when will you marry me, Mary?'

'We will talk about that by-and-by,' I replied, overwhelmed with happiness again, yet afraid lest I might shew it more plainly than it is womanly to do if I said more.

'Why should there be any delay between you and me? I – beg of you not to make any unnecessary delay, Mary. You ought to have been my wife long ago. I know you would prefer a quiet wedding, and – afterwards – wouldn't you like to travel a few months before settling down? You used to have a fancy for seeing some of the old continental towns.'

I could only whisper that it would be very delightful – with him – lowering my head until my cheek rested upon his hand. Then to keep my reeling senses firm, I looked up into his face and made a little attempt at a jest about his not knowing me when first we met.

'Only for a second,' he replied. And even in that light I could see that his colour was heightened. He looked pained too; and I certainly had not meant to pain him. Amongst my failings was not that of the desire to be always trying little wiles to test those I love, as we women are sometimes accused of doing. I had used the words solely in jest and to steady myself.

'Only for a second,' he repeated; adding gently, 'and we will soon have you blooming again, Mary.'

Blooming again! I caught in my breath with a little half-sob. Then making a strong effort, telling myself that I must and would behave better than a love-sick hysterical girl, I lightly replied: 'What if my blooming days are over, Philip?'

He bent lower down, to get a better look into my face, as he said: 'Nonsense! What makes you talk in that strain? It is not fair to me.' Then he added more gravely: 'You have always told me that your friends here are real ones, Mary; and they seem to be very much attached to you. It was very pleasant to hear them talk of you in your absence.'

'They are everything and more than I have described them to be, Philip. Mrs Tipper has been like a dear old mother to me; and Lilian – the best and truest thing I can say about Lilian is, that she is what she looks. No one could be mistaken about Lilian. Hers is the kind of loveliness which takes its expression from the mind.'

'Yes; it is just that. The fellow who could not appreciate her deserves to lose her.' I had given him an account of Lilian's troubles in my letters; indeed he was well acquainted with all that was connected with my life at Fairview. 'I only regret that I was not in England at the time. I suppose it is too late now for' —

'It is too late for any kind of intervention now; but if vengeance is in your thoughts, you may rest content. It will be, I think, quite punishment enough to be the husband of the girl he has married, with the remembrance of Lilian. He certainly loved Lilian.'

'Ah, that is something! When were they married?'

'About three weeks ago,' I told him. And then we got talking over the Farrar history, until the chiming of a distant clock reminded us that he had but twenty minutes in which to reach the railway station, in order to catch the last up-train.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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