

BABY THE FIRST.

The poet may sing Like a bird on the wing, And the prosier account his quill To a talented strain, But I mean to maintain That there's one thing which passes their skill. It has never been sung By terrestrial tongue, It has never been rehearsed How ineffably prized, And how much idolized In the household is baby the first!

A MOUNTAIN GIRL.

"Whoa!" The command was unnecessary, for both horse and driver were willing to stop and rest under the shade of the oaks and poplars that hot July noon. From early morn, when the dew was on the grass, until now, when the sun was overhead, Mr. George Glade had driven his faithful horse over the wide, rugged mountain roads of the Blue Ridge, and the place was too inviting for him to pass by.

Mr. Slade was a schoolteacher, and his academy, as it was called, stood under the shadow of Mount Lopatela, one of the tallest peaks of the Blue Ridge. He was, at the time of which we speak, returning to his home from the nearest railroad town, 30 miles away. Some years ago, warned by approaching disease, he had left his native home in Massachusetts for a warmer climate. Attracted by the wild mountain scenery and the balmy air, which seemed to banish his pulmonary troubles, he had made his home among these hardy and hospitable mountaineers. He had again entered upon his old occupation, which he had followed in his early manhood in New England home, and was now at the head of a flourishing school in this secluded country. His habits were simple, and his slender income was sufficient to satisfy his wants. He was alone in the world, and he had long ago decided to make his permanent home here among the mountains. It was not long before he became attached to these hardy mountaineers, and he readily accommodated himself to the primitive style of living. Although a man of northern birth and one who had worn the blue, he gave full credit to those who had worn the gray for honesty of purpose. In return he stood high in the esteem of all who knew him. His work in the schoolroom was making its impression on the community, and the children were devotedly attached to the patient, white-haired old man. It was but seldom that he went out in the busy world which lay beyond the mountains encircling the lovely valley where he had made his home. On this occasion he was returning to his home by a route which was new to him, and the picturesque beauty of this Switzerland of the south had never before made such deep impression upon him.

A lover's spot to spend the noonday hour could not have been found. Hard by was a bold spring, gushing out from the foot of the mountain at the head of a valley which sloped gently northward toward the Tennessee. The little stream formed by the spring went dashing down the hillside, winding its way among the boulders, now flowing smoothly along over its pebbly bed, then turning with swift current around some steep declivity, soon to reappear as it fell foaming and sparkling in the sunshine over a rocky ledge, and again stretching out like a head of silvered ribbon until it was lost in the distance, around on almost every side, the everlasting mountains, reaching up to the cloudless sky, clothed at this season of the year in greenest verdure, with their wooded crests and the deep blue ether background appearing like the gently rolling waves of the sea. Nestled among the jutting cliffs at the mountain base stood a humble log cabin, and across the road in the little field on the hillside in the growing corn could be seen an ox harnessed to a plow and tilling up the incline, and behind the plow, holding on with all her strength to the handle, was a half grown girl. The attention of Mr. Slade, who had unharnessed his horse and was preparing to lead the animal to the head of the little brook below the spring, was attracted. He saw her, as the ox reached the end of the row, stop, and standing her eyes with one hand look up at the sun.

As if satisfied that the moonlight had come, she quickly released the little spotted ox from his trappings. The ox needed no word of command, but turned and made his way rapidly down the slope to the brook to quench his thirst. The girl followed and reached the stream as soon as the ox had stuck his head to the running water. She stood for several moments with her bare feet in the clear, cold water, then, throwing back her hair, she stooped down and washed her hands, and then dipping up the water in her open palms bathed her face, toy with the boat and brushed her

her tangled hair. Her toilet was finished. What a picture! Standing in the running brook, under the blossoming branches of a banding mountain ivy, with its white and crimson flowers touching her hair, now released from its homespun covering where the sunlight and shadow met and mingled, her cheeks aglow from the morning's toil, and her eyes, blue as the ether above, turned toward the humble home on the hillside, she was indeed a child of nature—a true type of the mountain girl.

"Good morning, miss," said Mr. Slade, who had approached unperceived by the girl, who had been busy with her ablutions. The girl, startled by the sound of a human voice, sprang from the brook and prepared for flight in the direction of the cabin, but seeing the kindly face of the old gentleman she stopped and acknowledged his salutation with a nod. "Do you live here?" asked Mr. Slade. "Yes," she replied, pointing toward the cabin.

"Now," said Mr. Slade as his horse came up from the brook after satisfying his thirst, "can I not get a cool drink from the spring?" "Oh, yes," she replied, "I've got a gourd there," replied the girl as she led the way to the spring.

"Taking a large gourd which hung on a broken bough of a poplar tree overshadowing the spring, she dipped it brimming full of the ice cold water to the thirsty traveler. "Ah, that's a drink fit for a king," said the gentleman after he had almost drained the contents of the gourd. "That's what pap says," said the maid. "There hain't no colder water in the Blue Ridge," she continued, filling the gourd again and putting it to her lips.

"Who is pap?" asked Mr. Slade. "Pap! Why he is my father." "I know that, but I intended to ask his name." "John Hale. Howsomer, people as knows him call him Cap'n Hale, 'cause, you see, he was in the big war."

"What's your name, my child?" "Ida." "Where's your mother, Ida?" "Mother's gone to heaven more 'an two year ago; leas'tways she said she was goin there, and I believe it. See," she said softly, pointing to a mound on the hillside near the cottage. "And have you no brothers?" "Nary one, only two little sisters, Lucy and Sallie."

"Where is your father? Why is he not plowing instead of you?" "See here, mister, pap ain't able to plow nor do nothin else. He can't walk nor set up. He's got what they calls par'lysis. I told you as how pap was in the war. Well, over yonder at Chickamauga, where there was a big fight, the Yankees shot pap two times, and they almost killed him. I hate Yankees, don't you?"

Mr. Slade was silent. She continued her story: "After awhile pap mended and got so he could walk around some with a crutch and work a little bit. Ma has told me as how afore the war she and pap had a plenty to live on, but when he come home from Chickamauga it was all gone. Pap is a mighty good man, and he done the best he could, and after awhile when we children was big enough we helped him, and ma, she always helped him. One day just before ma was tuck down sick pap was comin down the mountain, and he fell and hurt himself in the hips where the Yankees shot him. Poor pap, he managed to kinder crawl home, and we all put him to bed, and he is in bed yet and can't turn himself without help. Poor pap! and the blue eyes grew moist, and there was a choking in her throat.

After a short pause she continued her story: "Ma tended him the best she could, and she sold one of the steers—the mate to Old Spot, out there—and she tuck the money, and she went and hired a doctor who lives way over yonder across the mountain on the other side of the Hiwassee river to come and see pap. We all prayed while ma was gone that pap might live and get well, and the good Lord, he heard us child, and pap did live, and he was a sight better when ma and the doctor come. The doctor, he looked at pap, and he examined him close, and he held down his head and studied and studied. Finally he looked up and said as how pap might live a long time, but he would never get up and be around any more. He said he would do all he could, but he nor nary other doctor was able to cure pap—poor pap! But that doctor wouldn't touch ma's money—not a cent of it. He's another one as is goin to heaven when he's dead and buried. Then ma, she tried to keep up, but she got weaker and weaker, and one day when the snow was on the ground, nigh on to two year ago, she come down to the spring, but she was so weak she couldn't get back up the hill. We children heard her call, and we come a-runnin, and we found her a sittin over there on that rock as white as the snow around. We children got her back to the house. The same doctor, he come, and he give ma physic, but—but ma never got up any more, and when the snow was all gone, and the poplar leaves was all out, and the mountain ivy was all out, she said she was a-goin to heaven, and she's there now."

She was silent. Her simple story had been told. There was something in Mr. Slade's throat which prevented him from speaking, and seeing the girl about to leave he asked, "Who makes a living for you all?" "Mr. and Old Spot," was the quick reply. "Can your father do nothing?" "Oh, yes, pap does a heap. He's mighty nimble with his hands, if he can't turn over without help. We children gathers straw and broom corn for him, and he makes bats and little baskets and brooms, and the doctor, he takes and sells 'em for pap, and that money buys us clothes and shoes and sometimes

a piece of bacon. Then the old cow—we call her Beauty—she gives us milk, and me and Old Spot makes the bread. Oh, we is all doin to 'ble well. Then pap helps us with our books, and I can read print and plain writin, and Lucy and Sallie, they knows their letters and can spell-fittie bits of words. But when I know enough—and pap says God will provide a way for me to know all I want to know—I'll learn 'em all about the mountains, and the stars, and the big world that is over yonder across the mountains. But I must go and turn pap and help the children with the dinner."

And she bounded up the hill like a deer. "Tell your father I will come in a few moments to see him," he called out to her. She turned as she entered the cabin door and nodded her head. Half an hour afterward Mr. Slade was seated in the humble home of the mountain girl. Her story was too true. There, stretched on a lowly bed, lay the poor paralytic, dead from his arms down, with his snow white hair—whitened not so much by the frosts of time as by the agony of suffering—brushed smoothly back from his brow. It was the abode of poverty. There was but one room and but scanty furniture of the most primitive kind. There were two doors, both standing wide open, and the bed of the invalid was wheeled in the middle of the room, in order that he might catch the gentle breeze which came so refreshingly down the mountain side. Over the fireplace on a rough shelf were a few well worn books and a broken jar, filled with the white and crimson blossoms of the mountain ivy and white and blue violets, gathered that morning on the banks of the meandering creek.

And that old man was bright and cheerful! All means that were in his reach had been used to restore him to vitality, but hope had fled, and he knew that he would never again rise up and walk. Life, even to him, had not lost all its joy and beauty. Upon Ida he rested for almost all aid, for the younger sisters were too small to render much assistance. Into her mind and soul he instilled a love for the beautiful, discernible in so many varied forms in the wild mountain scenery around their picturesque though humble home. Like the sunflower which grows so luxuriantly in this southern climate, his bed was always wheeled around so that he could see the morning sunlight as it streamed in through the door facing the east, and again, when the sun went down behind the mountain in the west, he loved for the last rays to fall in all their golden glory upon his head. Often when the moon was flooding mountain and stream and valley with mellow light he would ask Ida to wheel his bed near the open door, and then, with her hand in his, they would look down the beautiful valley and see the winding streamlet, with its banks lined with flowering ivy and laurel, looking like ghostly sentinels keeping silent watch over their mountain home. And they thanked God for it all.

Captain Hall had done what he could with his imperfect education to give Ida some knowledge of books, as the well thumbed volumes on the shelf testified. While her language was rude and imperfect and her information very limited, yet aspirations had been kindled in the heart of this child of the forest which she herself scarcely knew. Her life of toil, so hard for one of her sex and tender years, was sweetened by those longings which had begun to spring in her soul. She drew inspiration from all the objects around her—the grand old mountains, the thickly wooded forests, the cooling dove and the frisking squirrel, the bubbling spring and the running brook.

Mr. Slade had fastened his horse to the vehicle and was ready to depart as Ida came down to the ford of the brook, and whistling for the ox was preparing to return to her plowing on the hillside. "Ida," he said, "how would you like to go to school and learn?" "Go to school!" she interrupted. Her blue eyes kindled as she continued, "Ask me if I like to drink out of this spring when I am athirst, or to eat bread and honey when I am a-bungry. Go to school! But—" "But what?" "What's the use of talkin, mister? Are you a schoolkeeper?" "Yes, I am teaching school across the mountains, down in the Hiwassee valley. If you would like to go—" "Tain't no use to talk about it"—and her voice had a ring of sadness in it—"I can't leave pap and Old Spot."

Mr. Slade bade goodby to the mountain girl, but his mind was made up. The first opportunity after his return home he paid a visit to Dr. Baker, the kind hearted physician who had befriended the Hales in their sickness and distress. Of his sooty means—scanty for a family of 13—he had given liberally to the stricken family. His professional services and the needed medicines were never charged for, and under the righteous pretense of selling the baskets and mats made by the feeble fingers of the old paralytic many a dime and quarter found their way over the mountain to the little cabin by the spring.

"Never have I seen a mortal being bear his sufferings more patiently than Captain Hale. He's always as cheerful as a cricket, no matter if there isn't a crumb of bread nor a scrap of meat in the house," said Dr. Baker in explaining the situation of the family to Mr. Slade. "As to Ida," he added, "she's as bright and as pretty as a picture. If she had the chance of a good education, professor, she would be a queen among women, or my name is not Billy Baker."

"I intend to give her the chance," said Mr. Slade, with decision. It was soon arranged. One of Dr. Baker's tenants was to go over and take care of the little farm and the helpless family, while Ida was to be taken to Mr. Slade's school and given the best opportunities of obtaining a finished

education. Good Mrs. Baker volunteered to fit her up with a wardrobe which would answer for present emergencies. Ten days after his first visit Mr. Slade was again drinking from the gourd which hung on the broken twig by the side of the mountain spring. As Ida came across the brook, following Old Spot from the cornfield, she met him. "Howdy, Mr. Slade?" she joyfully exclaimed. "What you come for?" "For you." "For me? What for, Mr. Slade?" "To carry you back with me to school."

"But I can't go. I can't leave pap and Old Spot and the children." Her lips quivered, and the tears came. "Yes, you can," said Mr. Slade, "for a man has come with me for the purpose of renting the farm. He will stay and take care of Old Spot and your father and the children."

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