

THE DRURY LANE BOYS' CLUB.

WHAT IT GREW FROM. WHAT IT IS. WHAT WE HOPE IT WILL BE.

By Frances Hodgson Burnett.



O all English children—to all London children especially—the words Drury Lane represent Fairyland. The happy well-to-do ones, on hearing them, recall nights in glorious Christmas holidays when, attired in all their festive best of gauzy white frocks and big sashes, and floating waved hair, or in trim Eton jackets and broad, spotless white Eton collars, with gentlemanly little beaver hats on their smooth-cropped, shining heads, they descended from their carriages, attended by mammas and papas, or governesses, or tutors, and mounting certain broad stone steps were ushered into a land of rapture and light with which ordinary, every-day London seemed to have nothing whatever to do. Little boys at boarding-school, little girls in the school-room at home, had talked all through the year of last year's pantomime at Drury Lane, and delighted themselves with imaginings of what this year's pantomime might be. As the Christmas holidays approached anticipation and conjecture became breathless, and when some morning the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Telegraph* all announced the exciting fact that Cinderella, or the White Cat, or Humpty Dumpty were to be produced with unusual splendor at Drury Lane, a rapturous sigh of relief and bliss was breathed through every nursery in the land.

The very building itself was enchanted. It did not betray itself by its exterior, as a weaker-minded structure might have done. It was sufficiently secure in its own resources not to endeavor to allure in any trivial manner. It had artfully placed itself in an ugly, dingy-looking street, and had allowed itself to be built in a dingy, plain, uncompromising way, scorning outward adornments, deigning no external hints of joy; but certain enslaving bills con-

fessing—almost, as it were, with magnificent reluctance—that kings and queens, princes and princesses, fairies and goblins, clowns, harlequins and pantaloons—caverns of delight and palaces of fairy dream, *might* be beheld inside on payment of certain sordid coin at the box-office. There must be imaginative children who privately compare it to a good ogre. (Which is a very rare thing, ogres being by nature most unpleasant as a rule, having a habit of roaring, and legs a mile long with which they chase people, devouring them when caught—besides frequently putting them into caves to fatten before they are served up, which is really a most irritating idea.)

But Drury Lane might be compared to a good ogre, who looks gruff and plain of exterior, but who, when he takes you into his care, does *not* eat you or annoyingly suggest you must be kept till plump enough, but surprises you by showing you all the ecstasies of Fairyland.

No one can adequately describe what there really is inside the cave. It is a kaleidoscopic dream of brilliant light and changing color, of glittering rainbow, troops of fairies with wings, and draperies which make them floating flowers, or bees, or birds, or snowflakes. But no one ever dreamed such things, though perhaps in a dream one sometimes might laugh as one laughs at the jokes—at the mischievous goblins, at the clown and his unfading feud with the dignified policeman, or the irascible old gentleman, or the easily gulled landlady, or shop-keeper. No one ever laughs so heartily when he is awake, and perhaps even at Drury Lane, after the passage of a certain number of years, the point of a joke founded on an innocent old gentleman with a hatful of stolen sausages craftily secreted by a clown, modifies its power to produce ecstasy of mirth.

But this is Drury Lane as it ap-

pears inside. The outside is different. The Good Ogre's Cave, which is such a power that it speaks of itself and is spoken of oftenest merely as "Drury Lane," without any one's feeling the necessity of the addition of the word "Theatre"—just as a queen writes her name "Victoria," or "Adelaide," or a duke "Marlborough," or "Norfolk"—the Good Ogre's cave is not *all* of Drury Lane—and the rest of it is very different. Most of its surroundings are ruled by ogres of a race less kind—who do not show their captives Fairyland—ogres of Hard Life, of Poverty, of Misfortune, of Lack of Opportunity, of Ignorance, often of Hopelessness, and Hunger, and Disease; always of want in one form or another, whether it is want of comforts or want of rest, or sustenance for body or mind.

If one drives by the theatre one nearly always sees a few dirty, more or less ragged children staring with eager, longing eyes at the wonderful bills and talking to each other, evidently about the goblins or fairies not-too-lavishly pictured on some of them.

They belong to the outside. They never go inside, and it is only the one of them who has the good luck to have a brother who is a printer's "devil," or a newsboy or a crossing sweeper capitalist enough to indulge in a seat in the gallery, who knows anything definite about the inside's glittering splendors.

And it is not permitted to look too long even at the bills and the outside, or it is quite likely a big policeman may walk by and tell you to "move on."

Drury Lane means so much. It means street after street branching out of it, narrower and poorer streets, where there are poor shops, and poor people, and poor courts; streets where one sees slatternly women and unkempt men, and always swarms of children playing, squabbling, darting among carts and under horses' heads in a way to excite marvel and terror; little ones staggering under the weight of babies who seem bigger than themselves, some of them with nice little faces, some of them with wretched ones, some with hungry eyes, some with quite merry ones, but all dirty—dirty—dirty. Poor little things—God help and love them! The poor in London

cannot be clean. It is not only poverty they must contend with, but smoke and grime and fog which stick and smear all in the West End as well as in the East, and which cannot be ignored and evaded even by ladies with luxurious baths and deft attendant maids—ladies who are not touched by the sordid details of every-day existence.

In passing through these streets, in looking at these children, one cannot help but think of what possibilities they might represent and what life holds for them. It is such a thing of chance that one man or woman is born with some great gift not given to the rest. Who knows when it is born into the world—in what baby brain the germ of it lies? It is such a thing to ponder of—the chance that sometimes the seed, for want of the right soil, the right air, the warmth of the sun, may wither away and never be a flower at all. Take the root of the rarest and most splendid bloom on earth, plant it in hard, dry earth, in a cellar, shut it from air and light and dew; and what common weed will not grow to a lovelier thing, if it has an open field where the rain falls and the sun shines? And among the little men playing or sauntering in the unsavory streets, with dirty hands in their ragged pockets; among the little child-women, staggering under burdens of unwholesome babies—who knows what splendid fruit or flower may be waiting to spring to life or die without a blossom?

I have often asked myself what germ of what gift lay in the mind of the boy who was the originator of what is now called the Drury Lane Boys' Club. It must have been some gift of executive ability, and for organization.

He was a little fellow, small for his age, and I do not know what that was. His name was Andrew Buckingham, and his mother had a kitchen in a cellar where she kept a mangle.

This is what he told me—as nearly as I can remember—and he told it to me the night I opened the Lionel Reading-room in the new premises of the Club, in Kemble Street, Drury Lane.

"You see, ma'am," he said, "there seemed to be no place for us boys anywhere. If two or three of us stopped a bit to talk in the street, the policemen

came and told us to 'move on.' Wherever we went, or stood about, or met each other, we was moved on. Seemed as if there was nothing for us anywhere but to 'move on.' So it come into my mind one Sunday, when there'd been some trouble, that if mother'd let us meet some nights in her cellar, we might make some rules and call it a club, and we couldn't be moved on from there. So mother let us meet in her cellar, and I made some rules—and that was the beginning of it. And I can tell you, ma'am, little did I think we'd ever have such a night as this, or such a place to meet in."

This is what his mother told me. I made her acquaintance in a room up a court near Covent Garden, where a simple, substantial dinner is given to about forty hungry children three times a week during the winter, by a young lady who is a daughter of the rector of the very poor parish, and who is the good angel of all the courts and back-streets in it. It is a very simple organization—the work of this one lady—a matter of two long tables in a small room, some homely, savory combination of meat and potatoes, and a homely, simple pudding; but it means warmth and comfort to forty hungry children three times a week.

Andrew's mother was presiding over the big dishes of "shepherd's pie," and while I helped the Good Angel to cut up the food for the youngest ones, we talked together.

"It was Andrew who founded the club," said the Good Angel. "Tell Mrs. Burnett about it, Mrs. Buckingham."

She was a stout, motherly, most respectable woman, with a round, kindly face which beamed with delight when her boy was mentioned. (He is not a little boy now, but a little young man.)

"Well, ma'am," she said, "Andrew always was a good boy. And when the others got in trouble it bothered him. And the police wouldn't let them have no meeting-place. And one Sunday a policeman wanted to take a little fellow up, and I got him away from him. I nearly got into trouble myself. I never told you about that, miss. (Beamingly, to the Good Angel.) And Andrew got to thinking about it. An' he says to

me, 'Mother, let us meet in your cellar. There's four of us, and I've heard something about clubs, and I believe I could draw up some rules, and we should be all right.' And I says, 'I dare say, Andrew, but there's the mangle. There wouldn't be room. What could I do with the mangle?' And he says, 'You could sell the mangle, mother. That wouldn't ruin you.' Just think of that now!" with maternal pride at the enterprise and daring of the suggestion. "But I always did want to please him. And I did sell the mangle. I sold it for fifteen shillings. And they began to meet in my cellar, the four of them. And Andrew drew up some rules. And that was the way it started, with Andrew and three other boys in that cellar, and me selling my mangle."

I myself have never seen these first rules, but I believe that they still exist somewhere, and to my mind they are most interesting because, in a quite primitive and rudimentary way, they indicate that these four boys in the cellar were moved by a sort of embryo impulse toward making the best of themselves, in as far as they knew how to do it.

I argue this because of one rule which was prominent among those drawn up.

To educated boys, to cared-for boys whose homes surround them with an atmosphere of good taste and refined feeling, a rule which suggested that in a club to which they belonged "No bad language should be used," would be a rather singular addition to the regulations. But to little London lads, living their sharp young lives in a hard-driven, realistic world, brought up in the streets and lanes and courts, in the midst of the struggle for life, hearing every hour the wrangling or chaff of costermongers and hawkers who have a vocabulary of their own, of great scope and richness of vigorous epithet—to boys such as these a choice or moderation of language positively amounts to an indication of an actual *genius* for morals and good manners. Why should a boy of that class decide *not* to use certain words and phrases current in the world he knows? How should he be aware that blasphemy and worse are not desirable elements of conversation? It

is in the vicinities of Park Lane and Grosvenor and Berkeley Squares they are not used, and he does not visit in Mayfair. In Slum Street and FrAGRANCE Alley the ladies and gentlemen adorn argument, expostulation, and even *persiflage* and sprightly repartee with flowers of speech which Mayfair most probably never heard of. We of the fortunate world place our children in the care of French or German nurses that they may become "familiar with the language;" the children in the London streets become "familiar with the language" in something the same way, though not through nurses or governesses, and "the language" is neither German, Italian, nor French. There are, of course—there must be, even among the poorest—some fathers and mothers who, even amid their limitations, try to weed "the language" in some degree, but it is not in the nature of things that there should be very many.

So, that four lads should make for themselves a sort of refuge from the streets, and that they should resolve that there should be "No bad language," denotes an ingenuous desire for improvement quite as strong and as much to be respected as the impulse which leads more fortunate, educated boys to decide that their clubs shall speak French or German and debate the questions of the day. I am not even sure that the gathering in the cellar had any name when it was first decided that its members should "use no bad language." Perhaps the boys called it "The Club," and nothing else, but whether it had a name or not, it was the beginning of a good thing. And when one thinks how much is meant by those words, "the *beginning* of a good thing," one respects very much the four boys in their cellar and their primitive resolutions.

The Club met for some time in this small way, but, as was to be expected, other boys hearing of it thought it must be more comfortable to meet and talk where they were not liable to be "moved on," and where even a cellar protected them from wet, and cold, and mud, and fog. They wanted to "join," and one after another was taken in.

What the subscription fee was in those early days I have not inquired, but to suit the incomes of the members it must have been small, and as to this day, it is only sixpence a month (about twelve cents) moderation must have marked its bounds modestly.

But the cellar was not large and even the sale of the mangle did not provide much space, and in time necessity demanded that something should be done.

What *could* be done by boys who possessed nothing, and who were regarded by the general public merely as an element to be "moved on" when seen by a policeman. Here I must again take the liberty of mentioning the "Good Angel." I feel it is rather a liberty to make her a part of a published sketch, because she is such a very quiet and modest little young lady and lives her life of daily and hourly good and kind deeds in such a simple, gentle way—as if what she does were the only natural thing to do and could not possibly be left undone. I am sure she does not even know she is a "Good Angel," but I know it, and what is more, so many—oh, so many poor, hungry, cold, and unhappy ones in wretched back streets and alleys and courts, know it a thousand times better. In her quiet way she is part of that "beginning of a good thing" as much as Andrew was.

The little room in Russell Court—the one where the poor children's dinners are given them—is known as the Parish Room. How primitive it seems in connection with such a dignified parochial name would not be easily conveyed. But it has space enough to allow of its being used for small gatherings, such as charity dinners or teas.

To Andrew there occurred the courageous idea that as the Good Angel (suppose I call her "Miss Gracie" which is *not* her name)—as Miss Gracie had been kind to them and given them encouragement, she might be able to aid them in their extremity. So he went to her and explained the situation, and asked if she would intercede with her father, the Rector, to give them permission to meet in the little Parish Room a few nights each week, when it was not being used for any other purpose.

Being interceded with, the Rector told Miss Gracie that if she could find among her friends some young man who was willing to take charge of the Club, by spending with it the evenings it met and making sure that it did not reduce the little Parish Room to ashes or minute fragments, he would give his permission. His views on the subject of the London street "boy" were not tinged with any romantic, roseate glow, and it would not have been a trifling matter if anything had happened to the Parish Room.

Miss Gracie, having been a Good Angel so long, had naturally some friends who had some of the same qualities as herself. I do not know whether it is that a Good Angel draws goodness and kindness within her radius by some subtle natural power, or whether by merely existing herself she creates such things in those around her, but it is certainly true that no Good Angel—man or woman, girl or boy—ever existed without, somehow, seeming to bring to light kind and gentle things. There can be no more doubt of this than there can be doubt of the simple fact that if the sun shines constantly enough the very stones themselves will be warmed a little, and the poorest bit of common earth will find itself trying to put forth some tiny green thing, if it is only a blade of grass.

So Miss Gracie found a young man who was willing to aid her and her boys. I believe he was a very young man indeed at that time—not very much more than a boy himself. He was a Mr. Carlos Wilson, and if regarded from the story standpoint, Miss Gracie is the heroine and Andrew Buckingham the first hero. Mr. Carlos Wilson is another one.

I did not know him then, and I cannot tell at all definitely what his methods and plans were when he began first to go down to the Parish Room two or three nights a week and take charge of the embryo Drury Lane Boys' Club. But I do know that he meant to be the Club's friend, and, whatever his methods, he won the boys' confidence and liking, than which there could be no better beginning.

I think his first plan was quite a sim-

ple one, and I am sure its very simplicity was its strength. He wanted to help them to establish a small corner for themselves in which they could spend their evenings better—more comfortably—more healthily, and more safely than they could spend them wandering about in all sorts of weather in the streets, or lounging in the flare of the gas-lit corners of them. It seems a modest undertaking, perhaps, but one has to remember that London streets have their attractions. An active, curious, sharp-minded lad does not rush naturally and readily away from the deceptively bright-looking world of street life at night, unless he has something interesting and attractive offered to him in exchange. People who have plenty of amusements, people who drive comfortably to the theatres, almost inevitably, I think, find themselves looking out of their brougham windows with interest. For myself, I know that on cold nights, when the warmth inside the carriage formed a clouded dimness on the glass, I always found myself involuntarily rubbing off a clear place with my handkerchief, so that I could look through when we passed certain places, particularly that big crossing where Piccadilly seems to divide itself into various tributaries pouring into the great city sea, and where the Criterion and the Pavilion dazzle and glow, and there are so many lights and people and carriages and majestic policemen. I liked it myself, and often wanted to get out of my brougham and stand on the corners, or near the theatre or music-hall entrances, and watch the people as they walked past, or left their hansoms or carriages and turned in to be amused. If a lady from the West End found it attractive, why should not a lad neither well clad nor well housed, whose only theatre was the streets, and to whom walking about was a perfectly unfatiguing matter. If I had unlimited space I could write many pages giving color to the delights of that night life of the gas-lighted London streets, and the farce and comedy one can see and hear in the chaff of hansom-cab drivers, in the witticisms of coster ladies and gentlemen, in the casual banter of young

swells as they stand at theatre entrances. Any sharp street lad knows where the best entertainment is to be found, and that there are certain brightly lighted places where he can seem, for the moment, almost to belong to the world of the fortunate ones as he stands and watches the carriages draw up, and the powdered footmen descend to open their doors for pretty women in lovely frocks, who seem only to set foot on common pavement to pass from luxurious carriages to the theatre's brightness.

By night the gas-light and the specious suggestions of festivities serve to cast a glamour over the hard things dull daylight reveals, and so it is but natural that one must have some counter-attraction to offer to boys who know the street fascinations in all their variety.

And without any other capital or resources than a kind heart, good sense, and a sympathetic knowledge of boyish nature, the very young man who went down to Russell Court to be the friend of the Club managed to provide the counter-attractions. To provide them, if one had at command a number of well-fitted rooms, a gymnasium, a collection of games, a library and a number of people ready to represent something in the way of entertainment might not be so difficult, but for one extremely young man to provide them, in one unattractive room, without anything but his own wits and energy to draw upon, was to do a thing which fills me, at least, with a combination of amazement and intense respect.

One thing which has also caused me amazement on this matter is, that I have found, in speaking of it, that neither the young man nor his friends regard his undertaking as in the least remarkable or heroic. They refer to it, as the Good Angel and her friends refer to her unending good deeds, as if it was the most casual and natural thing in the world. And yet thinking people know that a young man has usually many things to do more exciting than spending evenings in an unavoidably stuffy room, entertaining miscellaneous street boys. But in the English nature there is much moderation of view, and the tendency to poetize a situation and see color in it is not strong. And,

after all, one cannot help liking immensely the many of them who in doing fine things never think of calling them fine, in fact never think of calling them anything at all, but simply do them in their practical steady-going fashion and never expect that they will even be commented upon.

To my mind the most interesting feature of the Club is its growth from such a small beginning, and the good to be gained by writing about it is that its simple history may hold suggestion.

In its one room its efforts were unavoidably the most economical and primitive. Their success must have arisen absolutely from the amount of energy and good feeling put into them.

The young fellow who had befriended it in course of time enlisted the interest of two or three other young men like himself. A few cheap games were bought, a few old books were given them, the young men, having formed themselves into a committee, evidently were possessed of both ingenuity and invention, and exercised them to the fullest extent. More boys and still more boys heard of the Club and wanted to join it. Boy nature talks about itself and its doings, and boy curiosity and interest are easily excited.

It became necessary to get a room which could be used every night instead of three nights a week. Additional six-penny fees from added members made this possible, though, of course, the room was a poor one, in a poor house, in a poor street. The young committee, feeling that as much out-of-door exercise as possible would be a gain in the months when the weather allowed of it, organized a cricket club, a hare and hounds club, and managed occasional simple outings where fresh air, at least, could be breathed.

There came a time when a drum-and-fife band became a possibility. A kindly fellow, who had, I think, been band-master in some regiment, gave a lesson or two a week with excellent results. The opportunity to thump on a drum or play on a fife without calling forth violent opposition and bitter reproach is one no normally constituted boy could regard lightly. The fife-and-drum band made gigantic strides and became

the most inspiring institution. The cricketers and harriers flourished and grew strong, the few old books were read and re-read until they almost dropped to pieces, the games of draughts and chess saw active service, and when, somehow, a second- or third-hand bagatelle-table appeared in the room, and a venerable but still audible piano lent the inspiration of its tones to the gatherings, the Club felt itself rich indeed.

The point one remembers with interest is that the organization was, as it were, a private undertaking. It was not "under the distinguished patronage" of any one, it would not have been mentioned in any list of charities. Nobody made it donations; except for the young committee and the street boys who belonged to it, and, perhaps, an occasional friend outside, it was not heard of. As far as the big world was concerned it had no entity, and yet it was doing its work—work the world would feel the effect of, though it would not know where it was done. No handful of young, growing human beings, however small it is, can be given even the simplest chances for mental and physical development without the world's being the better for it. The young committee had work enough to do, and difficulties and annoyances enough to combat against, but they had their encouragements. Gradually, though they were not preached to or lectured—boys who came to the Club seemed to get a nicer mental and moral tone, a less rough manner, and a more manly and well-meaning outlook on things in general. London street lads are not dull as a rule, their very lives make them sharp and quick to see and comprehend what is honestly and practically presented to them.

To the generality of them texts and sermons would not be a safe method of appeal, they can always hear those, and they regard them with frank distrust, but honest friendliness and helpful, intelligent good feeling are not lost on them.

When I first heard of the Club, nearly three years ago, I had two boys of my own. To my mind, the Boy has long been the most interesting object in nature. He is an unworked mine,

whose wealth of resources we cannot even guess at; he is an unclimbed mountain, the view from whose summit may be of such expanse and beauty that we might stand breathless with love and awe before it; he is an untrodden forest, whose labyrinths may reveal such wonders of rare growth as the world has never seen; he is an unsailed sea from whose depths the diver, Life, may bring forth strange treasures; he is the dawning of a day whose sunset may illumine a whole world. He may not be a romantic object to-day, he may have—probably has—a stalwart appetite, a habit of reducing order to chaos—a tendency to break into whoops and uncouth sounds, he may exhibit a distinct antipathy to correctness of demeanor, and to study, but—who knows? There is a lovely story of a celebrated man, who, when he saw in a garden a beautiful rose growing, took off his hat to it as to a beautiful lady. The Boy suggests to me a parallel mental attitude. Figuratively, I make a little reverence, saying—even to an unprepossessing one:

"Far be it from me, your Highness, my lord Bishop, your Statesmanship, my lord Judge, your Honor, the Maker of Pictures, of Books, of Laws, of great Benevolences, whichever it is to be, in forty years from now, far be it from me to treat you with unbelief and disrespect. I have lived long enough to know all that I may do, but you—who knows how low I should feel called upon to bow before what you may be—if I lived long enough to see your ripeness." It may be politic to be amiable to a boy, certainly it is doing wise and good work for the world to give him all the chances that belong to him.

The two I knew the best had been denied no "chance," nor had they been stinted in any. They had had books, pleasures, travels, clever friends who were men and women, and the love which makes such things worth having. All given to them had been capital well invested. They were fine, young, human things.

When, one evening in London, the young man who had first been the friend of the Club told me its story, it occurred to me that two fortunate boys with

nice natures and tremendous boyish experiences would be a good element to introduce into the club-room in the backstreet in Drury Lane. They would have so much to say and could say it in the way boys could best understand. I was just on the point of leaving London, but I suggested to the Club's Friend that, when I returned the next season, my two should be introduced to the Club and interest themselves in it. I knew they would regard the experience as delightful, and gather material which might form a stratum of their very varied education.

To the members of the Club, themselves, I knew they would represent as much novelty and entertainment as the bagatelle-board and piano had done.

My visitor found the idea excellent. We discussed the plan with much pleasure and interest and finally parted with the understanding that the next summer it should be carried out. I introduce this personal detail because it was the reason for my becoming later more intimate with the Club.

The next summer we were not in England. One of the two who were to have visited the room near Drury Lane was being taken from one Continental health resort to another. His brother was travelling with him. The next time I returned to London, the following year, one had been sent home to America, the short life of the other was ended.

It was then that, among other work which brought interest, the Boys' Club presented itself to my mind. The boy, as an object to appeal to one's heart and touch it, to appeal to one's mind and fill it with thought and the wish to help him to all his chances, was even more powerful than he had been before. To be human is to be personal—to be, personal is to be human.

I asked the Club's Friend to call on me again. He came and told me how they stood. The membership had grown so that the place they occupied would not hold it. If they could find something which would give them more room it would be of advantage to them in every way. Boys were applying for admission whom they could not take in, and a young man, who was rich and generous, had said he would fit up a

room as a gymnasium if they had such a room to spare. I had a plan also which required a room.

The few old books they possessed had been read until their contents were known by heart. In memory of a boy whose brief life had been spent among books he revelled in, I thought I should like to give them a comfortable reading-room and at least the nucleus of a library, forming itself on the books he had been fond of.

The committee had found a building in Kemble Street, Drury Lane. It was very plain and rough, having been merely used as a small printing establishment, but there was a room in the basement which could be used as a gymnasium, there was a good-sized room above which could be used as a general meeting-place, and one above that which could be used as a reading-room if they had one.

But the trouble was to secure the place. Rough and bare as it was, with its dingy, whitewashed brick walls and apparently unplanned flooring, the owner, on being applied to, and hearing that the premises were to be used by a boys' club, whereof the members were not gathered from the West End, refused to let it to them. His ideas of the London street lad were not poetized in any greater degree than most people's.

"So there we are," the Club's Friend said to me. "And I assure you we are quite in despair. They won't hear of us."

Then it occurred to me that perhaps if a person who was known to be responsible should intercede for them with the owner of the property, and guarantee that it would really be in safe hands, he might be induced to reconsider his decision.

"The truth is," said the Club's Friend, laughing, "that when I went to him and he saw that I was a young fellow, myself, I suppose he thought we should only be a lot of lads all together, and he would not trust us to behave ourselves."

The end of our discussion of the subject was that I went to call on the owner of the building, myself, and finding him out of town wrote to him. I told him what I knew of the Club and what I thought of its character, and, feeling

that such an intention must bear some conviction with it, I explained that I sufficiently respected it and its object to be on the point of giving it a reading-room and library in the name of my own son. The result finally was that the adverse decision was reconsidered and, certain forms being gone through, the triumphant Boys' Club entered into possession of No. 30 Kemble Street, Drury Lane, on whose one entrance-door was painted the words "Drury Lane Boys' Club."

But there were many things to be done before the premises were in good working order, and it is the details of what was done with the rough, bare rooms, which may be useful to readers who wish to do a practical thing, having only unpromising material and space to make use of.

The basement room was not a large one. It was, in fact, an ordinary sized cellar, but the floor was cemented, and as many vaulting-bars and poles, and ropes and pulleys as could be used in it, were put up substantially, by order of the donor of the gymnasium. When finished it was a most practicable and valuable addition to the Club's resources. On the entrance floor two small rooms were partitioned off, one to be used at night by the man who was care-taker, the other to be used by the boys as a place in which to put on the clothes in which they played cricket, and ran with the harriers. The floor from the entrance was covered with very thick and substantial linoleum cloth, which looked clean and could be easily washed off each morning. The room on the floor above was a large one. It made no pretence at beauty or decoration. It was furnished with the articles which had seen hard and honorable service in the first room the club had owned. Its floor was covered with what I think is called cocconut matting; it contained some strong small tables to play games on, some veteran chairs, the bagatelle-board and the venerable piano, which at the time was suffering from the temporary loss of a leg. The little Drury Lane Boys' Club had none of the sumptuousness of the People's Palace.

From this apartment one mounted a sort of ladder to the rooms on the third

floor. This had contained the printing-presses used by the previous occupiers. The walls were brick, the rough wood rafters formed the ceiling, the floor was covered with accumulations of printer's ink.

I looked about me with some slight dismay when I first saw it. I had a fancy that I should like to make the Lionel Reading-room a place as far comfortable and pleasant to look at as was compatible with a back street and a working-boys' club. In fact, I had had a dream of being able to combine the practical and the simply decorative in such a manner that the boy whose portrait was to look down from the walls might himself have found it a place cheerful and pleasant to sit in and turn over books.

But there were several points to be considered in the effort to produce this combination. There is nothing so difficult as to combine the ornamental with the sternly practical.

"I do not want a room which openly proclaims itself a poor boys' library the moment one enters it," I said. "I should like it to have an atmosphere of its own, which would put a boy—even a rough boy—into the mood for sitting down quietly to read and let others read about him. They can make as much noise as they like in the Gymnasium, they can talk and chaff each other in the General Room over their games; but here I should like them to come when they want to enjoy themselves in a restful sort of way. If it looks bright and rather pretty, I am sure it will be good for them."

The young committee thought I was right, though I don't think, as they surveyed the room, they quite saw how it was to be accomplished. In fact, I did not myself.

"I can plaster the walls and ceiling, and have paper put on," I said, "but what am I to do with all these windows, and what is to be done with the floor?"

"With the floor?" repeated the committee, with a slight air of trepidation.

"Look at it," I said. "Nothing looks more desolate than a bare floor; and yet you tell me anything like upholstery is out of the question."

The committee laughed.

"Stuffed chairs and carpets are," they said. "The stuffing would get knocked out of the chairs, and as the members naturally run to hob-nailed shoes a carpet would not have much chance. It would be worn out in a week."

"Staining and polishing——" I began, with a timorous sense of unpracticalness.

"Just as bad," they said. "They would unstain and unpolish it for you in no time. They could not help it."

"Linoleum," I said, rather discouraged; "though I can't say I like it very much."

"That would do first-rate," was the decision. "It could be easily washed off, couldn't it?"

So I made up my mind that I must confine myself to linoleum, and console myself by choosing the pattern with care and discrimination. A man was given the work of plastering the walls and ceiling, and giving the ladder-like approach something more of the air of a staircase; and while the work was being done I made some visits to the furnishing departments at Shoolbred's. My feeling about linoleum had been that its oilcloth look always suggested a bath-room in restricted circumstances, but I found at Shoolbred's such clever and new designs that I was pleased beyond measure. The one I chose was a preparation about a quarter of an inch thick, as solid and substantial as a board, and a wonderfully perfect representation of a neatly inlaid wood floor. It was really so good in its taste and effect that it might well have been used in rooms of much more pretension than the one I bought it for.

The difficulty of the floor covering being disposed of, there was still the difficulty of the windows.

The peculiarity of the room was that it was all windows—broad low windows, one nearly the full length of the end of the room, two nearly as long taking up the greater part of one side, two long ones and a small one on the other. It is supposable that they had been put in for the convenience of the printers, who needed all the light they could get on the many dull days.

The windows were a problem for more reasons than one. A vast expanse

of bare window, giving view on all sides of a dreary narrow street and dingy houses, is not cheerful, and one cannot indulge in art muslin and lace draperies with impunity even in the West End of London. In the vicinity of Drury Lane they are worse than out of the question.

A most clever invention, known as the Glacier Window Decoration, came to the rescue here. Sheets of a preparation of isinglass made in artistic stained glass designs, were used to cover the panes. The designs and colors are so excellent and correct, that, treated in this manner and hung with warm-tinted, substantial curtains, the barren waste of windows became quite a decorative addition. Color was one's only resource. Nothing was practicable which could be pulled down by a chance movement, knocked over, or trodden on. Upholstered chairs were out of the question, so, comfortably-shaped, stained and varnished ones were used. An ordinary table-cloth, the most unconscious boy movement might push out of place; an uncovered table presents an expanse of chilly barrenness; so the rather long and broad and very solid reading-table was covered with thick crimson baize, secured all round with brass-headed tacks. A smaller square table, meant to be used when large volumes were being looked over, was covered in the same way. This had its first *raison d'être* in the fact that the brother of the Good Angel had given to the club a set of the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*, than which, it seemed to me, few things could be more instructive and interesting. It represented, as it were, an illustrated history of the events of the times, placing itself before young minds and eyes in the manner most likely to arrest attention and rouse contemplation.

The walls were covered with a paper of good color—one of the terra-cotta shades, avoiding heaviness or dulness; the ceiling was tinted in the same tone; a line of stained book-shelves surrounded the room from the floor to the sills of the all-pervading windows. There was only one comparatively small space which would permit of the shelves being built from floor to ceiling.

The windows filling so much space,

there was not much wall-surface to be used in decoration, and the idea also suggested itself to one's mind that the few inexpensive pictures hung might be subject to choice also. The ordinary pretty or romantic thing, whatever its sentiment or grace, might be more fitted to other places. To the boy mind something more definite may better appeal.

Over the corner fireplace hung the portrait of the boy whose gift to these unknown boy friends of his the room was. One space between the windows was given up to a lovely little picture with a sad and sweet story. I had found it in the General Room downstairs—the sole decoration of the white-washed walls except a brilliantly-colored picture of Her Majesty in full regalia, and I had taken the liberty of bringing it myself to this memorial room, because it seemed the atmosphere for it.

It is the most sweet photograph of a lovely down-gazing-faced girl of eighteen or nineteen. When the Club was a poor little embryo, as it were, when it had few acquaintances but the Good Angel and the fellow I call "the Club's Friend," this young girl was kind to it also. There are early members who remember the summer day when she entertained them in the gardens of the country house which was her home. Perhaps they remember it all the more tenderly because before another summer's coming the blossom of her beautiful girlhood had faded out of life. It seemed fitting that her lovely drooping face should have a space of its own in the room which was the quietest, and where the boys would be most likely to spend their most thoughtful moments. The picture is not a large one, but there is nothing else hung on the panel of wall between the window draperies—nothing, at least, but a small hanging receptacle for flowers placed beneath it. I dare say that, as he passes by the hawkers' baskets in the street, it will occur now and then to more than one boy to spend a copper on a simple little nosegay, that it may bloom under the gentle girl face.

The largest picture in the room is an engraving of a painting, the story of

which is the touching one of old Argus's death. Ulysses, in tattered, travel-worn garment, stands on the marble terrace by the sea, his arms behind him, his face tender and pitiful as he looks down at his one faithful and unforgetting servant—the old dog who, after all the years of exile, lifts his fading eyes to his master's face, knowing him again, and dies.

The story suggesting itself in the picture might cause an imaginative boy to ask questions, and the answers to them might lead him to wish to read the rest. That was why it was chosen. The few other pictures are merely framed and well-tinted photographs of Venetian scenes. A city whose streets are the sea must suggest inquiry and interest. There is one picture of an ideal young head, thoughtful and beautiful; there are some blue pots with palms, in safe places, a few simple bits of color on the crimson-covered mantel and the only hanging cabinet the walls give room to, and there the decoration begins and ends. Nothing could be more simple and inexpensive. Any description of it would be totally superfluous, but that it does look bright and comfortable, notwithstanding that it was necessary that the practical view of the situation should be so continually kept in view; and so the detail may have a use to other furnishers of utilitarian rooms.

The books which fill the shelves I was aided in my choice of by more than one person. One list of titles was founded on favorite books of the original of the portrait over the mantel; another was made for me by a boy of seventeen whom I had never seen, and who at the time was lying ill under the care of a doctor in Harley Street, and who had beguiled some of his easier moments by making it for me; another was made for me—a most intelligent and interesting little catalogue—written in a small account book by a dear little fellow of thirteen who had never been strong enough to be sent to boarding-school, but whose bright, thoughtful mind reflected itself and its tastes clearly in the books he chose for other boys to read. One list was made by Mr. Harold Warne, of the publishing firm of Warne

& Co., and was founded on books he had found popular and useful in a boys' club of something the same kind as the one in Kemble Street, which he had been interested in at Hampstead. Besides kindly procuring for me the books on my lists, Mr. Warne supplemented them with a gift of their own publications. Mr. Passmore Edwards also presented two hundred beautiful volumes of standard works, such as might have been a most valuable addition to any library. And when, on the afternoon of February 27th, I turned to look back at the room before leaving it, I did so with the feeling that I left the pictured eyes over the mantel to look down at pleasant things, and that no Drury Lane Club boy could enter without finding a comfortable corner, and without finding on the low shelves some book which would suit his tastes, whatsoever they might be.

I had never seen the Club's members until the evening of that day when the new premises were formally opened. With the magic assistance of the Good Angel a substantial evening meal was prepared in the General Room. When I arrived, at eight o'clock, two or three long tables had tea and coffee, bread and butter, cake and sandwiches adorning them, and numberless boys—as it seemed to me—filled the benches on each side of them.

The impression I gained, when I could look round at them after the applause with which they greet a friend subsided, was an agreeable and encouraging one. I was struck by the good-natured intelligence of their faces, and by the smart cleanliness of their appearance. The faces did not look as if the life and hard work of Drury Lane and its vicinity had dulled the brightness of their faculties, or discouraged them.

I think I had been imagining that the limitations of poverty and the lack of advantages might have had a depressing and repressing effect which would stamp itself even on young faces. We know it does that sometimes. But I was glad, as I looked up and down the tea-tables, to see that they all looked more or less quick-witted and alert; in fact, it seemed to me that there was not a boy there on whom a reading-room would be wasted.

There might be boys who would prefer the gymnasium and the clubs of cricket and harriers, and the fife and drum band; and why should they not? Exercise, and fresh air, and inspiring music are boons to any boys. But even the gymnasium patrons looked as if they might now and then mount to the reading-room to turn over the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*, or forget the vaulting-bars for a while in the marvels of Jules Verne, or Du Chaillu, or the romancings of Harrison Ainsworth in the "Tower of London," or "Old London Bridge," or "Windsor Castle." I had been asked to present myself this evening to "open" the Library. The prospect had rather frightened me. I had been very happy in preparing the room and choosing the books, but I had never "opened" anything, and I did not know how. I timidly asked the young committee if they could instruct me. They said that if I would "say a few words to the boys" it would be all right. I had never "said a few words" to boys in public in my life. I had said a good many words to two boys in private, and they had always understood and liked them, but they were my own two, who were my most intimate friends. If I had had time to become intimate with the seventy-five members of the Club, I could have talked to them, but this was my first meeting with them. I knew I could write some simple and direct things which might suggest thoughts to them, so I asked the young committee if I might write a little letter which would be equally personal to each boy, and, being printed, might be given to them to read for themselves—a copy for each boy, as if it were a private epistle. They thought the boys would like this, so it was done.

After the tea we all adjourned to the Lionel Room together. There were several guests who were interested, and the young Member of Parliament for the district (almost everything connected with the Club seems young) had kindly come to preside. The room looked very bright and full, and the ceremonies were very simple.

The Club's Friend read a brief history of the Club's origin and growth. The

young Member of Parliament was the son of a man whose name all England knows and honors for many reasons. His father was W. H. Smith, the leader of the House of Commons, and the king of the book trade of the railway-station stalls throughout the land. He himself was a man whose intellect, energy, and uprightness had made his own rank and fortune; his charities and generosities are as well known as his name, and it seemed a fitting thing that the son, whose ambition might well be to follow his footsteps, should preside over the simple ceremony whose results might mean much to this roomful of boys.

He read to them the letter I had written and made a brief speech himself. One of the young committee said a few friendly words, and then the founder of the Club, the boy who had gathered the four in the cellar, and disposed of the mangle—Andrew Buckingham—spoke to them too. I knew his mother had assisted to prepare the tea in the room below, and I could not help hoping that she had stayed and could hear what he said.

There was no pretension in it. His little modest speech was simply a few words of pleasure and congratulation from a good-hearted, manly fellow who was glad to have been the means of beginning a good thing. Then I wished them good fortune and good results, and declared the new premises open; and the small ceremony was over.

I stood behind the crimson-covered table, and the boys passed by me in single file as I shook hands with them, one by one, and gave them their copies of the letter. I saw their faces more closely than I had done at the tea-tables, and I was glad to think that when these seventy-five thought of me, it would be as of a friend.

This was the letter each of them has a copy of:

MY DEAR BOYS: I am told there are 75 members of your Club. I wish that I could say some words to you that would be helpful to each one of the number. To have said even a few words that 75 boys would remember, and gain some good thoughts from as they grew to manhood, would be to have done a good service to the country they live in. 75 boys represent a great deal. They represent the whole lives of 75 men, who will be an

influence for good or evil every day they live. It is the boys of to-day who have the progress of the future in their young hands. I want you to feel that, and *never* to forget it. There may be boys in this Drury Lane Boys' Club who have in them the power and gifts which will produce some of the finest things the next century will be benefited by. Remember that. Who can say what any boy may do in the life which lies all before him? Only time will tell. Who can guess in what group of lads to-day stands the great scientist, artist, politician, or inventor whose name will be a household word in thirty or forty years from now? There might be one of them in this very room, and he might form his mind by reading some of the books on the shelves. What each boy himself must make up his mind to is, that he—*he himself*—will make the very best of himself that he can, and that he will do all he can to make the very best of others. When I say that—I mean the best of his heart, the best of his mind, and the best of his body. I think I put the heart first. The boy or man whose heart is full of kind, brave, generous thoughts will find his intellect developed by them, and an intelligent man will realize that his body must be respected and kept strong and fine and fresh, or it will not help him to do his work.

I used to say to my own two boys, "You are like the block of marble which is to be made into a statue. You yourselves are the sculptors. It depends upon *you* whether you chisel it into a figure which is beautiful and noble, or one that is distorted and base. Every ungenerous act, every hurtful word, every unmanly thought is a false stroke of the chisel and mars the statue."

There is another simile I have thought of, and which I wish you would reflect on. You have seen a pebble thrown into a pond and have watched the movements it sets up in the water—the ripples which widen and widen until their circles reach the shore. It is so with each human being's existence. There is no human life cast into the great ocean of Time which does not set circling ripples moving, which in the end widen to the shore of Eternity itself. Each one of us—you, I, your friend, every creature who lives—sets the great sea of humanity astir. Is there one among us who would not wish that the waves his life makes might help to bear to safety some boat that needed aid. This reading-room, given to you to-night by a boy like yourselves, is one of the ripples made by his life, which ended so early. He had a warm heart and a generous nature, and he liked to share his pleasures and luxuries with other boys who had not so many. Now that he is not with me on earth it is my comfort to try to do for such boys the things which may help them to make that "best of themselves" I have spoken of. I like to think of this room in Drury Lane, where his portrait looks down on you while you read books he was himself fond of. If those books help you and prompt you to fine thoughts, then, you see, the ripples *his* life made will have helped *your* boats onward. It was a very short life, but it was not lived in vain if it was the means of

giving even *one* boy a better chance to develop into a man who will help the world he lives in instead of harming it. He was only a boy, as you are boys; but he would have felt that, I know. Keep always before your minds this great fact—that whether a man's world is at the West End of London or the East, in Drury Lane or Grosvenor Square, Nature gives him at his birth a capital of his own—a brain to think and plan, a heart to feel, two hands to work. It is for the man himself to put this capital out at the best interest, and prove what it will yield. Invest yours well, not only for yourselves but for your fellow-man.

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

February 27, 1892.

After they all had received their letters a pretty thing happened. Remembering that they are boys to whom spare coppers are a positively unknown quantity, it seemed to me a very pretty thing indeed, as it was an idea originating solely among themselves and carried out without any consulting of other people.

As I was talking to some of the committee by the crimson table, a boy with a nice, rather shy face appeared by my side bearing a beautiful bouquet of flowers. It was a lovely nosegay, with long, pale, pink streamers and bow.

The bearer was the spokesman of the Club, who had presented this pretty thing to me as a token of their gratitude and pleasure.

I went down afterward to the entertainment they gave us in the general room below, behind a perfect screen of flowers. The young committee had given me a lovely, airily arranged thing of violets and lilies-of-the-valley, and I sat as it were in a bower.

The entertainment was infinitely interesting to me. The enthusiasm of the boys when some ladies sang them some pretty, tender songs—not sentimental, but *tender* little songs—was a nice thing to see. It was such a genuine thing. A member of the Club recited wonderfully well a dramatic little poetic story of an old groom, an affectionate, faithful servitor of a noble family whose young heir had ruined his fortunes by racing and play, and whom the old groom rescues from utter despair by his clever management of a young filly known as “Kissingcup,” who wins a great race. It was very spirited and horsey and emotional, and the fact that the boy not only evidently *felt* all the emotion

of it, but had taught himself to enunciate marvellously well, was very interesting.

His audience, both the Club and the visitors, were as appreciative as he could have wished. The comedian of the Club (there is always a comedian in everything—I believe he is a supply which is the result of natural demand, and he is always the best beloved of all), the comedian was one of the old members who, after many vicissitudes, had enlisted and become a smart, well-behaved soldier. He was greeted with rapture the moment he rose from his seat. He sang some of Chevalier's inimitable costermonger songs with an appreciative sense of humor which was quite delightful. The coster dialect naturally was easy enough for him, and his expression and gestures could scarcely have been better.

He sang the song beloved of the music-halls and street boys at the present moment—one of a number as individual and clever in their representations of the costermonger cockney world as the stories and songs of Uncle Remus are in their pictures of the negro.

This particular one is called “Wot cher?” (which is a sort of coster salutation meaning “What cheer?”), or sometimes “Knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road.” “Knocked ’em,” I believe signifies, being freely translated, something like “overpowered the public by the splendor of my appearance and appointments.” The coster in the song relates “’ow a most respectable party came to our court,” with the astonishing and brilliant news that they had “come into” property—the property being a coster's cart and “moke.” (I think almost everyone knows that a “moke” is a donkey.)

Then the song describes how the court was electrified and filled with awe and burning jealousy by seeing the patrician manner in which he and “the Missus” drove away in state on Sunday “afternoon” to dazzle the less aristocratic and “knock ’em in the Old Kent Road.” Of course, he observes, the neighbors

“Ses nahsty things about the moke.

But ’tain’t nothin’ but their envy, cos *they* ain’t carriage folk.”

And the chorus (there *must* be a chorus to a music-hall song) is the derisive chaff of these envious ones, and the coster's observation upon it.

“ ‘Wot cher?’ all the neighbors cry.
 ‘Who’r yer goin’ to meet, Bill?’
 ‘Ave yer bort the street, Bill?’
 Lor’ me—thort I should hev died
 When I knocked ‘em in the Old Kent Road.”

I dare say my quotation is by no means exact, but it may give the flavor.

The singer gave all of it, and it seemed to me that there might have been circumstances under which his talents might have developed into something which would have been quite marked in its line.

Finally we were favored by the Drum-and-Fife Band. It was a credit to its teacher and to itself. I had really had no idea of finding it so proficient, though I had been sure I should find it energetic and spirited.

When I went down to my brougham the boy who had been the presenter of the bouquet carried it before me triumphantly. His nice face looked nicer than ever.

The street was dark and a little crowd of people stood on the pavement near the door, some women stood in the street on the other side of the carriage, and looked at me through the window. They were as interested as they are when they watch people going to a Drawing-room or a grand party. The modest festivity of the Club had been like a party to Kemble Street, and here was one of its guests getting into a carriage with her arms full of splendid bouquets with ribbon streamers.

The lights were still burning in that upper room where the pictured boy-face looked down from over the mantel. The stained glass effect of the windows made a rich bit of color in the gloom surrounding it. It looked quite foreign to the narrow, sordid street, but it wore an air of warmth and promise. I watched it until the brougham turned the corner and it was out of sight, wondering what work the ripples set up by that pebble dropped into the ocean of life might do—hoping that it might be permitted to it to help, at least, some boats to a wider shore.

THE PRICELESS PEARL.*

By John White Chadwick.

“DEATH, the Egyptian, melts and drinks the pearl :”
 And straight a rapture through his being runs,
 A fire that seems the essence of all the suns
 That ever made the summer’s pomp unfurl
 Its banners, and the green leaves softly curl
 Back from the fruit ; a sense of shining ones
 Engirding round, until his vision shuns
 The awful splendor of that radiant whorl.
 And then a voice : These things wouldst thou explore ?
 Who drinks the pearl of life compounded so
 Of love, and joy, and hope, and peace, and pain—
 All sweetest, saddest things that mortals know—
 Drinks to his own salvation : he shall gain
 Life beyond life, and Death shall be no more.

* Written after reading Mr. T. W. Higginson’s Sonnet in the April number of SCRIBNER’S MAGAZINE.