CHAPTER X BROTHERS AND SISTERS

POLLY'S happiest day was Sunday, for Will never failed to spend it with her. Instead of sleeping later than usual that morning, she was always up bright and early, flying round to get ready for her guest, for Will came to breakfast, and they made a long day of it. Will considered his sister the best and prettiest girl going, and Polly, knowing well that a time would come when he would find a better and a prettier, was grateful for his good opinion, and tried to deserve it. So she made her room and herself as neat and inviting as possible, and always ran to meet him with a bright face and a motherly greeting, when he came tramping in, ruddy, brisk, and beaming, with the brown loaf and the little pot of beans from the bake-house near by.

They liked a good country breakfast, and nothing gave Polly more satisfaction than to see her big boy clear the dishes, empty the little coffee- pot, and then sit and laugh at her across the ravaged table. Another pleasure was to let him help clear away, as they used to do at home, while the peals of laughter that always accompanied this performance did Miss Mills' heart good to hear, for the room was so small and Will so big that he seemed to be everywhere at once, and Polly and Puttel were continually dodging his long arms and legs. Then they used to inspect the flower pots, pay Nick a visit, and have a little music as a good beginning for the day, after which they went to church and dined with Miss Mills, who considered Will "an excellent young man." If the afternoon was fair, they took a long walk together over the bridges into the country, or about the city streets full of Sabbath quietude. Most people meeting them would have seen only an awkward young man, with a boy's face atop of his tall body, and a quietly dressed, fresh faced little woman hanging on his arm; but a few people, with eyes to read romances and pleasant histories everywhere, found something very attractive in this couple, and smiled as they passed, wondering if they were young, lovers, or country cousins "looking round."

If the day was stormy, they stayed at home, reading, writing letters, talking over their affairs, and giving each other good advice; for, though Will was nearly three years younger than Polly, he could n't for the life of him help assuming amusingly venerable airs, when he became a Freshman. In the twilight he had a good lounge on the sofa, and Polly sung to him, which arrangement he particularly enjoyed, it was so "cosy and homey." At nine o'clock, Polly packed his bag with clean clothes, nicely

mended, such remnants of the festive tea as were transportable, and kissed him "good- night," with many injunctions to muffle up his throat going over the bridge, and be sure that his feet were dry and warm when he went to bed. All of which Will laughed at, accepted graciously, and didn't obey; but he liked it, and trudged away for another week's work, rested, cheered, and strengthened by that quiet, happy day with Polly, for he had been brought up to believe in home influences, and this brother and sister loved one another dearly, and were not ashamed to own it.

One other person enjoyed the humble pleasures of these Sundays quite as much as Polly and Will. Maud used to beg to come to tea, and Polly, glad to do anything for those who had done a good deal for her, made a point of calling for the little girl as they came home from their walk, or sending Will to escort her in the carriage, which Maud always managed to secure if bad weather threatened to quench her hopes. Tom and Fanny laughed at her fancy, but she did not tire of it, for the child was lonely, and found something in that little room which the great house could not give her.

Maud was twelve now; a pale, plain child, with sharp, intelligent eyes, and a busy little mind, that did a good deal more thinking than anybody imagined. She was just at the unattractive, fidgety age when no one knew what to do with her, and so let her fumble her way up as she could, finding pleasure in odd things, and living much alone, for she did not go to school, because her shoulders were growing round, and Mrs. Shaw would not "allow her figure to be spoiled." That suited Maud excellently; and whenever her father spoke of sending her again, or getting a governess, she was seized with bad headaches, a pain in her back, or weakness of the eyes, at which Mr. Shaw laughed, but let her holiday go on. Nobody seemed to care much for plain, pug-nosed little Maudie; her father was busy, her mother nervous and sick, Fanny absorbed in her own affairs, and Tom regarded her as most young men do their younger sisters, as a person born for his amusement and convenience, nothing more. Maud admired Tom with all her heart, and made a little slave of herself to him, feeling well repaid if he merely said, "Thank you, chicken," or did n't pinch her nose, or nip her ear, as he had a way of doing, "just as if I was a doll, or a dog, and had n't got any feelings," she sometimes said to Fanny, when some service or sacrifice had been accepted without gratitude or respect. It never occurred to Tom, when Maud sat watching him with her face full of wistfulness, that she wanted to be petted as much as ever he did in his neglected boyhood, or that when he called her "Pug" before people, her little feelings were as deeply wounded as his used to be, when the

boys called him "Carrots." He was fond of her in his fashion, but he did n't take the trouble to show it, so Maud worshipped him afar off, afraid to betray the affection that no rebuff could kill or cool.

One snowy Sunday afternoon Tom lay on the sofa in his favourite attitude, reading "Pendennis" for the fourth time, and smoking like a chimney as he did so. Maud stood at the window watching the falling flakes with an anxious countenance, and presently a great sigh broke from her.

"Don't do that again, chicken, or you 'll blow me away. What's the matter?" asked Tom, throwing down his book with a yawn that threatened dislocation.

"I 'm afraid I can't go to Polly's," answered Maud, disconsolately.

"Of course you can't; it 's snowing hard, and father won't be home with the carriage till this evening. What are you always cutting off to Polly's for?"

"I like it; we have such nice times, and Will is there, and we bake little johnny-cakes in the baker before the fire, and they sing, and it is so pleasant."

"Warbling johnny-cakes must be interesting. Come and tell me all about it."

"No, you 'll only laugh at me."

"I give you my word I won't, if I can help it; but I really am dying of curiosity to know what you do down there. You like to hear secrets, so tell me yours, and I 'll be as dumb as an oyster."

"It is n't a secret, and you would n't care for it. Do you want another pillow?" she

added, as Tom gave his a thump.

"This will do; but why you women always stick tassels and fringe all over a sofa-cushion, to tease and tickle a fellow, is what I don't understand."

"One thing that Polly does Sunday nights, is to take Will's head in her lap, and smooth his forehead. It rests him after studying so hard, she says. If you don't like the pillow, I could do that for you, 'cause you look as if you

were more tired of studying than Will," said Maud, with some hesitation, but an evident desire to be useful and agreeable.

"Well, I don't care if you do try it, for I am confoundedly tired." And Tom laughed, as he recalled the frolic he had been on the night before.

Maud established herself with great satisfaction, and Tom owned that a silk apron was nicer than a fuzzy cushion.

"Do you like it?" she asked, after a few strokes over the hot forehead, which she thought was fevered by intense application to Greek and Latin.

"Not bad; play away," was the gracious reply, as Tom shut his eyes, and lay so still that Maud was charmed at the success of her attempt. Presently, she said, softly, "Tom, are you asleep?"

"Just turning the comer."

"Before you get quite round would you please tell me what a Public Admonition is?"

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

"I heard Will talking about Publics and Privates, and I meant to ask him, but I forgot."

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember; it was about somebody who cut prayers, and got a Private, and had done all sorts of bad things, and had one or two Publics. I did n't hear the name and did n't care; I only wanted to know what the words meant."

"So Will tells tales, does he?" and Tom's forehead wrinkled with a frown.

"No, he did n't; Polly knew about it and asked him."

"Will's a 'dig,'" growled Tom, shutting his eyes again, as if nothing more could be said of the delinquent William.

"I don't care if he is; I like him very much, and so does Polly."

"Happy Fresh!" said Tom, with a comical groan.

"You need n't sniff at him, for he is nice, and treats me with respect," cried Maud, with an energy that made Tom laugh in her
face.

"He 's good to Polly always, and puts on her cloak for her, and says 'my dear,' and kisses her 'goodnight,' and don't think it 's silly, and I wish I had a brother just like him, yes, I do!" And Maud showed signs of woe, for her disappointment about going was very great.

"Bless my boots! what's the chicken ruffling up her little feathers and pecking at me for? Is that the way Polly soothes the best of brothers?" said Tom, still laughing.

"Oh, I forgot! there, I won't cry; but I do want to go," and Maud swallowed her tears, and began to stroke again.

Now Tom's horse and sleigh were in the stable, for he meant to

drive out to College that evening, but he did n't take Maud's hint. It was less trouble to lie still, and say in a conciliatory tone, "Tell me some more about this good boy, it 's very interesting."

"No, I shan't, but I 'll tell about Puttel's playing on the piano," said Maud, anxious to efface the memory of her momentary weakness. "Polly points to the right key with a little stick, and Puttel sits on the stool and pats each key as it 's touched, and it makes a tune. It's so funny to see her, and Nick perches on the rack and sings as if he 'd kill himself."

"Very thrilling," said Tom, in a sleepy tone.

Maud felt that her conversation was not as interesting as she hoped, and tried again.

"Polly thinks you are handsomer than Mr. Sydney."

"Much obliged."

"I asked which she thought had the nicest face, and she said yours was the handsomest, and his the best."

"Does he ever go there?" asked a sharp voice behind them; and looking round Maud saw Fanny in the big chair, cooking her feet over the register.

"I never saw him there; he sent up some books one day, and Will eased her about it."

"What did she do?" demanded Fanny. "Oh, she shook him."

"What a spectacle!" and Tom looked as if he would have enjoyed seeing it, but Fanny's face grew so forbidding, that Tom's little dog, who was approaching to welcome her, put his tail between his legs and fled under the table.

"Then there is n't any 'Sparking Sunday night'?" sung Tom, who appeared to have waked up again.

"Of course not. Polly is n't going to marry anybody; she 's going to keep house for Will when he 's a minister, I heard her say so," cried Maud, with importance.

"What a fate for pretty Polly!" ejaculated Tom.

"She likes it, and I 'm sure I should think she would; it 's beautiful to hear 'em plan it all out."

"Any more gossip to retail, Pug?" asked Tom a minute after, as Maud seemed absorbed in visions of the, future.

"He told a funny story about blowing up one of the professors. You never told us, so I suppose you did n't know it. Some bad fellow put a torpedo, or some sort of powder thing, under the chair, and it went off in the midst of the lesson, and the poor man flew up, frightened most to pieces, and the boys ran with pails of water to put the

fire out. But the thing that made Will laugh most was, that the very fellow who did it got his trousers burnt trying to put out the fire, and he asked the is it Faculty or President? "

"Either will do," murmured Tom, who was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Well, he asked 'em to give him some new ones, and they did give him money enough, for a nice pair; but he got some cheap ones, with horrid great stripes on 'em, and always wore 'em to that particular class, 'which was one too many for the fellows,' Will said, and with the rest of the money he had a punch party. Was n't it dreadful?"

"Awful!" And Tom exploded into a great laugh, that made Fanny cover her ears, and the little dog bark wildly.

"Did you know that bad boy?" asked innocent Maud.

"Slightly," gasped Tom, in whose wardrobe at college those identical trousers were hanging at that moment.

"Don't make such a noise, my head aches dreadfully," said Fanny, fretfully.

"Girls' heads always do ache," answered Tom, subsiding from a roar into a chuckle.

"What pleasure you boys can find in such ungentlemanly things, I don't see," said Fanny, who was evidently out of sorts.

"As much a mystery to you as it is to us, how you girls can like to gabble and prink

from one week's end to the other," retorted Tom.

There was a pause after this little passage-at-arms, but Fan wanted to be amused, for time hung heavily on her hands, so she asked, in a more amiable tone, "How 's Trix?"

"As sweet as ever," answered Tom, gruffly.

"Did she scold you, as usual?"

"She just did."

"What was the matter?"

"Well, I 'll leave it to you if this is n't unreasonable: she won't dance with me herself, yet don't like me to go it with anybody else. I said, I thought, if a fellow took a girl to a party, she ought to dance with him once, at least, especially if they were engaged. She said that was the very reason why she should n't do it; so, at the last hop, I let her alone, and had a gay time with Belle, and to-day Trix gave it to me hot and heavy, coming home from church."

"If you go and engage yourself to a girl like that, I don't know what you can expect. Did she wear her Paris hat to-day?" added Fan, with sudden interest in her voice.

"She wore some sort of a blue thing, with a confounded bird of Paradise in it, that kept whisking into my face every time she turned her head."

"Men never know a pretty thing when they see it. That hat is perfectly lovely."

"They know a lady when they see her, and Trix don't look like one; I can't say where the trouble is, but there 's too much fuss and feathers for my taste. You are twice as stylish, yet you never look loud or fast."

Touched by this unusual compliment, Fanny drew her chair nearer as she replied with complacency, "Yes, I flatter myself I do know how to dress well. Trix never did; she 's fond of gay colors, and generally looks like a walking rainbow."

"Can't you give her a hint? Tell her not to wear blue gloves anyway, she knows I hate 'em."

"I 've done my best for your sake, Tom, but she is a perverse creature, and don't mind a word I say, even about things much more objectionable than blue gloves."

"Maudie, run and bring me my other cigar case, it 's lying round somewhere."

Maud went; and as soon as the door was shut, Tom rose on his elbow, saying in a cautiously lowered voice, "Fan, does Trix paint?"

"Yes, and draws too," answered Fanny, with a sly laugh.

"Come, you know what I mean; I 've a right to ask and you ought to tell," said Tom, soberly, for he was beginning to find that being engaged was not unmitigated bliss.

"What makes you think she does?"

"Well, between ourselves," said Tom, looking a little sheepish, but anxious to set his mind at rest, "she never will let me kiss her on her cheek, nothing but an unsatisfactory peck at her lips. Then the other day, as I took a bit of heliotrope out of

a vase to put in my button-hole, I whisked a drop of water into her face; I was going to wipe it off, but she pushed my hand away, and ran to the glass, where she carefully dabbed it dry, and came back with one cheek redder than the other. I did n't say anything, but I had my suspicions.

Come now, does she?"

"Yes, she does; but don't say a word to her, for she 'll never forgive my telling if she knew it."

"I don't care for that; I don't like it, and I won't have it," said Tom, decidedly.

"You can't help yourself. Half the girls do it, either paint or powder, darken their lashes with burnt hair-pins, or take cologne on lumps of sugar or belladonna to make their eyes bright. Clara tried arsenic for her complexion, but her mother stopped it," said Fanny, betraying the secrets of the prison- house in the basest manner.

"I knew you girls were a set of humbugs, and very pretty ones, too, some of you, but I can't say I like to see you painted up like a lot of actresses," said Tom, with an air of disgust.

"I don't do anything of the sort, or need it, but Trix does; and having chosen her, you must abide your choice, for better or worse." "It has n't come to that yet," muttered Tom, as he lay down again with a rebellious air.

Maud's return put an end to these confidences, though Tom excited her curiosity by asking the mysterious question, "I say, Fan, is Polly up to that sort of thing?"

"No, she thinks it 's awful. When she gets pale and dragged out she will probably change her mind."

"I doubt it," said Tom.

"Polly says it is n't proper to talk secrets before people who ain't in 'em," observed Maud, with dignity.

"Do, for mercy sake, stop talking about Polly, I 'm sick to death of it," cried Fanny, snappishly.

"Hullo!" and Tom sat up to take a survey. "I thought you were bosom friends, and as spoony as ever."

"Well, I am fond of Polly, but I get tired of hearing Maud sing her praises everlastingly. Now don't go and repeat that, chatterbox."

"My goodness, is n't she cross?" whispered Maud to Tom.

"As two sticks; let her be. There 's the bell; see who it is, Pug," answered Tom, as a tingle broke the silence of the house.

Maud went to peep over the banisters, and came flying back in a rapture.

"It 's Will come for me! Can't I go? It don't snow hard, and I 'll bundle up, and you can send for me when papa comes."

"I don't care what you do," answered Fan, who was in a very bad temper.

Without waiting for any other permission, Maud rushed away to get ready. Will would n't come up, he was so snowy, and Fanny was glad, because with her he was bashful, awkward, and silent, so Tom went down and entertained him with Maud's report. They were very good friends, but led entirely different lives, Will being a "dig," and Tom a "bird," or, in plain English, one was a hard student, and the other a jolly young gentleman.

Tom had rather patronized Will, who did n't like it, and showed that he did n't by refusing to borrow money of him, or accept any of his invitations to join the clubs and societies to which Tom belonged. So Shaw let Milton alone, and he got on very well in his own way, doggedly sticking to his books, and resisting all temptations but those of certain libraries, athletic games, and such inexpensive pleasures as were within his means; for this benighted youth had not yet discovered that college nowadays is a place in which to "sky-lark," not to study.

When Maud came down and trotted contentedly away, holding Will's hand, Tom watched them out of sight, and then strolled about the house whistling and thinking, till he went to sleep in his father's arm-chair, for want of something better to do. He awoke to the joys of a solitary tea, for his mother never came down, and Fanny shut herself and her headache up in her own room.

"Well, this is cheerful," he said, as the clock struck eight, and his fourth cigar came to an end. "Trix is mad, and Fan in the dumps, so I 'll take myself off. Guess I 'll go round to Polly's, and ask Will to drive out with me, and save him the walk, poor chap. Might bring Midget home, it will please her, and there 's no knowing when the governor will be back." With these thoughts in his head, Tom leisurely got under way, and left his horse at a neighboring stable, for he meant to make a little call, and see what it was Maud enjoyed so much.

"Polly is holding forth," he said to himself, as he went quietly up stairs, and the steady murmur of a pleasant voice came down to him. Tom laughed at Polly's earnest way of talking when she was interested in anything. But he liked it because it was so different from the coquettish clatter of most of the girls with whom he talked. Young men often laugh at the sensible girls whom they secretly respect, and affect to admire the silly ones whom they secretly despise, because earnestness, intelligence, and womanly dignity are not the fashion.

The door was ajar, and pausing in the dark entry Tom took a survey before he went in. The prospect was not dazzling, but home-like and pleasant. The light of a bright fire filled the little room, and down on a stool before it was Maud tending Puttel, and watching with deep interest the roasting of an apple intended for her special benefit. On the couch lounged Will, his thoughtful eyes fixed on Polly, who, while she talked, smoothed the broad forehead of her "yellow-haired laddie" in a way that Tom thought an immense improvement on Maud's performance. They had evidently been building castles in the air, for Polly was saying in her most impressive manner, "Well, whatever you do, Will, don't have a great, costly church that takes so much money to build and support it that you have nothing to give away. I like the plain, old-fashioned churches, built for use, not show, where people met for hearty praying and preaching, and where everybody made their own music instead of listening to opera singers, as we do now. I don't care if the old churches were bare and cold, and the seats hard, there was real piety in them, and the sincerity of it was felt in the lives of the people. I don't want a religion that I put away with my Sunday clothes, and don't take out till the day comes round again; I want something to see and feel and live by day-by-day, and I hope you 'll be one of the true ministers, who can teach by precept and example, how to get and keep it."

"I hope I shall be, Polly, but you know they say that in families, if there is a boy who can't do anything else, they make a minister of him. I sometimes think I ain't good for much, and that seems to me the reason why I should n't even try to be a minister," said Will, smiling, yet looking as if with all his humility he did have faith in the aspirations that came to him in his best moments.

"Some one said that very thing to father once, and I remember he answered, 'I am glad to give my best and brightest son to the service of God.' "

"Did he say that?" and Will's color rose, for the big, book-loving fellow was as sensitive as a girl to the praise of those dearest to him.

"Yes," said Polly, unconsciously giving the strongest stimulus to her brother's hope and courage. "Yes, and he added, 'I shall let my boys follow the guide that is in them, and only ask of them to use their gifts conscientiously, and be honest, useful men.' "

"So we will! Ned is doing well out West, and I 'm hard at it here. If father does his best to give us the chance we each want, the least we can do is to work with a will."

"Whatever you do, you can't help working with a Will," cried Tom,

who had been so interested, that he forgot he was playing eavesdropper.

Polly flew up, looking so pleased and surprised, that Tom reproached himself for not having called oftener.

"I 've come for Maud," he announced, in a paternal tone, which made that young lady open her eyes.

"I can't go till my apple is done; besides, it is n't nine yet, and Will is going to take me along, when he goes. I 'd rather have him."

"I 'm going to take you both in the cutter. The storm is over, but it

is heavy walking, so you 'll drive out with me, old man?" said Tom, with a nod at Will.

"Of course he will; and thank you very much. I 've been trying to keep him all night; Miss Mills always manages to find a corner for stray people, but he insists on going, so as to get to work early to-morrow," said Polly, delighted to see that Tom was taking off his coat, as if he meant to wait for Maud's apple, which Polly blessed for being so slow to cook.

Putting her guest into the best chair, Polly sat down and beamed at him with such

hospitable satisfaction, that Tom went up several pegs in his own estimation.

"You don't come very often, so we are rather over-powered when you do honor us," she said, demurely.

"Well, you, know we fellows are so busy, we have n't much time to enjoy ourselves," answered Tom.

"Ahem!" said Will, loudly.

"Take a troche," said Tom.

Then they both burst out laughing, and Polly, fully understanding the joke, joined them, saying, "Here are some peanuts, Tom; do enjoy yourself while you can."

"Now I call that a delicate compliment!" And Tom, who had not lost his early relish for this sort of refreshment, though he seldom indulged his passion nowadays, because peanuts are considered vulgar, fell to cracking and munching with great satisfaction.

"Do you remember the first visit I made at your house, how you gave me peanuts, coming from the depot, and frightened me out of my wits, pretending the coachman was tipsy?" asked Polly.

"Of course I do, and how we coasted one day," answered Tom, laughing.

"Yes, and the velocipede; you 've got the scar of that yet, I see."

"I remember how you stood by me while it was sewed up; that was very plucky, Polly."

"I was dreadfully afraid, but I remember I wanted to seem very brave, because you 'd called me a coward."

"Did I? Ought to have been ashamed of myself. I used to rough you shamefully, Polly, and you were so good-natured, you let me do it."

"Could n't help myself," laughed Polly. "I did use to think you were an awful boy, but seems to me I rather liked it."

"She had so much of it at home, she got used to it," put in Will, pulling the little curl behind Polly's ear.

"You boys never teased me as Tom did, that 's the reason it amused me, I suppose; novelty hath charms, you know."

"Grandma used to lecture Tom for plaguing you, Polly, and he used to say he 'd be a tip-top boy, but he was n't," observed Maud, with a venerable air.

"Dear old grandma; she did her best, but I 'm a bad lot," said Tom, with a shake of the head and a sober face.

"It always seems as if she must be up in her rooms, and I can't get used to finding them empty," added Polly, softly.

"Father would n't have anything moved, and Tom sits up there sometimes; it makes him feel good, he says," said Maud, who had a talent for betraying trifles which

people preferred should not be mentioned in public.

"You 'd better hurry up your apple, for if it is n't done pretty soon, you 'll have to leave it, Pug," said Tom, looking annoyed.

"How is Fan?" asked Polly, with tact.

"Well, Fan is rather under the weather; says she 's dyspeptic, which means cross."

"She is cross, but she 's sick too, for I found her crying one day, and she said nobody cared about her, and she might as well be dead," added Maud, having turned her apple with tender care.

"We must try to cheer her up, among us. If I was n't so busy I 'd like to devote myself to her, she has done so much for me," said Polly, gratefully.

"I wish you could. I can't understand her, for she acts like a weathercock, and I never know how I 'm going to find her. I hate to have her mope so, but, upon my life, I don't know what to do," said Tom; but as he uttered the words, something was suggested by the sight before him. Chairs were few, and Polly had taken half of Will's when they drew round the fire. Now she was leaning against him, in a cosy, confiding way, delightful to behold, while Will's strong arm went round her with a protecting air, which said, as plainly as any words, that this big brother and small sister knew how to love and help one another. It was a pleasant little picture, all the pleasanter for its unconsciousness, and Tom found it both suggestive and agreeable.

"Poor old Fan, she don't get much petting; maybe that 's what she wants. I 'll try it and see, for she stands by me like a trump. If she was a rosy, cosy little woman, like Polly, it would come easier, though," thought Tom, as he meditatively ate his last nut, feeling that fraternal affection could not be very difficult of demonstration, to brothers blessed with pretty, good-tempered sisters.

"I told Tom about the bad fellow who blew up the professor, and he said he knew him, slightly; and I was so relieved, because I had a kind of a feeling that it was Tom himself, you and Will laughed so about it."

Maud had a queer way of going on with her own thoughts, and suddenly coming out with whatever lay uppermost, regardless of time, place, or company. As this remark fell from her, there was a general smile, and Polly said, with mock solemnity, "It was a sad thing, and I 've no doubt that misguided young man is very sorry for it now."

"He looked perfectly bowed down with remorse last time I saw him," said Will, regarding Tom with eyes full of fun, for Will was a boy as well as a bookworm, and relished a joke as well as scatter-brained Tom.

"He always is remorseful after a scrape, I 've understood, for he is
n't a very bad fellow, only his spirits are one too many for him, and he is n't as fond of his book as another fellow I know."

"I 'm afraid he 'll he expelled if he don't mind," said Polly, warningly.

"Should n't wonder if he was, he 's such an unlucky dog," answered Tom, rather soberly.

"I hope he 'll remember that his friends will be very much disappointed if he is. He might make them so proud and happy; that I guess he will, for he is n't half as thoughtless as he makes himself out," said Polly, looking across at Tom with such friendly eyes that he was quite touched, though of course he did n't show it.

"Thank you, Polly; he may pull through, but I have my doubts. Now old man, let us

'pud' along; it 's getting late for the chicken," he added, relapsing into the graceful diction with which a classical education gifts its fortunate possessor.

Taking advantage of the moment while Will was wrestling with his boots in the closet, and Maud was absorbed in packing her apple into a large basket, Polly said to Tom in a low tone, "Thank you very much, for being so kind to Will."

"Bless your heart, I have n't done anything; he 's such a proud fellow he won't let me," answered Tom.

"But you do in many little ways; to-night, for example. Do you think I don't know that the suit of clothes he 's just got would have cost a good deal more, if your tailor had n't made them? He 's only a boy, and don't understand things yet; but I know your way of helping proud people; so that they don't find it out, and I do thank you, Tom, so much."

"Oh, come, Polly, that won't do. What do you know about tailors and college matters?" said Tom, looking as much confused as if she had found him out in something reprehensible.

"I don't know much, and that 's the reason why I 'm grateful for your kindness to Will. I don't care what stories they tell about you, I 'm sure, you won't lead him into trouble, but keep him straight, for my sake. You know I 've lost one brother, and Will takes Jimmy's place to me now."

The tears in Polly's eyes as she said that made Tom vow a tremendous vow within himself to stand by Will through thick and thin, and "keep him straight for Polly's sake"; feeling all the time how ill-fitted he was for such a task.

"I 'll do my best," he said, heartily, as he pressed the hand Polly gave him, with a look which assured her that he felt the appeal to his honor, and that henceforth the

country lad was safe from all the temptations Tom could have offered him. "There! now I shall give that to mamma to take her pills in; it 's just what she likes, and it pleases her to be thought of," said Maud, surveying her gift with complacency, as she put on her things.

"You 're a good little soul, to remember poor mum, said Tom, with an approving nod.

"Well, she was so pleased with the grapes you brought her, I thought I 'd try something, and maybe she 'd say 'Thank you, darling,' to me too. Do you think she will?" whispered Maud, with the wistful look so often seen on her little plain face. "See if she don't;" and to Maud's great surprise Tom did n't laugh at her project. "Good night, dear; take care of yourself, and keep your muffler round your mouth going over the bridge, or you 'll be as hoarse as a crow to-morrow," said Polly, as she kissed her brother, who returned it without looking as if he thought it "girl's nonsense" Then the three piled into the sleigh and drove off, leave Polly nodding on the doorstep.

Maud found the drive altogether too short, but was consoled by the promise of a longer one if the sleighing lasted till next Saturday: and when Tom ran up to bid his mother good-by, and give her a hint about Maud's gift, she stayed below to say, at the last minute, in unconscious imitation of Polly.

"Good night; take care of yourself, my dear."

Tom laughed, and was about to pinch the much enduring little nose; but, as if the words reminded him of something, he gave her a kiss instead, a piece of forbearance which almost took Maud's breath away with surprise and gratification.

It was rather a silent drive, for Will obediently kept his muffler up, and Tom fell into a brown study.

He was not much given to reflection, but occasionally indulged when something gave him a turn in that direction, and at such times he was as sober and sincere as could be desired. Any one might have lectured him for an hour without doing as much good as that little call and the chat that grew out of it, for, though nothing very wise or witty was said, many things were suggested, and every one knows that persuasive influences are better than any amount of moralizing. Neither Polly nor Will tried to do anything of the sort, and that was the charm of it. Nobody likes to be talked to, but nobody can resist the eloquence of unconscious preaching. With all his thoughtlessness, Tom was quick to see and feel these things, and was not spoilt enough yet to laugh at them. The sight of Will and Polly's simple affection for one another reminded him of a neglected duty so pleasantly, that he could not forget it. Talking of early days made him wish he could go back and start again, doing better. Grandma's name recalled the tender memory that always did him good, and the thought that Polly trusted her dearest brother to his care stirred up a manful desire to deserve the confidence. Tortures would n't have drawn a word of all this from him, but it had its effect, for boys don't leave their hearts and consciences behind them when they enter college, and little things of this sort do much to keep both from being damaged by the for years' scrimmage which begins the battle of life for most of them.