

Chapter 14

Three Children. The Wages of Intelligence

Owen spent the greater part of the dinner hour by himself in the drawing-room making pencil sketches in his pocket-book and taking measurements. In the evening after leaving off, instead of going straight home as usual he went round to the Free Library to see if he could find anything concerning Moorish decorative work in any of the books there. Although it was only a small and ill-equipped institution he was rewarded by the discovery of illustrations of several examples of which he made sketches. After about an hour spent this way, as he was proceeding homewards he observed two children--a boy and a girl--whose appearance seemed familiar. They were standing at the window of a sweetstuff shop examining the wares exposed therein. As Owen came up the children turned round and they recognized each other simultaneously. They were Charley and Elsie Linden. Owen spoke to them as he drew near and the boy appealed to him for his opinion concerning a dispute they had been having.

'I say, mister. Which do you think is the best: a fardensworth of everlasting stickjaw torfee, or a prize packet?'

'I'd rather have a prize packet,' replied Owen, unhesitatingly.

'There! I told you so!' cried Elsie, triumphantly.

'Well, I don't care. I'd sooner 'ave the torfee,' said Charley, doggedly.

'Why, can't you agree which of the two to buy?'

'Oh no, it's not that,' replied Elsie. 'We was only just SUPPOSING what we'd buy if we 'ad a fardin; but we're not really goin' to buy nothing, because we ain't got no money.'

'Oh, I see,' said Owen. 'But I think I have some money,' and putting his hand into his pocket he produced two halfpennies and gave one to each of the children, who immediately went in to buy the toffee and the prize packet, and when they came out he walked along with them, as they were going in the same direction as he was: indeed, they would have to pass by his house.

'Has your grandfather got anything to do yet?' he inquired as they went along.

'No. 'E's still walkin' about, mister,' replied Charley.

When they reached Owen's door he invited them to come up to see the kitten, which they had been inquiring about on the way. Frankie was delighted with these two visitors, and whilst they were eating some home-made cakes that Nora gave them, he entertained them by displaying the contents of his toy box, and the antics of the kitten, which was

the best toy of all, for it invented new games all the time: acrobatic performances on the rails of chairs; curtain climbing; running slides up and down the oilcloth; hiding and peeping round corners and under the sofa. The kitten cut so many comical capers, and in a little while the children began to create such an uproar, that Nora had to interfere lest the people in the flat underneath should be annoyed.

However, Elsie and Charley were not able to stay very long, because their mother would be anxious about them, but they promised to come again some other day to play with Frankie.

'I'm going to 'ave a prize next Sunday at our Sunday School,' said Elsie as they were leaving.

'What are you going to get it for?' asked Nora.

'Cause I learned my text properly. I had to learn the whole of the first chapter of Matthew by heart and I never made one single mistake! So teacher said she'd give me a nice book next Sunday.'

'I 'ad one too, the other week, about six months ago, didn't I, Elsie?' said Charley.

'Yes,' replied Elsie and added: 'Do they give prizes at your Sunday School, Frankie?'

'I don't go to Sunday School.'

'Ain't you never been?' said Charley in a tone of surprise.

'No,' replied Frankie. 'Dad says I have quite enough of school all the week.'

'You ought to come to ours, man!' urged Charley. 'It's not like being in school at all! And we 'as a treat in the summer, and prizes and sometimes a magic lantern 'tainment. It ain't 'arf all right, I can tell you.'

Frankie looked inquiringly at his mother.

'Might I go, Mum?'

'Yes, if you like, dear.'

'But I don't know the way.'

'Oh, it's not far from 'ere,' cried Charley. 'We 'as to pass by your 'ouse when we're goin', so I'll call for you on Sunday if you like.'

'It's only just round in Duke Street; you know, the "Shining Light Chapel",' said Elsie. 'It commences at three o'clock.'

'All right,' said Nora. 'I'll have Frankie ready at a quarter to three. But now you must run home as fast as you can. Did you like

those cakes?'

'Yes, thank you very much,' answered Elsie.

'Not 'arf!' said Charley.

'Does your mother make cakes for you sometimes?'

'She used to, but she's too busy now, making blouses and one thing and another,' Elsie answered.

'I suppose she hasn't much time for cooking,' said Nora, 'so I've wrapped up some more of those cakes in this parcel for you to take home for tomorrow. I think you can manage to carry it all right, can't you, Charley?'

'I think I'd better carry it myself,' said Elsie. 'Charley's SO careless, he's sure to lose some of them.'

'I ain't no more careless than you are,' cried Charley, indignantly.

'What about the time you dropped the quarter of butter you was sent for in the mud?'

'That wasn't carelessness: that was an accident, and it wasn't butter at all: it was margarine, so there!'

Eventually it was arranged that they were to carry the parcel in turns,

Elsie to have first innings. Frankie went downstairs to the front door with them to see them off, and as they went down the street he shouted after them:

'Mind you remember, next Sunday!'

'All right,' Charley shouted back. 'We shan't forget.'

On Thursday Owen stayed at home until after breakfast to finish the designs which he had promised to have ready that morning.

When he took them to the office at nine o'clock, the hour at which he had arranged to meet Rushton, the latter had not yet arrived, and he did not put in an appearance until half an hour later. Like the majority of people who do brain work, he needed a great deal more rest than those who do only mere physical labour.

'Oh, you've brought them sketches, I suppose,' he remarked in a surly tone as he came in. 'You know, there was no need for you to wait: you could 'ave left 'em 'ere and gone on to your job.'

He sat down at his desk and looked carelessly at the drawing that Owen handed to him. It was on a sheet of paper about twenty-four by eighteen inches. The design was drawn with pencil and one half of it was coloured.

'That's for the ceiling,' said Owen. 'I hadn't time to colour all of it.'

With an affectation of indifference, Rushton laid the drawing down and took the other which Owen handed to him.

'This is for the large wall. The same design would be adapted for the other walls; and this one shows the door and the panels under the window.'

Rushton expressed no opinion about the merits of the drawings. He examined them carelessly one after the other, and then, laying them down, he inquired:

'How long would it take you to do this work--if we get the job?'

'About three weeks: say 150 hours. That is--the decorative work only. Of course, the walls and ceiling would have to be painted first: they will need three coats of white.'

Rushton scribbled a note on a piece of paper.

'Well,' he said, after a pause, 'you can leave these 'ere and I'll see Mr Sweater about it and tell 'im what it will cost, and if he decides to have it done I'll let you know.'

He put the drawings aside with the air of a man who has other matters to attend to, and began to open one of the several letters that were on his desk. He meant this as an intimation that the audience was at an end and that he desired the 'hand' to retire from the presence. Owen understood this, but he did not retire, because it was necessary to mention one or two things which Rushton would have to allow for when preparing the estimate.

'Of course I should want some help,' he said. 'I should need a man occasionally, and the boy most of the time. Then there's the gold leaf--say, fifteen books.'

'Don't you think it would be possible to use gold paint?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'Is there anything else?' inquired Rushton as he finished writing down these items.

'I think that's all, except a few sheets of cartridge paper for stencils and working drawings. The quantity of paint necessary for the decorative work will be very small.'

As soon as Owen was gone, Rushton took up the designs and examined them attentively.

'These are all right,' he muttered. 'Good enough for anywhere. If he

can paint anything like as well as this on the walls and ceiling of the room, it will stand all the looking at that anyone in this town is likely to give it.'

'Let's see,' he continued. 'He said three weeks, but he's so anxious to do the job that he's most likely under-estimated the time; I'd better allow four weeks: that means about 200 hours: 200 hours at eight-pence: how much is that? And say he has a painter to help him half the time. 100 hours at sixpence-ha'penny.'

He consulted a ready reckoner that was on the desk.

'Time, £9.7.6. Materials: fifteen books of gold, say a pound. Then there's the cartridge paper and the colours--say another pound, at the outside. Boy's time? Well, he gets no wages as yet, so we needn't mention that at all. Then there's the preparing of the room. Three coats of white paint. I wish Hunter was here to give me an idea what it will cost.'

As if in answer to his wish, Nimrod entered the office at that moment, and in reply to Rushton's query said that to give the walls and ceiling three coats of paint would cost about three pounds five for time and material. Between them the two brain workers figured that fifteen pounds would cover the entire cost of the work--painting and decorating.

'Well, I reckon we can charge Sweater forty-five pounds for it,' said Rushton. 'It isn't like an ordinary job, you know. If he gets a

London firm to do it, it'll cost him double that, if not more.'

Having arrived at this decision, Rushton rung up Sweater's Emporium on the telephone, and, finding that Mr Sweater was there, he rolled up the designs and set out for that gentleman's office.

The men work with their hands, and the masters work with their brains. What a dreadful calamity it would be for the world and for mankind if all these brain workers were to go on strike.