

**THE MANOR AND
THE MILL; OR, THE
BOYS' INSTITUTE**

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The Manor and the Mill; or, The Boys' Institute by E. O.

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W. H. B. 1844

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BY E. O.

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1860.

THE MANOR AND THE MILL.

‘Put down thy book, boy, and come to tea; thee’ll never earn thy bread-and-butter by reading!’ cried a woman’s voice, elevated above its usual pleasant pitch by momentary irritation, as she saw the lad whom she addressed eagerly catching the last gleam of a winter twilight upon the well-worn volume he held in his hand.

‘There are some who have earned better than that by reading, Mother,’ he answered, shutting his book, and taking his seat at the round table, tidily spread for tea, by the broad bright hearth, at which no candle was yet needed.

‘Not such as we are,’ returned his mother; ‘hand-labour is for us, and plenty of it too; may be, I have been wrong in giving you as much learning as you have had already—more by far than your poor father ever got, or, I will say, ever needed either; and where was there a man in Trenton more respected than he was, or one who did better for his family as long as he lived?’

‘There was no one who did his duty better than he did, I firmly believe,’ answered the boy, looking steadily into the fire; ‘but—I cannot see what he was.’

'I never asked you to sit down to your meals with your hands black from the forge,' replied Mrs. Locksley, (for such was the widow's name,) 'though he, honest man, would come in from his work, and wipe his forehead and give me a kiss, and then cut his bread, and think naught about it. You've been differently brought up; and we neither of us ever grudged you your schooling, Philip, nor anything else we could do for you; times are changed, and we didn't want you to be what we were, but to go on with the times, and get all you could from them. What I do want is, that you would buckle to your work now, and earn a right to be idle by-and-by, if that is what pleases you best.'

'I shall never have such a right!' exclaimed Philip, passionately, 'neither here nor hereafter; if that was to be the end, I would not toil for it!'

'Then why is the money less than it used to be?' asked Mrs. Locksley, narrowly scanning her son's expressive features, and half hesitating, though she spoke sharply.

'You have hit the right nail on the head now,' he replied; and for some moments there was silence between them: it was broken first by Philip. 'I have brought you every farthing of my week's wages, Mother, but I did not work over-time; I was not obliged to do it; you know we agreed that if I did, I should have the money for myself; the men got me to read a book to them I liked, and I seemed to understand it better when I read it aloud, and they all liked it too: so there you have the reason!'

Mrs. Locksley was no weak quarrelsome woman;

she saw at once that in her son's present mood, the style of argument she was prepared with would not succeed; and taking a last gulp of tea, she rose, and went without reply to her ironing-board, at one end of which a quantity of lace and other delicate articles, with a sweet scent of fresh air still about them, lay ready to be finished off, and laid in those dainty wicker baskets that stood near. Philip glanced for a moment at the book he had again opened, then he also got up, and quietly slipped the fresh heaters into the irons, and put them on the stands upon the board; next he lighted the lamp that hung ready-trimmed from the great beam across the ceiling; and as the ruddy light glowed all over the many-cornered room, flickering on the tall clock, and along the oaken dresser, and the polished cupboard-doors, he went up to his mother, who had not yet spoken, and passed his arm round her: 'Good-night,' he said, 'I am going out; don't think I will ever shirk my work, or bring home less than you want, if I can help it: but oh, Mother! Mother! I must learn; I cannot be like the rest; I long to know what the world is, and what it is made of, and what people and things are in it. I cannot be content with only earning food and clothing; and I have no one to help me but Master Craddock, who cannot tell me half I want to understand, and who knows scarcely anything of books, though indeed he does know much more than I do.'

'He is a good old man,' said Mrs. Locksley, whose warm feelings her son's appeal had now fully awakened, 'but don't go after him, Philip;

stay and read by the fire-side if you have nothing better to do; I should break my heart if I thought you would take to herb-gathering and fishing, and wandering about the country as he does.'

Philip laughed good-humouredly. 'No fear of that, till I am, as you say, rich enough to be idle; I was not bred to an out-of-door life like Roger Craddock, and I only wish to enjoy it now and then for a treat; you won't object to that, Mother? He was to get some plants for me, and I am going to see for them, that is all, though looking through that book (he glanced fondly at the page he had left open in Gerard's Herbal) does make one long to set out with him.'

'Then I would leave it alone,' said Mrs. Locksley, setting down her iron with a sharp click, unlike its usual soothing, monotonous sound.

At this moment, while Philip still stood irresolute, came a low tap at the door, and with the chilly gust of wind that blew in when it was opened, there entered also a little girl, holding her cloak round her with one small hand, and in the other a bunch of green leaves and long fibres; she looked rosy, and there was a merry light in her blue eyes, as if she had not been long out in the cold, but she glanced wistfully towards the fire, and round the cosy kitchen, and dropped a curtsy to Mrs. Locksley without speaking.

'It is Lucy Craddock!' said Philip to his mother, with something of apology in his tone. 'I do believe you have brought me a specimen of the cinque-foil,' he continued, taking the plants carefully from her cold fingers. 'O what a pretty *thing*! And what is this?'

'Let her sit down by the fire, Philip,' said Mrs. Locksley, looking round from her ironing at her guest, 'and give the child a cup of tea; you seem to have left plenty this evening. How is your grandfather, Lucy?'

'Quite well, thank you, Ma'am, but he has been out all day, and only came back just before I set out; he was afraid the plants would not dry so well to-morrow, and sent me with them; I mustn't stay, Jem will be wanting me.'

'Only two minutes, Lucy!' said Philip, making her sit down at the table, where, indeed, an abundant supply of tea and good home-made bread was left. 'Just tell me what this is, while I pour you out some tea, and you get a little warmer.'

'Draba Verna,' answered the girl; 'it came from the top of the walls round the abbey, and he thought you would like it for your book, though it is not rare, only very early; but I think that is as good as being rare, don't you?'

'I think so now, the last week in February; but by-and-by, when the long days come, and there are plenty of flowers, I shall look out for prizes, I can tell you.'

'Such prizes as these?' asked Mrs. Locksley, as she came for fresh irons to the fire, and glanced disdainfully at Lucy's treasures.

'Finer than these, but perhaps not greater, for I am only beginning my collection with the year,' replied Philip, cheerfully; and as he spoke he opened a side-door, and carried the bundle of weeds into what appeared to be a large, nearly empty room, where, as his mother knew, he kept most of his peculiar possessions.