

**"ONLY."**

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"Only." by Henry S. Mackarness

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**HENRY S. MACKARNESS**

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BY

THE AUTHOR

OF

TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM,

OLD JOLLIFFE,

&c. &c.

*by*  
Mrs Matilda Anne (Blanché) Blackarress.

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### CHAPTER I.

A BRIGHT lazy summer day in June is one of the most delightful things to those, who can enjoy it thoroughly, beneath the shade of some fine old trees, the light breeze playing amongst the leaves and the little birds singing their sweet songs gently to one another, as though they would not disturb the silent repose in which in these glaringly hot days Nature seems wrapt; but in the scorching streets who can enjoy such weather; there is no comfort save in a room with the blinds closely drawn, and the windows wide open, even then unable to obtain anything like pure or refreshing air from the loaded atmosphere.

In a house in one of the best streets in town, the heat on a day such as this seems to have quite overpowered a very delicate looking woman, who is extended on a couch in a small but prettily furnished drawing-room, the windows are open, the curtains closely drawn to exclude the burning sun. A rustic flowerstand in the centre window is filled with plants, their perfume scenting the

room almost too powerfully, for there is no fresh air coming from open fields or breezy mountains to mingle with their overpowering sweetness. The lady has a book in her lap, but she is not reading; one transparently white hand is resting on the back of the sofa, and with the other she is fanning herself with a large fan of ostrich feathers. The door is suddenly thrown open, and a fine boy about eight years old rushes in, in a loose brown holland blouse, his long dark hair pushed back from his forehead, his collar thrown open displaying a very white throat, whiter still from contrast with his sunburnt but very handsome face.

" Oh! Mamma dear," he said as well as he could speak for want of breath, " make haste and give me a shilling please, I want it for such a poor boy without shoes and stockings, and so hot and thirsty, and his feet all blistered, Mamma; he was crying for some drink and I've given him such a lot of water, and now I want to give him a shilling, for he must go to Wimbledon, he says, and he must walk because he's got no money, and he can't walk with his poor feet all blistered; make haste dear Ma, I'm afraid he'll go."

" My dear boy," answered his mother in a weak and languid voice, " I really cannot allow it, Stuart." " Oh! Ma, dear, only a shilling, do."

She slowly drew a purse from her pocket, saying, " I think a shilling is too much for you to give him, remember it is all you have, and you may see some poor creature worse off, who needs your help; I think sixpence is plenty to give to a boy you know nothing of."



"Oh! no Ma, give it me dear, do!" and snatching it from his mother who had reluctantly taken it from the purse, he flew out of the room calling out "thank you" as he slammed the door after him. The poor invalid started at the noise, and then said with a heavy sigh, "what a dangerous disposition, to leave with a small, very small fortune, and a young sister to take care of;—my poor little Edith, and I have no energy nor strength to correct him," and again she sighed heavily.

The door re-opened, but much more gently this time, and a little girl crept in, but seeing her mother awake, she shut the door, and rushing to her jumped on the sofa beside her, and kissed her repeatedly; no one could have doubted the relationship; between Edith Vernon and her mother the likeness was remarkable, save that no trace of illness or suffering was on the laughing face of the child, and the bright hue of health and happiness sparkled in those lustrous dark eyes. "Dear Mamma, where is Stuart? I have been waiting for him so long," said the child. "He is gone to give a beggar boy his shilling, my love." "What a whole shilling, Mamma, all his money;—how good of Stuart!"

The mother smiled, and with her thin white hand stroked the child's rosy face: there was something in this simple praise, that gratified her, she had felt, that it was not quite good of Stuart to be heedless of her advice, or quite right of her to permit him to be so, but this innocent meed of praise from his little affectionate sister offered her an excuse for her own inertness, and looking at it in another light, she thought it was good of Stuart

to give all his money to the beggar, and was glad she had not prevented his so doing. Poor Mrs. Vernon! the ease with which she could silence the gentle instigation of conscience, in this and in still more serious instances, had been a rock on which she had wrecked all her happiness: against that truthful monitor she had married Stuart Vernon, knowing as she did his reckless expenditure, striving to drown "the still small voice" which whispered such extravagance evidenced a want of principle; but Vernon was handsome, mixed in the best society, was clever and amusing, and even without the excuse of love, for though pleased with him she had not had time to love him, Marian Harcourt gave her hand to the fascinating Stuart Vernon.

Soon, too soon she learnt her mistake, but instead of exerting herself to correct him, using her influence (for he really loved her very much) to stay this ruinous propensity, she gave in to him, contented always to quiet her still troublesome conscience with that dangerous word "only," which her husband was so fond of using. One thing led to another, deep in debt, each year they became more and more involved, till at length agitation and annoyance completely undermined Marian's naturally delicate health and she became a confirmed invalid. This of course added to the expenses, Vernon's gay and joyous temper became sullen and morose, and in short, happiness winged her flight from an abode where no prospect of cheerfulness or content could exist; till at length Vernon unwilling longer to witness the wreck he had made, left his home and his unhappy wife, to seek peace and forgetfulness abroad.

His plea for absence, was to retrieve his fortune by some employment, and poor Marian credited this at first, but as months and at length years went by, and still he came not, and finally ceased to write, hope soon followed every other happy feeling, and with poor Medora, she felt "he is gone, and I am desolate." Her children failed to console her, for they caused her too much anxiety, especially as Stuart was becoming the counterpart of his father;—the same joyous manner, the same reckless disregard of consequences, and the same habit of acting on the impulse of the moment. These impulses it is true were all or mostly all good, and had he possessed an energetic strong-minded mother, he would have eventually been a fine character, but alas! for Stuart, such was not the case, and the faults of the child were in the right way to become the vices of the man.

About an hour after the scene I have related, a young girl was hurrying through one of the narrow streets as quickly as the overpowering heat would permit her: though in the lower walk of life, there was a superiority about her, which made her very interesting; a certain refinement of features and delicacy of appearance altogether, which seldom belongs to the poorer class. There was nothing of gaiety about her face, and the objects in the street seemed to have no attraction for her, with her head down and her soft brown eyes fixed on the ground, she sped along and finally turned up a dirty street in which numbers of children were playing, and quarrelling, and stopped before one of the numerous rag-shops, which seemed to be the prevalent trade of the neighbourhood.