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The Little Islanders

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Published Dec 7, 1864 by J. Harris corner of S. Pauls Church East London.

THE
LITTLE ISLANDERS,

OR THE

BLESSINGS OF INDUSTRY.

EMBELLISHED WITH THREE COPPER-PLATE ENGRAVINGS.

LONDON:

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LITTLE ISLANDERS.



AT the commencement of the year 1740, rendered remarkable by a severe frost of nine weeks continuance, the peasantry of England were, in many places, sadly distressed for want of fuel; and in some parts of Westmoreland the old and infirm labourer found it utterly impossible to procure either wood or turf to warm his shivering and unhappy family.

Sir Robert Bonitas, who possessed an extensive estate in this county, was sensibly affected by

the misery of his indigent tenants, and resolved to afford them some relief, by cutting down a beautiful wood, which covered an island of about eight or nine acres in the adjacent river. This wood was, indeed, a favourite retreat, and beneath its umbrageous branches his children frequently amused themselves in the summer season, whilst himself and his amiable lady listened to the harmonious warbling of the birds, or meditated on the wonderful works of their Creator: but the *wants of the poor* were more important in Sir Robert's estimation than the enjoyments of his family, and his determination was unalterably fixed.

Accordingly the worthy baronet assembled the neighbouring peasants, and ordered them to accompany him to the island, where he explained his generous intention. A burst of acclamation evinced their gratitude, but not an individual would raise his axe against the revered plantation.—“Well then,” exclaimed Sir Robert’s eldest son, “I and my brother will set an example, by cutting down our young poplars, and my father’s servants will, no doubt, assist our feeble exertions.” Alfred was as good as his word, and the peasants were at length persuaded to fall to work; so that before sun set, a considerable portion of the timber

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was cut and carried; the hearth of each indigent cottager was again illumined with the cheerful blaze; and every eye and hand was lifted to heaven with unfeigned devotion, to call down blessings on the head of their benefactor.

The ensuing morning the labourers were again convened, and in a few hours the island was cleared of every tree except a venerable oak, which had been planted at the birth of Sir Robert's father, and was almost entirely covered with inscriptions. Seated beneath the spreading branches of this tree, the baronet questioned his children respecting their opinion of the island in its present state.

They ingenuously confessed that the first idea of its being cleared gave them great pain, but that on hearing the cause they had become perfectly reconciled, and were now more truly delighted with the monument of their father's generosity than they had ever been with the cool shade of their favourite walks, or the most entertaining of their usual sports. Sir Robert was evidently gratified by this answer, and remarked to his young companions as they proceeded homewards, that the power of virtue, equally charming and resistless, never failed of enlivening even the most dreary objects, and of diffusing perpetual serenity and pleasure over the minds of her votaries.

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We must now apprise our juvenile readers that the family of Sir Robert and Lady Bonitas consisted of two sons and two daughters. The boys, Alfred and Henry, were twin brothers, at this time about ten years old; and the girls, named Charlotte and Louisa, were two years younger. These children were all blessed with an amiable disposition, and lived together in the utmost harmony, equally happy in themselves, beloved by their parents, and respected by all the neighbourhood. Alfred in particular possessed a remarkably quick understanding; which he improved by an attentive perusal of valuable books, and in his leisure hours he amused himself

with learning all the handicraft trades of the village, so that he was enabled to display his ingenuity in gardening, pottery, joiners work, and basket making. His brother Henry was not equally acute and inventive, but he frequently benefited by Alfred's advice, and was ever ready to assist in all his schemes and undertakings. The two sisters were possessed of many pleasing accomplishments, and as they were tolerably instructed in needle work, cookery, and other domestic concerns, they passed their days in a continued round of true pleasures, never indulging in a disgraceful indolence, nor complaining that time hung heavy on their hands.

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One afternoon, whilst Henry was reading the celebrated adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Alfred communicated a singular project to his brother and sisters. He proposed that, if their parents would grant permission, they should, in the course of the ensuing spring, make a voyage to the little island, and that, after representing the shipwreck of Crusoe, they should endeavour to imitate the patience, activity and industry of that famous mariner, by remaining there some years, and by striving to supply their necessities by the unremitting exertions of their little community. This scheme was instantly agreed on, and Sir Robert appointed the first

of May, for taking possession of the territory which was in future to be called *Robinson Crusoe's Island*.

The winter glided insensibly away, the opening spring proved remarkably pleasant, and on the appointed morning the whole party embarked in an old pleasure boat, which on the present occasion was considered as a large ship, and the river as an unknown ocean. The crew consisted of Sir Robert and Lady Bonitas, the four children, a clergyman who had been employed for some time as their tutor, and a carpenter's apprentice, named Giles, who, though fifteen years old, was very little taller than Alfred. Sir Ro-

bert and the clergyman rowed, while Alfred, who sustained the character of Robinson Crusoe, was attentively consulting the compass. A strong gale happening to spring up as they approached the island, the ideal shipwreck took place, and the ladies were carried on shore by their young companions, while Sir Robert with his lady and the tutor escaped on some planks. When they had landed, and taken time to recover from their fright they found that poor Giles was missing, and were almost inclined to fear that some real accident had befallen him, but Giles had acted his part even better than the others, and was now walking through a shallow part of



the river, where he seemed to be combating the fury of the waves, and imploring assistance ; a rope was therefore thrown out to him, and Giles was safely landed amidst the acclamations of the joyous party.

Having made a tour round the island ; the shipwrecked mariners determined to form a bower for their temporary abode, and accordingly collected a great number of branches and pieces of wood for that purpose. Sir Robert and the tutor gave directions, and Giles proved a very valuable assistant ; but as many other things would be necessary for their accommodation, the pleasure boat had been

carefully stocked, and Alfred was reminded that he must, like Robinson Crusoe, search the hull of his vessel.

When the harbour was completed, Giles and Alfred employed themselves in making some wooden stools, a table, and two straw-bottomed chairs, and occasionally amused themselves with cutting out wooden spoons, forks, &c. But whilst these works proceeded with rapidity, the young settlers were at a great loss for an oven to bake their bread, and enable them to make their pottery. Sir Robert, therefore, engaged a bricklayer's son from the neighbouring village to supply this want; and they were soon afterwards joined by a

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dwarf who had been bred up to the trade of a locksmith ; two little girls who were acquainted with wool carding, and weaving ; and a most useful boy who had worked some time as a taylor, but who had also a tolerable idea of making candles without moulds, and was reputed to be very expert in writing and casting accompts.

The little island now began to wear the appearance of a regular settlement, several little cottages being erected near the old oak, and the young artisans supplied with an oven, a loom, and tools of every description. The girls were likewise busily employed in making or mending clothes, preparing

bread, and making butter, as Sir Robert had kindly sent them a cow, with some fowls, and two or three sheep. It must also be observed that as Alfred was desirous of imitating Crusoe in every particular, he frequently went out, with the bricklayer's son, whom he had named Friday, to enjoy the amusements of shooting and fishing.

When the Crusoe plan was first put in execution, our readers must understand, the little islanders were only employed in the above-mentioned avocations at those hours which were allotted for play, and no person remained upon the island after evening, the works being resumed every day; but since the erection of the cottages, and

the accession of the dwarf, the bricklayer's son, and the other assistants, some beds were removed thither, and the little islanders became stationary, under the care of their amiable preceptor.

On the 3d of September, the birth day of Lady Bonitas, the children were particularly desirous of giving a little entertainment in their island; and their parents kindly promised to honour it with their presence. Accordingly, the cottages were decorated with garlands and wreaths of flowers; and at the foot of the oak tree which had escaped the general destruction, was placed a large basket of wild flowers, with a label inscrib-

ed “ *The offering of the Little Islanders.*” At a short distance, stood a table set out with bowls of milk, and plates of fruit ; and all the children were elegantly dressed, with wreaths of flowers on their heads.

Sir Robert and his lady landed amidst universal acclamations, and were conducted to the principal cottage where they partook of a rural repast ; whilst the children were evidently delighted at drinking out of their own coarse cups, eating with the wooden forks and spoons, which themselves had manufactured, and occasionally reminding their parents that both the bread and butter had been made by their beloved sisters.

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Published by Messrs. J. Horns, Avenue of St. George, (formerly) West London.




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“ My children,” said the baronet, “ I am by no means surprised at your satisfaction, which results from the consciousness of your own labour and industry ; for it is extremely natural that you should be better pleased with this earthen ware and these wooden spoons, than with the plate and porcelain which usually adorn my table ; the former being of your own manufacture, while the latter is merely obtained by purchase. Continue therefore, my dear children, to cultivate these industrious habits, which are productive of such innocent and honourable gratifications.

After dinner, Lady Bonitas pro-

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posed augmenting the number of the female islanders, by sending for the sister of the dwarf, who was a good tempered creature, and being nearly thirty years old, was a very proper person to superintend the concerns of the infant farm, and the domestic arrangements. And it was also agreed that a little girl, named Maria, who had been brought up from her infancy at the expence of Sir Robert, should be received into the colony. With these arrangements the children were greatly delighted, and a little code of laws was drawn up for the government of the whole community, by the worthy clergyman who officiated

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in the double capacity of chaplain and preceptor.

Having spent a most agreeable day, and distributed some presents among the islanders, Sir Robert took his four children to the family mansion, in the evening, where the scene of festivity was terminated by a ball.

When the visitors were gone, Lady Bonitas desired her daughters to carry the large basket of flowers which they had given her, into her apartment; but on going to fetch it from the hall, they found it covered with a cloth, and so extremely heavy, that they could scarcely raise it. They therefore uncovered it, and to their

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great astonishment, found a beautiful infant lying fast asleep upon the flowers. The sudden scream which they uttered at this unexpected sight, brought Sir Robert and Lady Bonitas, with Alfred, Henry, and their tutor into the hall; and after various surmises it was universally agreed that some stranger must have left the child in the basket whilst the company were engaged in dancing. "However," said Sir Robert, "this poor little outcast must not be suffered to perish, and therefore as soon as a nurse can be provided it shall be sent to Robinson Crusoe's island, and brought up with my children." This kind declaration was receiv-

ed with many thanks, and the baronet promised, that if his children would assemble in the breakfast parlour at an early hour next morning, he would relate an occurrence somewhat similar to the present, but which had happened several years ago.

After enjoying that tranquil repose which usually awaits the sons and daughters of virtue, Sir Robert's children arose at six o'clock, and on entering the breakfast parlour joined in fervent devotion to the giver of all good. They then reminded their father of his promise, and preserved a profound silence whilst he related the following story :—

“About nine years ago,” my children, “your mother and I set out on a journey to London, and slept the first night at the mansion of a friend, thirty miles from this spot. My friend was unfortunately called to another part of the county by some urgent business, but he had left orders for our reception; and towards evening, the old steward asked if we would amuse ourselves with seeing the tricks of a pretended conjuror, who had put up in the village. We consented to the proposal, and were entertained with several aughable tricks; but the conjuror said he could show us something more interesting by day-light; and

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accordingly your mother proposed that he should wait upon us at nine o'clock next morning. He promised to be punctual, at the same time begging permission to leave a box in our apartment, under the pretence that, as it contained some very curious mechanism, it might probably be injured at the public-house where he lodged.

“ His request being granted, the old man took his leave for the night, and we sat down to supper; but we had scarcely finished our repast when we fancied that some murmuring sounds arose from the box. Your mother was much alarmed, but I immediately

went to the spot, and, on listening attentively, heard a child complaining of thirst. I immediately broke open the box which was perforated with little holes in several parts, and discovered a lovely boy about three years old, reclining on a bed of flowers, and habited so as to represent Cupid, having a quiver at his back, and a bow and arrow in one hand. The inside of the box was tastefully ornamented with wreaths of flowers, and the object before us was altogether attractive and interesting.

“Your mother immediately took the infant in her arms and gave him a glass of water, for which he



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appeared very thankful; she then relieved him of his bow and quiver; made up a little bed on the sofa; and watched over him till Cupid fell asleep. We then retired to rest, almost wishing that the conjuror might never call again.

“ We rose early the next morning, and heard that the old man had quitted the village immediately after leaving us. We therefore cautioned our servants to be silent on the subject, and took the little creature with us to town, having previously purchased a suitable dress for him; and as we never introduced him to our company, the adventure remained unknown

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to all but ourselves and our faithful domestics.

“ On our return from London, we placed him at a boarding school, where he soon evinced a strong desire for learning, and made a surprising proficiency in all his little studies. He is now about twelve years old, and has attained a much greater stock of useful knowledge than could have been expected: for to the common acquirements of reading, writing, and arithmetic, he adds considerable skill in drawing and painting, and is so well acquainted with the rules of architecture, that he can take a plan with the utmost accuracy. He also rides on

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horseback with equal elegance and courage, and is extremely expert in the use of the bow and arrow; but as I intend to send him to your island he is now employed in learning the trade of a cooper, which will there prove very useful."

The children were highly gratified with the history of this youth, and fondly anticipated the hour of his arrival among them, which Sir Robert promised to accelerate.

At this time there were, as our readers have already seen, several inhabitants on the island, whose hours were equally divided between their devotions, their studies, and their amusing labours,

The worthy chaplain set apart a portion of each day for the worship of the Almighty, and in his subsequent instructions he had always the good fortune to inspire his pupils with a spirit of emulation. The girls were attended with equal care; and as the talents of each individual contributed to the general good, they were utter strangers to the baleful influence of envy, or discontent. Love and harmony reigned predominant in every breast, and their conduct was so praise-worthy, that it soon became proverbial among the neighbouring peasants, who in bestowing their highest praise on a good child, would say, "He is

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as amiable as one of the Little Islanders."

When the youth Augustus (who had been found in the box by Sir Robert) arrived at the island, he was received with the most heartfelt joy, and every one crowded eagerly around him, in order to gain some useful information from his superior knowledge. He answered all their questions with peculiar sweetness, and readily obliged his new companions by making a curious sun dial on which he inscribed, "Number your minutes lest your hours be lost."

The gardens belonging to the cottages were now well cultivated, and stocked with a choice assort-

ment of flowers, fruits, and esculent vegetables; two adjacent fields were planted with corn and potatoes; and at the end of a young plantation of firs and poplars was erected a charming arbour, composed of lattice work, and covered with vines and honeysuckles. Here the little colonists assembled on Sundays and holidays, and amused themselves with reading or reciting some interesting tales, or with conversing on rational subjects. Sometimes Charlotte and Louisa, who were possessed of enchanting voices, warbled an hymn of praise to their Maker, whilst Alfred played some melting air on his german flute, and the sister of the dwarf

occasionally struck the chords of her sweetly sounding guitar. At other times a dance was proposed around the venerable oak, and the day concluded with harmless hilarity.

The approaching birth day of Sir Robert suggested the idea of giving some new entertainment on the island, and after various plans had been proposed and abandoned, it was at length agreed that there should be a fair, conducted entirely by the juvenile islanders, and kept open every afternoon for a fortnight, the booths to be opened regularly at two, and closed at seven o'clock. Accordingly a great number of labouring boys were hired from the neighbouring

village, to erect the temporary shops, and other accommodations; and on the sixteenth of July, the fair was opened, and attended by a great number of ladies and gentlemen who had travelled many miles to see *Robinson Crusoe's Island*.

All the booths were laid out with great taste and elegance, some containing a variety of toys, others bird nets and fishing tackle; and others, the manufactures of the islanders, consisting of turnery, earthen ware, baskets, drawings, coarse cloths, and artificial flowers. But that of Augustus was most generally and deservedly admired; for that ingenious youth had displayed on the heads of four casks

made by himself, several elegant models of buildings, delicately cut out in ivory, and some fine designs in architecture, all of which were soon purchased; and indeed every stall was completely cleared in less than the fortnight, and not a single customer asked for an abatement on any article. The money received on this occasion was, by unanimous consent, divided into three parts, one quarter being set apart for the relief of the infirm men and indigent children in the adjacent village; another quarter being destined for the purchase of paper, pencils, crayons, &c. preparatory to the introduction of some ornamental paintings, and the remainder being laid up for stocking

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the shops against the ensuing fair ; as it was resolved there should always be two in a year, the one on the birth day of Sir Robert Bonitas, and the other on that of his amiable lady.

On the demise of Sir Robert and his amiable lady, the little community was broken up, and the island gradually deserted ; but the children, who had now attained to years of maturity, were all happily settled, and every peasant who desired to impress his offspring with a love of industry, often recited the interesting adventures of the Little Islanders.

F I N I S .



