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The Story of Charles Maitland, or, The Dangers of a Meddling Disposition

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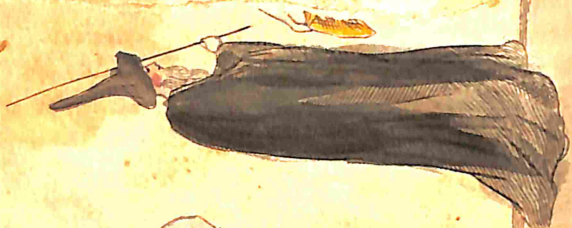
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THE STORY OF
CHARLES MAITLAND;
OR, THE
DANGERS OF A MEDDLING DISPOSITION.

Embellished with a Magic Lantern Exhibition.

Published and Sold by David Hogan, No. 249,
Market-street, Philadelphia.



THE
STORY OF
CHARLES MAITLAND;

OR,

THE DANGERS OF

A MEDDLING DISPOSITION.

[MR. MANLY preparing the Magic Lantern; MRS. MANLY placing a screen before the Fire; and FREDERIC, CAROLINE, SOPHY, and EDWARD, arranging the Chairs conveniently.]

MR. MANLY.

Well,—What do you see?

CAROLINE.

Oh! what is that? I see a little girl with wings, and somebody in a black robe and a long beard.

EDWARD.

And there is a Turk!

A

MR. MANLY.

What you see is a ball, composed of children in masquerade ; and the boy in the black robe, with the white wand in his hand, is a very naughty one, and might (by his meddling disposition) have made a breach between two families who were very much united, and lived on the most friendly terms, if he had had to deal with people of less discernment and good sense. I will tell you how it happened.

Charles Maitland being invited to spend the Christmas holidays with two of his schoolfellows, William and Edmund Owen, and having obtained his father's permission for so doing, they sat off in high spirits, accompanied by Mr. Wilmot (a clergyman who had undertaken the care of their education) and his wife, an amiable and sweet-tempered woman, who treated them with as much tenderness as if they had been her own children. They were all on horseback, for the distance was not great, and the weather mild for the season ; and they trotted along very comfortably, chatting on different subjects, till they missed Charles, who Mr. Wilmot found, on riding back two or three hundred yards, dismounted from his poney, and in deep conversation with two men who were drinking at the door of an ale-house. On Mr. Wilmot's enquiring why he had stayed behind them, and what he was doing ? " Why, young master is very curious, sir," said

one of the countrymen : “ neighbour Thomas and I are striking a little bargain, and talking of matters that do not concern him, nor would he understand them if I were to tell him ; yet he insists on knowing what the bargain is, that he may tell us which of the two is likely to have the best of it. I can’t help laughing for my part ;—he had better go and learn his lesson, and leave us to settle our affairs our own way.” Here the two men began to laugh heartily, and Charles, not a little ashamed, got upon his poney and rode after his companions, in order to avoid a lecture from Mr. Wilmot, which he was sensible he well deserved though he could not get the better of his inclination to know every body’s business, and to meddle and advise on every subject which came in his way.

Soon after their arrival at Mr. Owen’s, it was proposed among other amusements that there should be a masquerade ball for the children, to which all the young people of the neighbourhood should be invited.

Nothing was thought of but their dresses, and the different characters they were to appear in. A thousand little projects were formed of disguising themselves so as not to be known to each other ; and parties were made for particular dances, groupes and gypsies, beggars, &c. Nothing was seen but whispering, huddling into corners, and hiding gowns, petticoats, turbans, and finery.

This was too much for Charles Maitland : he wanted to make one in every party, to know all their secrets, and to direct and order the whole business : he did nothing but stalk about the house, listen to every conversation, and pry into every ones plan of disguise, without thinking of his own.

In the course of this improper occupation, he had discovered that Edmund Owen and his sister Emily were extremely taken up with an affair which had nothing to do with the masquerade, or any other of [their Christmas amusements : it was something of a more serious nature, and on which the future welfare of a whole family very much depended.

A very worthy woman was in danger of being left without support, owing to the ill conduct of her husband. He understood that the man was a person who superintended the education of children, and to whom Mr. Owen had long been a friend on account of his family, though he had never been blind to his bad qualities ; but his patience was at length exhausted : the man grew more and more inattentive to his pupils, never went sober to bed, and spent that money with his dissolute companions which his wife and children stood in need of. He was therefore, determined to give him no further encouragement ; and, as he was a person of consequence, and very much esteemed, in that neighbourhood, there was no doubt but his example would be followed by

others, and whatever step he took would be approved of.

It appeared to Charles that Edmund Owen and Emily wished to contrive a private conversation with the person in question, to acquaint him with their father's displeasure, and to warn him of the risk he ran of losing his bread, unless he could determine to change his conduct; and he thought they would, probably, make but a bungling business of it, and that he was much more capable of doing it himself. He had no kind of doubt as to the person;—who should it be but Mr. Wilmot! Yet he thought it very strange,—he had never seen Mr. Wilmot in liquor, but how should he?—they always went early to bed, and he had quite time enough after that to go and join his companions; and as to teaching them, he was no judge of what he ought to do. To be sure he had always fancied Mr. Wilmot was very strict, and that he kept them very tight to their learning, but perhaps they did not do half so much as was necessary!—in short it must be Mr. Wilmot, it could be no other person; and though he did not see the necessity of repeating all he had heard to him, he determined to be beforehand with Edmund and Emily in hinting to him that Mr. Owen's seeming friendship to him was not to be depended upon; that he had a very bad opinion of him, and would not suffer his two sons to return with him, but would, on the contrary, publish his bad conduct to all the neighbourhood, and had no doubt but

that every child would be withdrawn from his house immediately.

If Charles Maitland had not been a silly boy, he could have known that the most improbable thing in the world was that Mr. Owen should receive under his roof, or have so long entrusted his children to the care of a man of whom he entertained so bad an opinion ; and the truth of the matter is that (as you will readily believe) it was not Mr. Wilmot whom his young friends were speaking of, but a poor man who kept a day school in the village, and to whom, as he could read and write very well, they had given the care of a Sunday school with a good salary for his trouble, hoping it would encourage him to alter his conduct, and stay more at home with his family : but unfortunately the more he found the means, the more he drank ; and Mr. Owen plainly saw that he never would be a proper person to be entrusted with any thing where a perfectly good example and regular conduct were so essentially necessary, and Edmund and Emily, feeling a great deal for his unfortunate wife and children, flattered themselves that he would attend to their advice, and that they should have the satisfaction of seeing him quite reformed and his family happy.

EDWARD.

I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting you, but I should like to know how Charles Maitland

contrived to hear so much of Edmund's conversation with his sister : I suppose he put his ear to the key hole, or hid himself in some dark closet, or—

FREDERIC.

I should like to have caught him, I would have nailed his ear to the door, and I would have given him such a trimming, that I would have made him repent of his curiosity.

MR. MANLY.

You are much too violent, Frederic : he was curious and meddling, and you would have been cruel, so that to correct him of a fault you would have committed another.—But he neither listened at the key hole, or crept into a closet ; I will tell you, if you will be patient, how he discovered, as he imagined, Mr. Wilmot's family conduct.

Having perceived, as I said before, that Edmund and Emily were often engaged in private conversations, in which no other person appeared to have any share ; and finding all the hints he threw out of wishing to make one in the party were to no purpose, he, like a naughty boy, thought it would be better to find out what he wanted to know by art and contrivance, than to remain any longer in ignorance. Accordingly he began to reflect on the means, and after many hours spent in fruitless attempts to form some

plan, he at length recollected the masquerade, which was to take place the following evening, and where he thought he might, by personating Edmund during a short absence, which he could easily manage, draw from Emily the whole secret which appeared to occupy them so seriously, and which he was quite miserable at being ignorant of.

His first care was to discover Edmund's and Emily's dresses, and privately to prepare one of the same kind as Edmund's for himself. This was no very difficult matter, for William, seeing him so anxious to know it, and little imagining his motive, but supposing he meant to have a little fun, very good-naturedly told him that his sister would appear in a fancy dress, and his brother in that of a conjuror, making him promise, however, not to say he had mentioned it; and Edmund's being a very simple dress, he found no difficulty in getting one so exactly the same, that the two boys were not to be distinguished one from the other.

When the company was assembled in the great eating room, Charles sent in a note to Edmund, desiring he would meet him in the shrubbery, and if he was there before him, requested he would wait a moment. Edmund complied immediately; and the instant he went out, Charles went into the room, joined Emily, and in a low voice began to question her about their secret; and so artfully did he manage the matter, that in five minutes he drew enough from her (who imagined she was

talking to her brother) to conclude that poor Mr. Wilmot was a very bad man, and to hope that Mr. Owen would write to his father to prevent his being sent back with him. Had he staid a little longer, he would, in all probability, have discovered his mistake, for Emily, who was very full of the subject, continued chattering, when he, perceiving his friend Edmund coming in at the door, had ran away to the other end of the room, that he might slip out and change his dress.

Emily continued the discourse with her brother, without perceiving the mistake ; but he was too much amused with the motley groupe which surrounded him to pay any attention to her discourse. He asked her if she had seen Charles Maitland, and begged if she met with him in the crowd she would tell him he had waited in the shrubbery till he was tired, and that he supposed he was only playing tricks with him. Charles Maitland was, however, otherwise engaged ; he soon made his appearance in the character of a miller, with an empty sack thrown over his shoulder, and his clothes covered with meal, but his mind being entirely occupied with the project he had of giving Mr. Wilmot a wholesome lesson, and of warning him of the danger he was in of losing Mr. Owen's friendship, as well as that of all the families in the neighbourhood, he appeared not even to hear the wit and jokes which passed on his powdered hat and shoes, or any of the many questions which were asked him concerning his mill, &c.

Perceiving Mr. Wilmot alone in a corner of the room, he immediately went up to him, seated himself by him, and taking aside his mask, in the idea that his being known would give more weight to what he had to say, opened the business without any ceremony.

Mr. Wilmot (as may easily be imagined) was thunderstruck at what he heard, conscious how little he merited the slightest blame, and how very far his inclination lead him from the fault he was accused of, he could not conceive where such a report could have originated, or that Mr. Owen, knowing him so well and for so many years past, could pay attention to any thing so very ill-natured and malicious. He put a number of questions to Charles, who, as he had not the smallest idea of any mistake, and thought he was serving his master by communicating all he knew of the matter, told him he had it from Edmund and Emily, who had heard it from their papa, and who were very well acquainted with his intentions.

Some of the dancers coming up and dragging away Charles, Mr. Wilmot was left to reflect upon the extraordinary circumstances. If he was astonished at Mr. Owen's giving ear to a report so much to his disadvantage, he was equally surprised at his hypocrisy, and knew not how to persuade himself that, believing him so worthless, he should have invited him so warmly to spend the holidays at his house, and have received him with so much apparent sincerity and friendship.

He grew angry, and sometimes thought he would leave the house immediately ; but the next moment the whole story appeared so ridiculous, that he determined to have a private conversation with Mr. Owen as soon as they had breakfasted the next morning, and insist upon knowing who were his enemies. He wished to have questioned Charles still further, but he was in the midst of the dancing ; and at supper he did not sit near him, so that he had no opportunity.

At breakfast, nothing was talked of but the amusement of the preceding evening, and all was gaiety and mirth. Mr. Wilmot alone sat gloomy and out of humour, and he waited impatiently to have an explanation with Mr. Owen, which to his great joy he soon had ; for observing that he took the road to the shrubbery alone, he immediately followed, and surprised him beyond measure by recounting the extraordinary intelligence he had received from Charles.

I scarcely need add that Edmund and Emily were sent for, and all was soon explained to Mr. Wilmot's satisfaction. With Charles it fared much otherwise ; the faults in his disposition appeared in such glaring colours, that he was himself thunderstruck at perceiving the bad consequences which might have arisen from his indulging himself in them, and that his passion for meddling in other people's concerns had tempted him to act towards his companions with the most unjustifiable duplicity.

Mr. Owen wished to send him directly out of the house, and to make his father and mother acquainted with his conduct; but he appeared so penitent, and Mr. Wilmot and his young friends pleaded his cause so earnestly, that he was at length forgiven: and I hope it proved a warning to him in future.

MRS. MANLY.

I hope, indeed, it did; for his fault was a very dangerous one, and he must often have made a great deal of mischief. I hope to-morrow evening your papa will indulge you with another exhibition and story.

CAROLINE, SOPHY.

Thank you, papa.

JOHN BOUVIER, PRINTER.