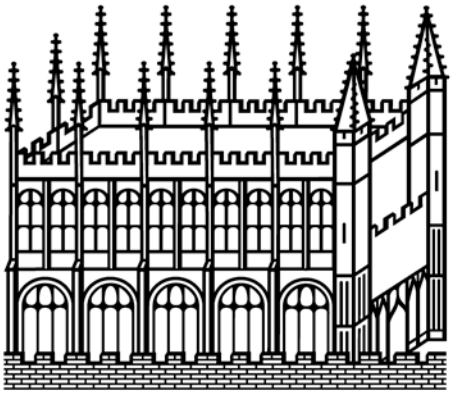

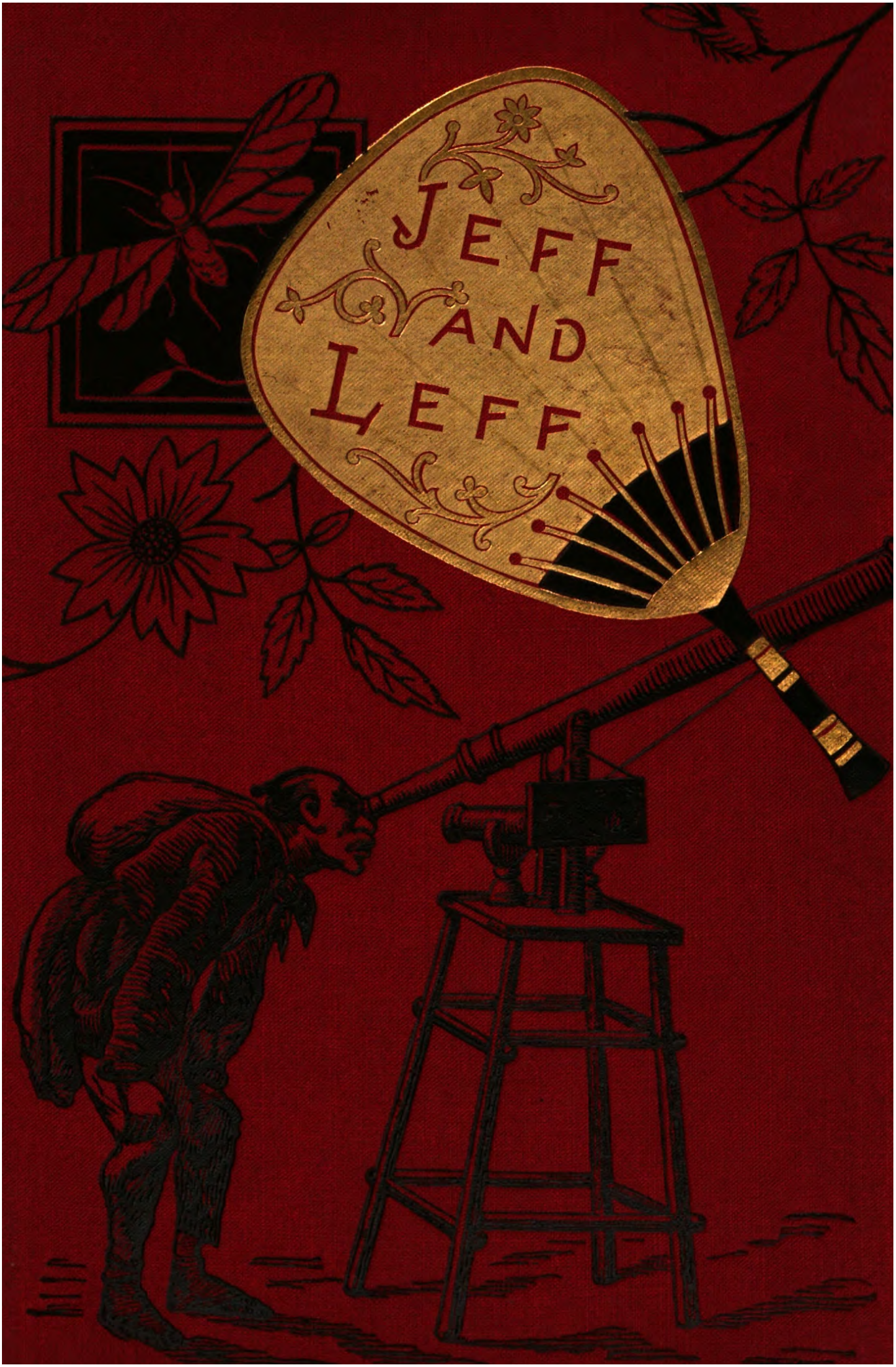
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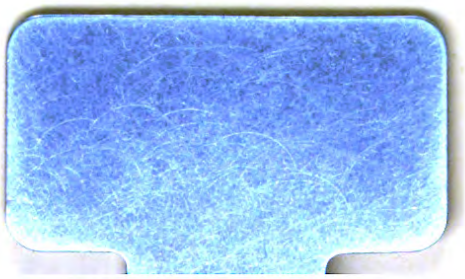

GEORGE AND ETHIE AT THE GARDEN PALING.—(*See p.* 106.)

JEFF AND LEFT:

THE STORY OF TWO POOR CITY ARABS

AND

OTHER STORIES

NEW YORK

DOROTHY AND PUPPY AT THE GARDEN PALING.—(*See p.* 106.)

JEFF AND LEFF;

THE STORY OF TWO POOR CITY ARABS,

AND

OTHER STORIES.

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO.,

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JEFF AND LEFF.

THE STORY OF TWO POOR CITY ARABS.

CHAPTER I.

In an Attic—Beggar and Thief—Jeff and Leff—The Teacher's Visit—A Foundling—Honest Work—Hopes and Fears—A Love of Theft.

MY story begins in a very small attic, the sides of which slanted abruptly from the middle of a roof so low that a man could only stand upright in one line across the middle of the floor.

The light stole in to awaken the occupants of this room, and a big lad crawled from a heap of rags and stood upright in the clothes he never thought of taking off at night—perhaps for fear he should not be able to put such tender things on again!

He was a tall, rather awkward-looking boy, and after gazing around, almost hopelessly, for some moments, he knelt down before the little grate, and by means of rags, paper, and sundry bits of sticks, he kindled a fire.

He next pulled a stool towards him, placed some crusts of bread on it, and put water to warm in a tin cup. Then he fetched a little milk.

After these arrangements, he looked at his hands.

Yes, they were very black; and he felt his face then, as if the touch told him that it was black also.

"I must have it clean," he said aloud; and then, as if a sudden thought struck him, he pulled back the window and rubbed his hands and face in the beautiful white Christmas snow that lay piled up on the window sill.

"Ah! I doubt they'll never be as white as *that!*" he thought, as he lifted his beggar face to the sky.

Yes, he was a beggar—a beggar, and a thief even. But had all the good gone out of him? As he lifted his face, it caught the first rays that the sun sent down into that dirty sin-stricken alley, and he smiled; the smile brought him to himself, and he began to think in a rambling sort of fashion, "What have I to do with smiling? The snow—the snow—white. What was it? 'Wash me whiter than snow.' Whiter than *snow! Me?* Not me, but the me inside. Whiter? Yes, I'll say it, I will. 'Wash me whiter than snow—wash me whiter than snow.' That's what the Sunday-school people ask God to do."

"Jeff!"

He shut the window, and crept back to the bundle of rags that had been his bed.

"Jeff, is it morning again?" said the voice.

"Aye, laddie, morning again, and a fire! Think of that, Leff, a fire to warm us!"

"Jeff! Jeff!" and a thin, puny boy rolled himself over till he could stand up. "A fire, Jeff?" he asked anxiously. Where did it come from?"

"Yes, but it's all right. I begged and picked up every bit after you went to sleep last night. I was singing carols outside, and got a penny."

"Jeff," and the voice was very soft and grateful, "I should soon be well if we had a fire sometimes."

Then Jeff sat on the stool, with the child on his knee, while they strove to warm their hands and feet, and eat the crusts, soaking them in the warm water.

"How many may we eat?" asked Leff, miserly.

"All these. I've put some by for dinner."

"Got them last night too?"

"Aye. What are you doing with those crumbs?"

"Jeff, here's a wee one. I'm not very hungry; let's leave it for the birdies. Poor things!"

"Best eat it up, Leff; the birds can furrage for themselves better than we can."

"No, Jeff, just this one handful?"

"Aye then, do."

Jeff brushed all the snow from the window, and put the crumbs on it. Afterwards, with the rest of the warm water he washed Leff's hands and face, and they sat to watch if any birds would come.

"Jeff, I'm terribly tired."

"Aye, little one?" and he began to rock him backwards and forwards, singing softly the words of a carol he had lately sung in the street.

"Jeff," said the child presently, "will you promise never to get anything by——"

"By stealing? No, Leff, that I can't. Leff, if I promised, and broke my promise, I couldn't never look you in the face again. I'll try my best against it, and that must content you."

"So it does, Jeff. Ah!" and he leaned wearily back in the strong arms, and went to sleep again.

Jeff got up, and in the one line across the room where

he could stand upright, he walked up and down with the light weight, sometimes holding him still as a baby, and then, when the restlessness seized poor little Leff, he let him lean up over his shoulder, while he sung to him a Christmas carol, such as he sung out in the snow.

"Oh, Jeff, that's good," he said at last. "Now tell me last Sunday's verse. Do you remember it? 'Whiter than snow,'" replied the child.

"Aye, I said it this morning; and, Leff, I looked up to the sky, and wasn't it strange? I smiled, just as I do to you, I did. I wonder why?"

"Ah, Jeff, I knew it would come."

"Sure, I don't understand you, Leff!"

"Why, Jeff, I do think God in heaven must have smiled down upon you, and then you couldn't hold out no longer, and you smiled back; and, to tell Him you were going to belong to Him, you said, 'Wash me whiter than snow.'"

"Ah, a bit of sunshine did come down into my face, and there's none now. But how's a fellow like me to be different? Ain't I a beggar out and out? Ain't I a thief out and out? Ain't I been in jail?—and wasn't I took up for a thief when I was no more than nine years old? Who'd give me work? I guess it's no use; no, no, it ain't; there's no honest way for me to live. One can't sell carols all the year round, and I'll have to go back to it all."

"Jeff, Jeff!" and the thin arm crept round his neck and fondled the tangled locks. "Jeff, I do believe God smiled on you this morning, and I guess when you go to get honest work, He'll smile on you too, right down into your face, and folks 'll wonder what it is; and

they'll take it for God's smile on it, though they would send you away a hundred times you went without it."

Jeff listened, but he shook his head.

"Sure, there's nothing like his smile, Jeff; it's different to all else. When folks see it, they take it for a whiff of something better than they see."

Just then the sun burst from the clouds, and shed a glory into the dark attic; and from the two lads' faces a smile went out to welcome the beams.

Then they were silent for a bit, till Leff cried, "Jeff, did you ever? Two robins at our crumbs!"

All through the long morning hours Leff slept, and when he at last awoke, it was to find Jeff away, and to hear one of the lodgers below calling loudly to him. He got up, and tumbled to the door. "Here's a man a-calling and a-calling after you;" and poor little Leff's heart beat, and his head swam, with the fear that something had happened to Jeff, and that this man had come to tell him of it.

In his terror he could neither move nor speak, and the woman called down to the man, that he had better come up and see the child himself.

In another moment Leff recognised the kind genial face of one of the teachers at the ragged school where they went from time to time, when he was well enough.

"Jeff?" he asked, trembling all over.

"Who is Jeff?" said the man, kindly.

"Are you come to say he's dead?"

"No, no, child, I've not seen him;" and the relief was so great that Leff burst into tears.

The missionary drew him into the room, and then, in the firm kind way that drew all boys to him, he

soothed, and gradually drew from him the history of his life.

The missionary asked if Jeff was his brother.

"No," answered Leff, "not my brother; he's nothing to me. Once he had a father, but he left him, and he doesn't know anything of his mother. Jeff wasn't much older than I am now, when, one night, when he was in the 'Ring of Roses,' some men were going out, and they stumbled over a sort of bundle. Jeff says it was me, and they took me up, and laughed and mocked, and Jeff, he got savage, and snatched me from them. They called a lot of things at him, but he didn't mind. Ever since then, he's been father, and mother, and all. They used to call me 'the child that was left,' in the alley; and Jeff said, 'Yes, left to him.' He seemed to think I'd come a-purpose for him, and he liked to say it, and then got into the way of calling me 'Leff,' to remind him I belonged to him; so that's all the name I've ever had, and I don't want no other, sir."

"Poor lads! poor fellows! How soon will Jeff be back?"

"Can't say, sir; he's gone singing or begging, I guess."

"When he comes back, tell him I want to see him at the school to-morrow. I think I know where I I can get him some work; and you come as well, if you are able. I'll send some soup round for you." And in the midst of Leff's thanks, he disappeared down the crooked stairs.

It was late in the afternoon before Jeff returned, tired, hungry, and dispirited. He threw himself down on the floor without a word.

"Jeff, old fellow," said Leff, at last, "it's been a bad day, has it?"

"So bad that I'll stand it no longer. If God means me to be honest, why doesn't He help me? Why doesn't He send me some work?"

"So He has, Jeff," answered Leff; "I only waited to tell you till you should care to listen."

"He has, Leff—He has? Where?—how?"

And then Leff poured out his story, ending with, "So you see, Jeff, God is going to make the good life possible, though you don't believe Him."

"So it is, Leff; but perhaps better is in store for us now."

The next morning they set out together for the missionary's house.

It was some time before he could learn much from Jeff, still longer before he could draw from him his humble eager aspirations after a higher and better life.

He then told him that he had found a gentleman who was willing to give him work. It would be hard work, but fair pay; but he insisted that they should leave their present lodging for one in another part of the town, where they would be more free from their old companions. So the next day they left their attic, and Jeff saw his master, and, decently dressed, entered on his first honest work. He was no longer a street Arab.

A few weeks brought a wondrous change to them. True, they still lived in the smallest barrenest attic possible; but their food was better, Jeff's face was not so hard and hopeless, Leff's not quite so pinched and white.

Hope had entered their hearts, and bore them bravely up, though the stream yet ran deep.

Night after night found them both at school; the better life no longer seemed only *possible* to Jeff, but he seemed really to have entered on it.

"Jeff," said Leff, one night, as they sat together, "isn't all this too good? We could not have believed it a few months ago; and yet, even then, I suppose, God was getting it all ready for us."

"Yes, lad, I suppose so. It's odd that we've only just got to know Him, when He has always known us; and yet, the alley!—that place was enough to make us think there was no God at all."

"Jeff, do you know, sometimes I have a wish," cried Leff, with glowing face, "that when I grow up, I may go back to the alley; not, perhaps, as a missionary, but to try and help them—those who want to be helped to good as we did—and oh, Jeff, don't you think nothing would show God so much how we love Him as if we were to try and bring other poor fellows to know Him and get a bit of His love."

Jeff was silent for a bit; but at last he said in a broken voice, and hiding his face, "Leff, do you ever think I—I shall go back to the old life now—ever be a thief again?"

Leff started, and turned white.

"Why, Jeff, what could make you think of such a thing? I don't believe God would ever let you go back; besides, even if you *did*, He would follow you, as the Shepherd in the Bible followed the sheep, and He'd bring you back. I'm sure He'd never let you go back for good."

He looked very eagerly at Jeff, as if longing to hear him echo the words; but he only said, hesitatingly, and in a whisper "I've a great fear of it, Leff. I was always a thief, you know. I took to it natural like."

"Oh Jeff, Jeff, it would break my heart! oh don't don't!"

"There Leff, don't cry. I was only thinking—." But as he spoke he passed his coat-sleeve over his own eyes, and continued, "I'll tell you how it is; you never were a thief, so you won't understand; but you know I was a rare one at it, and, do you know, it seems as if I could not get the love of it away. It isn't that I want the things—for we can buy all we want mostly—but it's just that I have a sort of craving to steal—to take the things I see; a sort of longing for it, just as some people have for the drink—and it's no good; it comes again and again. It's just the pleasure of nipping things away. I don't want to keep them, you know. But I can't keep my hands off some-how—I must have been born to it."

They were quiet till Leff said—

"But Jeff, God must know this."

"Then why don't He take it away?" asked Jeff, bitterly. "If He sees me doing all I can, why don't He help to make it easy?"

Poor Leff thought a bit before he answered.

"Jeff, I expect it's to make a man of you. If it all went easy, may-be you'd be nothing more than a baby, and this hard thing will make you strong, and fit to be trusted."

"But, Leff," he answered, despondingly; "that's just it. I'm not a bit strong. I'm as weak as a baby, and I can't stand it."

"Jeff, don't you remember what came in church last week; and we noticed it because it came so queer, just after saying the Lord had gone into heaven?—'The Lord working *with* them; and He won't leave us alone, though we are such poor fellows."

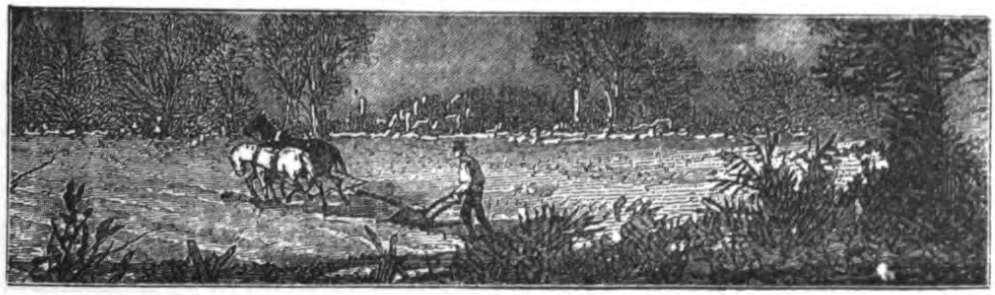
"But perhaps I might go to the bad, after all. Shall I tell about it? I'm afraid they'll say I'm not fit to come to Sunday-school if I'm so bad at heart."

"I don't think that, Jeff. They'll want you to come all the more, to help you to get strong. But when do you feel so bad about it—always?"

"Almost always. I want to make away with the things from the shops, as I come along. I know it's mad, and bad, but I can't help it; it's like the drink, its like the drink," he repeated, wearily.

Would it be better if I came to meet you every day?"

Jeff nodded, but added, quickly, "It's too far for you, or I wish you could, lad."



CHAPTER II.

Yielding to Temptation—Jeff in Prison—A Friend in Need—Leff Alone—A Visit to Jeff—The Trial—Punishment—Freedom Regained—Twenty Years after.

YET Leff's brave little heart carried him twice a day for the next fortnight, and Jeff no longer walked the dreaded thoroughfares alone. He got brighter and happier. But at the end of the fortnight Leff was laid up with cold and illness. At first, Jeff came home brightly and cheerfully, but before long the strange longing came creeping over him. Leff noticed it; feared, and hoped, and prayed that God would uphold his Jeff.

As he lay asleep one afternoon, he was suddenly awoke by steps rushing up the stairs, and Jeff sprang wildly in the room. Jeff!—was it Jeff? Pale, haggard, wild, he threw himself beside Leff, and in an agony of incoherent words, made him understand that the dreaded deed had been done, and that he was followed. Even as he spoke the loud voice below and the measured tramp told all. Leff threw his arms round him, in his grief and terror. They both knew there was no mercy to be found. No policeman would listen to their tale of sorrow, or believe in the tears, and dreads, and struggles,

before the strange madness—the act so loathed, and shunned, and hated by both, had been committed by that forlorn ill-trained boy who could not face temptation.

Leff only begged to know what jail he was going to, repeating the name again and again to try and keep it in his dazed head. Perhaps something struck the policeman, and the shopman from whom the goods had been stolen (thrown away by Jeff as soon as he found he was detected and he had realised what he had done), in the quiet obedience of the thief, and the awed silence in which, for one moment, the two clung to each other. Only Leff spoke at last, to say—

"Don't think that it's all no use, and you'll have to go back. Don't, dear Jeff; it must come right."

Then followed the march through the streets; the crowd of boys and girls rushing to see a thief taken to prison; the jeers of those who recognised him as a school-goer. When they reached the jail, far from shrinking back, Jeff pressed forward to hide his stricken head—where nothing but sin is admitted. He knew prison-life before now, and he threw himself on the floor, refusing to look up, refusing to speak; till at last his fellow-prisoners left him to himself To himself!—and then the real misery came. What would they think of him ?—the missionary, his master, the ladies at the school, the clergyman, whom of late he had been seeing so constantly, and whom he had never yet told of his fearful temptation? Could they think of him as anything but a wicked, bad fellow—a hypocrite, deceiving and meaning to deceive?

Leff!—he could not think of him, only of his late

words, not to think it was all no use, and that he would have to go back. But Leff was a child, good and pure; he could not understand Jeff's madness; certainly, now there was nothing for it but the old life; and thus his thoughts wandered, till he fell asleep exhausted.

Meanwhile, poor little Leff poured out his trouble in tears and sobs, with brief snatches of prayer—a miserable, hopeless, helpless feeling coming over him.

Slowly and quietly Leff, shrinking, and fearing to be noticed, threaded his way, for the first time alone, to the Vicarage House. How should he tell? How could he make anyone believe how dreadful it had been for Jeff? How should he *begin?* But it was far easier than he expected. Mr. Erard's quick kind eye needed only a glance to see that something was very wrong, and that a worse trouble than illness lay on the shrinking shivering little creature before him.

It was a new thing to poor little Leff to find that the great distance he had fancied must always exist between himself and the clergyman was suddenly blown away, and from the first moment that he felt his quick sympathy, and the strong hand stretched out to protect him, he could pour out all his trouble and sorrow fearlessly and easily to that kind heart that seemed so readily to understand Jeff's many temptations and many struggles. A quick sympathy lay in the hearts of those two, so different and so far apart in a worldly aspect, so near in God's kingdom, since both loved and served one Master, and both were seeking one poor lost sheep.

It was dark long before Leff reached his attic; but it was with far from a darkened hopeless heart that he lay down alone. Alone! and yet, surely if Jeff were

awake, his thoughts were with him, and the great loving Father over them both; and in *His* blessed care Leff was content to leave poor Jeff. Late the next afternoon, Mr. Erard gained admission into the prison. Jeff had already made up his mind that all was hopeless for him, and that he must return to the old life; but something in the vicar's greeting penetrated to his very heart, and he could only cover his face with his hands, and try to stifle the sob that almost choked him. Permission had been obtained from the governor for the interview to take place alone, and very thankful both were for it. It was a long talk, painful and sorrowful, but yet full of hope; for though cast down and dismayed, Jeff found his hope yet once more in God. At last the trial came on. Leff made himself so ill with crying and fear, that he had to remain at home, every pulse throbbing with terror and anguish. It was not the first time Jeff had stood in a dock, but this time it was more painful to him than he could have thought possible. Well he knew some were there, grieving and sorrowing for his disgrace; well he knew also that there were many others rejoicing over his fall, and longing to hoot and jeer at the boy who thought himself so fine and good.

There seemed to be something in his favour, so far as his reformed character during the last few months, but it was not a first offence; and though the articles stolen were of little value, and certainly not of any use to Jeff, he received a year's imprisonment with hard labour.

The next day kind Mr. Erard took Leff to bid Jeff good-bye, and left the two broken-hearted fellows to-

gether. Leff was shortly to be sent into the country, where the vicar's mother lived, to gain health, to have schooling and to occupy himself in garden work under the care of an old servant; but before that, the poor foundling was to be baptised.

In a few days he was drinking in the balmy country air, far, far away from the dirty alley.

Leff grew stronger and better every day; from time to time he heard of Jeff, for Mr. Erard went to see him, and always sent a note to Leff afterwards, which notes were the treasures of his life.

And how did it fare with poor Jeff? Truly, he "went softly" every day, fearing, yet hoping; taking his punishment as the just retribution of his sin, and seeing in it the mercy which he felt had once and for ever, during the sharp pain, broken the love of the inward temptation which had been so strong. His greatest comfort was in Mr. Erard's periodical visits, which roused and cheered him, and let him feel that though lost and dead to the world, there were yet those in it who would give him a helping hand, and never let him lose himself again among the street Arabs of London.

The day came, and Jeff, once more in his own clothes, having cast away his prison dress for ever, stepped out *free* into the sunshine; not alone, but with the good vicar beside him. Too full of feeling for word or look, he almost stumbled across the court. Just before the gates were unbarred to let him out, a slight, brown, healthy young fellow seized him, and Jeff and Leff were together again.

How they threaded their way through the crowded streets they knew not. Mr. Erard saw them to the

station, and then into the train which took them down to Leff's home. It was a comfort to be alone most of the way, and very soberly the two talked of the past and future—Jeff, humble and stern; Leff, full of hope and thankfulness.

* * * * *

Twenty years later, and Mr. Erard is still working in his crowded parish. Amongst much change, there are two to whom he never turns in vain—the one, Jeffrey Humphrey, a rising young farmer in the country, whose ready gifts for and warm interest in his work often cheer his heart; the other, his young lay helper, David Humphrey, Jeff's more than brother, who now, with all his manhood's powers, works for poor fellows who, like himself, were left neglected to the sins and sorrows of life in dark alleys and crowded courts, that perchance he may bring them by "a way that they had not hitherto known," even to the arms of love that are outstretched for all.

ONLY A BLACKSMITH;

OR,

NED WILTON'S VICTORY.

CHAPTER I.

The Champion of the Cricket Match—Ned's Future—A Great Resolve —Ned and his Father—A Good Sister—Repentance.

THERE had been a cricket match out on the Newcome downs, between the Newcome National schoolboys and the youths of a neighbouring town, and, now on the very spot where the noisy, rollicking, merry crew had sped hither and thither, shouting as only healthy boys can shout, lay a boy, with his face pressed down on the turf, sobbing as if his heart would break. No one would have guessed that this was Ned Wilton, the champion of the winning party, the cleverest, merriest, funniest boy in all the school, whose shout had been loudest among all the other shouts that afternoon; whose laugh had rung out the clearest; whose legs had been the nimblest, and had performed wonders in running; whose cheeks had glowed; whose eyes had sparkled; whose whole being, in short, had been brimful of life and boyish activity. But so it was, and there lay his bat by his side, looking so mute, so powerless to comfort its young owner. Surely the fairies,

taking glances at the weeping lad from the hearts of wild thyme, harebells, and other flowers, quivering in the evening breeze, must have thought a boy the most fickle, changeable being in all creation. But Ned Wilton had met with a great sorrow, a great disappointment, such as fairies never dream of.

When he had swept down the hill-side that afternoon, among all the other happy boys, shouting, hurrahing, laughing, leaping, and exulting over their well-contested victory, and entered the kitchen at home, bat in hand, very hungry, very thirsty, very hot, very tired, but very proud and happy, hoping to sit down in peace to his tea, and, like an old soldier, recount his exploits to his three little sisters, Lizzie, Bess, and Lou, his father, sitting at the tea-table, greeted him with the words :—

"Ned, I've made up my mind; you must turn into shop next week!"

"Oh, father, I can't!" cried poor Ned, the blood in his veins seeming to stand still, and then leaping on at race-horse speed, as if maddened with the proposition.

"You can, and you will; I say so," was the stern reply; and Ned knew that he must; the very bat in his hand seemed to quiver, as if it knew, wooden thing though it was, what that turning in would be, what a bright sunny picture of the future it would blot out.

Ned waited to hear no more, but dashed out of the house, in a whirlwind of passion and sorrow; if his cheeks had glowed before, they were crimson now; his merry dark eyes flashed as they never flashed in his gayest moments. Away and away he sped, his bat clenched in his hand, to some quiet spot, where he could hide his grief and blinding tears; where no one could hear the

sobs that must have their way. Strange that he should choose the deserted cricket ground; but he did; and there he lay, all alone, sobbing—sobbing out his disappointment in all the wildness of his passionate nature. Well for the young that they can thus weep out their bitter griefs, and grow strong and brave to fight the battle of life!

Ned's father was a blacksmith, a stern, harsh man, obstinate as a mule—not that I should have said this to Ned, for woe to those who teach children aught but to respect their parents, but he was so, nevertheless—with a law, like that of the Medes and Persians, which altered not; this Ned knew, and felt certain, if the word had gone forth that he was to turn into shop, he should have to turn in, and wept over it accordingly.

To leave school, and his dearly-loved lessons, to give up his cherished scheme of being a pupil-teacher—the scheme of which he had dreamt so much, of which he had so often talked with his mother, his sweet blue-eyed angel mother. And she was gone, gone for ever. If she was only here now to plead for him, to say that she wished it? Oh! she did wish it, and she was gone; he had nobody to feel for him, except his three little sisters, and what could they do for him, poor children? Nothing, nothing!

The boy's heart was ready to break; he almost shrieked as it all swept over him. Floods of tears watered the cricket-ground, and all the while the rosy sunset rays were playing over it; a lark was trilling out its song high above his head; the flowers seemed to shake with laughter; the bees hummed out how merry they were; and only the wind sighed for weeping motherless Ned. How his heart cried out for his dear blue-eyed mother,

who had been sleeping in the churchyard for three long years! How it all came back to him! The miserable day when she left them all; her last good-bye; and, most clearly, most distinctly of all, her faltering command, "Obey your father in all things, my boy, and God will bless you!"

This last it was that was breaking the boy's heart. He had tried, indeed he had, to obey him; but this being a blacksmith, she never could have meant this, when she had so often said, in their long talks together, that she should like him to be a pupil-teacher. "No, she never could have meant me to be a smudge of a blacksmith, and I never will!" he cried, raising his tear-stained face from the ground, and dashing back the dark curly mass of hair from his forehead, just as the last sunbeam kissed him and wished him good-night.

There was a look of determination in his face as he rose and picked up his bat. He was going to brave his father's will, headstrong boy! Down the hill-side he went, along the lane, beneath the elm trees. No use for them to wave their arms over him, and whisper of submission; Ned was strong in his resolve; there were no tears in his eyes now!

They were all in the kitchen—his father, Lizzie, Bess, and Lou—when he reached home.

"Father, I can't be a blacksmith," said he, confronting Mr. Wilton, his cap in his hand, his bat across his shoulder.

"Can't or can, you will," was the sharp reply.

"But, father, I want to be a pupil-teacher," Ned's voice trembled.

"And I want you to be a blacksmith, so you'll be a blacksmith," were his father's words; no sympathy in

them, not a thought had he of his young son's like or dislike in the matter.

"I won't!" cried Ned, passionately.

"What! you won't? Say that again if you dare!" His father was a passionate man.

"I won't be a blacksmith—there!" and down went the end of Ned's bat with a thump.

"You won't?"——"I won't!" cried Ned, stoutly.

His father sprang up, and seized a large stick, lying there as if on purpose—Ned remembered he himself had put it there earlier in the day. He caught hold of the boy, who threw down his bat, stood erect and defiant, with compressed lips and flashing eyes. His three little sisters huddled together in their fright, with very white faces. Down went the stick whack on Ned's devoted shoulders, again and still again. Ned never flinched or moaned, only his eyes flashed wildly. How his poor little sisters sobbed to themselves! Down, and still down, went the stick.

Lizzie's sisterly heart could bear it no longer. She was twelve, only two years younger than her brother. She must be brave. She darted between the two, just in time to receive a cut with the terrible stick across her fair shoulders. She screamed, her father pushed her out of the way, and didn't Ned's back taste it now!

Poor little Lizzie! by all the love she bore him, by the pain she was now feeling, she must try and stop the cruel blows. "Father! mother!" she screamed, and darted towards them again.

Why the child cried out for her mother, considering she had been dead three years, cannot be told—perhaps she felt the need of her gentle mediation—but her cry conquered;

her father loved his wife, loved her still; he threw the stick from him, pushed his son on one side, and left the house.

As for Ned, that magic name seemed to open the very fountain of his tears, poor, passionate, loving, wilful boy. He rushed away up-stairs to his own little room, threw himself on his bed, and wept, sobbed, and shrieked in his agony, burying his face in the bed-clothes lest they should hear below.

His bursts of grief were less violent, and twilight was gathering around him, when his little sisters stole in to give him their good-night kiss, as was their custom. How they loved their bright-eyed brother, although he was the daily plague of their lives! By-the-by, a boy without a sister to plague is only half blessed; and a girl without a plague of a brother is very much to be pitied. He did not look up.

Lizzie stroked his hair. "I wouldn't cry so, Ned," said she. Ned cried on.

"We're come to say 'good night,' Ned;" Lizzie was crying now.

Ned heard it, and looked up. "Oh, Lizzie, why did you step in and take that cruel blow?" he asked, turning his face towards her.

"I didn't mind; 'tisn't about that I'm crying; 'tis because you're so miserable." Poor child, she had a large wheal across her shoulders!

"Father is a tyrant! and I won't be a blacksmith!" cried Ned, fiercely.

"Oh, Ned, what would mother say?" Lizzie's soft little hand still stroked his hair.

Ned was silent. A weak, faint voice seemed to be saying, "Obey your father in all things, my boy."

He buried his face in the bed-clothes again. It seemed as if his tears would never have done flowing. His three little sisters were sorry for him, but they did not know how to comfort him, so they wound their clinging arms around his neck, kissed him, and went away to bed.

It was almost dark when Ned looked up again. He glanced out of the window. One bright star was shining in on him—the star he had watched so many nights, and called it his mother's star, because he lay and looked at it, and thought of her the first night after she died.

He lay now and looked at it, lovingly, longingly, thinking of the gentle being that had gone, and left him so desolate. And she was up there above the stars, above the blue sky waiting for him, while he was down below with such a tender, aching, smarting back, because he had disobeyed her last command. Yes, he had disobeyed her; he saw it all now. "All things" meant even to being a blacksmith. Gentle repentant tears flowed down his cheeks as he lay and thought, looking out at that beautiful star that shone down upon him.

He stole down off his bed. He would submit to his father, he resolved; and then he poured out the story of his sorrow, his rebellion, his pride, his sin, into the ears of Him who once walked this earth a boy among men, with whom his mother was resting, who is daily calling us amid life's trials to come unto Him and rest, the light of the star shining on his hot swollen face. His prayer ended, he lay down, and fell asleep, his mother's star watching over him like a guardian angel, and slept as peacefully through the short summer's night as if to wear the leathern apron was not his destiny, and to teach the young ideas how to shoot was.

CHAPTER II.

Good Resolutions—Brother and Sister—Lizzie's Grief.

CLINK-CLANK, clink, clink, clink-clank, were the first sounds which greeted Ned's ears on waking the next morning. At first he wondered what there was unpleasant connected with the sounds, considering he had heard them for so many years. Then it all came back to him—he was to be a blacksmith, and must try and content himself with making such unmusical sounds to the end of the chapter. He had sometimes heard a hint or two from his father about such a thing being possible, which had given his heart a passing quake and been forgotten, but now it was really true. His poor stiff back confirmed it, so did the remembrance of that tearful confession, resolution, and prayer on his knees last night, but it did not seem half so bad to look forward to as then. "What can't be cured must be endured," has comforted many a boy, aye, and girl too, and so it did Ned. He leaped out of bed, sprang into his clothes almost as briskly as on the morning before, with a grand cricket-match in prospect. There was a whole week before his drudgery would have to

begin at least. To-day was only Tuesday, he told himself; and he knelt down to say his prayers with such a glad, young, bounding heart—a very thanksgiving for life in itself. Then out to the pump he bounded, and dived, splashed, and soused himself under the cool water. (A good thing for Lizzie that the pump was not in Ned's bedroom.) After that, away went Ned for a turn at cricket—just to keep his hand in, he said. Never such lads for cricket as the Newcome school boys; no wonder they beat all the crack hands hollow, as they themselves expressed it.

At breakfast the dark red wheal on Lizzie's shoulder was a silent reproach to both Ned and his father; but Lizzie only smiled when Ned whispered to her how sorry he was, and tried to pull her pinafore over it. Oh, it was hard for the boy to look round the dear old school that day, and to feel that after a few more days it would be nothing to him nor he to it; that dust, dirt, heat, and din would be his portion henceforth, when he had, in his ambition, pictured to himself a life so different! He had intended to climb, and climb, high up the ladder of learning. Ah, Ned, climbers often get hindrances by the way, to prove, to try them, and set them climbing in the right direction!

Home to dinner, back to school, home again, expecting to find tea ready, came Ned; but instead of anything so pleasant, he found no clink-clank resounding in the shop, and his sisters crying bitterly, for since Ned had gone out a dreadful thing had happened, about which I must tell you.

CHAPTER III.

Bad News—With the Invalid—Convalescence—Another Cricket Match—The Walk Home.

"HALLO! what's up now?" asked Ned.

"Oh, Ned, a horse has kicked father, and we're afraid he's——" the children's sobs finished the sentence.

"Not dead!" cried Ned, his face turning pale.

"Oh, we don't know; they won't tell us; they only told us not to bother. The doctor is there. Oh, Ned, Ned!" The children clung to him in their terror.

"Don't cry," he said; "I'll go and see him."

"He went into the house; Lizzie was there in the kitchen, crying.—"Oh, Ned, Ned!" she sobbed.

"Is he dead, Lizzie?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

"Oh, I don't know!" was her sorrowful reply.

"I'll know," said Ned; and he ascended the stairs. He knocked at the door of his father's room; nobody heeded him. He opened it, and put his head in.

"Is he dead?" he asked, growing sick with the thought.

"No, my boy, no," said the doctor, looking up from his patient; "we shall bring him round. But go down

to those little sobbing maidens, and comfort them," he added, observing how white and scared the boy's face was.

Ned obeyed. His head was playing him strange tricks, it almost pitched him down the stairs. It was a sickening sight—his poor unconscious father, the doctor's nimble fingers bandaging up his head, the pitying neighbours standing by. Presently, the doctor went away, comforting the children with the assurance that their father would be well again in a jiffy, upon the strength of which assurance they prepared tea, and Ned stole up to see if any was needed in the sick room. Only one kind neighbour remained, the woman who always came to help with the house-work. She could not leave her patient, she said, so Ned carried her a cup up-stairs, his head playing the same silly trick of turning giddy as he caught sight of the ghastly face.

Days passed, and the blacksmith was no better; rather worse than otherwise; it was sad to hear him moan and mutter all through the summer days in his darkened room. Sometimes Ned sat by his side for hours, while Mrs. Smith was busy about the house. What bitter regrets filled the boy's heart at such times! Would he die, the forge be given up, and the wicked words he had uttered come true? he asked himself, in remorse and agony. Was this God's punishment for his passion? Never had the clink-clank sounded so musical in his ears, as their one journeyman pursued his work! Never had he known how dear was his father to him, for what he was indebted to him—home, education, in fact, all he possessed—until now, when death and life seemed struggling for the mastery over the strong man! What scalding tears Ned shed during that sad time,

there by the bed-side of his father! how many times were the poor, wasted, restless hands pressed to his lips! what prayers and confessions did he whisper there on his knees, while his father lay tossing in his long nights of delirium, unconscious of everything!

And all the time, outside the darkened room, the summer was passing away, and glad golden harvest-time stealing on. Ned often heard the shouts of the cricketers waft down of an evening from the sunny downs, but he had neither time nor inclination to join them; indeed, it seemed as if he was no longer himself, but some other boy, whose father lay sick in a darkened room, about whom the neighbours shook their heads and looked grave; some other boy, who watched so many weary hours in that shadowy room, who kept the accounts, went here and there, trying to do his best with the business he had always detested, carrying with him everywhere such a sorrowful heavy heart.

Joy, joy, joy! His father was conscious; the doctor said he would pull through now. Ned's heart seemed ready to burst with the sudden happiness; he danced a jig in the kitchen with his three little sisters till they were giddy, and then hid away in his room to weep out his gratitude to God. But many glorious summer days went by before the blacksmith could lay his hand on his boy's head, and murmur his thanks for his tender constant care, so great was his weakness.

One day Ned was sitting by his father, longing for the time when the sunshine might riot through the room, for he was weary with his long confinement—*with*, not *of*, oh, no! Ned grudged nothing he could do for his father, in gratitude for his recovery. He had

heard the cricketers go by, and knew just how sunny and bright the downs were looking, how cool and breezy it was up there, when who should come in but the rector.

"There is to be a cricket-match this afternoon. What do you say, Mr. Wilton, to changing nurses, taking me for a substitute, and letting this young man stretch his legs, eh?" he asked, after a few minutes' quiet chat.

"With all my heart; let him go, sir, and I can do without a nurse," was Mr. Wilton's reply.

"Do without a nurse! we can't hear of that. But I want the Newcome boys to win. Now, I can't run, but I can nurse, so Ned shall do the running, and I will do the nursing. Go, Ned; bat, legs and all."

Ned required no more bidding; but, after seeing all there which his father needed, bounded away to the downs. Here he was greeted with loud cheers by his friends, who, with many pats on the back, voted him to take his place among them, and be their champion; so soon his merry laugh went rippling out over the downs, his cheeks grew bright and rosy, his eyes sparkled, and he was his old self again—Ned Wilton come out of his cloud.

But when the well-contested game was over—he and his party victors as usual—he would not have been so sad and pensive as he walked home after leaving his companions had he known the subject of his father's and the rector's talk that afternoon. Yes, Ned was sad and pensive; the old longing for the pupil-teachership was crying out within him: it is difficult to crush out the hopes and aspirations of youth. Still he bravely resolved, as a sort of thank-offering for his father's life being spared, not to shrink from the path of life chosen for him, even though it was to be the smutty one of a blacksmith.

CHAPTER IV.

Blacksmith and Scholar—Christmas Eve—A Glad Surprise.

WHEN October arrived, with its glorious sunsets, glowing leaves all crimson and gold, and hazy skies, Mr. Wilton was able to be out and about again. True, his head would not bear the clink-clank of the shop for a very long time together, neither could he "lift on high his brawny arm" with the vigour of old; still, he was able to attend to his business, and felt his strength coming back every day. October, too, tested the power of Ned's good resolution. The mandate went forth, that turn into shop he must, and turn in he did, rolling up his sleeves, tying on the leathern apron, with a strong unflinching will, but with a sorrowful sinking heart. If he was to be a blacksmith, he would not be an ignorant one, he determined; so,

after the day's toils were over, he brought out his books night after night, and forgot, for the time, amid his dearly-loved studies, that he was learning to be a son of Vulcan, and did not like his trade. His father, too, was less harsh to him; that hovering on the brink of the grave had wrought a great change in Mr. Wilton, and his boy's quiet submission to his will was drawing the two together with invisible bands of love and confidence. So the days went by until Christmas-eve.

Certainly it was Christmas-eve; still, Ned did not see why that alone should bring such mysterious smiles, nods, and winks to his father's face; nor why his three little sisters should smile, wink, and nod back at him again, dancing round and round on one foot every few minutes. At last, Ned, after vainly trying to shake the secret from them, turned the key of the parlour door, and locked them in, secret and all. However, by-and-by he let them out, upon them promising him through the key-hole that he should know all directly after tea. You may be sure Ned burnt his mouth, hurrying to get tea over as soon as possible.

"Ned, my boy," said his father—Ned half believed he saw tears in his eyes—"Ned, my boy, do you like being a blacksmith?"

"No, father!" Ned did not mince the matter.

"And you want to be a pupil-teacher?"

"Yes, father, I do;" no mincing still.

"Well, then, you *shall* be a pupil-teacher."

Ned's arm was round his father's neck, and, tall lad though he was, he pressed such a warm kiss on his cheek! Then the girls kissed him, kissed their father,

cried for joy, and the glad Christmas bells seemed to rejoice with them.

Ned sat silent; he was thinking of his mother.

"What would she say?" the words glided out unawares; he did not intend to utter them aloud.

"Ay, Ned," said Mr. Wilton, sorrowfully; "when I was lying on my bed, after that dreadful time of danger, and thought how near I had been to joining her, and appearing before God, I saw so clearly how wrong I had been in the matter about your trade, and many things beside. A sick bed is a rare clear glass to look at one's past life through. I said something like this to our rector, that afternoon when he sent you out to the cricketers. He advised me to let you try the blacksmithing until Christmas; he said it would do you good, and then he would take you into the school. I tell you; 'tis right you should know. I see my faults; let us begin anew."

"Oh, father, we have begun this long time!" said happy humble Ned, his face hidden in his hands.

"Then we will go on from strength to strength," was the father's reply; and the bells seemed to tell of the lonely One, born, as on that night, who would lead them on—climbing, mounting, over temptation and sin, until they stood in the presence of His Father, and their Father.

This then was clear shining after rain for Ned. With what a full thankful heart did he kneel in the light of his mother's star, and tell out his gratitude to his God, to his mother's God, who had seen his passion, his penitence, and his submission.

OLD GINGERBREAD.

CHAPTER I.

Gingerbread's Home—The Tax Collector—An Annual Subscription—Alf—An Intruder—Loss of the "Intelligent Animal"—Alf's Disappointment—Good News—Life in the Country—The Circus.

"I DO like Gingerbread so much!" exclaimed a curly-headed little girl, one among a whole cluster of small children sitting on the steps of a house facing a stony street, with coach-houses and stables on each side. And then another and another declared that he or she liked, loved, and delighted in Gingerbread, until they all seemed to be agreed on the subject for ever. What capital gingerbread it must be!

And yet they had no gingerbread among them, not a morsel, nothing more eatable than orange-peels. But there was a large brown soft-haired dog sitting at the bottom of the steps, and they were fondling and caressing him, lovingly pulling his ears, and inserting their

little awkward fingers in his large mild eyes, winking in the heat, for it was a sunny day. His tongue was lolling out an inch or two; he had just had a panting run after them up and down the street, and his tail was tapping restlessly on the flags, only the remnant of what a proper dog's tail ought to be. He was Gingerbread.

And why Gingerbread? Well, that was the name they gave him. If they would call him by the name of something they liked, why did it not happen to be Barley-sugar or anything else? Now where did you ever see a melting, yellow, transparent dog like barley-sugar? but you have seen many a dog of the very colour of nice brown gingerbread.

He lived in the mews, he had strayed in there years ago, he seemed bent on staying there for life. He walked in and out of the coach-houses, and went to visit at the stables, being on terms of intimate acquaintance with all the horses. He drank their water, putting up his paws on the edge of the trough, and he slept among their straw. But he liked better still to go up the high stone steps to the coachmen's rooms above, where he was always welcome to a bone and a good look at the fire; and best of all he liked the two neat little houses that stood facing the end of the mews. In one of these lived his prime favourite, poor lame Alf, and it was on the door-steps of lame Alf's dwelling that all the children were assembled this afternoon.

Gingerbread had the happiest of homes in these mews, for the whole place was his home; and the moment he saw another dog intruding, even if he were only sneaking in as far as the pump at the corner, he

would chase the stranger out without mercy, and then return to his playmates with a vengeful eye but a quiet heart.

He never wanted a meal, and he honoured now one stable, now another, with his presence, amassing in the corners small heaps of bones, and leaving them among the straw as monuments to the generosity of his much-valued though humble patrons.

There was indeed great perplexity in the mews one day when a tax-collector came round, and it was clear in a very few minutes that either a five shilling licence must be bought for the dog, or he would be taken away. Now it was very hard to tell who should pay for the licence, because nobody owned him at all, but it was harder still to think of Gingerbread being led away out of sight for ever.

So the coachmen and ostlers made a collection, one giving sixpence and another threepence, till the five shillings was ready, and the faithful old dog was free. Every year the same little ceremony took place, and Gingerbread was more than ever the dog of the mews.

I said Alf was his particular favourite. Poor little fellow! he sat close to Gingerbread now on the lowest step, with his crutches lying beside him; and his admiration of his big rough playfellow made his pale face bright and happy. For, with all his merits, the brown retriever was a rough companion, and sometimes he knocked the children over, or jumped upon them when he was unusually dirty. But it was noted that he never jumped up against Alfred, and was more gentle with him. And though he had a remarkable aversion to all sorts of sticks and broom-sticks, not having

been known to venture within three yards of one for any inducement whatever, he was not in the least afraid of the little boy's crutches, not even when Alfred rubbed his curly back with the end of one of them. And so they were all admiring Gingerbread, when there came an ugly man, with a shambling, lazy walk—quite a stranger in the mews. All the children looked at him, and whispered; and the dog looked too, with a grave, dubious glance, as if he were debating within himself whether he ought to let this idle-looking intruder pass, or catch him by the heels.

"Well, old boy! Whieu, Roger!" said the stranger, stopping with his hands in his pockets, and looking at the dog.

"His name's not Roger, sir; it's Gingerbread," chorused all the children.

Whereupon the brown retriever, hearing his name called by four steps full of young friends, bounded to his feet, and set up such a furious barking that the intruder withdrew to a respectful distance.

"Ugh, you brute! you'd bite me, would you? would you—eh?" he said, in a tone half-cringing, half-defiant, such a tone as would tempt any dog to make an onslaught.

Gingerbread flew at him with a loud echoing bark, and what would have become of him no one could tell, had not little Alf cried out, "Ginger, Ginger, come back! come back directly!"

Ginger came back, and licked the lame boy's hand, turning his eye furtively towards the man, and evidently sorry, with a doggish dogged sorrow, that he had not been allowed to take him at his word.

"Well," said the rescued victim, slowly, "that there dog is a most intelligent animal."

After having thus given vent to his feelings, he winked his eye two or three times and turned on his heel and walked away, whistling slowly.

The children of the mews remembered this incident long, because two days after it Gingerbread disappeared mysteriously. They searched the stables, they explored the neighbouring streets, they peeped into the gardens of the square, and decided that he could not possibly have got in there, for the simple reason that Gingerbread could not have squeezed himself through the railing for love or money. Then, holding a solemn council on the steps, they decided, with tears, wailings, and howlings, that the ugly man with the white hat must have set his wicked eye on the "intelligent animal," and taken him away in secret.

Lame Alf did not believe this at all. No one, he declared could have been so cruel as to rob him of the only thing he had in the world. The dog would not care for any one in a strange place. He would not play and be clever for any one else. No; they could not have stolen him, he never would have gone for anybody.

But days passed on and there was no sign of his return. Late every evening, wet or dry, little Alf's crutches were heard dunping on the stones, as he went limping along to the pump. There he took out of his pocket bones and scraps of meat, and laid them temptingly in wait for Gingerbread. Every morning he saw that they were gone, and declared with glee that he was right; "dear Ginger was only rambling about somewhere, for

had he not been there last night and carried away the supper?"

Poor little Alf! it was a pity he was undeceived, but so it happened. For one night, when he had leant his crutches against the pump, and was spreading out the dainty morsels beneath it, there came a "miaow" in the loudest of Tom-cat tones from the top of the wall, and looking up he beheld a cat he had been feeding for a week past, rejoicing in his sorrow, positively purring with its tail arched over its back, and picking its steps through the broken glass, making ready to jump down on to Gingerbread's supper.

Poor Alf felt vexed enough to have thrown his crutch at the cat for disappointment. However, he went away limping home and up-stairs to his own room, where he sat within the white-screened window, crying bitterly, as now at last it dawned upon him that poor Gingerbread, his pet and playmate, must really be gone for ever.

But when the cold winter frosted the stones of the street, the white blind of that upper window was kept down during the day; and all night, as well as the flashing glow of the fire, there was the steady light of candle in the room within, kept by a watcher beside a sick bed. The boys and girls no longer played outside on the steps. They made their slides about the pump at the other end, and when an ostler chased them for making the place so slippery that he fell with his bucket, they fled straightway to the two houses at the end, knowing that he would not make a row just under the window where little Alf lay ill.

It was only when May had come, with its bright

sunny mornings, that the boy, pale and sickly-looking, ventured out of the house, supporting himself with one of his crutches, and leaning his other hand on his mother's arm.

It was on one of the May evenings that Alf's father came in, with a radiant face. He was coachman to one of the families in the large houses of the square.

"Do you know, Alice," he said to his wife, when she was cutting the bread and butter at their homely tea-table, and he had drawn the boy to his knee, "Miss Harford was asking about Alf to-day. I said he was mending, but slowly, poor child! And—is not she good?—she promised me she would speak to her father, and see if she could not get him sent for a month or two to the country."

"Oh!" Little Alf could say no more. He threw his arms around his father's neck in a transport of delight. The country! it seemed to him more like a dream than reality to hear that he might be going there.

Green grass, and shady woods, and sunny fields, were things he had only heard of—visionary things, like that fairyland his mother had told him about in pleasant stories, during those weary days when he was lying ill.

But dream-like as the good news seemed, the next day it was much nearer, for the news brought by his father that night was that his master had been asked, and would be glad to do something for his little boy. A housekeeper of Mr. Harford's had married a young farmer of the name of Butterfield, and they had settled down in Devonshire, so Miss Harford should

write at once to the old servant, and the boy and his mother could go down into Devonshire, with all their expenses paid.

Not one wink of sleep did Alf get that night. The very next day his mother went herself to the great house in the square, to tell Mr. Harford's daughter how overjoyed her goodness had made them, and in less than a week the trunk was packed, and conveyed to the station; good-bye was said, and they were in the railway carriage and off, his mother surrounded by ever so many bundles, and he himself wrapped in warm shawls, and resting between her and the window.

And now, leaving the mews, with the horses trotting slowly up and down, we will go away to Sunderdown, in the heart of warm beautiful Devonshire. It was a village of white-washed cottages, with thatched roofs, and little well-stocked gardens. Some modern houses and two shops had intruded into the old-fashioned place; but the oldest end was still as pretty and simple as ever. There were plenty of fruit trees about the cottages, and through every opening between the houses one might see fields of young corn. And then the country round, with its gentle slopes and wooded hollows, and its one gushing stream flowing with a winding course through the fields, and near the village, foaming over the stones beneath a rustic bridge—all was a refreshing sight, of which town-dwellers could never tire. There was verdure every where—distant wooded heights of billowy foliage, belts of trees at the meadow sides, flowers running wild in the lanes.

At a little distance from the oldest and prettiest end

of the village was a white-walled farm-house, with a luxuriant garden and well-stocked yard. It was there that Alfred and his mother, after their journey from London, had been warmly received by the farmer and his wife. There they had lodged now for a month past, and, what with fresh eggs, fresh milk and butter, and, above all, fresh air, the whiteness was soon chased from Alf's cheeks and the dark circles from beneath his eyes; and he was able to go by himself down the village street, telling the country people that he was much better, quite well indeed, when they asked kindly how he was. And, more still, he was able to wander in the fields and lie down to rest for hours on the long grass, with his crutches laid beside him, and his eyes and ears and heart drinking in the sweetness of the country, and the warbling of the birds.

He was returning late in the afternoon from one of these rambles, wishing much to see again the farm-house kitchen, with its well-spread table, when he entered the lower end of the village. Setting out, he had taken the road from the other end, so he had not passed that spot since yesterday morning.

Great was his surprise to see there an immense round tent, with a flag flying from its top, and in the background some covered cars, with windows, like gipsy wagons. As he approached it, the sound of music came from within, loudly and merrily. Several of the village folks were gathered about the entrance. and some boys, lying on their faces, were trying to peep in under the edge of the canvas.

One of them looked up. "Oh, here's Alf!" and he

sprang to his feet. "Come, little 'un, and lean on me." He took one of the crutches, and gave his arm instead. He was a good-natured boy, who, like most of the others, had been interested by the arrival in the village of the lame little stranger.

"What's all this?" asked Alfred, breathlessly.

"The circus, of course."

"Circus! what's that?" was the next question.

"Oh! look ye here, lads," exclaimed the other; "he don't know what a circus is. It's where they have pufforming hosses and all sorts of things. Every year, when they're a goin' to Exeter, this one stops here a day or two to let the folks see it."

"Can they see anything by lying down and looking under there?" asked Alf.

"No, they only think they can."

"And how much is it to go in?"

"A penny and twopence, when it's half over; threepence and sixpence from the beginning," said the other, much more readily than he would have said the multiplication table. "I'm going to-night!"

While they talked, the banging of drums and the shrieking and blowing of brass instruments had ceased within, and now a crowd of people came pouring out. Alfred watched them curiously, as if they had been seeing wonders, and therefore there was some wonder to be seen in them; and, last of all, the proprietor of the circus appeared.

"Next pfaumance at six o'clock pre-cisely," he cried out. "All the horses showed off to the utmost advantage by gaslight. The Arab steed who belonged to King Theodore, and which he sent to England after the

battle of Waterloo. The world-famed horse, 'Black Champion,' wot will tell the time of the day this very night, ladies and gen'lmen, at six o'clock pre-cisely. And the brilliant drama of *Prince Emerald and the Wicked Wurthur's Revenge in the Fearful Forest*, seen by the Court of Queen Victoria and all the Royal Family; which werry drama, ladies and gen'lmen, will introduce the most ashtownding and only-believable-with-your-eyes wonder—Clandangero!"

The last word he sent rolling forth with such a volume of sound, that scarcely any body could tell exactly what it was. And then, bowing to the crowd as low as any one could reasonably expect such a short man to do, turned round and walked into the tent, with a great air of consequence.

CHAPTER II.

Inside the Circus—A Grand Performance—Old Friends—A Happy Reunion—At Home Again.

HOW little Alfred longed to go into that house of canvas! How he longed to be present at the six o'clock "p'formance!" but such a pleasure seemed too great to be within his reach. He thirsted for the sight of the horses, with music and by gaslight. He believed firmly that the horse of King Theodore, whoever that mighty man might be, was behind the canvas; that Black Champion would tell the time from a big silver watch. But how would he tell it? And Prince Emerald and the Fearful Forest became to him like magic words, while he gazed at the walls of canvas.

Alf wished the boys good-bye, and went up the village street, striking out with his crutches as fast as he could. In about ten minutes the farmhouse was reached. He soon found himself in the neat tiled kitchen, where his mother was helping the farmer's wife to spread the table for tea.

"Mother, mother!" he cried, "there's a circus in the village, and its a great round tent, and there's horses inside and music, and it's going to Exeter, and there's a horse there that tells the time, and another. Do let us go!"

Mrs. Butterfield understood quickly enough what he meant, for she had heard the evening before about the arrival of the travelling circus in the village; and when Isaac the farmer came in from his work he found all three talking over the news with quite as much excitement as Alfred had displayed at first.

"Well, what d'ye say," said the young countryman; "suppose we all go this evening—the three of us to make a party—and take Alfred?"

And so it was agreed upon that they should go, and should lose no time in getting ready. The rosy-faced hostess filled out the tea so quickly that she was near scalding her hand; her husband was never before known to eat so obligingly fast, after a hard day's work; Alfred's mother left herself no peace, trying to think of which end of the box she had put her best bonnet; and Alfred himself asked half a dozen times if they were quite sure they had made no mistake about the clock, because it must be six now.

Off they went all together, down by the thatched cottages. There was a crowd about the circus door, but most of them were only watching with envious eyes the people going in. Many were the salutations exchanged with the Butterfield party as they elbowed their way, for a village crowd is a talkative one, everybody knows everybody else. The circus band, mounted on the platform at the door, were straining their lungs and

thundering out music that on a near approach drowned all lesser sounds.

They entered. The farmer paid down the money in the passage at a sort of little window, and then they went, with a whole stream of the Sunderdown folks, along a passage with canvas walls, and through a curtained doorway at the end. A cry of delight escaped from the boy when he saw the rows of seats all round, where the people were taking their places, the flaring jets of gas, making one forget that it was still daylight outside; the great arena in the centre, strewed with sand, with a mysterious door at one side, covered by red curtains, that stirred and shook when any one passed.

The people were pouring in fast, but they were not half enough to fill the spacious tent. There was a buzz of voices in every direction, an impatient stamping of feet by some boys behind the Butterfields, and there was the muffled sound of the music outside going on, as if the players intended to stand another hour at the door gathering an audience. But at last it ceased; they came in, and carried their instruments to a place where were music stands and a raised platform at one side of the arena. There they struck up, and, though when they appeared everybody thought the performance was going to begin, they played, played, played, until it seemed to Alfred as if half an hour had passed. Every few minutes a man parted the crimson curtains and looked across the sanded space, to see if any more people were coming; but at last, when every one was well-nigh exhausted with expectation, a bell tinkled, the music struck up again, the curtains were pushed aside, and the first of the horses appeared.

One after another they performed—white, brown, and black; and some were of such colours, so marked and spotted, as horses never were since the days when, if we are to believe the children's *Noah's Arks*, there were lambs standing taller than lions, orange-coloured foxes, with long thin tails, and dicky-birds much bigger than either.

But it would be useless to tell how the white muslin fairies rode those horses, and how men, with spangled costumes and foreign sounding names stuck to their backs in every way except standing on their heads; and how the clown came round with a big snuff-box, which he invited every one to take a pinch out of—so polite that many did try to oblige him, and almost sneezed their heads off; and how King Theodore's horse made an attempt to kick the clown, and put up his head and neighed frightfully, quite out of tune with the brass band; and how the wonderful horse that told the time was placed in the centre of a circle of numbered cards on the ground, and, when he was asked the hour, put his hoof quite by accident on four, and then on twelve, and when the proprietor growled at him, tried to run away. These were all as nothing compared to the famous drama, for which, during an interval of five minutes, while the clown talked insanely, scenery was erected on a low platform or stage placed in front of the red-curtained door.

The first scene was a road at night—that is, the sanded arena with the gas turned down. Enter Prince Emerald, on horseback. It was scarcely too dark to see that he was the man who had betrayed such anxiety about the audience coming. He rode all round, and

said something that nobody could hear. Then entered four highwaymen, also on horseback. The wicked Wurthur was among them. They laid a deep plot of catching Prince Emerald, and robbing him on the road, but they spoke out so loud that he must have heard every word. They set upon him. He defended himself gallantly against all four. The audience applauded till the tent shook. A dog, somewhere out of sight, barked loudly, while the Prince was in the very act of saying that had his faithful dog, his Clandangero, been within call, he would have torn them limb from limb.

The next scenes were on the stage, with the lights brightened. There was an ancestral hall, where some ladies and gentlemen talked, and two horses were brought in, though why or wherefore no one can tell. Then came the grand *finale* in which, as the programme said, the prodigy Clandangero would take part.

The lights were burning brightly, and there was a forest arranged, in which the wicked Wurthur—who, as any one could see, was the red-faced proprietor, in a green coat and hat and feathers—the wicked Wurthur, carrying out his design, lay in wait behind a tree, and Prince Emerald, all tinsel and spangles, came swaggering by. The robber sprang upon him, and the Prince cried frantically for Clandangero.

There was a silence. Clandangero's nose appeared at the wing; but he came no farther, though the robber snapped his fingers, enticingly, under cover of his coat-tail.

"He comes, my faithful dog! he will tear him limb from limb!" exclaimed Prince Emerald, dramatically.

And Clandangero did come, at a very leisurely pace—

a fine black dog, with a white breast. At that moment the prince threw his adversary to the ground, making the platform, scenery, and everything shake, as if it would come to pieces.

"Clandangero!" exclaimed the excited Prince Emerald, forgetting, in his excitement, that every one else might not know their parts as well as he knew his. "See, he springs upon him! Noble animal! Now, traitor, take thy doom!"

Whereupon the black dog sat down at the front of the stage, tapped his dumpy tail on the boards, and looked slowly round at the audience, with his tongue hanging out, good-humouredly.

Never was anything so provoking! Some talked, and most laughed, and others made consoling remarks aloud in the awful hush, that "it was a fine dog, it was." As for the prince, while he pretended to be struggling with his enemy he deliberately put his foot on the wagging tail to bring its owner to a sense of duty.

But instead of flying at the robber and saving his master, the dog suddenly hopped down off the stage, trotted across the arena, and went jumping over the seats directly opposite. Half the orchestra ceased playing, to see what would be done, and the other half went on. Then the half that had stopped began again at the point where they had left off, and the others did not wait for them; so they went on in frightful discord, playing different parts.

But what mattered that? Nobody was listening; everybody was staring, open-mouthed, as they saw the great Clandangero, sniffing, and uttering small barks

and squeaks of satisfaction, make his way to one point of the benches, on which he had set his eyes from the beginning, and there put his great paws up against a little boy, and frisk about, and bark out wildly, and roll on the ground, for very joy. And Alf seized the play-actor's dog. He knew him, for all his strange black and white coat, and clasped him in his arms with one breathless cry, "My Gingerbread—my own, dear old Ginger! It must be—it is my Ginger!"

In a few minutes there was the greatest confusion. No one would look at the play, for everybody thought the dog much better; and the wicked Wurthur himself found it necessary to leave the stage, and hurry up, cap, feathers, green coat, and all, pushing through the crowd, to bring the stray actor, the dog, back to his business.

"It's my dog!" cried Alf; "mother, isn't it? Mr. Butterfield, sir, do make him know it's my Gingerbread that I lost ever so long ago."

"No 'taint," said the manager, gruffly.

Poor Isaac Butterfield was too bewildered to say anything.

"It is indeed! don't you see, sir, he knows me?" Alf persisted.

"He knows no such thing as your impudence," said the wicked Wurthur, or in other words, the proprietor.

"But we lost a dog last autumn," Alf's mother puts in.

That made Wurthur furious. Did they think he stole their dog! And he looked dreadful, with his great black moustache stuck on crooked—just like a real robber, Alf thought, and trembled.

"But I'm sure it's Ginger," he could only repeat. "He knows me very well, and I knew his bark in a moment."

"But your dog was a yellow-brown one, dear," his mother remarked.

"Yes, and they've gone and smeared him, the darling," Alf replied, nothing daunted, but with tears in his eyes.

There was a great scene in the circus; but the end of it was that the place was cleared of people by the sudden putting out of the gas, leaving all in hazy twilight; and in the confusion Wurthur's rough voice ceased, and neither he nor the dog were anywhere to be found. The party from the farmhouse had to go away with the rest. As they came out the proprietor was again in sight, standing in the fast-fading twilight at the entrance; but now, divested of the guise of the wicked Wurthur, he was in a rage at their having insulted him, "with saying he stole the hugly beast, as warn't a bit of good for nothing."

As they passed, Prince Emerald was going into the ticket-office. He went close by the Butterfields, and, though he was covered with tinsel now, Alf was pretty sure he had seen him once before, looking anything but a prince.

However, they had to go home without the dog. The affair was talked over at the farmhouse till a late hour. The only point that Isaac Butterfield could not understand was, how the animal in question could be black and white now, though he was brown a few months ago. It would be a hard case to prove, he said; but Alf was in such grief and anxiety that he promised to step over to

the circus the first thing in the morning, and insist on knowing if the dog was painted, as they often painted the horses.

"And I'll tell you what, my little man," he added, quite touched, rough countryman as he was, at the sight of the lame boy's trouble, "if they won't give the dog, I'll see if I can't buy him."

That was one of Alfred's restless nights. He had wild disconnected dreams about highwaymen and horses, and the hoarse music of the band was still ringing in the silence through his throbbing brain. He woke frequently, and slept and dreamt again, but there was no dream of which Gingerbread did not form a part. First he was playing with him among all the children outside the door of a coach-house; then he was feeding him; but it was always the brown Gingerbread of old, and the dog would whine piteously, refusing everything.

The whining woke him, for it was not a dream. He opened his eyes. The morning light shone brightly into his small quiet room, but it was very early yet. The clock down-stairs struck four. And then arose another howl, not from any visionary dog, but from a real one somewhere outside, endowed with four legs, and a tail, and very good canine lungs, wherever he was.

Alf slipped out of bed. The farmer's great coat hung behind the door. He threw it round him, trailing its tail on the ground, and limped down-stairs, almost tumbling at every step in his haste. Entering the kitchen, where the tiles were icy cold to his bare feet, and the clock ticked loudly, he helped himself across the floor by seizing tables and chairs; and all the while a scratching went on outside. He turned the key, back

flew the bolts, and the door opening let in a flood of fresh air and sunshine, and the black retriever, the world-famed Clandangero!

The boy closed the door hastily, and bolted it, lest any one might be in pursuit; and the dog began barking with joy, went bounding about the kitchen, pulling off the table-cover, and knocking over the clothes-basket, as if he were mad with delight.

"I knew 'twas Gingerbread," Alf said aloud, beside himself with glee; and he searched in the cupboard, and drew out a big bone, as a banquet of welcome.

But what did Gingerbread want of bones? He only cared for the pats of the small hand, and the sound of the glad gentle voice he loved.

The farmer and his wife and Alf's mother came all tumbling down-stairs, to know what the noise was about. "I declare—if it isn't the dog!" they all cried out together; and no matter, if he were to be black as a coal for ever, Gingerbread's identity was agreed upon there and then.

Before taking his breakfast, the farmer went out to the circus, and soon returned triumphant. The proprietor had contended to the last that the dog was his own, but it was clear that he knew he had no real claim upon him, when he took at once Butterfield's offer: "Here's ten shillings now for the dog; take it like a man, and say no more about it." That day the circus left Sunderdown, and did not return until next summer, when instead of Clandangero, they had a fine wax-work show to delight the people's eyes—the great "Juke of Wailington" "the Emperoar of Rassia and the Nany Sahib"—wonderful creatures, all with blue staring eyes

and weak legs; but Alf was not there to see them, nor Gingerbread either.

It was about a week after that eventful morning that the coachman came down to Devonshire to bring home his little son. For the first time there were faint roses in Alfred's cheeks, and he had more strength in his weak foot than he had ever felt before in his life. They took the black retriever back to London; and it must be recorded, to the honour of the same dog, that he bore without a flinch the streams of water that the ostlers dashed upon him from buckets, mops, and hose. Never was a dog mopped before as he was mopped; but he stood in the mews, panting and steaming, as patient and good-natured as could be, till the crowd of children looking on set up a cheer of triumph and recognition, as Gingerbread slowly became a patchy yellow-brown dog once more.

After that day it was generally understood that he belonged to Alf, though he played as freely as of old with his numerous friends, and recognised with glad little licks the poor crossing-sweeper at the corner, who had so often shared her crusts with him. He was not proud, our old Gingerbread, in these better days when he *did* belong to somebody; and little Nell had been kinder than the "wicked Wurthur." So he guarded the street from intruding dogs, and paid his visits to the horses, as if he had never been obliged by the circus-player to leave the mews against his will. Gingerbread is now getting old and infirm; but the grey hairs that now show in his yellow-brown coat make him more dear than ever to his loving master.

UNCLE RICHARD'S STORY.

"Even a Child may be known by its Works."

Bertha and Her Uncle—Duty—The Story—Carelessness and its Result—The Wounded Child.

"I HAVE been looking everywhere for you, Uncle Richard! what are you doing out here alone?" asks little Beatrice, as she finds herself suddenly facing the old walnut-tree in the far meadow, and sees her well-beloved uncle, with his hat well over his eyes, stretched out at his ease among the tall grass and sweet-scented clover. "The house is so dull when you are away!"

"Is it, little girl?" he laughs, as she sits down beside him, and coolly proceeds to take off his hat, and to carefully place a kiss on his nose. "Well, you see, it is all so pleasant here—especially for any one like me, who spends all his days in close streets and smoky towns—the country is such a treat."

"Yes, but why do you live there, Uncle Richard? You might as well always stay here."

"I might, dearie; but, you see, there's duty."

"Duty! I hate duty! It always means something disagreeable!" and spoiled Beatie catches up a handful of grass and scatters it angrily about her.

"Not always, lovey. Indeed, you would find it a most uncomfortable world if every one only did what was agreeable to themselves. I don't like going about among some of the grinders and workers of our town, listening to their ugly words and complaints, and sometimes seeing sad sights in their homes, half as well as I do lying here, with God's pure air and beautiful birds and flowers about me. But then I hope I am doing His work when I can leave a good thought, or do some little service to these poor ignorant children of His—then the heavy duty becomes very light and pleasant, love. The yoke of Christ is not a heavy one to bear to those who take it up willingly, as I learn of it here," and he looks reverently at the book in his hand, and then at the blue sky, so calm and still.

"What part are you reading, uncle?" asks Beatrice, eagerly. "I like best about little baby Moses, or poor Joseph, who was sold, and became rich. Hagar and Ishmael is such a sad story, though Ishmael did become a great man. But there are plenty of children in the Bible that became famous prophets and kings, and were written and talked about. How nice it would be if one could become famous now!" Then, seeing the look in her uncle's eyes, Beatrice added, "I mean, become good—very, very good and famous."

"Good and famous are such very different things, Beatie; a man may be famous and very bad. Some men——"

"Oh, I don't mean men. I mean children—boys, or

"STRETCHED OUT AT HIS EASE."—(*See p.* 63.)

girls like me. There seems nothing at all that we can do."

"Girls like you can do a very great deal: they can be gentle, and helpful, and patient—unselfish, in short—thinking of others before themselves, and so make others happy. That's doing something, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's nothing! any one can do that!" she sighs, still scattering the daisies.

"Can they? I heard of a girl disturbing the whole house all one morning, because she could not have a new doll's hat. Yes, she did really, Beatrice. Then she sulked for an hour—can you believe it?—because she was asked to mend her own gloves. The rest of the day was filled up with complaints, because of a small cut on her thumb done by herself with a penknife borrowed unasked, and——"

"Oh, please don't!" cried poor Beatie, with a crimsoned face.

"Very well! I only wanted to show you how much there is for children to do, and very difficult work, too; so cheer up, while I tell you the story of a little girl I met with in the course of my travels—only a poor little simple country child, but one who taught me how great was the power of unselfish love and patience."

Beatie, with a mental resolve to be good, recovers her composure at the promise of a story out here among the flowers and butterflies, and listens attentively as Uncle Richard begins.

"Once upon a time—as all stories ought to begin, only mine did not begin so very long ago—I lived as curate in a pretty village in Yorkshire. An out-of-the-way spot it was, but very pretty, and a great place for nutting and blackberries.

"During my rambles I often met with big Ben Brian, a kind of under-keeper, who lived in a queer kind of nest, built of logs and stones, some distance from the village, and at the entrance of a wood. It was a wild out-of-the-way sort of place, pretty enough in the summer, when it was hidden in ivy and honeysuckle, but dreary in the winter, when the snow lying on it made it look like some monster white mushroom—an unlucky place, the villagers said, for summer after summer the fever had stolen in like a cruel thief, and carried off seven pretty children, and at last their patient weakly mother, leaving poor big Ben almost broken-hearted, with only Nelly Mary to comfort him; and a pretty, bright, healthy little gipsy she was when I first saw her, most precious to her forlorn father, who seemed to have fixed all the hopes and love of his life on this one remaining little blossom of that life's faded flowers.

"I often had long chats with big Ben, when we met in the wood, and his honest blue eyes would glisten, and the sadness go out of his face when he talked of his one darling—his little maid, as he called her. He was never tired of telling of her womanly little ways and speeches; then how she swept, and sewed, and sang for him; how she had her mother's sweet, patient manners, and often reminded him of her waiting in heaven!

"'Ah, sir,' he said to me one day, 'I do pray God every night to spare me my little maid. I'm oft afraid she's too good for the like o' me. When I get grieved and low o' nights, sometimes, thinking o' them that's gone, she do sing about the goodness o' the Lord, hymns and such like she have learnt at the school, till I'm afraid she'll take wings like that lark up yonder, sir, as is going

up and up, forgetting all about the evil and pecking as is down in the world below it, sir. She sings that sweet it melts my grief away. Part joy, part grief, sir.'

"What he said about her singing was true of him too. Every Sunday she came hand in hand with her father to the tiny church, and I could hear their voices, clear and fresh above all others, rising up to His honour and glory, as though He had never sent them a trouble or a trial. Then they would trudge off together lovingly hand in hand, through the long lanes, with a smiling bob and bow for most folks they met; she smart in a red cloth cloak, rapidly getting too small for her growing self; he in well-brushed velveteens, and a posy in his button-hole. As long as her loving fingers could detect a flower in any nook, it was cherished for 'fa'' on Sunday; for was he not all the world to her, his one daughter, his pride, 'his little maid?'

"One Saturday it happened that I had some books sent from London, and turning them over, I came to a small one, on the cover of which was the picture of a girl in a red cloak. 'Not unlike little Briant!' I thought; so I put it in my pocket, intending to give it to her when she came to church next morning. Then I strolled out for a walk. It was just such a day as this, Beatie, fresh and sweet, and I wandered on from meadow to lane, now stopping to admire the beauties about me, now trying to decide which should be my Easter Sunday text, when suddenly something red caught my eye, and I saw it was a cloak lying on a chair, which chair was standing in the porch of Log Lodge, as the people called it. I had come over three miles, so I stopped to breathe, and think how pretty and peaceful it all looked. Only a little

noisy bullfinch sang and twittered in the window, over its nest all smothered in honeysuckle, and a happy cat and kittens lay purring on the grass-plat.

"Suddenly I remembered the book in my pocket. I was a good mind to go in and give it to Nelly Mary in exchange for a few of those smiles which I knew it would conjure up. As I paused, undecided, I heard a light joyous laugh, which the bird stopped its notes to listen to.

"Then—oh, then!—I heard a far different sound ring through the air—the sudden report of a gun, followed by a shriek, a cry, and a fall.

"For a moment I thought it must be some hunter near; but then the lodge door was burst open from within, and a man in his shirt-sleeves came rushing frantically along the path, so pale, so haggard, and so wild, I scarcely knew him for big brown Ben, the keeper.

"I caught him in my arms, exclaiming, 'What—who has done this, Ben?' for I thought he was wounded.

"'I ha' done it! I ha' done it!' he cried, struggling in my hold like a madman; 'I ha' killed her, I say. Let me go!'

"'Done what, man?' and I forced him to stand still.

"'I ha' killed her—my Nell! I ha' seen her dead, I tell thee! My last darling is dead; I ha' killed her! Let me die too!'

"Then as I let go my hold, he cast himself on the turf, and lay, face downwards, like a dead man.

"I ran hurriedly into the lodge. There was a gun on the floor; and on the black hearth-rug lay little Nelly Mary, while scattered about her were a lot of wild flowers, which she had evidently been tying up as she fell. My own heart almost stopped as I stooped down to feel hers. Thank God! it was beating yet, though she was sense-

less. Then I saw it was her arm that had been injured. The old story,—a gun left loaded, and carelessly handled. Oh dear, how many lives this one mistake has cost.

"I dared not move her, but I put some water to her pale lips and face; and presently the blue eyes opened, looked wonderingly round, and fixed themselves on the gun, lying near.

"'Where's fa'?' she whispered, chokingly.

"'He's here, darling—he's here, little Nell. Keep quiet, your father wishes it, dear!'

"'Ah!' she sighed softly, 'I 'm glad it did not hurt poor fa' instead of me.' Then she lay quite still again, a picture of patience.

"A deep groan made me look up with a start. 'Is my little maid dead?' asked a hoarse voice. Ben had risen, and come to the door. His eyes were quite dry, and bright and shiny.

"'Ben,' I said, 'with God's help your child will recover, but we must have a doctor at once; you must go to the village as fast as you can.'

"'I canna go, sir! I canna leave her. Do you go, sir. I pray you, let me stay by her. Maybe she's dying, my little maid, and I killed her,' he wailed.

"'Nonsense, Ben! go at once. You are fresher and quicker than I. I will watch her. She is safe for the present, I tell you, man! Go—run, for her life! If you love her and wish to save her, go!'

"He flung himself down over the rug, careful in his sorrow not to hurt her, and kissed her still face in tearless agony. Then he tore off like a hunted hare, down the green lanes and across the meadows; it was a race for a life, dearer far than his own.

CHAPTER II.

The Doctor—Suspense—A Patient Child—Bertha's Accident—The Result of the Story.

"I STAYED alone by that little figure, doing all I could for her, which was not much; but I bound up the hurt arm, gave her water, and waited. Every now and then she roused a little, and asked for 'fa'—dear fa'—poor fa'.'

"I think she was bewildered whether the same shot had touched them both; but she never once complained of her own hurt and pain: he was her only trouble, and the not seeing him fretted her wofully. I could not persuade her he was safe. At last—how long it seemed to me, yet how short a time it really was!—there came a sound of wheels, nearer and nearer, then good fat Dr. Robins came hurrying in, his face full of tender compassion.

"'Well, well, my little girl——Why, here's a pretty to-do,' he said softly, bending over her. Then, as he saw her looking uneasily behind him, he beckoned to her father, who came forward, still white and tearless and desperate. 'Come, father, we want you to help us a

little. Don't let her see you quake, man!' he whispered. 'You can do more than I can to soothe her.' But she had fainted again.

"Between them they lifted the thick rug and its senseless occupant, and carried it on to the little bed; then I took Ben's hand, and led him outside. He stood quite still where I placed him—still as if he had been stone. The little bullfinch sang louder and more merrily than ever; I could have choked it just then. I should have tried to comfort the poor man, but I was too excited and troubled. Oh, how long the doctor seemed! Would he tell us the child must die? Poor, poor Ben! At this moment out waddled the doctor. He shut the door very quietly behind him, then he turned to the stony figure by his side, and gave him a great hearty slap on the back, crying, in his kind voice, 'Cheer up, Ben Briant! there's no fear; it's a bad flesh-wound, but it will heal with care. Come, look up, man! Your little maid's the right sort to mend. She's patience itself, and will be well in a month, if you keep her quiet. And no fretting, mind! your business is to cheer her up!'

"Shall I ever forget the 'Thank God I haven't killed her!' which burst from that poor father, as he let himself drop straight down on his knees, and, laying his face on the old red cloak, wept and sobbed out his thankfulness, forgetting we were there.

"The doctor, opening the door, drew me into the room gently. 'Poor chap! let him have it out, for, bless me! he has something to be thankful for. If the shot had lodged anywhere else she'd have been gone straight off. Ah, well!—What's that you're saying, my dear? We can't have any talking yet!

Yes, your fa' is coming—never fear. I'll fetch him in now. Come, father, to little Nell.'

"When I looked in an hour or two afterwards, with the nurse I had brought to help Ben, I found him sitting by her bedside, with her uninjured hand in his. She had had a little sleep, and was better now, she said. And how pretty and patient she looked, with her golden hair lying on her pillow like a crown! I thought she did not see me, but she did, in an instant, and drew her hand out of Ben's for a moment—only for a moment—to put it into mine.

"'I am so glad——'

"'My dear, you must not speak,' I said, hurriedly.

"'No, sir, I won't any more; but I am so glad it was me that was hurt, instead of fa'!'

"'Oh Nelly, darling!' he said, softly, for he was trying not to excite himself, for her sake, 'I could have borne ten times as much, to save you pain.'

"I held up a warning finger, for she was flushing as she answered, 'But I am only a little girl, of no use, and you are fa', that does so much for me. I can better keep still than you, and the ache will leave off if I try to be good, won't it?'"

"And did she get quite well?" asked Beatie, with a great lump in her throat.

"She did, dear. You see, she was gentle and quiet, trying to bear patiently what she saw was so great a trial to her father. She never complained: she never spoke of herself, and only loved him the more for the accident, showing that even a child can be strong to bear, if there is good will to help, and unselfish love for others."

"IT WAS BATHED IN WARM WATER."—(*See p. 77.*)

A few weeks after Uncle Richard had gone Beatrice had a fall over a step—a little thing, it seemed, but it sprained her ankle very severely; it was bathed in warm water, and rubbed and bathed again. She must lie still on the sofa, was the doctor's verdict, or it would be a serious matter.

"Still on the sofa!" Does any one of you realise what that means for a lively healthy girl like Beatie? "Oh dear, I shall have a dreadful time of it, she is so self-willed!" groaned mamma, ever kind, but with many household cares.

"Miss Beatrice keep still! She'll keep us all in a turmoil!" groaned the servants.

"She'll be laid up all the winter, such a little uncontrollable quicksilver as she is!" said Aunt Sarah, who had nursed Beatrice before.

But somehow Uncle Richard's words had touched Beatie's heart. "Even a child can be strong, if there is good will to help strength." She *would* be strong, so she submitted to all the rubbings, and lay quietly on the sofa, only now and then getting impatient at her imprisonment, then determining to bear it with a good will, and be strong. Seeing her so gentle and patient, every one did their best to help and cheer the little invalid. Books, prints, pets of all sorts came, and smiling friends, glad to see she was not crying and complaining, as they expected. Every one tries to help those who try to help themselves, and Beatrice did try.

"Well, I never saw so bad a twist so soon mended!" said the doctor, about a fortnight after. "I wish all my patients had Miss Elliot's patience, they would get over their troubles a good deal quicker, and it would be

much pleasanter work attending to them, I am sure."

"I don't understand it, doctor; but I am most thankful Beatie has been a help, instead of a trouble on the sofa; and oh, what a help a child can be if she tries! No one knows how much the mother of a family has to think about, and how sorry and troubled she is when any of the children are ailing!" Then, as Beatrice came slightly limping into the room, Mamma went forward to meet her, and leading her to her own easy-chair, said, with a kiss, "I was just saying to Doctor Hall that I wondered what it was that had so altered my little girl. Where did she learn to be considerate and patient? You are my little comfort now, instead of my little troublesome one. What has changed you, darling?"

"Only a story Uncle Richard told me, mamma."

JENNY AND HER JOHNNY:

UNCLE RICHARD'S SECOND STORY.

"Oh, little hearts have power to love,
And little hands to labour."

A Quiet Ramble—Children's Quarrels—Under the Walnut Tree—Jenny and Johnny—Jenny's Promise—Fulfilling Her Promise—Johnny's Fall—Search for the Missing Boy—A Strange Hiding-place—End of the Quarrel.

ONE bright sunny Sunday afternoon, when the very birds in the trees seemed too thoughtful even to sing loudly, but chirped their gladness in low, subdued hymns of thankfulness for the happy summer weather, Uncle Richard, having stolen a few days from his town duties, is strolling, book in hand, up and down the garden-walk at the back of that dear old country house he loves. He is thinking how beautiful everything is—how sweet the flowers, how blue the sky, how solemn the hush that even in far-off country places is somehow only noticed on Sundays. He rambles on, until he finds himself crossing the vegetable garden, and approaching the low ivy-covered nursery window, where a whole colony of busy swallows are twittering peacefully at home—

that is, the outside—but from within the room different sounds are heard—sad sounds to listen to on this sweet Sunday afternoon.

"You're a horrid, bad, wicked boy; and I've a mind to give you a hard slap, I have!" cries a girl's voice, raised shrill and high with passion.

"I'm so, so solly, Beatie!" sobs a very subdued childish tone. "So velly solly I did it."

"'Sorry!' what's the use of that? You've been and torn all the binding off my new geography prize, and poked it in the fire—you know you have, you little monkey. I hate you!"

Then comes a sudden shriek; the slap has evidently been given. The culprit resents with kicks, and cries for "Mamma, mamma!" and the nursery window is flung open with such a sudden bang that several young swallows chirp with alarm, and Uncle Richard draws back unobserved, while a little girl comes fluttering out, and runs past him, wringing her hands with rage.

Can this be his pretty Beatrice?—her golden hair all dishevelled, her face crimson, her blue eyes flashing! Can this be gentle Beatrice, who, when her frock is caught by a pitying white rose, turns to break it from its stem, and throws it, bruised and crushed, into the bushes? O, Passion, what an ugly master thou art! On and on that ugly master carries her till he flings her on to a great mound of new-cut grass, all scented with dying buttercups, clover, and pink daisies, fragrant to the last. She lays her throbbing head on the soft pillow, and cries, almost breathlessly, "Tiresome child! I detest him, I do!"

A brown-eyed bird perches on a stone opposite her, and seems to repeat her words in a loud wondering

note, "Detest, detest, detest! I detest him, I do—do——How sad, how sad, how sad!"

"Oh, go away, do, worry! you make my head ache!"

She clutches a handful of turf, to throw at him, but still he sits and sings, or, as it seems to her, repeats her own words, "I detest, dete-e-e-st him!"

When folks sit silently listening to a bird, Passion gets tired of their company. So it is with Beatrice, who lets the turf drop, and begins to relent.

"Well, of course, I don't mean that," she thinks; "I mean that it was a shame of Freddy—naughty boy. I wish I hadn't slapped him so hard, after all," she adds, as Passion disappears from the scene; "poor little fellow! he said he was sorry." And a vision of the tear-stained sorry face troubles her conscience. Then she remembers some words his mother used before going to church that morning—"Be kind to Freddy, Beatrice, when I am away; be his little mother; he is almost a baby, remember, dear, and you are a big girl." "Almost a baby!" and she had slapped him, and shaken him, even while he cried, "Beatrice, I am so solly!"

Should she go back and comfort him? No; she is not equal to that, when she thinks of her spoiled "geography," and so she stifles the better feeling that whispers forgiveness. For a good half-hour she lies on the scented grass; the soft pitying sunshine dries her tears, and the little wild flowers look up, and wonder how she can still look so sober, with them around her.

"Beatie, Beatie! where are you, my girl?" cries a cheerful voice, near.

Poor Beatie! she must face her uncle. Hot and flushed, she jumps up, wondering if he will see and wonder at her

appearance. But, no; he takes no notice. Only more kindly than usual, if possible, he calls her to look at a rare humming-bird moth that is darting in and on and out of all the sweetest flowers. Then they get to talking about bees and butterflies, and the thousand and one country sights that please townsfolk so much. She feels good and happy again—almost.

Presently they find themselves under the old walnut-tree in the far meadow, and Uncle Richard proposes that they should rest awhile on the soft clover, and have a quiet talk.

"Uncle," says Beatrice, as she snuggles down by his side, "do you remember the pretty story you told me here, about Nelly Mary ?—you know. Will you tell me another like it? please do."

"Tell me, first, what did you learn from that one, Beatie?" he asked, softly stroking her hair.

"I learnt to try and be unselfish and patient. I thought I had, at least; but, oh dear! it's so hard, so very hard, to be good, sometimes."

She is thinking how angry she was but just now, and feeling that her uncle is looking at her with serious, sad eyes, and knows all about it.

"And you want another story, to help you. Well, I will tell you one, Beatie."

"A true one!" she cries, eagerly.

"A true one, dear; so listen to the record of the doings of a little country lass—for no dainty lady was my Jenny: no golden-haired missy, like you, Beat, with hosts of toys and books, and fine silk sashes. No! my Jenny had nothing when she was twelve years old, but her Johnny, and very dear and precious was he to her unselfish heart.

"At the time I am speaking of, Jenny and her

Johnny—thus they were always spoken of—were living in a poor little hut on the outskirts of a forest. Their father had been killed by a falling wall; and worn out with sorrow and fretting, their poor gentle hard-working mother felt herself growing weaker every day. She grew thinner and whiter, and more anxious, as she looked at her two children, and tried to trust them without a murmur to that God who has promised that He would be a father to the fatherless.

"Jenny was a slight, thoughtful girl, tall and brown-eyed; and little three-year-old Johnny was fat, rosy, and masterful. No wonder the mother wondered what would become of them when she was gone, for they had no relations and few friends. Yet she had a true and trusting heart, this poor dying widow, working so hard at her embroidery to the last, while Jenny, all unconscious of the coming shadow, busied about the two tiny rooms cooking, cleaning, mending, in a manner perfectly surprising in a little girl of her age. She knew her mother was ailing, and that her strong young arms could help her, so she did all the hard work without a murmur, while the mother sat stitching.

"But the day came when that mother's hand dropped wearily; when the needle would no longer trace the dainty outline of roses and lilies; then she took Johnny in her arms, and called Jenny, still holding her boy tenderly to her heart.

"'My Jenny,' she said, 'I am going to give you a sacred trust. I am going to ask you to be a little mother to our Johnny. Will you promise, that I may turn to God in peace and ask Him to watch over you both, my poor forlorn lambs?'

"It was a sad, sad awaking for poor Jenny, who loved her patient mother dearly; so dearly that she tried to bear the blow as quietly as possible. Presently, when the poor girl was able to stay the bitter sudden tears that would make her feel sick and faint with the great trouble to come, the mother placed Johnny in her arms, and drew both their young heads to her sorrowful patient heart, blessing and caressing them both, while she said falteringly, 'Jenny, my daughter, promise me now this one thing and we will speak no more of the cloud which the Lord sees fit to shadow your young lives with. Promise that you will take what care you can of your little brother. That you will try to teach him the way to be good; that some day I may hold you both again, mine for ever and ever.'

"'Mother, I promise I will be very good to him,' sobbed the girl through her tears.

"'And you, Johnny darling, try and be good when poor mother is gone, and love Jenny.'

"But Johnny, who had been staring with wide open blue eyes, quite speechless at the sight of Jenny's tears, burst out with a sudden roar 'that mother should not go; she should not leave him; he would have no other mother; that he loved her; that he would fight any one who tried to take her away;' and he clenched his dimple fists, and shook them at Jenny as though she were the aggressor.

"But before the autumn leaves had fallen his mother did go; and Jenny and Johnny were alone—alone in that dreary little cottage. And Jenny sat weeping, with her head hidden in the scanty black skirt, while the boy played at her feet.

"But as she sat sobbing there, thinking only of her

own forlorn state, he gradually left off his game, came with scared looks, and, laying his tangled curly locks on her lap, declared that she should be his mother as long as she liked, if she only would leave off crying and take him just a bit.

"Then Jenny threw aside the black skirt, and kissing the tearful rosy face, renewed the promise she had made to her dead mother. She would do her best for Johnny's sake; and she sat there rocking him until the little fellow fell asleep in her arms.

"Then she laid him in his bed; and shaking off the feeling that made her sit there, uncaring, with her face hidden, she bathed her swollen eyes, brushed her hair, and got the place in order, even fetching out the embroidery frame which her mother had used so long, and which she had put out of sight in her first despair.

"And the next day, when she found a little lost lamb bleating so pitifully at her door, she took it up and carried it in her arms till she found its fond anxious mother; 'So,' she thought, 'will I care for Johnny. Some day I will give him to our mother, who will rejoice as this one does, only a good deal more, because it will be Heaven there.'

"From that day Jenny set aside all thought of self. Her whole heart was set upon keeping her promise, and bravely and nobly she did it; early and late she toiled; she went from house to house earning a few pence here and there—never begging, mind; never taking anything she had not earned; but never thinking any work too hard that brought in money. Her mother had been very skilful at her needle, and the girl took after her; at spare times, or when Johnny was asleep, she practised at the old embroidery

frame, but coarser work did not make her fingers very fit for such delicate materials, nor did she very well know how to dispose of the few articles she had managed to embroider to her satisfaction. The people at the big house were away, and no one else wanted such things. Still she scrambled along somehow till Johnny's fourth birthday; the day when I first saw her and heard her simple story.

"I happened to be delayed in the village for a day or two, and, taking a very early morning stroll, saw a young girl standing at an old-fashioned doorway feeding chicks. It was such a sweet bright smiling face, that I could not resist smiling back at it.

"'What an early breakfast you are giving your noisy family, little maid!' I said.—'It is my Johnny's birthday, and I want to get done early, sir,' she answered, quite as though everybody knew her Johnny.

"Later on there was a great stir among the villagers. Jenny's Johnny was missing from the cottage, and Jenny was as one out of her mind.

"Jenny, it seemed, had had one little article which she treasured next to Johnny—it was a lovely lawn handkerchief all gaily embroidered with red roses, the work of her loved mother when a girl. It had always been most carefully preserved; and every now and then Jenny took it out of the little drawer filled with lavender, and admired and cried over it. Of course wearing it was out of the question; it was far too precious for that. She had even refused a golden half-sovereign offered for it by the pedlar who had come that way to the fair.

"Of late she had been too busy to look at her treasure, for people were getting used to employ the

clever willing girl; and poor as they were, many a shilling came in Jenny's way to help her keep her promise and her Johnny.

"Well, it happened very unfortunately, that the said Johnny, being left, as he often was, to amuse himself as best he could, took it into his head to get on the top of the table and pull open the small drawer by the fire-side, where lay the precious handkerchief all by itself.

"'Mammy's pretty wed woses; how nice you 'mell!' cooed the boy, holding the handle, and bending over the drawer. Somehow he missed his footing, and came down, drawer, 'woses,' and all; only he came down on his head, and screamed as four-year-old boys can, and the poor 'woses' fluttered out of his hand on to the fender. Luckily there was no fire.

"Old Bridget, from her cottage, came to see the cause of the screaming, and found my lord with a great bruise on his forehead, and the empty drawer clutched in his fat hand. As she opened the door something red-and-white fluttered on to the bars, then up the broad open chimney, then away—who knows where, but the wind-angels?

"Oh, how poor Jenny cried when she found her precious little handkerchief gone! What a grief and a trouble it was to her; yet she never said a harsh word to the child that had set her heart aching, but tenderly bathed the great bump on his forehead, sobbing, while he looked at her with wondering, troubled eyes. He knew it was all grief for that handkerchief that was lost.

"'Don't cwy, likle mother! Other mother's woses flewd away—back to other mother who did 'em. P'raps she'll send 'em to Jenny again, p'raps.'

"'Mother is in heaven; it's too far, dear.'

"'Is it furder than the middle of the forest?' asked Johnny. 'Couldn't I ask her to give 'em you again? She made 'em first.'

"'Oh hush, Johnny! I wish you could! But it is no use talking; bed-time now, dear, and you must go to bed, because sister has to get out early and earn some breakfast for Johnny.'

"As she laid the sturdy child down, she kissed her boy as tenderly as ever, for she remembered he was almost a baby and she a big girl, as you know, Beatrice."

Beatrice thought of that other boy, almost a baby, that she had been so harsh to, and blushed.

"Well, the next day, as I told you, Johnny was lost. Jenny had gone out to help do some washing, and Bridget had left the child happily feeding a brood of tiny chicks round about the cottage door. She had thought no more about him, till the unusual silence struck her.

"'Johnny!' for an hour or two she called all about the place, but no Johnny answered her, and too soon she found that Johnny had vanished—but where? The few and far neighbours had not seen him, and Bridget wrung her old hands when she thought of the river, and the possibility of his having strayed so far alone. Those little red legs were firm and strong.

"Ill news, they say, fly apace, and certainly it was not long before the knowledge of her brother's disappearance reached Jenny, who went flying white-faced, seeking and calling for the child, but no answer came. Kind men, who had gone round about the place, returned one by one without the slightest clue. The daylight passed away, and darkened into night, and then midnight; still no token or sign of the lost boy of poor half-frantic Jenny.

"'We can look nowhere else to-night, my poor child!' said my friend, who had been eager in the chase; 'we have gone every way—far beyond any distance he could have wandered. Try and take patience till morning dawns; we will surely find him then; he cannot have disappeared altogether, you know.'

"Jenny listened with dry, tearless eyes, and answered huskily, 'But I *must* find him; I promised mother to take care of him. What will she think! what will she think!'

"'My dear,' I said, 'try and have patience. Your mother knows, perhaps, how faithfully you have tried to keep your promise. As soon as it is light we will scour the country round, and bring you your boy. We can do no more to-night.' But she only wrung her hands, and darted from the crowd, to resume her fruitless search, for in the darkness we could every now and then hear that pitiful cry—'Johnny, Johnny, where are you, dear?' But still no answer came to bless her.

"I do not think many people in the village slept that night; I did not for one. That dark flowing river had been in my thoughts as it had been in others—luckily it never entered those of Jenny; but every time I dozed I woke up with a frightened start. So when the first pale light showed itself I rose, and dressed, and, going gently down-stairs, passed into the garden and the lane beyond.

"It was a soft grey spring morning, and only one cock made itself heard. All seemed so hushed and still that I felt depressed as I went round the back of the cottages towards the one where the lost child had so lately nestled.

"It looked very solitary standing there alone; the flowers drooped, the windows were some of them open, and, looking in at the little parlour, I saw a slim girl's

figure kneeling by the side of an empty crib. She was in her hat and shawl, just as she had left her washing yesterday; she had evidently fallen asleep praying for her Johnny's safety. Retreating as softly as possible, I was quite startled by a sudden gruff squeak, and nip at my legs. Looking round to see what this meant, I found I had disturbed the repose of a solemn old one-eyed jackdaw that appeared to have been sleeping in the remains of a chip basket. I cannot tell why, at a time when my mind was filled with far other things, I should have stooped down to talk, to look in at the retreat of this wise old bird—perhaps it was because I felt myself so useless as yet. However, stoop down I did, and peering into the basket saw there was a child's hat lying at the back of it, filled with rubbish. Well, after all, it might be any child's hat, but this had a green ribbon, so had lost Johnny's, and it was clean, so was Johnny's; how came it there? and the old jackdaw looked up at me with evil eyes as much as to say, 'Ah, you would like to know, but you won't?' and went hopping off in great dudgeon. I felt quite angry with that bird: where had he got that hat from? After all, was the child anywhere near? and did the jackdaw know it?

"Very soon the neighbours roused. I showed the hat. Mother Bridget declared it to be the one the missing child had worn but yesterday. Where, then, had Jack found it? While they searched every nook and corner he was known to haunt, I followed the old bird for more than two hours; and what a dance he led me! I dropped things for him to hide, but he only put them into impossible places, and then screamed and hopped with delight. Still he kept near about the

cottage, and never went beyond the great straw-rick in the meadows beyond. Of course we had looked round this rick, but all was clear there. Yet Jack kept his one eye so innocently turned away from it that I could not help being suspicious, and came back several times to prod at it; Jack following, and screaming angrily.

"'Taint no use, master,' said an old labourer, sorrowfully; 't' river's the next thing to look into; the child aint a mouse that he could squeeze into this here stack.'

"'He couldn't have got to the top, could he?' I asked, doubtfully; it seemed such a foolish question to ask the man.

"'He couldn't unless he had wings, like this here magpie, as seems to know we ha' lost summat,' answered old Saunders, rather sneeringly.

"'I tell you what, I'll go up and see,' I said, all at once, more out of contradiction than anything else.

"'Will 'ee, sir? I make bold to ask how? We aint got wings to lend you, sir.'

"'Well, perhaps you've got a ladder instead, Master Clever.'

"'There's only one as would reach in all the place, and that belongs to Joe Brush the miller, as squints.'

"'Well, go and ask Joe Brush to bring it here.'

"'Joe went to Talford yesterday, an' he keeps it locked up when he's away; leastways, so I've heard.'

"I sent off to inquire after Joe's ladder; the searchers gradually got together; and my friend, heading them, came towards where I stood and said, 'We are going down to the river now, Richard. What are you doing here? Won't you come with us? Are you waiting for anything?'

"'Waiting for Joe Brush's ladder,' I answered.

"'Well, perhaps you are right. Why, my poor Jenny, is it you? You must go home with Bridget here. You look ready to drop, child.'

"It was indeed Jenny, so pale and wan, holding that little straw hat, pressed on her arms. But she was not crying, only looking anxiously, first at one face, then at another.

"'Oh, please don't give up looking for Johnny!' she cried, clasping her hands; 'he can't be lost—can he? Johnny, Johnny! where are you?' she almost screamed in her despair.

"Then, from high above our heads, came a sweet childish voice, muffled and far-off, 'I am here, Jenny!'

"Whiter, whiter grew the little sister, who, all unprepared, thought it was a voice from the skies; as to us, a loud and joyous shout answered the call. And how it happened I cannot tell you, but before Joe Brush's ladder had arrived, one man had scrambled on another man's back, and another man on to his, and, almost at the risk of a broken neck, had reached the top of the great straw heap, into which, somewhat to our surprise, he disappeared, head-foremost it seemed to us.

"'All right, I've got 'un!' came his call.

"'Where are you both?' we shouted.

"In a hole! Little 'un safe and sound, but we can't get out till the ladder comes!'

"What a rush there was to hurry on that ladder! and, oh! what a cheer when Johnny, with his yellow hair all on end, and his blue eyes very open and round, was handed out of his hiding-place, and passed from arm to arm, till he rested in those of Jenny, hitherto so tearless, now sobbing as though her heart would break with very joy.

"'Don't cry, Jenny!' with his fat arms round her

neck; 'don't cry! I am so hungry; and see, I have got back mother's woses.'

"And, sure enough, rolled up in a damp dirty lump, was a something pink and white and torn.

"I need not tell you that the children had not far to go for a breakfast that morning, or indeed any other morning. I took care of that, at any rate. For a trifle old Bridget looked after them until Johnny was old enough to go to a good school, and Jenny found time to practise her embroidery, which in a short time she did so well that she had no lack of customers among our many acquaintances. She was always unselfish and devoted—a real 'other mother' to the lad, as he grew up honest and true, under her careful charge."

"But, uncle, how did he get up into such a place? and where did he find 'mother's woses'?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that important part of my story, which we could not quite make out at the time. We found that Joe Brush had left his ladder against the straw heap for a short time on the day Johnny was lost. Joe remembered seeing the magpie hopping about the ladder-foot, with some red rag, as he thought, and a boy running after him. We could only suppose that the child, seeing the bird hopping off with the very handkerchief his sister had cried about, followed and scrambled up the ladder after the thief. Once on the top, he had tumbled into a very soft resting-place, fortunately unharmed, and, after crying a bit, had burrowed into the straw, and had fallen asleep—his hiding-place solely visible to the stars—and was awakened only by that loud-appealing call of 'Johnny, where are you?' It was fortunate we were

near enough to hear his answer, or he might have spent an unpleasant time while we had been looking everywhere but the right place for the poor little man.

"And now, Beatie, my story is finished. Has it taught you anything? Will you tell me, or leave me to judge by the result?"

Beatie bends her head over the clover, and smiles, with tears in her eyes.

"Why, I declare, there is Freddy at the window! I must go and say 'Good-morning' to the little fellow."

Uncle Richard rises, and walks across the lawn, and away to where the little fellow is rubbing his nose in a rather wobegone state on the glass. But he stops at sight of his uncle.

"What's the matter, old man?" calls out the uncle from below; "what are you doing there?"

"Ma's out, and I all 'lone, and Beatie don't love me, an' it's all mis'able!" says the boy, with a quiver in his voice and lip.

Just then the door behind him opens, and Beatie steals in, and, catching up the little fellow in her arms, gives him such a tender loving kiss that he looks amazed and half-frightened.

"I'm so sorry that I slapped you, Freddy! I was very cross, I know; but I'll try and be kind another time, see if I don't."

"Big sister, well, I won't never more tear your graffelly's books," protests Freddy, earnestly, as he claps his hands joyfully.

I don't know if Freddy will keep his promise—"he is almost a baby;" but I do know that Beatrice tries very hard to keep hers. So you see, Uncle Richard's second story was not thrown away. C. L. M.

THE RUNAWAY.

Running Off to Sea—Thoughts of Home—A Kind Sailor Spinning a Yarn—A Bad Captain—Terrible Scenes—A Fire at Sea—The Return.

"PLEASE, sir, is there a ship going to sail to-night, and would the captain take me for his cabin boy?"

The old sailor of whom the question was asked gave a start of surprise, and then raised his lantern, with which he had been lighting himself along the wharves, so as to see the owner of the voice.

He saw before him a pale, delicate-looking boy, with bright, eager-looking eyes, something like you, Ned.

His shoes were covered with dust, as if he had walked a long distance, and in his hand he held a small bundle, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief.

"A little runaway," thought the sailor; and then added, in a gruff but not unkind voice, "Going to sail soon? Why, what do you want to know for?"

"If you please, sir, I—I want to go to sea, and I want to go at once, or ——"

"You will be caught and taken back, and get a good caning too, perhaps, for running away."

As the old sailor spoke, the boy's face became crimson and then pale by turns. He gave an anxious look into the sailor's face, and then cried—

"You won't give me up, sir, will you? It is quite true I have run away from school. I wanted so much to be a sailor, and see foreign countries, and they would not hear of it, or I would not have run away. Do promise, sir, to help me off."

"My poor child, you little know the hardships of a sailor's life. Have you no mother to grieve for you when she finds out you have run away to sea?"

It was with a sob in his throat he answered, "Yes, sir, I have a mother, and she will be so sorry. I did not think. I wish I had said good-bye to her. She will worry and fret, I suppose."

"You may well say that, my boy. Suppose you had sailed in one of those ships to-night, and were never to see your mother or father again. The same thing happened to me, child, and I have never yet forgiven myself for the sorrow I caused." And the old tar looked grave.

Little Alfred had tried very hard to choke back his sobs at the mention of his mother and home; the thought of never seeing her again was almost more than he could bear, and he answered, with bent head—

"I wish I had not run away from school, but it is too late now to go back, even if I wanted. You are so kind, sir, will you tell me what I had better do? I cannot bear to go back," he sobbed.

"Come home with me, my lad, for this night at least. You have walked far to-day, if I am not mistaken,

and a night's rest will do you good. Whilst I smoke my pipe I will spin you a yarn, if you like, and you shall know how I came to go to sea, and some of the hardships I endured. Then to-morrow we will consult what you had better do."

The boy seized the old sailor's hand, and cried, "How good you are to me, sir! I will do just as you advise me to. How glad I am I met you!"

"Thank God, my lad, you did not meet with a villain, as I did. But now mind your footing as we go along, or you will be tripped over into Davy Jones's locker with the cables and ropes about."

The light from the lantern helped them to avoid the dangers in their path, and Alfred, with his new friend, was soon clear of the docks. Arrived at his lodging, which looked like a cabin, and smelt of tar, the old man placed bread and cheese on the table, and told his tired young companion to eat whilst he smoked and told his yarn, as he called it.

"Well, my boy," began the old sailor, "it's many a long year ago since I ran away from school, just as you have done. I did not like school. I was always hanging about the beach and boats, and thought it would be a fine thing to see foreign parts and have no lessons to learn. I thought about it often—at school over my books—at home under the apple-trees—by grandpapa's side, when he told Milly and I tales of the sea. I was about twelve years old—older than I should judge you to be, my lad—when I ran away from my poor mother; and dearly I paid for it, besides never seeing her alive again, or poor old grandfather either."

Here the old sailor gave three or four whiffs without

speaking, and looked steadily at the cuff of his jacket. Presently he roused up.

"I can't well call to mind all the 'ticklers, but here goes, as far as I can remember.

"It was a dark winter's night when I reached the docks—they were not so far off; I had watched about them many a time—and the first person I met I put just the same question to, my lad, as you did to me to-night. Maybe it was that which gave me a start, and made me look closely at you. But the mate I hailed answered sharp and stern, 'Come along, boy; I know a ship that is going to sea to-night, and the captain wants just such a smart lad. You will soon make your fortune.' He held his lantern close to my face, and I at the same time saw his. Child as I was I knew it was the face of a bad man. I would have made off, but I suppose the man saw my intention in my face, for he seized me roughly by the arm, which fairly took me off my legs, and before I could recover from my terror, I found myself in a boat being pulled out into the water. 'Boat ahoy!' shouted my companion, gruffly; then I saw we were near a large ship. I was half dragged and half pushed up the side, and then dropped on deck. All around was confusion and bustle, for the ship was under orders to leave the river that night, and I had been kidnapped just in time to sail in her, worse luck! I soon learnt the man who had brought me on board was the captain and owner of the ship. I also learnt my suspicion of his being a bad man was but too true. He possessed a black, base heart, and gave full sway to his evil passions. It was only men of bad character, whom no one else would

employ, who would sail with him, for he was known; so master and crew were well matched.

"It was not alone the kicks and blows which I had to bear, besides a scanty allowance of food, which made the life on board that ship so terrible to me, but it was the fearful scenes I had to witness. You will shudder, boy, when I tell you I saw actual *murder* committed before my eyes!

"I have told you how much the men hated the captain, who knew it, and rejoiced in the fact. He also knew his very life was not safe with them, so he always went about well armed. Even when asleep he kept a revolver, ready loaded, by his side. The men knew his revolver and knives were no child's toys, but would be used with scant mercy if their tyrant was provoked; so in general they managed to avoid rousing his anger. However, one day there was a quarrel going on among the crew, when the captain chose to interfere, and order the men to disperse and return to their duties. In general he would carelessly look on, and encourage the men to fight savagely. The men's evil passions were at their height, and no one heeded the captain's order.

"I had watched the fight between the men at a safe distance. I heard the captain's dreaded voice order them to disperse, and when no notice was taken of his command, I saw him deliberately draw his revolver, and shoot dead upon the spot the man nearest to him!

"There was a pause in the fight, and the men looked for an instant with horror at their murdered comrade. I almost expected to see them take vengeance upon their tyrant, but the captain never moved. Looking boldly upon the men, and pointing his revolver at them, he

declared he would shoot the first man who refused to obey his orders to return to his duty.

"The men sullenly obeyed their dreaded tyrant, and each returned to his duty. Their murdered companion was thrown overboard, and nothing more was thought of him.

"I could tell you, my boy, of many other terrible scenes on board that ship of which I was an unhappy witness; but I have told you enough to prove that nothing could be worse than the society of men who have no fear of God before their eyes, and who give full sway to their passions. I had had a good mother and religious teaching in my home in the old apple orchard. Think then of my horror to hear the name of God only spoke amidst the most profane swearing! I used to feel assured that He would visit us with some awful punishment, and I was not deceived. That dreadful ship was doomed!

"My life was so miserable; for the captain seemed to delight in exercising the most brutal treatment of me, and the men always gave me a kick or a cuff when I came in their way, that I often longed to end my misery in the black depths of the sea. It was only the pious teaching I had received and the hope of one day seeing my parents again, and begging their forgiveness for the sorrow I had caused them in running away to sea, which prevented me. I was only a poor helpless child, you know, and I could not have held out much longer; for I was becoming weak and thin, and quite unfit to perform the work expected of me, which consisted in obeying the orders of every man on board, just as they chose to exercise authority. My pale, wasted form called forth

no mercy, and there was no doctor on board to tend or notice me. I had to work, weak or ill, for my cruel masters gave me no rest.

"But a strange accident happened to alter all this. One night, when all except the watch were asleep, we were suddenly aroused by that most fearful sound at sea —the fire-bell. The ship was in flames! Every man worked willingly and well, for fire is the most fearful element with which sailors have to contend. Bad enough on land, but how much worse at sea, where there is no escape but by the boats from either being drowned or roasted alive!

"The men worked well at first, until they found the fire was mastering them. Then some one spread the report that the captain had several barrels of gunpowder on board, unknown to the men. No sooner was this whispered, than a wild panic seized them all, and they refused any longer to remain by the vessel. It was in vain the captain denied there being any powder on board, and declared the fire was already yielding to their efforts, and the vessel could yet be saved. The men angrily refused to believe him, but were busy lowering the ship's boats.

"All was confusion, for no one would obey orders. The captain, seeing it was no longer any use to resist, tried to exercise some control by telling off a certain number of men for each boat, and having provisions stowed in each for their use.

"All this time I was hiding behind a large water butt, where I could see all that was going on, trembling like a leaf, but afraid to go forwards. I saw with terror they were preparing to leave the vessel, and well

I knew my fate was to be left behind. Two of the boats were found to be unseaworthy, and the others would only just hold the captain and crew. Not a thought was given to me.

"One of the boats had been lowered, and the men allotted to her were just in the act of pushing off, when some one cried, with a wild shriek, 'The powder has caught fire!'

"In an instant the men on board made a frantic rush and sprang into the boat, which already held as many, one of whom was the captain, as it could safely hold. The result was easy to foresee. The boat capsized, and captain and crew were struggling for life together in the red waters, and the cold moon shone down on them.

"I could see the drowning sailors even then swearing and fighting together, each trying to save himself at the expense of the other. But I turned sick with terror as their drowning shrieks reached my ears, and I closed my eyes to the frightful scene crying, 'Mother, oh mother!' Soon all was quiet, and when I opened my eyes not a man was to be seen of the crew of that ill-fated ship!

"The fire was still raging, and I began to wonder how long it must be before it would reach me. There was also the fear lest the men had told the truth about gunpowder being on board. Any way, I believed my death was certain, and I tried to say my prayers as my mother had taught me so long ago; it seemed in that moment my remorse was great for the sorrow I had caused my forsaken parents. Weakened by long-continued ill-treatment, I felt my brain reel, and then I remembered no more until I found myself lying in a

comfortable cot, slung in a cabin of a ship. Some one was leaning over me, and I heard a kind voice saying, 'He will do now: it is a mercy we took him off when we did.'

"I had a long, long illness; and not until I was better did the kind surgeon tell me how I came under his care; how our ship had been seen in flames by a man-of-war, and a boat had been put off to find if any of the crew could be saved this fearful fate. It was with some danger of being suffocated two of the brave sailors had sprang on board, and had found only little me lying insensible on the deck, with my timbers all of a heap.

"After my recovery I joined the ship, and have ever since belonged to the navy. Though I have experienced many hardships, yet I have never been cruelly treated since my first ill-fated voyage. And that's the end of my yarn; so now we'll turn in."

Little Alfred had listened to the old sailor's story with the most eager attention. He had not ventured to interrupt him by asking a single question, but now he whispered in an awe-struck voice, "Do you think, sir, God punished you so dreadfully because you ran away from home, and left them all to be so frightened and sorry for you?"

"I believe, my boy, God allowed me to fall into that bad man's power because of my ungrateful disobedience. Does He not especially command obedience to parents? And may we not expect He will punish those who break this command, as well as any other? What would you like to do to-morrow, my lad? Will you go to sea?"

"I will go back to school, and then I will write to

mother, and tell her how sorry I am for having disobeyed and frightened her," said Alfred, bravely.

"I am glad to hear you say that, my boy; if your parents refuse to allow you to be a sailor, be sure they have some good cause for denying you. Anyhow, to begin life as a runaway is to take with you a heavy load of sin to begin with, a bad cargo, which is sure to draw down its own punishment."

"And you never saw your mother again, sir?" asked Alfred, as he lay down to sleep at last.

"No, boy. When I returned home, after many years, for the vessel which picked me off the burning ship was bound for a foreign station, my parents were dead, and no one in the village remembered me. But now turn in and get some sleep."

The little runaway bade good-bye to the old sailor the next morning, and returned to school.

The whole place was in a commotion; a messenger was just starting to search the country for him. At first the master was very angry, and gave him a thrashing; but Alfred was soon forgiven on his showing that he was really sorry both for what he had done and the anxiety caused by his wicked, thoughtless act, and resolved never to run away again.

THE PARTY AT NUMBER FIVE.

The Party—A Discontented Boy—A Little Act of Kindness—Mr. Tinkler's Plants—An Interesting Patient—An Invitation to Number Five.

NUMBER Five is having a party again, I do declare, Ethie! come quick and look; the wind is blowing back the boughs to-day, so you can see beautifully. There's Cousin Jack, and Ariel from the Square, and the little twins from Number Two, besides heaps of really big boys. And now what *are* they doing? There is the papa talking to them, and he has something in his hand—it is the new steam balloon; and, look, there's a Christmas-tree beyond! Oh dear, dear, I wish I was there! I wish we knew Number Five; they are always having parties!"

The sigh that accompanied the last remark nearly blew away the little pale girl, who, at her brother's call, had eagerly pushed forward to a place at the back window in the London house, which commanded a view

of all the gardens of the houses in Houghton Terrace. It was a favourite post of observation of both children. To Ethelind it furnished a fund of enjoyment on the days when she was weak and tired, and could not go out; for there was always some one in the gardens to be watched and admired. And though the trees at the end of them had provokingly thick branches, a kind breeze often blew them aside, and enabled her to guess as to what was going on.

Perhaps what made matters worse was that it was not so very long since this boy and girl had lived in a pretty country village, where they had a large garden full of sweet scented flowers—sweet peas, lavender, and old-man—and the garden was surrounded by a dear old paling, at which they had often spent many a summer afternoon side by side, smiling at the few passers-by, or rushing off after some bright-winged butterfly; but now the low paling had become a high wall, and the waving willow was gone. They were town children now.

To Georgie, the rosy-faced brother, it was more a pain than a pleasure to gaze out of the window. He did not possess his sister's contented soul, and he was always longing to enter into the paradise spread beneath him, and to play with the singularly fortunate children who had access to it. For this little brother and sister did not live in Houghton Terrace at all, but in a side street, whose houses were smaller and had no gardens, only a back yard; yes, that very yard on which Georgie's eyes fell discontentedly when he withdrew them for a moment from the fair prospect beyond.

Ethelind had her say, however, to make; Georgie's little peaked face lighted up with pleasure the while.

"It is indeed a party, Geordie, one of their very best, or the twins would not have their white coats on. I heard their mamma say, one day when the wind set this way, they must be kept for state occasions. And see! here is the little fairy from over the way. See, she has a fan, and flowers, and a red hood, looking so pretty, that Mabel, the big sister, is holding the baby to see her! That dear baby! Oh, Geordie, if we had a baby now, to crow, and wear a blue sash; and if I had a red cloak and a fan!"

But Georgie had no soul for babies, red cloaks, or fans; he was all for balloons, and tops, and mechanical toys, and cricket; and above all he did want society—the society of his own kind—and this it was made him look with such longing eyes at the hospitable door at Number Five, where there were two boys of about his own age just going in. He and Ethie had a daily governess, who taught them and took them walks, and was very good, but not very amusing; and then they had a papa very busy all day in the City, and very tired when he came home, and a mamma who was very kind to them, but had a great deal to do—making their clothes and ordering dinner, and writing letters, and helping papa in different ways, and who could not be brought to see that George ought to go to a boy's school for at least a year, or that Ethie was a very stupid companion for him. Indeed, she made the little girl blush one day by openly telling Georgie that he ought to think himself lucky to have such a sister, who was ready to work out all his plans, and yet had wit enough to devise a great many amusements out of her own head.

He must be patient, she said; some day he would

have boys enough for companions, and meantime, might she (mamma) ask one favour, that he would let Ethel hold him by the heels when he looked at the garden at Number Five, for she knew some day that he must tumble over, with so eagerly twisting his whole body over the sill.

After Georgie had been talked to in this way, he would feel a little ashamed of his impatience and discontent, and resolve, feebly I am afraid, that he would "be good;" and then a glimpse at the Number Five garden would upset him again, as it did on this particular day. Why should he, George Arthur Trevannoch, be shut up in a pokey little place, while boys no bigger than himself were playing within earshot the most delightful games, and he could not join them? It was a shame! he never went to parties, or did as other boys did. That was Georgie's favourite speech when anything went wrong. At last he grew so unhappy in the twilight, watching the merry party playing at forfeits—he could fancy them saying, "Here's a pretty thing"—and envying them, that Ethie left the window, hoping he would follow her and take to some occupation which would divert his mind.

The balloon had gone away out of sight, and the children seemed to be having something nice to eat—grapes and things; a fresh insult to Georgie, who had not tasted grapes that winter. Ethie and Georgie knew most of the company by sight, and had names for them. Ariel was the little boy in sailor's dress, who had the name of his uncle's yacht on the ribbon round his hat; the Zebra was another boy, who generally wore striped stockings, and so on. Sometimes the

children had had the right name wafted to them by a favourable wind, and then they carefully kept to it, as in the case of Sister Mabel and Cousin Jack. Their watch-tower in the spare-room window would have been delightful to Ethel if only Georgie would not want so to know Number Five. She would like, too, certainly, to wander about that holly-decked garden; but then she could be happy without it, and Georgie couldn't. Poor Georgie! If only a note was to come some day to ask him to one of the parties, how delightful it would be! Mamma would get out his best new suit, and his blue tie, and the stockings least mended at the knee, and Georgie would go off, looking so nice and smiling, and she, Ethie, would stand at the window and watch him stepping out of the French door at Number Five, and shaking hands with Cousin Jack—a real public school boy—and all the other little boys, and then losing himself in that shrubbery walk, which could not rightly be seen from their window, and therefore was a subject of constant speculation. Ethie saw the picture so plainly in her mind, that she could not help following Georgie to the bath-room, where she heard him idly turning taps and making the water fly about, to tell him of it.

And Georgie listened, really amused, but telling Ethel it only made him worse to talk that way; why did she do it? Now if she could manage to get him invited to Number Five, it would be a different matter, but as it was, he thought her an unkind thing to make him wish for it. Ethie had half a notion of being hurt at this, and going away to her dolls or her cats by herself, but she was the most unselfish girl in all

London, and soon gave up that idea. A better one came into her head.

"Georgie," she said, "little Tinkler fell down yesterday, just as I was coming in from our walk—you didn't see. I picked him up, and gave him my bun, because he cried so; and Mr. Tinkler, who was opposite, saw me, and he came and fetched little Tinkler and thanked me, and said if I'd step across any day he'd give me two or three choice flower-slips. Would it be 'any day' yet, do you think? Could we go and get them now? and then, as it's half-holiday, we could arrange our plants."

Georgie was graciously pleased to agree to this proposal, and presently he and Ethelind were happily engaged in the despised yard, amongst a grove of red flower-pots and dried-up stumps—their own particular treasures—among which Mr. Tinkler's four choice plants were to hold an honoured position.

A London back yard! Not a very charming place, you will think, and yet Ethel spent daily some happy hours in it; aye, and Georgie too. I must try and describe it. It was long and narrow, and made narrower by a little rockery running down the side of it, and concealing the lower part of the wall which divided it from the Houghton Terrace gardens, bounded by walls, on the top of which the neighbours' cats walked or basked in the sun. Out of respect for Ethie and her partialities, George never teased these cats, or even frightened them; so they frequently paid her a visit—on rare occasions receiving a tiny saucerful of milk, or a scrap of rice pudding, as a particular favour from Barbara, the cook.

Barbara didn't "hold with" keeping other people's cats, she said; but she did "hold with" Miss Ethie in her secret heart, and loved to please her, even when the doing of it did not exactly chime with her own inclinations. So Ethie had six cats on visiting terms in the yard, all with names of her bestowal, some of which their real mistresses had never heard.

There was patient Grisel, a very lean bony cat, with a contented purr always on hand; Rufus, a plump reddish tortoiseshell; Puck, Punch, Judy, and Mariana: all these were dear friends of Ethie's, and when she was in the back yard, one or more was sure to be there also, curled at her feet; and Ethie never felt dull or lonely, though she was a sickly little girl, as I said before; and often in hot or showery or very cold weather, she had to be left at home, while Georgie was taken out by Miss Thomson.

But to come back to the yard. The settling of the plants kept Georgie interested for some time, till a sudden shout in the direction of Number Five roused all his wishing powers again. He threw himself flat on his face on the flags, to Ethie's great dismay, and declared again that it was very hard, indeed it was a shame, that he was not invited.

"But we don't know them, dear," said Ethie, gently (she was a whole year older than Georgie, and quite a mother to him); "and so how could they invite you?"

"But they ought to know us!" said Georgie, angrily: then, sinking his voice into a plaintive tone, "Oh, Ethie' dear Ethie, can't you get to know them? Couldn't mamma send you on a half holiday, with Miss Thomson, to call on that girl Mabel?"

Ethelind shook her head. "That is not the fashion in London, indeed, Geordie," she said, sorrowfully. "It would be too forward—what people call pushing—and no one would like us for it, or really wish to know us. Mamma didn't even call next door, till she found out, through Dr. Davey, that the lady wished it very much."

"You don't care about it; you don't feel like me," said Georgie, with another despairing plunge. "No, don't bring your heliotrope to me to smell; everything makes me sick here. I want to go to Number Five; and if you really loved me, Ethie, you would find a way. Mamma says you are clever; and what's the use of your cleverness, if you won't try to please me?"

Poor Ethie! this was being hard on her, to ask such an impossible thing. She set down the heliotrope, and tried to think of something comforting to say, but Georgie was really crying for the moon now, and she felt almost relieved when her mother's voice from the window startled Georgie out of his recumbent position.

"Get up, Georgie," she said, "you will be all over dust and blacks. And what is all this complaining about? I am afraid half-holidays are too long for you; you don't seem able to amuse yourself. Run now, and take me a letter to the pillar."

It was lucky mamma seemed to want no answer to her questions; even Georgie seemed relieved at that, and said no more about Number Five when Ethie helped him to make himself tidy.

All the same, Ethie thought a great deal about Georgie's wish, and racked her poor brains to imagine some way of getting acquainted with the delightful family at Number Five, short of being rude or pushing.

Suppose one of the twins fell down, like little Tinkler. and she picked it up; or suppose the wind blew that splendid kite of Cousin Jack's into their tree (they had one tree in the yard) and Georgie had to get it out, would that be sufficient introduction to warrant an invitation to Number Five's parties? She could not decide; but meantime the twins tripped merrily down the street, and never did fall; and no kite, nor ball, nor shuttlecock flew their way. Chance did not favour their wishes.

But Ethie went on hoping for Georgie's sake, and nursed her dolls and petted her cats, without a moment's thought of herself.

By-and-bye something took place at Number Five which startled the children; all the blinds were kept down for a week, and then little black figures flitted about the garden, laughing and shouting much as usual.

Ethel eagerly counted them over. "I saw the papa yesterday, and there's the mamma walking with Mabel. Cousin Jack is gone back to school; you saw the cab come last Tuesday week, Georgie. The boys were playing in the garden just now, and we met the twins and baby out walking to-day. So they are all safe. Who can be dead?"

"Perhaps an aunt or uncle, or a grandmamma or grandpapa," suggested their mother; "it is evidently a near relation, for they are all in deep mourning."

Ethel thought a good deal about the matter, till a new interest arose for her. One day she heard a piteous mew in a dark corner of the yard, and there crouched a mass of soft tangled fur, out of which peeped two great green eyes. A very large cat, or a small lion, which was it? Even Ethel, the animal-lover, approached

it cautiously, but she was soon reassured. The poor fondling creature was nothing but a cat in distress. Its leg was badly hurt—Ethel could tell that much, and she tenderly made a bed for it in a corner, before she ran to call Barbara.

Poor Ethel burst into tears when Barbara pronounced its leg to be broken. Some rough boy had most probably thrown a stone at it. It was a very handsome Angora cat, evidently used to petting, and, suffering as it was, it seemed to like Ethie's caresses. She was to have gone with Georgie and a little cousin from the country to the Zoological Gardens that afternoon, but she implored her mamma to leave her behind to wait on the poor cat. She could not enjoy herself for thinking of it, she was sure, and Georgie would have Walter to talk to, so he would not miss her.

In vain Georgie tried to shake her resolution. "Please, please," she answered, "let me stay, it would not be kind to leave poor pussy. No treat could make me forget her." So mamma and Georgie and Walter went off, leaving Ethie sitting by her poor new pet, who was lying comfortably on the doll's largest mattress, sheltered from the sun by an old umbrella, deftly arranged by Georgie.

On the return of the party, Ethie met them with a smiling face. "Oh, mamma, I am so happy! Dr. Davey called while you were out, and I asked him to see my poor new cat, and he was so kind. He set its leg, and he says it will get well, and be a valuable cat. Even Barbara says it would be a pleasure to have a beast of that sort about, and she's going to let it sleep in her kitchen to-night."

"I wonder who it belongs to," said mamma, meditatively. "It is odd, Ethie, you never noticed it before. It must have newly come to London, and lost itself, or perhaps it could go no further on its way home, and so, happily, wandered into your hands, my little Samaritan."

"All the same, Ethie, I think you were a muff to lose the seal for it," said Georgie. "Barbara could have minded it for you one afternoon."

"But Barbara would never have thought of asking Dr. Davey to attend it," said Ethie, gravely. "I was sorry to lose the seal, and the dear little elephant, Georgie, but I think it was best that I stayed at home."

"Duty first, and pleasure afterwards, my child," said mamma, with a smile. "Georgie doesn't know the comfort of that homely little maxim yet."

"Brush," as Ethel called the new cat, on account of its splendid tail, improved in health daily, and was so far recovered, that one day when there was a chilly east wind, it limped across the yard, and took its place by Barbara's fireside. It evidently intended to be the pet of the house, and when it grew quite well and strong, would be a real show cat, every one said.

"Mamma," declared Ethie one day, "suppose any one came to claim Brush now, I should be broken-hearted."

"But then think, child, of the hearts that may be broken wondering what has become of her," said mamma, "for you yourself say she has been a great pet with some one."

"Yes, that's true," said Ethie, meditatively; "but at any rate, mamma, I am sure it will be the great trial

of my life parting with her, and I do hope her friends have given her up now, and got quite reconciled to her loss," added tender-hearted Ethel.

If Ethie could only have known that at that very moment Brush's friends had their hands on the clue that was to guide them to their lost darling!

"Brush," or "Fatima," as she was called in her old home, had been the pet for some years of a kind old lady living in the country.

On her somewhat sudden death, the cat had been taken to London to live with a married daughter of her mistress, but Fatima felt strange there, and took the first opportunity of escape into the surrounding wilds of roof and garden. There, scudding along with her marvellous tail spread out, she had excited the wonder of some thoughtless lad, who, by a too well-aimed stone, had broken the poor thing's leg, in which state it had limped into Ethie's territory.

This was Fatima's story, which she repeatedly mewed into Ethie's ear, or tried to make her understand, when Ethie was writing or teaching her the piano, though for many a day the little girl could only guess at it. But where did Fatima live, and from what house had she escaped, and did the people want her back again? Listen to Ethie, as she pours into Georgie's ear the story, one afternoon, when, as often happened, she had been left at home with Brush and a bad cold.

"Georgie, Georgie, I'm dancing with joy!" began Ethie, her usually pale cheeks crimson with excitement. "Only think, Brush's mistress has called."

"But I thought that was the very thing you were afraid of?" said bewildered Georgie.

"So I was, but I'm not now," said Ethie, "for—listen Georgie, dear Georgie—you're to go there to-morrow!"

"And carry the cat, and have all the errand-boys laughing at me!" said Georgie, hotly; "no thank you, Ethelind."

"Oh, Georgie dear, don't call me Ethelind, and do listen, for it is just what you longed for come true; it's *Number Five* that called, and you are invited there to *tea* to-morrow, to get acquainted with the boys, and I'm to go when my cold is well; oh, isn't it delightful!"

This did sound something worth listening to. Georgie's cheeks became, if possible, a little redder than usual, and he was quite ready to pay attention to a quieter and more detailed account of the visit from Brush's relations. "Is it really the cat from Number Five?" he inquired.

"Yes, really," said Ethie, "but we couldn't guess that, because it only arrived the day before in a hamper from the poor grandmamma's house that died, and they meant to be so kind to it; but it got frightened at the numbers and the strangeness, they think, and somehow it got away, and wandered over to us."

"Was it the mamma who came, or the boys?" asked Georgie.

"The mamma, and a very nice one too," said Ethie; "thinner than she looks between the leaves, you know, but with such a kind smile. The baker's boy told her we had taken in a strange lame cat. And she won't take Brush back; she has given her to me; and only asks leave to visit her now and then; and she asked me and you to tea directly. And then mamma told her of the pleasure we had watching her children in the garden

—and do you know, they cannot see us a bit at our window, because the trees grow so close—so the Number Five mamma said we were to come round and be introduced. Gerald and Tom are her boys, and Tom is five days older than you. And the Number Five mamma went round into the yard, and saw Brush asleep under her tent; and she kissed me, and thanked Barbara and gave her a gold sovereign, and said it was such a relief to her to think that her poor old mother's cat was not wandering homeless about the world, but had found such a kind refuge. And the Number Five mamma——"

"Ethie, darling," broke in her mother, "try to call your new friend by her name—Mrs. Seagrave."

"Yes, mamma, I will, but you please tell Georgie the rest, for my throat is scratchy with talking."

"I don't think you have left me much to say, dear," said her mother, smiling, "but I think Georgie will have something to thank the kind sister for now. Was it not your great wish, my boy, to be invited to Number Five, and hasn't sister Ethel managed it at last? not by begging for it, or pushing herself forward improperly, but by being gentle and kind to everything and every one, and staying at home nursing sick cats, when she might have been enjoying herself in the Zoological."

"You're a jolly old girl, Ethie!" said Georgie, recovering, with an effort, from a paralysis of pleasure, "and it has been your doing all along, and thank you very much." And Ethie received the most smacking kiss Georgie had ever given her in his life, and it pleased her very much. "I only wish you could go too," he added, as an afterthought; "but you can watch me from the window."

"Yes," said Ethel, cheerfully, "I shall like that. Oh, Georgie!" she whispered, "do you remember the day you wanted so to go to the party at Number Five, and you told me to try and manage it? I never thought it could come true, though I wished it so much, and now here it is without our trying. It is rather a nice world, isn't it, dear, though books do call it a vale of tears?"

"Oh, such books are not meant for us," said Georgie, loftily.

By the next Christmas time they were all such friends, that when there was a grander party than ever at Mr. Seagrave's, Ethie went in a pretty white frock and a red cloak, just like that worn by Fairy.

Little girls who try to be unselfish and kind often do find the world nice, aye, and are able, too, to make it pleasant to their brothers and other people. Georgie visited a good deal at Number Five after this, and in time went to a large school, and had many boy companions; but he never found one whose society he preferred to that of his sister Ethie.

JEM AND HIS CAT.

A Kind Crossing-Sweeper—Jem's House—At the Crossing—Sunday—Going to School—A New Life.

"MAW, miah-h!" The voice was weak, but very pitiful, and reached a very tender little heart, though it was only cased in a ragged jacket, no waistcoat, and half a shirt.

Jem Peters stood and listened. London streets were not very much frequented this snowy morning in March, and he had this long dull Upper Bank Street all to himself just now, as he pattered along, returning from a message he had been delivering from his grandmother at "Airey" No. 7. "What was that melancholy little cry, then, and where did it come from?"

"It aint a babby," said Jem, meditatively; and then a minute later he added, "but it's a cat, and a nice 'un too."

It was indeed a handsome cat, that lay curled up in the corner of a blank wall close by, and Jem, who could neither resist child nor animal, soon clambered up alongside of the creature, stroking it and endeavouring

to persuade it to leap down. Puss liked his attentions, but Jem speedily discovered that the poor thing had hurt its leg, and was resting on its cold bed of snow simply because it had not the power to move; it had evidently stepped on a sharp piece of broken glass in its clamberings, for the pure white snow was stained with blood in places, and it stood up and held one paw aloft, as if to tell its misfortunes to its compassionate friend.

"Granny 'll make a fine to-do if I take it home," said Jem, half aloud; "but it'll die here in the cold, the poor beast—so here goes." And he lifted the heavy creature in his arms and leapt on to the pavement with it.

Jem Peters was a crossing sweeper by profession, though he was also errand-boy to a number of houses with which his Granny kept up a connection as purchaser of kitchen-stuff. Jem had been beaten, shaken, scolded, aye, and sworn at from his earliest youth; at home he hardly knew what a kind word meant, and he had never entered a church since his christening; but all the same no one could doubt that some of the good gifts God showers on His children had fallen upon him, for he was gentle, loving, and generous.

At the same time he was as ignorant as any little black heathen, and his language was at times as profane as that of the wicked people around him; for whom else had he to copy?

"If she do beat me for it I can't help it," said Jem, toiling on towards "home" with his furry darling purring against his heart; "and she'll lie uncommon

warm next me o' nights." From which it appeared Jem meant to adopt the foundling he carried.

Fate favoured him; Granny was out when he reached the wretched hole he called home, and he stumped up to his corner in the garret, and laid his cat on a heap of shavings known as his "bed."

He watched her a bit, and felt in his pocket for a farthing to buy her a drop of skim milk, but not one was forthcoming; so he got his broom, and adjuring Puss to lie still till he came back, prepared, breakfastless himself, to set out for his crossing. Granny had made a rule that till he brought at least fourpence home he was not entitled to food, and it was often afternoon before Jem, gaunt and hungry, would dash in with the money, and seize the bit of coarse bread and the pan of tea simmering on the wretched hearth. He never thought somehow of spending on himself any of the money he so hardly earned—it was Granny's, he would tell you. There, again, this wretched little cast-away child showed that he, too, had been made after a pattern of a pure truth-loving God, far as he had fallen away from that likeness in most things.

When Puss saw him prepare to leave her, however, she had her qualms about the safety of her situation, and, with a little alarmed cry, she rustled out of the shavings after him. In vain Jem told her Granny was out for the day—he knew that by the signs around him. Puss said as plainly as she could that where he went she must go. Jem was perplexed; at last a thought struck him, his wardrobe, consisting of another pair of old boots and another half shirt, along with three bits of

rope and a candle end, was contained in the lower part of an old hat-box which had been given him by a servant with whom Granny had dealings, these he turned out, and putting some shavings at the bottom of it, he placed Puss within, and prepared to take her to his crossing. It was a tightish fit, but Puss approved of the plan.

"There's Syd the shoeblack, he'll help me keep a eye on her," meditated Jem, aloud, as he set off, rather pleased not to be parted from his new treasure. The plan was a success; Jem brushed and Puss watched, and many a kindly old maid dropped an extra penny into Jem's dirty hand because of the invalid cat. Of course the boy had his troubles; rude lads would at times pass and frighten and insult the treasure in the hat-box, but for a halfpenny a day, Syd the shoeblack was brought over to defend Puss, when Jem was otherwise occupied.

Granny had of course found and grumbled at the new inmate of the garret; but since Jem never asked for food for her, and even brought more than his usual contribution towards housekeeping, she contented herself with grumbling.

Jem adored his cat, and shared all his meals with her; she had recovered from her wound, and though she still limped slightly, she was now a fine handsome tortoise-shell cat, that often leaped from her hat-box to pick her way daintily over his crossing, if he stood on the other side.

The only day in the week Puss disliked was Sunday. Granny, poor heathen that she was, only marked the day by sleeping later and being more at home; and Jem had his way of keeping Sunday, by leaving Puss and the hat-box in the garret altogether, and only repairing

to his crossing just before and just after church. Sunday was not a good day for crossings; ladies left their purses at home, and men wore tight kid gloves, and did not like fumbling for halfpence. But then both Jem and Puss had real dinner on Sundays, though they were very hungry before it came, as Granny provided no breakfast on that day.

Jem was always an early riser, and could not take the extra two hours in bed on Sunday which Granny did, so he usually sauntered out in the empty streets, and wearied for dinner-time. He was airing himself on the sunny side one Sunday, about three weeks after Puss's arrival, when a tall fair lady spoke to him and asked him did he go to school.

Jem shook his shock head.

"But did he wish to do so?" she inquired.

Jem shook his head again. School was not for such as him.

"School, with breakfast before it—nice hot milk and bread," said the lady, gently.

Jem stared. March was still lingering bleak and blue in the draughty streets; hot food sounded tempting—

"I couldn't come without her," said Jem at last, pointing vaguely in the direction of the garret, some streets away.

"Oh bring her, then," said the gentle lady, eagerly; "is she your sister, my boy?"

"No-o," stammered Jem, she aint."

"Your cousin—your friend?"

"No-o-o," said Jem, more puzzled.

"Never mind," pursued the lady; "it will be all right—bring her with you, and she shall have breakfast too. Don't forget the address—Martin's Court, at the

end of Twiner street;" and she glided away, leaving Jem all eyes and wonder.

He deliberated a moment, and then said, "We'll go!" and ran home for his cat; he had not an idea but that the lady thoroughly understood at last who he meant by "she," and certainly there had been a double invitation to breakfast and school.

It was a curious little object that presented itself at Martin's Court that morning—a dirty little boy with a handsome cat in his arms.

"No cats admitted here," said a smiling, bustling woman, who was ladling milk and porridge into basins.

"She was promised a breakfast, and me too," said Jem, sturdily, then catching a sight of his friend of the morning, he turned appealingly to her.

"You said it, you know you did!" he urged.

And then it flashed on the gentle manager what she had said, for she recognised Jem as the little street waif she had spoken to.

And the end was that Puss had a saucer of milk, and sat demurely by Jem, and breakfast over, she walked with an air of possession up to the big fire-place at the end of the room, and washed her face, and doubled up her paws, and fell asleep.

But Jem sat still and heard a hymn sung, and was not pushed out of the room by any one and told this was not the place for such as him; and then he heard other boys, no bigger than himself, answering questions and learning strange pleasant sounding words, and his heart swelled, he could not tell why; and when the gentle lady came near him next, he touched her on the sleeve, and said, hoarsely, "Learn me some'at; I don't

know nothing"—which was not good grammar, but expressed clearly the wish of his heart at the time.

So Jem learnt one text and a bit of a hymn, and said it constantly, as if it were a charm, all the week through, and felt a different boy all over. He had stumbled across a new sort of men and women, people who gave him nice things and said pleasant words to him, and expected nothing in return—people who told him wonderful tales of a Better Land, over the crossing to which he one day would tread perhaps.

Now, too, he found out that he was not alone Granny's child—Granny who beat him, and was never mother to his mother, only lived in the house when that poor soul died, and took her child, because she thought she could make something out of him—no! he was not only Granny's child, but God's—God who lived in heaven, and who kept him alive.

"The day you were called Jem they promised you should serve and love Him," said the gentle lady one day, trying to explain Jem's baptism to the little ignorant lad.

"Did they?" said Jem, quite pleased; "then you'll show me how."

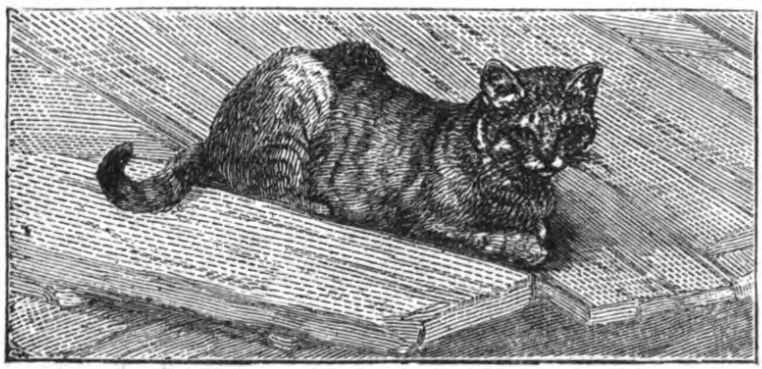
And as far as lay in her power the gentle lady did show him how. Granny dying shortly after, Jem became a regular frequenter of the Martin Street school: he left his trade of crossing-sweeper, and took to shoemaking, for which he showed a decided talent, and which suited his health better than the more exposed life. He had a tiny little bed in the school-house, and Puss slept by his side; she once thought the rug in front of the matron's fire a more comfortable place, but

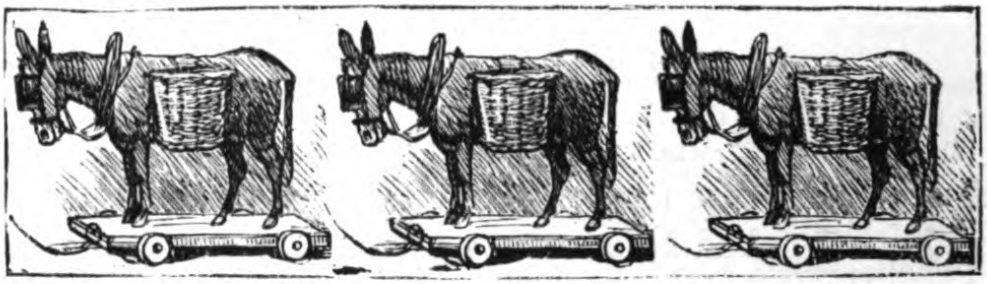
in the middle of the night, missing Jem, she set up such a wailing, that for the future Jem had orders to carry her off. And here we may leave them happy and content, these little strays from great London streets, directed by the finger of God, and guided, by the hands of His ministering angels on earth, into pleasant shelter.

There are in these days, thank God, many such refuges in great cities, where neither poverty nor ignorance are a bar to entrance, and where the little children are suffered to enter in just as they are, and are drawn out of the mire of their sad lives into a happier and holier atmosphere.

Of such small souls are verily the kingdom of heaven come on earth, you would think, if you saw their bright and loving faces, after a little notice, a little love, has been expended upon them by the more favoured ones around.

H. A. F.





THE HISTORY OF A SOLDIER, A DONKEY, AND A DOLL.

CHAPTER I.

A German Home during the Franco-Prussian War—Toy-making—Making a Donkey—Old Meyer, the Soldier—News from the War—The Donkey Gets a Hole in His Side—How the Donkeys were Finished—Working at Toys.

ONLY a few years ago, there was a time of terrible trouble for many a French and many a German family. A great war was going on between the two countries, and hundreds of thousands of the Germans had gone away as soldiers into France. When it was all over, there were wives who would never see their husbands again on earth, sisters who would never meet their brothers, little children whose fathers would never come back. But now those at home did not know as yet whether any of these sad things were

to come to pass or not. The soldiers were still in France, fighting great battles, of which they heard from time to time; and how many of them would return, or when they would return, no one could tell.

Going back to this time, let us look into a house in a German village near the town of Sonneberg. Outside it was a pretty cottage, almost covered with climbing plants, that trailed over the door and hung down over the windows. Inside, the white boarded floor was strewn with shavings; a pitcher of water stood near the stove; a tray of plaster was on the table, with plenty of paint and paint-brushes.

The children had come home from school, and were at work making toys; for this family lived in the country of toy-making, and, with many others, were employed by the toy-manufactories of Sonneberg, and supplied by them with moulds. The woman had one of these metal moulds in her hands, and a little blue-eyed girl was watching her, for she was about to perform a very curious operation—going to make a donkey.

Taking some plaster, which had been heating on the fire, she poured it into the mould, and then moved it gently about, so that it spread all over the metal inside.

While she was thus engaged, a boy, who had been sitting near the door, cutting out wooden stands, with a box of little wheels at his elbow, exclaimed, "Mother, here's Meyer!" and instantly disappeared out of the door to meet Meyer, whoever he was.

Presently a shadow fell on the patch of sunlight on the floor within the doorway, and in came—first, the little boy, talking, and looking back over his shoulder, and nearly tumbling over the cat in so doing—secondly

a very tall, thin old man, perfectly erect, with an abundance of rough white hair, a pointed nose and chin, bright eyes that went all round the room and saluted the girl in a minute, while he nodded pleasantly to her. He carried a knotty stick, though he was straight and strong enough to need no support, and his step was firm and measured. He was an old soldier. The time had been when he was young—as young as the father of the children; and he, too, had been away fighting and marching, and knew what war was like; and now there was nothing in the world in which he was so much interested as the war in France, carried on by younger men, when he was too old to join them. More than once every day he went all the way to Sonneberg, to ask if there was any news; and, if he heard any, he never failed on his way back to go into Frau Furst's cottage, and tell her what it was.

"Any news, Herr Meyer?" she said, while the little girl placed one of the wooden chairs for him, and she herself turned the donkey out of the mould —a pitiful-looking object in whitish plaster, without his rough skin, or his mane, or his ears, or his tail—even without his head. Still she carefully held the plaster donkey standing on her hand.

"Have you no news?" she asked again.

Meyer nodded, and leant his sharp chin on the top of his stick, while he pressed his lips tightly together, and twisted his eyebrows, making a face that would frighten any one, and saying, "Bad news—very bad!" as plainly as words.

"I have heard it just now at Sonneberg," he began; "but don't you look so pale, Frau Furst."

But she had good cause to look pale, for Herr Meyer went on to tell her that there had been a terrible battle. The cavalry regiment in which her husband was had had some of the hardest of the fighting, and great numbers of them had fallen. The children could not understand that their father was most likely dead, or wounded and

HERR MEYER, THE OLD SOLDIER.

in agony, but she could. The toy fell from her hands, and she sank on the chair behind her.

"He must be gone; how could he have escaped? He must be dead, among the rest. Poor Joseph! poor Joseph!" And she buried her face in her checked

apron, and rocked herself to and fro, with many sobs and sighs behind the plaid cotton—heavy sighs, as if her heart were bursting and breaking.

The boy looked up at her helplessly with a pile of the smooth boards in his hand. The girl had caught the falling donkey, making a deep dint in his side with her small thumb. She did not think of that now. She had only a sense of some trouble; she did not know what it was—a vague sense of something sad that made her mother cry; so she cried too, hanging on the back of the chair, and holding Neddy still in one hand, making the dint deeper and deeper.

Old Meyer shuffled his stick about, and two or three times he began to talk, but he could get no further than "Well, now I." At last he did get on to, "Well, now I am sorry I told you at all, Frau Furst, or that I said it so suddenly. He may be all right, you know."

But it was hard to convince her that he might be all right, when he had just said that so many were killed of the very regiment he was in. It was a chance after all, and the chance was against him. When Herr Meyer saw her calmer, he went away, and at once she turned to the toys; they kept her from thinking of sadder things.

"Ma, I've put my thumb through the donkey!" cried the little girl, looking aghast at Neddy, when the cottage was quiet again.

"No matter, child, no matter. Put it with the rest." And the mother went on with her work, too deeply troubled about great things to think much of little ones.

Many were the donkeys that she moulded that day, so many that at last quite a troop of them stood side by side on the table in the window. Then she moulded

"ROSY APPLES FILLED THE BASKET WHICH SHE CARRIED ON HER ARM."—
(*See p.* 136.)

their heads, with very long necks, and laid them beside the owners. Meanwhile the boy had made unnumbered stands, and the little girl's clever fingers had plaited fine straws into many pairs of little paniers, for that afternoon they worked silently, and therefore quickly.

In the evening another boy came in, much taller than his brother. He had been working all day, but his work was not over yet. To him Frau Furst told the news, in a low voice, lest the younger children might gather what it was from hearing it repeated. He pretended to think lightly of it, saying it was a hundred to one but his father was safe. She did not know his anxiety, or how his heart sickened when he heard that news. It was all hidden for her sake.

Later on, the plaster animals were covered by this boy with a sort of dark-coloured paper skin, made rough and furry. Then he put on their woolly manes and queer plaited rope-like tails. His brother was painting the stands a brilliant green—convenient patches of verdure that walk about under the donkeys wherever they go, keeping them always in clover. Then they were nearly finished. Their long parchment ears were now gummed on, and the paint-brush touched them up with eyes and hoofs and white noses. Their small bridles were next fastened with little tin ornaments, and a saddle put on each, bound to him with a strap of pink tape. Then the little baskets were slung across their backs, and the wire hooks inserted in their necks, on which the heads were hung swinging and nodding. While the elder boy was doing all this, the little girl and her mother were plaiting straw baskets for donkeys still in the future; and the younger boy,

having fixed the wheels on the stands, was glueing the present donkey tribe to them, as fast as each was ready.

"There's only one of them I don't like," said the elder brother, when he was reviewing them standing all together finished. "This one here was touched roughly before it hardened out of the mould. It must have been, for there's a dint in its side."

"I know what it was," the mother said, examining the animal in question very closely; "but I don't think it shows. I can't see anything wrong with it."

"No, not now," the boy explained, "because I have stretched the skin across it, but whoever gets that donkey will find a hole in him some day."

For an hour or two they were all put out into the garden on a tray to dry. Then they were brought in again and left upon the table. No orders were given that they were not to be touched or handled before the glue was quite hard. These children worked at toys, not played with them. All they understood was that they were to be made and sent to the manufactory at Sonneberg, and there they were mysteriously changed by their sister Dorel into bread and butter, or even round rosy apples filled the basket which she carried on her arm. Dorel, the pretty sister, in her white cap and red cloak, returned to the house late every evening, and went out early in the morning, so when they came down-stairs next day they found that she and the donkeys had all gone away together. They set about making other toys, carving and moulding and painting; for these days they had to work hard, till the soldier who was so far away would come home again. But would he ever come? Perhaps not. Poor father!

CHAPTER II.

Other Toy-makers—The Toy Factory—Doll-making—Dorel's Work—What Dolls Hair is made of—And How Wax Dolls are finished.

WHILE they were patiently beginning to work again, a girl of fifteen was trudging along the road to Sonneberg, with a large basket on her arm. Others joined her farther on. They wished Dorel good morning, and, in return for a peep at her donkeys, showed what they had. One, raising the straw cover a little, gave her a sight of unpainted toys—plates, cups and saucers; another had carved wooden animals—horses and cows. A third carried a small basket in her hands. Within it were lions and tigers, white sheep, and goats, and red foxes as big as either, and elephants only a little larger. More still—there were Noahs, and Noah's wives, and Noah's sons, and Noah's sons' wives, too many to be counted, all having straight arms hanging down at their sides, and funny round hats and funnier faces—mouth and nose in no place in particular, and eyes anywhere. There were piles of common jointed dolls, roughly cut and coloured. The girls were all going together to the toy manufactories, to give up the work done at home.

When Dorel had arrived at Sonneberg, and received

the money for hers, she went to another manufactory, where they were making nothing but dolls, and where she was to work all day. Some women arrived with her, delivering their basket-loads there. These people were not so skilful as Frau Furst's family. They were only able to make parts of toys; their baskets were full of dolls' arms and legs, moulded in a kind of papier-maché, and still unpainted—some the cheap jointed Dutch dolls you know so well. Before going up-stairs she passed an open door. Men were inside painting those legs and arms by the hundred, varnishing them, and putting on the feet destined for inferior dolls those blue and red boots which are never to be destroyed or taken off until, perchance, the feet come off with them.

Up-stairs women and girls were fast arriving and setting about their day's work. Some were sewing the dolls together and filling them with bran, while from the shelves hundreds of heads looked down on them—heads in wax, and china, and wood, and india-rubber, but all without hair. At another place these heads were being made, and it was to that part of the workroom that Dorel turned. Several were cast in white wax tinged with pink, more still were only coated with wax. Some of the girls were busy painting them, giving them the rosy colour on the cheeks and red lips, and dark fine lines for eyebrows. Others were putting in those little round glass balls with which the dolls are supposed to see.

Beyond this workroom was another room, a wonderful place, where the most skilful workmen were employed in making superb dolls, that were to sell, not for so many shillings, but for so many guineas. They were adjusting their little teeth, and moulding their waxen

hands, and putting in that secret machinery which was to make them open and close their eyes, or walk about, or say "mamma!" and "papa!" As fast as they were finished they were being passed on to the dolls' milliners, who dressed the little aristocrats in finery of all colours, copying from fashion-plates spread before them, or from illustrated papers which had come all the way from London or Paris.

Dorel's work was not with such exalted specimens as these, still she had to be very clever in her own way. It was her part to take the best of the dolls, those whose faces were not to be daubed with paint, but softly tinted, and give the peach-like bloom to the cheeks and necks. To do this she had to hold them over a small furnace till the wax glowed and glistened with heat. Then instantly withdrawing them, they were laid aside; but a moment too long over the furnace would make them not beautiful but ugly, with noses out of shape, and flattened ears, and eyebrows melted off.

Even yet these dolls, for all the fine colour in their faces, had not a vestige of hair. But they were passed on to a woman who had three or four heaps near her of a glossy silken material—brown, black, golden, and flaxen. It had come from England, where it had been prepared from the hair of Angora cats—those large cats with long soft fur and thick bushy tails. She put on the dolls' wigs with wonderful expertness. She might well do it quickly, it was her work from morning till night. When the gum adhered quite fast, another work-woman took them up one by one, and drawing out of the furnace her small curling tongs, or crimping iron, curled or crimped the hair. Perhaps in this hairdressing

process her hot hands had touched the delicate waxen features. But the girl next to her examined each of them as fast as they were laid down. If she perceived a soil she had only to sprinkle the face with alabaster powder, and the pearly dust made it perfect again.

So were they working day after day at Sonneberg, the children and sisters and wives of some of the German soldiers. And where was Dorel's father, of whom she thought so often and so fearfully that her hand trembled as she held the waxen faces one after another over the furnace? Ah, where!

CHAPTER III.

The Wounded Soldier—Succoured by a Poor Widow—Poor little Marie goes for the Doctor—French Reproaches for a Deed of Charity—The Soldier Recovers—And tells Marie about making Toys—Marie has none—The Soldier Departs at last.

NOW our story carries us away to France.

A party of German soldiers, mounted on horseback, were riding out of a French village, where they had been asking questions of all the frightened people, to discover for their comrades whether there were any French soldiers about, and where they were. They were riding out between the boundaries of two orchards, when there was a loud report, and from the hedge a shot flew in among them. As the smoke cleared off, a man was running away through the trees. His shot had taken effect. One of them had fallen from his horse. Two others leaped to the ground, while the rest rode on.

"It's Furst," said one who was from the same village near Sonneberg, and knew the fallen man.

"Is he living?" the other asked.

Yes; he was living, but badly wounded, and unconscious. What should they do? They began to talk about leaving him there, or demanding that he should be lodged in one of the houses; but how could they tell if the people in the house would take care of him? The only thing they were agreed about was that they could not carry him away. Yet how could they leave him there alone on the dusty road to die? And even while they stood over him they dreaded more shots from behind the hedge.

"Stay!" said one of them, as they were just turning away. "Here's some one coming."

The door of a house had opened, and a pale-faced woman dressed in black came towards them. She had been looking out from her window, and her heart had taken pity on the wounded soldier, although he was not of her nation. But how was she to tell them what she wanted? She did not know German, and they did not know French; but she had left the door of her house open, and touching one of them on the arm, she pointed back to it. They understood her at once, and, raising the wounded man between them, carried him in. They went back through an outer room, into one beyond. It was a half-empty, comfortless room, for this woman was a widow, and the poorest in the village; but they were glad to leave their comrade there, and when they had laid him upon the bed, they went out, bending down their leather helmets to pass through the small low doorway. They bowed to her a most gracious salute from the gate, and mounting their horses, rode away.

They did not notice anybody in the outer room,

but there was some one there who was frightened very much at those great tall men, their long sabres hanging at their sides, and their spurred cavalry boots shaking the floor and the cottage. In a corner of the room sat pale little Marie, the widow's only child. Her face was thin, but sweet and smiling, without a trace of colour; and its whiteness made her large eyes seem darker still.

The woman in black had returned to the inner room. She followed softly, and peeped in. The man was lying on the bed, very still, with her mother bending over him. But when he tried to move, he gave a long loud cry, terrifying her so, that she was afraid to be alone at the door another moment; and running in, she hid her face in the folds of her mother's dress.

"Don't be frightened, darling," the widow said. "We shall have him better soon. Run away, and wait for me outside."

Marie went back to the outer room, where she sat trembling near the window, wondering who could have hurt the man so much. It all reminded her of something that happened about a year ago, when her father was lying in that room quite still, and they let her go sometimes to peep in at the door, telling her not to make a noise, for he was in a very happy sleep, and she should not wake him. And then she had been taken by a neighbour for a whole day to a distant farmhouse. Such a happy day it was, when she was getting fruit in the orchard, and looking at the farmyard, and riding the pony round and round the paddock, filling her apron with corn, and feeding the chicks and the impudent noisy sparrows

—not to mention the two pretty white pigeons that fluttered down, never minding the growls of Fritz in his kennel. Oh, it was all so bright and happy—a day like a picture! But when she came home all full of glee, and asked if he were awake yet, her mother had cried bitterly, and pressed her in her arms, saying that he was gone away, but they would see him again. Since then they had both worn black—an ugly colour, Marie thought—and somehow the recollection of that day at the farmhouse was always sad, though it had been in itself so happy. Now all this reminded her of that time, so she looked very quiet and thoughtful when her mother came into the room.

"Run, Marie," her mother said, "to the doctor's house, and tell Monsieur Dumare to come as quickly as he can. Will you remember the message?—The doctor is to come as quickly as he can."

The child said, "Yes," brightening up at the thought of her important errand, and away she ran, her wooden shoes, or *sabots* as they are called, making a clattering noise on the rough stony street, her old worn frock flying in the wind, her arms swinging up and down and round to help her on the faster.

But she had soon to stop running; and it was with slow steps and an aching side that she went up the gravelled path to the doctor's pretty rustic cottage, where the woodbine was hanging wild over the porch, and the roses were in flower by the windows, falling to pieces with bloom, and showing their yellow hearts.

The doctor's servant was holding the door open; the doctor was just going out. They both looked very hard at the poorly-dressed little girl while she gave her

message, and then waited, panting, leaning against the green wooden porch. Two or three times she had to repeat it. At last the servant made out what it was, and told the doctor.

"I shall go immediately," he said. "Who is ill? Mother?"

Marie shook her head, and said something about a soldier; but the very idea of a soldier seemed to frighten her so much, that they both refrained from asking any more.

"I'll go there first," repeated the doctor, "and see what it is myself. But what's the matter with you, child?"

It was difficult to find out what was the matter. She was the very picture of patience in pain, as she leant against the porch, with the woodbine touching her loose brown hair, her face still and white, her hand among the woodbine leaves secretly pressed to her side. She never complained of pain or weakness; her mother looked so sad when she did, that she had acquired the habit of hiding it.

"Take care of her," said Monsieur Dumare, as he walked away. And the servant, not knowing anything better to do under the circumstances, marched her back before her through the narrow half of the cottage, and into a pantry at the end, where she regaled her with bread and jam.

I don't know whether bread and jam is a cure for a pain in the side; but certainly Marie revived, and ventured to give her confidence to the doctor's servant, by telling her about the man that the two tall soldiers had brought in between them, and laid on the bed in the back room.

The servant had seen the German cavalry pass through the village not half an hour ago, and she had heard a shot when they were gone towards its farther end; so by questioning the child she discovered that the man was a German soldier, and instantly—wonderful result!—the bread and jam disappeared.

"I did not think your mother would do the like," she said. "Those Germans killing our men by hundreds, and she taking one into her house! Is she French?"

Marie did not know whether she was or not. She was frightened by the woman's harsh voice; it was so different from the bread-and-jam sweetness.

"Well, you had better run home to her, and tell her my mind if you like," she added, shaking her head sturdily, and opening the pantry-door.

Marie did run home; but as to telling her mother the servant's mind, she had not an idea what her mind was, so of course she could not do it; and thus the widow was spared the first of the reproaches and hard words which were to be heaped on her by her French neighbours for having taken in a German.

She was not long to be ignorant of what her charity had cost her. No one spoke to her; old friends passed her by; people talked of her harshly in her hearing as she went through the streets. From that day she was marked in the village as one to be shunned and held in contempt—and all for having pitied a wounded suffering man. Even the child was not spared. Boys and girls not as tall as the garden-railings could tell her what *their* fathers and mothers thought of what *her* mother had done.

But the widow did not heed them. She had not begun the good deed for men, and for them she would not turn from it. Carefully she nursed the wounded soldier; and the child walked through the house with light footsteps, lest she might disturb him. Many a time Marie would refuse some dainty of the few "good things" that the widow could provide. "Give it to him," she would say, with her bright smile; "mother and I must make him well."

And "mother" and she did make him well at last. The doctor's visits became less and less frequent, and the soldier was able to walk about with one arm in a sling. Then he began to talk to them a great deal in broken bad French, that Marie thought very funny at first. How she loved to climb upon his knee, to listen to the stories he told her, and look again and again at his fine uniform, and make him show her on the torn coat the hole where the ball that hurt him so cruelly went into his arm! And how the soldier laughed when he heard how frightened of him she had been the first day he came, and of the two dreadful men that brought him in! But Marie did not tell any one what she thought—how he reminded her somehow of her father; only after he had lain on the bed, her father did not come out again and talk to her as the soldier did. He had gone away that day that she was at the farm-house; but he would come back. This was very like him, but not himself. Her mother said they would be with him again.

Among other things, their guest told her about his own little girl, who was taller than Marie, and had blue eyes instead of brown ones, and light hair; and of his

two boys, and his daughter, Dorel, who was growing up so fast, and was so fond of him. She liked to hear about them all, and wondered why he did not go straight back to them, knock at the door and go in, and live with his wife, and Dorel, and the two boys, and the little blue-eyed girl, and be happy ever after, as the people were in her mother's fairy tales. More still, she liked to hear what they were all doing in his home; and great was her astonishment the first day he told her they were making toys.

"Making toys!" she cried, opening her eyes wide, and looking up at him from his knee"

"Yes," he explained; "making toys for all the children in the world to play with. And in all the cottages about our village they are making donkeys, and dolls, and Noah's arks, and farmyards, and toy-soldiers, and wooden furniture, and cups and saucers, and everything you can think of."

"Oh!" said Marie, in awe and delight. She could say nothing but "Oh!"—but it was a very long expressive "Oh!" and said a great deal in itself.

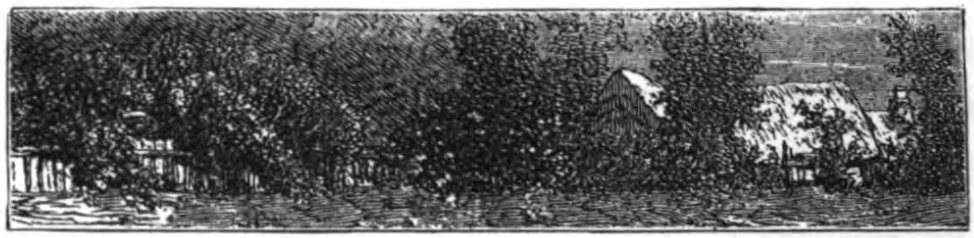
"Have not you any toys?" asked the soldier.

She shook her head.

"Have you never had any?"

No, she had never had any toys. Her mother had no money for buying them. She had only played with stones, and the big shells off the mantel-piece, and the daisies that grew in the grass at the edge of the street. It was no wonder that it seemed Paradise on earth to her to live in a village of donkeys and dolls and toy furniture, and a pleasure ever new and full of mystery to be making such things.

At last the day came when her prattling with this friendly soldier ended, and he was gone away with his arm still in a sling to follow his comrades. The child treasured up in the corner of the window a remembrance of him. No one knew how she came by it, but her mother suspected that her idle fingers must have wrenched it off his coat while she was listening to one of his stories; for all that was left to Marie of the great big soldier with the shining helmet, and the yellow moustache, and the endless power of telling tales, was —a brass button.



CHAPTER IV.

Little Marie gets Worse and Worse—A poor Mother—What sickness means in a Poor Home.

THE widow's cares increased. She saw a dark shadow deepening under Marie's eyes—saw her becoming more and more delicate, scarcely able now to sit up for half a day together. All the while she could only give her coarse food, which the child tried to eat without a murmur, but often she failed, and despite all her patient efforts for her mother's sake, the food remained untouched. When other children played, she could only lie still. Sometimes her mother carried her to the end of the lane, where she would try to cheer up, and other children would come and talk; but the anxious mother heard the cough, and saw how even the antics of Jean Meller's pet lamb failed to rouse her child—so patient and quiet now. At last she could go about no longer; and one day when her mother found her fainting at the brook side, with her

head falling among the big bulrushes, and her little hand crushed under her on the loose earth, she carried her in and laid her sadly on the bed. She knew she would not rise for many a long day to come; and, that she might have the child near her, she placed her in that back room in which, not very long ago, they had laid the wounded soldier.

Sleepless nights and weary days she lay there. Her mother, working hard at a rich man's house, near the village, could scarcely ever be with her; and once or twice in the day the woman from the next cottage came in to give her whatever food was left ready. How long she was to be there still no one knew. Daily she was wasting away, pining and fretting, and crying when she was alone, but without a murmur when her mother was there—always with the old bright smile to greet her mother's face. The doctor was failing to do her good, and even all that mother's love could not give her strength, or bring a trace of colour to her cheek.

Thus the weeks ran on—the widow grieving over her work at the château, yet obliged to be there all day that she might earn money for her child—the child at home in the lonely house, with her thin hands clasped together or feebly straying over the counterpane; nothing to rouse her, nothing to cheer her from day to day—nothing but her mother's face, when she came home in the evening, always with her loving smile, always with her tender words and fond embrace. That was all Marie had.

She knew how many stains of time were on the boarded walls, how the sunlight fell at different hours

of the day around the comfortless room. When it came in strong and golden, reflecting the window on the wall above her, with all the little marks in the coarse glass showing like shadowy trembling spots, then she knew that her mother was coming—coming across the fields and down the free airy roads between the hedges ; and sunlight never looked so bright and beautiful as it did then.

But the days shortened, and winter was near—dark, cold, bitter winter. It came, it passed, and was almost gone, and still the child lingered. The woman from next door came in oftener to take care that the fire was not burning out ; and when her mother returned home now, it was hours after dark. Even the flowers were gone—the few common flowers out of the little garden, that looked so beautiful when they were brought in and left in water by her bed-side. Winter had robbed her of them all, leaving only snow instead.

How she longed in the lonely hours to have something nice to look at—a picture hanging on the opposite wall or standing up against the footboard of her bed! The only pictures she saw were the clouds moving on in the far-off sky, when she looked languidly up at the window. She had seen the glorious autumn sunsets, when all the west was yellow, or red, or purple, with streaming bars of gold. But winter had robbed her of these as well. It was seldom now that the walls of the room glowed, and then the sky was red and angry, promising a storm. Last of her pictures were the stars which *did* come sooner on winter nights. When they sparkled outside her window, she began to wonder how far off they were, and what was beyond them; and that

made her think of the happy land of light to which starlight and moonlight are dim. Those were bright peaceful thoughts, that often made her fall asleep and dream.

But why was it that the widow did not like to hear her talking about the stars and beyond the stars? Why was it that she kissed her more fondly every day, and came back two and three times on one pretext or another?—perhaps because she feared she would soon have her little girl no longer.

CHAPTER V.

A French Château, and a rich little Girl—She has a New Donkey given her—Her Brother makes a Hole in it—Juliette's opinion on New and Old Toys—She carries Marie the Donkey—How Marie enjoyed her First Toy—How Another came the Same Day—And How Toys were Better than Medicine, and Juliette learnt a Lesson.

AS winter closes, we will take a peep at the château, the great house where the widow worked, but not at the underground department where she spent her time—a place of washing, and mangling, and baking, hot steam, and smells of cookery.

At one of the deep windows a little black-eyed French girl sat watching, with her hands clasped on her knees. A little fluffy dog sat watching too, decked out in a large red birthday bow. At first the snow fell, pitter patter—still the two sat watching. Then the snow left off, and the sun began to shine, and the two left the window, and up and down the terrace they went, bounding along it in the clear frosty sunshine. Papa's arrival was very anxiously expected that day—it was Juliette's birthday—because he had promised to bring

her something from town, one of the first toys that had been brought from Germany to France after the war.

There was the roll of wheels at last—light, swift wheels—and up the avenue came a pony and trap, bearing papa. The moment he stepped out, he caught up his little daughter in his arms. He had seen them watching for him, a small white figure in the distance, and the little dog by her side.

They went into the house together, and eagerly she waited while he plunged his hand deep into the pocket of his great-coat. What is it ? he asked, but she could not guess; so he had to satisfy her curiosity by bringing out a brown paper parcel. A very strange shape it was —a shape that defied all her guesses again. When she had run for the scissors, and cutting the twine asunder pulled off the crackling brown paper, out came a green stand with four little wheels, and the body of some dark animal.

" Oh, papa ! how—why, where is its head ? " she exclaimed.

" All right, Juliette, it's here." And her father, opening the paper wider, brought out Neddy's head, and fixed it on in a minute so dexterously, that the little girl declared it was a most charming donkey.

She had an abundance of toys in the nursery upstairs, but Neddy was the playmate that night. She and her little brother seemed as if they would never tire of him ; but, unluckily, the boy's fingers squeezed Neddy very hard, and, to the horror of both, in went the rough furry skin, leaving a deep dint, quite an ugly hole in the donkey's side.

Then there was one minute's mutual grief, and two

minutes' quarrelling. Juliette declared she did not like him a bit any longer; he was an old thing, all out of shape. So she carried him off, leaving baby brother screaming, with his finger in his mouth; of course he wanted that particular toy and no other. And while he was still lamenting the accident, and she was looking very cross, her mother came in. She hastened to show her what had happened to their new toy.

"But you can play with it yet," the lady said.

"No, mamma; I don't like broken ugly old toys."

"You have plenty of sound ones."

"Yes," said Juliette, looking at the toys scattered about the floor, "but nothing new."

"Well, this is new."

"But don't you see, mamma, there's a big hole in him, so he's old"—with a gush of tears.

"Oh Juliette, Juliette, don't cry about that!" said her mother, looking at the half-angry, half-sorrowful face. "Think how many poor children there are who have no toys at all."

"Are there?" she asked in astonishment.

"Many and many—even sick children, who have nothing to do all day but to lie in bed wearily. Now, there is a woman working here often, a widow from the village, and her little girl is at home ill, and I dare say she has no toys of any kind."

Though half-spoiled and hard to please, Juliette was far from being selfish, and seldom did a generous impulse come to her that she did not act upon it. For a minute or two she did not say anything; neither did her mother —she was leaving her words to do their own work.

"Mamma," she began at last, "I don't like this

donkey any more, and it is quite new. Do you think the little girl——?"

"Is as particular as you are?" her mother added, laughing. "No, indeed. And I suppose you want to give her rejected Neddy—is that it?"

"Yes, mamma. May I?"

"Of course, dear, you may," her mother answered. "Coppers and bread are not all poor children want; they want kind words too, just as much as you do, and something to cheer them, poor forlorn little things!"

"Then I shall go, mamma, and carry it myself."

The very same paper that Neddy came in was wrapped about him again that night; and next morning a little girl, with the parcel in her hand, arrived at the widow's door. The woman had not yet gone out. She could scarcely bring herself to believe that it was to her house the young lady from the château, as she called her, was coming. But it was; and Juliette gave her a kind though timid "Good morning, madame!"

"Good morning, miss! You are welcome; but it is a poor place for you to visit."

"Oh, no matter! I want to see the little sick girl. May I go in, please?"

The woman, wondering still more, led her to the inner room, where Marie was sitting up, supported by pillows, and scarcely able to touch her breakfast. For a few moments Juliette could not speak, she was so struck by the death-like looks of the little invalid; and yet she did not see her at the worst, for Marie's cheeks were tinged with a faint colour when she saw her visitor, the richly-dressed child with the bright healthy face, the white fur mantle keeping her from the cold

"I have brought you something, little girl," she said, going to the bedside, and laying the parcel near her.

The sick child was too shy to do anything but smile, and look wonderingly at her mother.

"Shall I open it for you?" Juliette went on, taking a knife off a tray, and cutting the twine.

Then she let the thin wax-like hands undo the paper for themselves, and bring out the toy.

"Oh, mother, mother! is not it beautiful?" almost cried the child, laughing delightedly to see how the donkey's head nodded. "I never saw anything like it. I shall not be lonely now!"

The colour, long absent from her face, had rushed into it when it lighted up with pleasure; and she fixed her eyes on the other bright face at the bedside, as she whispered, in something between astonishment and love and admiration, "Oh, how very good you must be, miss, to have brought it!"

The mother was thanking Juliette too, so that she was quite overwhelmed with their gratitude, not knowing what to do or say; and she thought as she left the cottage that morning, after talking a little to Marie, and showing her all the fine points of the donkey, that she had never felt so happy before.

If she was happy, how happy, too, was the sick child! It was the first plaything she had ever possessed, and, as she thought, the most beautiful one that could be made. She had no idea of holes, or dints, or blemishes. To her the nodding donkey was faultless, and she laughed and prattled and played with him, until her mother came home that night, and found her looking flushed and happy.

In the evening—that very evening—when the candle was lighting, there was a knock at the door. The widow was startled at first, knocks seldom came so late. When she opened it, a man put a large package into her hands, and then went away. He had a few other parcels strapped over his shoulders, and was going about delivering them. On removing the paper she discovered a long cardboard box; and, taking off the cover, she found it full of tissue paper, with a slip of paper laid on top, on which was written, "For Marie."

So to Marie she took it, and never had she heard such a cry of delight as the same Marie gave, when from the folds of tissue paper was disengaged a large wax doll, with rosy cheeks and yellow curls, and a most astonishing dress of blue muslin and silver spangles—a regular fancy doll, in fact.

Where had it come from? Had it dropped down out of the clouds to her? They looked into the box where the doll had been, and found that she had been lying on top of a letter, written in large, rough handwriting. It was from Joseph Furst, telling them that his arm was all right again, and he was safe at home with his wife and children. He and Dorel had sent one of the dolls that she herself had helped to make to the child of the kind French widow, who had taken care of him when he was wounded and far from home. Marie should never again say she had had no toys, for here was one, come from Germany, made for her by grateful hands, directed to herself, with many kisses, thanks, and good wishes.

And the end of all was that, between the donkey and the doll, little Marie got slowly well. There was

no more pining, no fretting, no long weary days, for she had something to cheer and enliven her, something of the many good things that other children have. Without perceiving herself how strength and health were coming back, she became slowly better and better, dressing and undressing her smiling pink-faced doll; laughing and talking much with the fond mother, who was so glad and thankful; sleeping well at night, to wake in the morning refreshed. Soon she was able to sit up; then to go out a little in the air; then to walk up and down the road in the early spring morning, when the sun was bright; and last, scarcely knowing how the change came, to her surprise and unspeakable joy, she was well again, and her mother was rejoicing with thankful heart.

Somebody else had cause to rejoice also, though in a small way. The trim-looking girl in the nursery where Miss Juliette and her brother were—the Norman girl with the tall cap of white muslin and ribbons—was always congratulating herself now on the neatness of the nursery, "since Miss Juliette took to giving away to the poor village children all the nasty broken rubbish, that only littered the shelves." And Juliette herself suspected that if she had known long ago what enjoyment she could give, without any loss of her own pleasure, to little hearts that ought to be as light as hers, she would never have allowed all those broken toys to accumulate among the dust and cobwebs—rubbish to her, but treasures in the poor homes where every penny has to be spent in food and needful clothes.

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