

SURLY BOB



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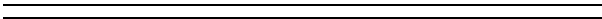
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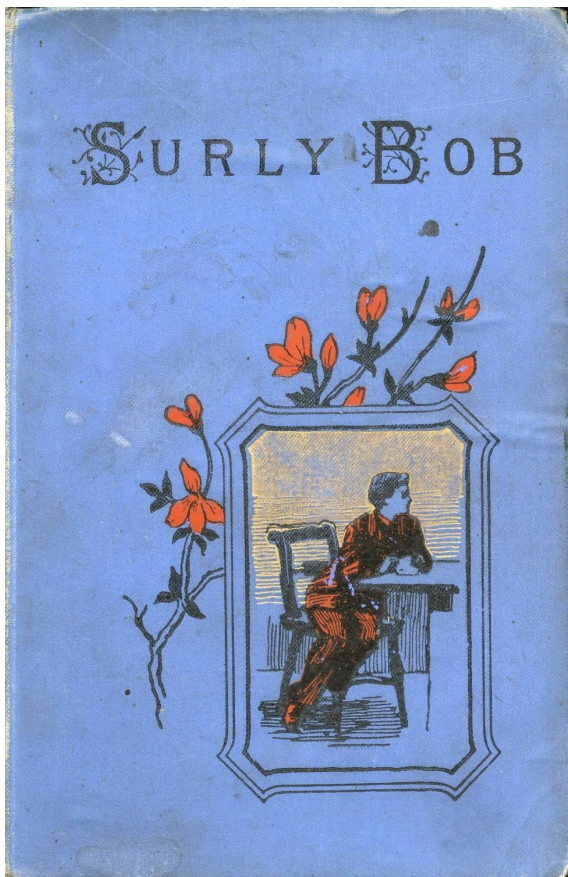
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SURLY BOB.

S U R L Y B O B

BY

L. C. SILKE,

AUTHOR OF "IN MISCHIEF AGAIN," "SHAG AND DOLL," ETC.



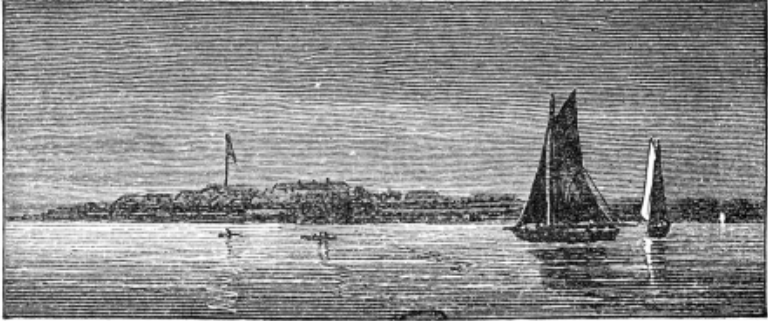
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S U R L Y B O B .

CHAPTER I.

IN SCHOOL.



CERTAINLY Bob Saunders, “Surly Bob,” as he was styled by his companions, was not an attractive boy. The Sunday scholars at St. Chad’s School were as a rule rather a rough, ill-looking, and unruly set of lads; but foremost among them all was Bob, who distinguished himself by being more rough, ill-looking, and unruly than the rest.

Bob was always looked upon as the black sheep in the class; not that he was the only black one there, but that he was considered to be of a deeper dye than the others. For if by chance Bob was absent from his place, the lesson went off comparatively peacefully; but whenever he was present, there was sure to be bad behaviour and disturbance of some sort, the blame of which was generally traced to him; for whenever mischief or quarrelling were going forward, Bob was almost invariably found to be mixed up in it.

That very afternoon, on coming into school, he had found another boy sitting in the particular seat which he chose to call his, and had suddenly, without waiting to see if his comrade were willing to give it up, dealt him such a box on the ear as quite to upset the balance of the other, who was entirely unprepared for the assault, and in consequence nearly fell right off the form. Before he could recover himself, Bob,

muttering, “You get out of there, that’s my place,” gave him a vigorous push, and then slipped into the seat he had been occupying.

Tom Lane, indignant at this treatment, doubled up his fists, and returned the blow that had been dealt him; and there is no knowing to what lengths their angry feelings might have carried them, had not their teacher arrived at that moment, and managed to restore some degree of order. But the two sat for some time regarding one another with menacing looks; Tom shaking his clenched fist at Bob, by way of showing him that he was not going to submit to such treatment, but was determined to “have it out” with his enemy after school, whilst Bob’s defiant glances seemed to dare him to “come on.”

At length the lesson began; but Bob was in one of his sullen moods this afternoon, and refused to open his mouth, not only allowing every question to remain unanswered, so far as he was concerned, but, for some reason only known to himself, maintaining a dogged silence when it came to his turn to read a verse. His teacher at length passed him by, and desired the lad next him to read it instead.



“REGARDING ONE ANOTHER WITH MENACING LOOKS”—(p. 10).

The child obeyed, after a glance at Bob, which was half wondering, half sorrowful, and read in a clear young voice the sacred words. He was a gentle little fellow, the smallest and youngest in the class, with a

pale complexion, fair hair, and intelligent face; but, poor boy, he was a cripple, and as he stood to read he was obliged to support himself on his little crutch.

A stranger at a first glance would have thought it impossible that there could be any relationship between the little child with the winning face and the big bully of the class, Bob Saunders, but nevertheless they were brothers; and as the younger resumed his seat, he, either accidentally or on purpose, laid his hand lightly on Bob's knee. The other did not shake it off, he suffered it to remain there as if he had not noticed it, but he turned his head away and gazed steadfastly in another direction, as if determined not to allow himself to look at the child. Was he afraid that his sullenness would melt if brought face to face with the gentleness of the other? or was it that even he himself could see and acknowledge the contrast between them, and took shame to himself for it?

No on-looker could have decided the question; for Bob's countenance always seemed to wear but one expression, and that an unfortunate and forbidding one. No softening look, no ray of interest was ever seen to light it up, as Sunday after Sunday he sat through the lesson, apparently not listening to a single word, as his teacher often despondingly thought. For, though frequently discouraged, Mr. Thornton had at different times felt some gleam of hope about the others, when he had noted signs of awakening intelligence on their faces; but Bob seemed beyond all influence—nothing appeared to reach him, nothing to touch him; he still remained the most daring, and quarrelsome, and sullen of the whole party. His character was thoroughly established: he was the "bad boy," not only of his class, but of the school.

The school broke up, and the boys streamed out; the enforced order and decorum with which they left the room flung to the winds the moment they got outside—at least by the more disorderly ones, for there were some who went quietly to their homes. But Bob and Tom Lane were not among the latter. They had their quarrel to finish before they separated; and, accordingly, choosing a favourable and tolerably retired spot, they had their fight out, not leaving off until each had given the other a black eye, by way of making an impression.

That done, and Bob feeling he had “settled” Tom, so to speak, for the time, he turned moodily homewards. But it was not much of a home he had—little more than a shelter from the rain, with food sufficient to keep life in him, though not enough to impart warmth or comfort. For Bob and Johnnie Saunders, being orphans, were left to the care of an uncle and aunt, and they, not being provident or good managers, were always complaining of the hardness of the times, and the difficulty of providing for their own children, “let alone those of other people.” So the brothers often came off with but short allowance; not that Mrs. Saunders of set purpose neglected or was unkind to them, but because, when there was not enough for all, it was a matter of course she thought that her own children should be served first.

Moreover, the cottage being small, and part of it let to lodgers, the family were rather cramped for room, and so Bob and Johnnie slept in a little sort of out-house, which stood at the end of the small back garden. It had evidently been erected in the first place merely as a sort of wash-house, or tool-house, and was a tumble-down place, flagged with rough stones, and bitterly cold in the severe weather, which had now prevailed for so long at Crossley. But thither Bob betook himself as soon as he reached the cottage.

He seemed to have expected to find Johnnie there, for though the place was so small that it only needed half a glance to scan the whole, he gave a lingering look all around, as if missing something. Then he shut the door, and remained a moment standing irresolutely, until a low sound of cooing attracted his attention, when, going to the corner whence it proceeded, he drew forth from some place of concealment a pretty little ring-dove.





CHAPTER II.

THE RING-DOVE.



THE bird stood erect on Bob's finger, as if she felt at home there, putting her head first on one side and then on the other, as she looked at him out of her small bright eyes. Bob returned her glances, and as he did so something actually approaching a smile broke over his rugged features and softened them, especially when, bending his head, he laid his cheek caressingly against the bird's soft plumage. Then he stroked it gently with his hand for a few moments, looking, as he did so, strangely unlike the boy who a short time ago had sat sullen and silent in his class in the school-room.

But some sudden sound from without made itself heard, and he was again his old self in a moment. The dove was instantly hidden from sight, as were also those softer feelings which seemed for the moment to have been stealing over him. Then he stood listening, apparently ready to repulse any attack upon or invasion of his domain. For Bob was always ready to fight for his rights, and he had come by degrees to look upon this out-house as his own property. For it was made no use of by the family (indeed, none of the cousins would have condescended to sleep in or inhabit such a miserable place), and having thus been given up entirely to the brothers, Bob had long considered it as exclusively his, and was as ready to defend it, and as resolved to keep off intruders, as if it had been his own castle by right of inheritance.

But he was generally left unmolested, there being little to tempt any one either in the place or its contents. Only sometimes the most provoking of the cousins, Sam and Bill, would come on purpose to annoy Bob, and try to force an entrance into his den. But they always met with such rough handling, that they had begun to think it best to leave "Surly Bob" to himself. And the latter, having found out a way

of shutting the crazy old door, when he went out, in such a manner that it would have been very difficult for any one but himself, who knew the knack, to open it, he felt pretty easy in his mind when absent as to the safety of whatever treasures he might have left within. Poor Bob's treasures, however, were soon numbered, the ring-dove apparently being the only one, as, besides the bed, the place seemed to contain nothing but a broken chair and a three-legged stool.

The sound outside he at length found was caused by little Johnnie's crutch; and, accordingly, as it drew nearer, he opened the door for his brother to enter. Then he closed it carefully again.

The little fellow came in looking blue with cold; and as he seated himself and laid aside his crutch, he exclaimed, "How bitter cold it is, ain't it, Bob? My hands and feet ache so I scarce knows how to bear it!" and he held up his numbed fingers to his mouth, that his warm breath might fall upon them and perhaps put a little heat into them.

"It's 'cause you can't run about like other chaps, that you get so starved," said Bob, as he went down upon his knees and took hold of one of Johnnie's feet.

"Whatever are you going to do, Bob?" he asked.

Bob did not reply, only bent lower over the small foot he was chafing; but the face which generally looked so ill-tempered and harsh wore another expression now; the usually heavy listless eyes were soft and even glistening; the firmly set and rather thick lips were parted into a half smile, as at some pleasant thought. Was it, then, that Bob, in spite of his rough exterior, had a heart, and that little Johnnie—and Johnnie alone—held the key to it? Was the silent sullen lad touched to find that there was one who could love him—even him, "Surly Bob"—and like to be with him? It almost looked so; and looked too as if he knew how to love in return, so gently did the boy—whose fists, half an hour ago, had dealt out blows and a black eye to Tom Lane—rub and chafe, and try to warm the little brother's feet and hands.

"Have you been all this time a-coming home?" he asked at length, abruptly.

"No, I went into widow Black's," replied Johnnie.

"What did you go in there for?"

“She was at the door, so I just spoke to her, and then she asked me to come in a few minutes. You see, as she’s blind, she’s glad of any one to talk to.”

“What d’you find to talk to her about? I ain’t never got nothing to say.”

“Oh, she asked me about the Sunday-school. She likes to hear what they’ve been telling us there; and I could remember some of it to-day, ’cause ’twas so easy to understand, wasn’t it, Bob?”

“Dunno,” returned the other, shortly.

At length he declared that Bob’s rubbing had made him quite warm, adding, “We’d best go in, hadn’t we? and see what we can get for tea, or it’ll all be over, I expect, for it must be getting past the time, and I’m dreadful hungry.”

“Come along, then,” returned Bob, handing him his crutch, and the two went out together, Johnnie saying, in a low voice, “And when we come back we’ll have out our little dove, won’t we, Bob, ’cause we shall be all safe then.”



CHAPTER III.

AN ACCIDENT.



WHEN the boys crossed the little garden on their return to their sleeping quarters, they found that the snow had begun to fall fast, whilst the wind, which blew in their faces, was very sharp and penetrating. It was a night cold enough to make even those who had plenty of warm food, and clothing, and good fires, shiver and draw their wraps more closely around them with perhaps a half fretful murmur at the severity of the weather. Bob and Johnnie,

however, who had none of these comforts, did not complain or grumble at it, but took it, as they did other hard things in their lot, almost as a matter of course, and bore it with a kind of silent patience.

But they felt it keenly enough, and long after they had lain down in bed they still remained awake, unable to sleep for the cold.

“Let’s lie a bit nearer each other, Bob, and then maybe we’ll get some heat into us,” said Johnnie, at length.

The elder brother turned, and putting his arms round the younger, drew him close to him, whilst at the same time he wrapped the coverings well about him, regardless of the fact that by so doing he left himself with only a very small share of blanket.

“You’ll get warm now, little ’un, won’t you?”

“Ay, soon, I dare say. But, Bob, you’re cold too; your hands feel like ice! and you’ve given me ’most all the blanket. You must take it back over yourself, Bob.”

“Oh, I don’t care for the cold,” returned Bob, in a half contemptuous tone, as if it was an evil too trifling to affect a big fellow like himself.

“Then I won’t care for it either.”

“Oh, you’re different; you can’t help it, ’cause you’re a little chap, and you get chilblains and all sorts of things.”

“And so do you, Bob; you’ve got a dreadful sore foot with chilblains.”

“Oh, that ain’t nothing—I don’t care for that!”

“Bob——” began Johnnie, and then broke off.

“Well,” returned the other.

“You’re always so kind to me, Bob; I do so wish——”

“What?”

“Why, that you’d be kind sometimes to the other fellows as well. They don’t know a bit what you’re really like, ’cause you only fight ’em, or beat and cuff ’em. If they knew you like I do they’d love you too.”

“What ’ud be the good of that?”

“Well, I don’t know; only I like people to love me. And I can’t bear ’em to say you’re the worst boy in all the class, like I’ve heard ’em say many a time. If I could speak up and tell ’em all I know, they’d say different.”

“Don’t you go telling no tales ’bout me,” muttered Bob; “and they may call me what they likes. ’Tain’t no matter to me.”

“Oh, Bob, don’t you care? I do; ’cause ’tain’t fair, and it vexes me so when they make you stand out, and keep you in, and say, ‘He’s a reg’lar bad ’un, he is,’ ’cause you ain’t, Bob; you ain’t bad, or you wouldn’t be so good to me,” and Johnnie’s voice had a half-sorrowful half-appealing tone in it.

“Have you been vexing yourself over that?” exclaimed Bob in astonishment. “Why, what a queer little chap you are! Who’d ever have thought that you’d have gone and fretted over their giving of me a bad name!”

“I don’t like it, Bob; I couldn’t bear to think as you deserved it.”

“Why not?”

“ ’Cause, Bob—you won’t be angry, will you?”

“No, not I.”

“Well, then, ’tis partly ’cause of what teacher said to-day, about its being them as love Jesus as He takes into His fold. And He said them as love Him try to be like Him; but if boys are always quarrelling and fighting that shows they aren’t trying to please Him, and don’t care about Him. And, oh, Bob! I do so want Him to be able to take us both into His fold, don’t you?”

“Dunno; I’m a deal too bad, I am.”

“But Jesus can make us good. And you aren’t too bad, Bob; you’re real good to me, and I love you ever so, and Jesus loves you too; teacher said He did—every single boy in the whole class.”

Bob made no reply, only tried to put his corner of the blanket more closely round Johnnie, and at last the little fellow’s eyes closed in sleep, whilst the elder one, who was still wakeful, lay for a while looking at the pale thin little face, which seemed paler than ever in the moonlight, which was streaming in through the small window, and falling right across the bed. Bob’s face relaxed into a softened expression as he gazed, until, at last, he murmured to himself, “The Shepherd as he’s been a talking about has got him safe in His arms, that’s certain; but as for me I’m too bad—a deal too bad.”

Meantime the snow outside was falling silently and noiselessly, working a change in the whole face of Nature, as it clothed everything in its own mantle of beauty, and made even that which in itself had no loveliness of form or colouring look pure and stainless in its dress of spotless white. Everywhere it fell alike—on the stately tree or the stunted shrub, the rich man’s roof, or the lowly out-house in which two poor boys were lying closely huddled together for warmth, a meet emblem of that Holy Spirit which descends so silently, and steals so secretly into hearts here and there; not singling out only the great or learned, but visiting alike the simple and untaught, and revealing His presence within them by changed actions, and gentler words and looks, clothing them with a beauty not their own, but put upon them. Might He not even now be drawing near to “Surly Bob,” though he knew it not, but lay murmuring, “I’m too bad—a deal too bad.”

The next day, on coming out of morning school, the boys lingered about in the road, or rather lane, outside, as was their custom, some of them generally having a quarrel to settle, or some piece of mischief to

plan. This morning they all seemed to have made common cause against Bob, as if determined to pay off old grudges, of which each of them could count up a score or more. Tom Lane in particular was still smarting from the treatment he had received yesterday, and was ready enough to join in any scheme of revenge upon his enemy, who often got the best of it in a hand-to-hand fight.

Dull and obtuse as the boys were in some matters, they had penetration enough to have found out by this time that the way to inflict a wound on Bob was to aim a dart at his little brother; for though Bob before others was generally cold and indifferent enough in his manner to Johnnie, taking but little notice of him, still his companions had somehow discovered his one sensitive part. And now, bent on "paying him out," they set themselves to tease Johnnie; not because they disliked him, for none could bear ill-will to the gentle unoffending child, but because they knew it was the surest way of annoying their mutual foe.

Accordingly, when Bob, who had been kept behind for a few minutes, came out of the school-house, he found a group of them surrounding his little brother, imitating his lame walk, and pretending to have a crutch, by the help of which they were limping along, whilst the child stood looking like a wounded stag at bay, more wondering and perplexed at their unkindness than angry. But Bob, as at a glance he took in the state of the case, was furious, and with a face dark with passion, rushed upon them, and dealt his blows right and left with an unsparing hand.

Before, however, he had settled off all his adversaries he heard a cry from Johnnie, and turning, saw him lying on the ground with Tom Lane sprawling on the top of him. The little fellow, not noticing it, had been standing on a slide which the boys had made before going into school, and Tom—whether accidentally or on purpose no one could say—coming along the slide behind Johnnie, and unperceived by him, had apparently been unable to stop himself, and so had tripped the other up, and fallen on him.

Bob rushed to his rescue, pausing first, however, to vent his anger upon Tom by giving him a sound thrashing. A fierce scuffle followed between the two, but though both boys were in a usual way pretty

equally matched as regarded size and strength, Bob's outraged feelings lent on this occasion such unwonted force to his blows that Tom was soon overcome. Then, throwing him from him, Bob turned to Johnnie, whom he found still sitting just where he had fallen, all doubled together, crying and sobbing.



CHAPTER IV.

SYMPATHY.



Now Johnnie, though a delicate little fellow, had a tolerably brave spirit, and was not given to cry and whine over every trifling hurt; therefore Bob knew something must indeed be the matter to call forth these signs of pain. He bent over him—that strangely softened look coming into his face, and chasing away the angry scowl it had worn a minute before, whilst he asked, and his usually harsh, gruff voice had a thrill of tenderness in it—“Be you hurt, little ’un? What have they been and done to you?”

“Oh, Bob, do help me; I can’t get up, and it hurts me so I can’t help crying,” and little Johnnie’s tearful face grew quite white from the pain.

“Where does it hurt?” asked Bob.

Johnnie pointed to his knee, the poor diseased one, where was the seat of all the mischief which had resulted in his lameness.

The elder brother’s face again grew dark, as he hissed out the words, “Shame! Brute! See if I don’t give it to him!” whilst he threw a glance around, as if intending another attack upon his enemy; but by this time the other boys had all cleared off, leaving the two entirely alone.

“Give me your hand, Bob, and I’ll try to get up.”

Instead, however, of doing that, Bob stooped and, with as careful and even gentle a touch as if he had been a woman, took his little brother in his arms, saying, “If you can’t walk, why I’ll carry you. We ain’t got far to go, and you needn’t be afraid as I’ll drop you. Am I hurting of you?” he asked, as Johnnie seemed to wince.

“Not much—not more than you could help,” answered Johnnie, trying to force back his sobs of pain, as he put his arms lovingly round Bob’s neck, and clung to him.

The other carried him as if he had been a mere feather’s weight; and bearing him through the kitchen, which he found empty, his aunt being at that moment up-stairs, he took him straight out to their own quarters at the back, and laid him down on the bed.

“How did it happen, Johnnie? What was that sneak Tom Lane a-doing to you? See if I don’t pay him out, that’s all!” and Bob set his teeth, and clenched his hand.

“No, Bob, don’t be so angry. Maybe he didn’t mean anything, for you see I was standing right on the slide—though I didn’t notice as I was—and then he came up behind sliding, and couldn’t stop himself, and so he knocked me down and fell down himself, too, on the top of me. Maybe he didn’t do it a purpose.”

“Oh, that’s likely, ain’t it? But he shall be paid out for it. See if I don’t give him such a licking as he never got afore!”

Bob’s face, as he spoke, had hardened into an expression of such set and sullen hatred that Johnnie seemed half-frightened by it.

“Bob,” he began, laying his hand upon that of the other, as if to detain him beside him, “you won’t go and do nothing bad to Tom, will you now? Do promise me as you won’t.”

The child paused, but no response came from the elder lad.

“Bob, do say as you won’t do anything to him; please do,” and this time the little fellow’s tones were full of entreaty.

“What d’you want me to promise that for?” muttered Bob.

“Oh, I do want it so much,” returned the other, without giving a direct answer.

“Why?” persisted Bob.

“Well,” answered Johnnie, forced to tell his reasons, “it’s ’cause of what teacher told us yesterday. Don’t you mind, Bob, how he said that if we wanted to belong to Jesus and keep safe in His fold, we must try and be like Him. And he said Jesus was never angry, or cross, or wouldn’t forgive, though they did such dreadful things to Him. So,

Bob, don't let us be cross or angry, or else it'll show so plain that we don't belong to Him."

The little boy paused a minute, and then went on, still in a low dreamy voice, "I was dreadful naughty just now I know. I was so angry when Tom threw me down, 'cause it hurt so, that I thumped him with my fists as hard as ever I could till he got up. And I called him bad names too. But I'm sorry now. 'Twas because I forgot about Jesus then; but, oh Bob, He saw it all! and He must have thought I didn't care about Him a bit! But I do; I love Him so I can't bear to think of vexing Him," and Johnnie's sobs mingled with his words. "Do you think He'll forgive me, Bob? 'cause I am sorry, real downright sorry!"

Bob had turned his face quite away, so that nothing of it could be seen; and now when Johnnie paused, he gave for answer nothing more than a sort of grunt deep down in his throat, which sound might have meant "yes," or "no," or anything. But Johnnie seemed to think it meant the former, as he pressed for nothing further, though his tender little heart seemed still full of sorrow.



CHAPTER V.

AN INDEPENDENT ACTION.



DINNER time came, but Johnnie could not move without such pain that Bob told him to “ ’bide still,” and he would bring his dinner out to him. Accordingly he went in, and asked for his brother’s share of the meal.

“Why don’t he come and get it for himself?” said Mrs. Saunders, shortly, as she stood rocking in her arms a sickly, fretful baby.

“ ’Cause he’s bad,” returned Bob, quite as shortly.

“Bad! What’s the matter with him?”

“He’s hurt.”

“How? What has he done to himself?”

“Some of ’em knocked him down.”

“Oh, is that all!” exclaimed Mrs. Saunders, as she gave herself to the task of endeavouring to still the infant’s cries, which grew louder and louder. “Can’t he stand a tumble without making all this fuss over it! My word, it’s time he learnt not to be such a baby!”

Bob shot an angry glance out of his eyes at these words; but Mrs. Saunders was too much taken up with her sick child to notice it; and Bob, having secured his own and Johnnie’s portion, took no further heed of her or any of the others, but hastened back to his little brother.

“I don’t know how I’m ever to get to school,” remarked Johnnie, when the time drew near. “It hurts so dreadful bad when I try to move!”

“Then you ’bide here; and I’ll make the door fast outside so that nobody shan’t get in to you; and I’ll come straight back after school.”

“But aunt ’ll be angry if I don’t go, she’s so strict about school!”

“Oh, she shan’t know anything about it; or if she does, I’ll settle it. You ’bide still here, and Mary Jane ’ill keep you company.”

And Bob drew forth the pretty little dove, which nestled close up to the child in a confiding manner, whilst he stroked its soft plumage, and murmured gentle words of endearment in a caressing tone, the bird meantime making a low cooing, as if replying to all he said. Bob watched them a minute, and then turned to leave; taking care to fasten the door very securely on the outside.

Tom Lane was not at school that afternoon, so that Bob was not tempted to endeavour to revenge Johnnie’s hurts upon him. But on the way home his cousin Sam overtook him, with the question, “Where’s Johnnie? ’cause he wasn’t at school.”

“That ain’t no business of yours,” growled Bob, with a threatening look.

“Yes it is; and I shall tell mother he’s been shirking school,” answered Sam, defiantly.

“You dare to, you sneak!” shouted Bob angrily. “Let me catch you telling tales, that’s all, and I’ll soon teach you not to do it another time!” and forthwith Bob, who was the bigger of the two, seizing the other boy by the collar, gave him a violent shaking, accompanied by a stunning box on the ear.

Then he flung him from him, with the muttered words, “You’d best hold your tongue, I warn you;” and, regardless of Sam’s whines and howls as he held his hand to the ear which was still tingling from the blow, he stalked off homewards. Sam gazed after him with glances of hatred and ill-will; but apparently he judged it best to take heed to Bob’s hints, for when he arrived at home he said nothing on the subject of Johnnie’s absence from school that afternoon.

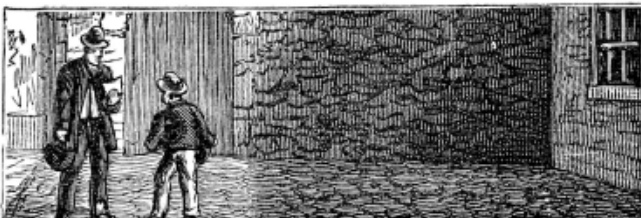
The little fellow himself turned towards Bob on his entrance with looks of such bright welcome that the latter could not fail to perceive that his presence brought pleasure to the child. Johnnie cared for him, he could not doubt that; but he was the only one in all the wide world who did care for and love him—“Surly Bob.” It seemed strange that such affection should be bestowed upon him, so ill-tempered, ill-mannered, and ill-looking a lad as he knew himself to be. Wonderful,

it appeared to him, that Johnnie, whom nearly every one loved and praised, should turn to him, and cling to him, and like to be with him; should take it so to heart when he got blamed or punished, and be so grateful for any little thing he did for him. How could he help returning such love?

He didn't try to help it, though he often tried not to show it; but in the depths of his heart—that heart of which so many felt inclined to doubt the existence—there dwelt a fund of tenderness, and devotion, and half-reverential love for the little brother, who was so good, so clever, so altogether different from himself. The praises which Johnnie so often received from his teachers—whilst *he* had nothing but blame bestowed upon *him*—awoke no feeling of jealousy in his breast, but only served to confirm his sense of Johnnie's superiority and his own inferiority.

And now, with the almost womanly softness and gentleness which Johnnie's helplessness and weakness called forth in him, he stooped over him, and in a few words—for Bob was never known to waste *them*, whatever he might have done with other things—he asked how he had been getting on, and if his pain was any better.

But though poor little Johnnie tried to put a good face on the matter, and said, with a smile, that Mary Jane had been very lively, and had gone on chattering to him all the time that Bob had been away, yet he could not conceal from his brother's sharp eyes how much he was suffering; and the latter's countenance darkened, and again he clenched his fist, as if preparing to deal out blows to some unseen enemy.



CHAPTER VI.

A CASE FOR THE HOSPITAL.



AND as, all through the night, Johnnie lay awake, unable to sleep for the pain, which seemed to grow worse and worse, so that he could scarcely help moaning at times, Bob alternately murmured words of encouragement, such as, “Cheer up, old fellow, it’ll be better presently!” or hissed out between his teeth threatening speeches, such as, “Won’t I just pay him out, and thrash him so as he’ll learn to take care what he’s about next time! Won’t I teach him as I’ve got a pair of fists, and know how to

use ’em, too!”

“Oh, don’t Bob!” pleaded Johnnie, “don’t be angry!”

“Can’t help it,” muttered Bob.

“But teacher says we can ask Jesus, and He’ll help us to do what’s right. Oh, Bob, do let us ask Him to help us to forgive Tom Lane and everybody! Will you promise, Bob, as you won’t do him any harm—not fight him, or anything?”

Johnnie’s tones were so earnest and entreating, that Bob at length yielded so far as to say “he’d see about it.”

“But won’t you promise, Bob?”

“No; ’cause I mightn’t be able to help laying hands on him,” returned the other shortly, and Johnnie was forced to be content.

It seemed a long night to the poor little fellow, who was wakeful and restless, whilst, as usual, he shivered from cold, which, severe everywhere, was doubly felt in the comfortless quarters which the two boys inhabited. Bob put his coat over him, and, as he had done the night before, wrapped the slight coverings as much as possible about him, and then lay with his arm around him. But when morning came

Johnnie seemed so worn out, and looked so ill, that Bob formed a sudden resolve, which was nothing less than to go for the doctor.

His aunt's indifference to Johnnie's hurts on the previous day had deeply offended him, for he did not stay to reflect that his short answers had led her to suppose it was nothing more than an ordinary tumble, such as boys are daily meeting with.

Therefore, after telling Johnnie that he should soon be back, he went out, shutting the door, as usual, carefully behind him.

He intended to "bolt"—to use his own expression—through the kitchen, so that no one might question or detain him; but unfortunately, in pushing open the back door in his usual rough manner, he upset a pail of water standing near. Mrs. Saunders, mop in hand, was engaged in washing the brick floor—for whatever her faults might be she certainly possessed the virtue of cleanliness—and as her temper was not of the sweetest, and, moreover as the noise and clatter of the falling pail awoke the baby, who instantly began to cry and yell lustily, this accident of Bob's aroused her anger.

In no gentle tones she exclaimed, "Now, then, you young good-for-nothing, what are you going to do next, I'd like to know! You're always after something or other you oughtn't to; I never saw a lad like you! There just you go and pick up that pail, and fill it again with water," she continued, at the same time closing and setting her back against the door leading to the street, through which she perceived Bob meant to make a dart.

Thus baffled he sullenly obeyed her order, thinking that afterwards he should be at liberty to depart, but Mrs. Saunders still kept her position before the door.

"Let me pass, will you!" he said gruffly and abruptly.

"Not I, for I know you're up to no good!" returned Mrs. Saunders; "what do you want to go out for?"

Bob declined answering her question; only re-repeated his former demand to be allowed to pass.

"Not till I know what you're a-going to do. You're after some piece of mischief or other, I'll be bound; for you ain't generally in such a hurry to be running out. It's work enough most mornings to get you

lazy fellows up at all, as I know to my cost. So tell me what you are a-going to do.”

But Bob remained silent. He could not tell his aunt his errand, as she would, he thought, be certain to forbid it, and say Johnnie wasn't ill, or, at least, that she could doctor him well enough herself. And to give some false reason, or say anything not true, was a thing which Bob, with all his faults, would not stoop to do. So he maintained a dogged silence.

How long the contest would have lasted it is impossible to say, for certainly Bob's obstinacy was sufficient to tire out the most patient and determined of natures, had not the baby, whose cries had been increasing in violence all this time, been suddenly seized with such a fit of coughing, that Mrs. Saunders was forced to quit her post to go and take up her child. Whereupon Bob, availing himself of the opportunity, opened the door, and rushed out of the cottage.

Mr. Hill, the parish doctor, was a kind-hearted man, who made it a point of conscience not to neglect any of his poor patients; and as, when Bob reached his door, he was just on the point of starting to pay an early visit to some one in that neighbourhood, he said he would accompany the lad, and look in upon his little brother in passing.

Most fortunately for him, at the moment when they reached the cottage, Mrs. Saunders had gone up-stairs with the baby in her arms, to call Sam and Bill, who had a habit of sleeping so long and so soundly in the mornings, that nothing but repeated calls and shakes and even scoldings could arouse them.

So, meantime, Bob, after giving a cautious peep around to make sure all was safe, slipped through the house, and, followed by the doctor, made his way out to little Johnnie. Then he breathed more freely. He had gained his object: and if his aunt did meet Mr. Hill on his way out he should not mind then, for the doctor would have seen Johnnie,



“MR. HILL ... SAT DOWN ... WHILST HE ASKED
SEVERAL QUESTIONS”—(p. 39).

and would be sure to tell her that he was really ill, and must be kindly treated.

Mr. Hill made a careful examination of the little fellow, and then sat down on the one chair the room boasted, whilst he asked several questions of the lads.

“I must see your aunt,” said Mr. Hill, rising and turning to Bob; “for I think this will be a case for the hospital, and it might be better to move him there at once. For he will require long and careful nursing; and that he could have better there than here. But you needn’t look so dismayed, my little fellow,” he added, noticing the blank expression of Johnnie’s face; “they’ll be very kind to you there.”

“Oh, sir, don’t take me away from Bob! Oh, please don’t! I couldn’t go and leave him.”

And the tears streamed down the child's cheeks; whilst Bob, whose face had melted into tenderness for the moment, abruptly turned his back upon them, and stood looking out through the little window. But Mr. Hill had seen the sudden change of expression, and glanced at him with curiosity, as if he had found an interesting study in the lad.

Then turning to the younger boy, he spoke a few cheering words to him in a reassuring tone; after which he prepared to take his leave.



CHAPTER VII.

“WILL HE FORGIVE?”



THE astonishment of Mrs. Saunders was extreme when Bob ushered the strange gentleman into the kitchen; and so soon as she understood the state of the case she cast angry threatening glances at the lad. He heeded them not, however, but leaving Mr. Hill to finish his talk with his aunt, he returned to Johnnie.

“Oh, Bob, don’t let ’em take me away,” cried the little fellow, as soon as he entered, “I want to ’bide here with you; and I won’t grumble any more about the cold or anything else; only don’t let ’em take me away!”

“But perhaps they’d make you well again ever so much quicker at the hospital,”

answered the other.

“But I don’t want to go; they’d be all strangers there, and I shouldn’t have you, Bob.”

“But you’d soon make friends of ’em,” returned Bob. “You ain’t like me; you’d soon make ’em love you.”

“Why, Bob, d’you want me to go?” asked Johnnie, in surprise. “I should have thought you’d have been lonely here, left all by yourself.”

A dull aching pain in Bob’s heart bore witness to the truth of Johnnie’s remark; but he did not stay to dwell upon his own feelings, for he had heard the doctor saying to his aunt that the child’s only chance of recovery was the care and good nursing he would receive at the hospital, and Johnnie’s well-being, still more Johnnie’s life, were far more precious to Bob than his own present comfort and happiness. So he stifled all longings to keep him beside him, and tried to reconcile the little brother’s mind to what lay before him.

But all that day he watched over him like some one guarding a most precious treasure, and even seemed jealous of admitting his aunt when she came out to see the boy. And he would scarcely suffer her to do anything for his brother, showing plainly, in his dogged, determined manner, that he considered Johnnie as his own special property, and wished that every service rendered him should be rendered by himself.

And a very gentle nurse he proved himself to be, which seemed wonderful in one so rough and uncouth, though it showed how great is the constraining power of love—how it can master the most rugged nature, and mould it into softness and tenderness.

When the doctor came the second time he was still more decided in his opinion that the little patient must go to the hospital, and accordingly he gave an order for his admittance the following day.

“How long d’you think he’ll have to ’bide there, sir?” Bob summoned up courage to ask.

“I can’t say, my lad; but I’m afraid it may be rather a tedious affair. However, you may be sure we shall do all we can for the little fellow.”

And then he went away.

The short winter’s day was already fast closing in, and darkness soon stole into the small room. It seemed to Bob to creep into his heart as well, for his one little sunbeam was about to be taken away from him, and he knew not when he would return, even if he ever did, for Johnnie looked so white and ill that perhaps he was going to die instead of getting well. But that last thought was too dreadful to be pursued for a moment, and it brought such a lump in Bob’s throat that he almost felt he should choke.

Johnnie had been lying silent, too tired for much talking; but now, when Bob gave a deep sigh, he seemed to guess something of what the other was feeling, and, as if wishing to comfort him, he put out his little hand, and taking Bob’s, drew it to his lips, and printed a kiss upon it. This was too much for Bob; his self-command gave way, and sinking down on his knees beside the little bed, he buried his face from sight, and gave way to a burst of tears.

This was perhaps the first time in his life that he had been so overcome; at least Johnnie could not remember ever having seen Bob

cry before; but now deep sobs for the moment shook the lad's strong frame. He soon recovered himself, however, and forced down all signs of grief, whilst Johnnie contented himself with again taking Bob's hands in his.

The darkness grew deeper and deeper, but still the two remained in the same attitude—the elder one fancying, from his silence, that the younger was falling off to sleep, and so fearing to disturb him by any movement.

After a quarter of an hour or more had passed by thus, Bob was almost startled when Johnnie's voice broke the silence, saying, in a low tone,

“You'll forgive him, Bob, won't you?”

“Who?” asked Bob, his thoughts having been wandering so far that for the moment he forgot to whom Johnnie was referring.

“You know Bob—Tom Lane. You'll do it, won't you?”

“I'll try, for your sake, as you seem to have set your heart so on it,” answered the lad, after a moment's hesitation.

“Not for my sake only, Bob.”

“Whose, then?” asked the other, in apparent surprise.

“Jesus Christ's,” replied Johnnie, in a low voice. “He's told us to forgive everybody, and you know He's looking down to see whether we do it or not, and 'twould make Him so sorry if He saw we weren't trying to please Him. 'Cause He loves us so, Bob—doesn't He? A deal better even than we love one another. So 'twould be so bad of us—wouldn't it?—to show as we didn't care for Him.”

Bob did not answer; and after a pause Johnnie began again.

“I thought at first, Bob, 'twould be so dreadful to go to the hospital all alone, with nobody as I knew or loved anywhere nigh me; but just now I seemed to remember all of a sudden as I shouldn't be alone after all, 'cause Jesus would be there. So I don't seem to mind going now, except for leaving you, Bob. But I'll ask Jesus to 'bide with you too. Isn't it nice to think as He can be in every place at the same time, with you here, and with me at the hospital? Doesn't it make you happy, Bob, to think how He's always taking care of us and loving us?”

Still no answer from Bob; only a husky sound in his throat. Certainly the two brothers were very unlike each other: Bob so silent and reserved, and Johnnie seeming to find it a relief to tell out his little feelings of love or sorrow. But it was only to his brother that he thus opened his mind; to all others he perhaps was almost as shy as the elder one about revealing the secrets of his heart.

Once more silence fell upon the brothers; during which Bob sat still and motionless. What was going on in his mind meanwhile no one could say; but possibly in that silence his little brother's simple words were echoing in his heart and speaking loudly there. Possibly, at that moment, if never before, he was feeling it to be a reality that the eye of God was upon him, searching out all his thoughts and feelings. And what did He see in him! What was Johnnie's little fit of passion, which was over in a minute and so mourned for afterwards, compared to the anger and longing for revenge which had stirred within him, not only lately, but countless times before? Possibly some such thoughts as these passed through Bob's mind; but as he did not tell his feelings, it is by his actions we must judge him; and therefore we must wait and see what those were before we can know whether he ever did learn that lesson of love and forgiveness—so hard to most of us—or whether it proved too difficult for him.





CHAPTER VIII.

LESSONS LEARNT IN LONELINESS.



“YOU’LL be able to come and see me at the hospital, won’t you, Bob? The doctor said so, didn’t he?”

“Aye, aye,” responded Bob.

“And when you come you’ll tell me what they said at Sunday-school, won’t you, Bob?”

“I never knows anything as they say there,” answered the other.

Johnnie’s face fell a little. “I should so like to know if teacher tells anything more about the Good Shepherd. And I shan’t be able to go.”

“Well, I’ll try and listen, but I ain’t like to remember much, ’cause you know I’m a stupid, that’s what I am.”

This little conversation was held between the brothers the next morning, before the hour of parting had arrived. One more request Johnnie had to make; and that was that Bob would take special care of his little dove, and never forget to feed or look after it. But he need scarcely have asked that; for Johnnie’s little favourite already held a place in Bob’s heart, partly on its own account, but chiefly because the little brother loved it so much.

At length came the separation, and Bob found himself left alone. The place had never looked so dull and cheerless, so bare and comfortless before; and as he thought of Johnnie’s wan pale face, the terrible fear came back again upon him that “may-be he was a-going to die!”

He sat down on his low stool, his elbows resting on his knees, and his face buried in his hands; and thus he remained for a considerable time, whilst every now and then a sob escaped him. At length—as if he found his burden of trouble and anxiety too great to bear alone, he

sank down on his knees beside the bed where Johnnie had lain, and sent up a prayer—perhaps his first real earnest one—to that Heavenly Friend, whom his little brother had already learned so to love and trust, that He would take care of him and make him well again. And as he thought of the child's words, "that Jesus would be with him in the hospital, and therefore he didn't so much mind going there," Bob's heart seemed to soften and go out in feelings of gratitude towards that unseen Friend, on Johnnie's account.

But he felt very lonely when he lay down that evening, for the first time, without his little brother beside him; and all that night his dreams were of Johnnie, whilst his first waking thoughts turned to him. There was no one now to give him a kind word or look; and all day long Bob, who had always seemed to do his best, by his rough, sullen, surly ways, to make himself disliked, went about with a dull aching pain at his heart, which made him more than ever inclined to be cross and quarrelsome. Though he could not have told what he wanted, he was longing for sympathy, for a friendly glance or a soothing word; but as, instead of trying to win, he had rather seemed to repel all love save Johnnie's, so now, in his hour of need and loneliness, none came forward to show him affection or take any interest in him.

On coming out of afternoon school Bob caught sight of Tom Lane, whom he looked upon as the cause of all his trouble; and, accordingly, his first impulse was to rush after him, and give him a "regular licking," as he would have expressed it. But the next instant came the remembrance of Johnnie's words, pleading with him, and trying to make him promise to forgive Tom. And the thought that Jesus was looking down upon him at that moment, to see whether he did what was right or not, came into his mind. He had a fierce struggle with himself; his angry passions were so strong, and he was so little accustomed to do anything but yield to them, that it seemed as if they must have the mastery, and, in spite of his promise to Johnnie, he must take some revenge upon his enemy. For revenge seemed so sweet; to forego it so hard and bitter!

But just as he seemed on the point of giving way, all that his little brother had said about the Good Shepherd, and his longing that they should both belong to His fold, came back to him. "And if I don't

forgive, I can't get taken in there: Johnnie 'll be inside and I left outside."

That thought decided him. He would try to forgive, whatever it cost him, and so he would let Tom Lane depart without that thrashing he had so longed to give him. Not in his own strength could he do even thus much: but when we earnestly wish to do what is right, that wish is like a prayer, and cries to God for help. And help and strength are promised to those who seek them.

Therefore Bob was enabled to come off conqueror. He turned away and walked off homewards, having gained his first victory over his angry passions; and new, strange feelings of joy and happiness seemed to steal into his heart and warm and comfort it.

And when he lay down to rest that night, still sorely missing his little bed-fellow, the thought of Johnnie brought back the recollection of his words, that Jesus would not only be with him at the hospital, but with Bob at home as well; and the idea of having a Friend always with him, watching over and loving him, was very sweet to poor friendless unloved Bob.

The next Sunday he went to school as usual; but when there—for the first time in the remembrance of his class—he sat quietly, read his verse properly, and listened attentively. For he had not forgotten his promise to little Johnnie, whom he hoped to see that afternoon; and he was trying hard to be able to take away something that he might tell him.

The other boys, astonished at this unwonted behaviour, tried to provoke him in various ways, but he heeded them not, his mind being too full of one subject to have room for any other. His determined nature showed itself in a new light now, for having made up his mind that he would listen and try to remember what was said, all the devices of the other lads to draw off his attention were quite in vain. He was like some rock standing firm in the midst of the waters, which dash themselves against it, but then glide off, powerless to harm or make any impression.

The lesson that day seemed as if it had been chosen on purpose for Bob, for it was all about forgiveness. And now he heard how the Lord

Jesus had taught that those who would be His friends and followers must imitate His example in being loving and forgiving; and, moreover, the teacher went on to say, real forgiveness was not simply to refrain from taking revenge and seeking to do harm to those who had injured us, but meant much more than this, even that we must be ready to do kind actions and speak kind words to those very people who had so hurt and vexed us:—"But I say unto you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

This was to go a step further than Bob had yet gone. He had refrained from taking revenge—that had been very hard work—but now he must do more still, or, according to what his teacher said, and the words of the text he had quoted taught, he could not say he had forgiven. And if he could not forgive the little offences done against himself, how could he expect the Lord Jesus to forgive him all his great offences.

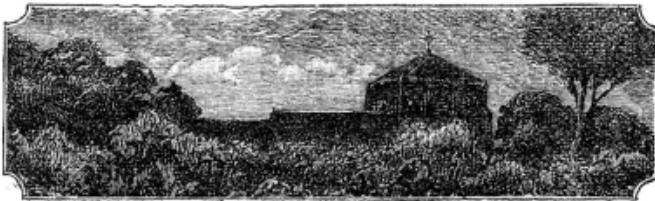
When Bob, having obtained admittance to the hospital, drew near Johnnie's bed, the latter looked up with a smile of such unmistakable pleasure at seeing him, that the nurse, who was standing near, could not help noticing it, and mentally wondered what there could be in that clumsy "lout of a fellow," as she called Bob in her own mind, to call forth such a welcome from the gentle little lad, who had already won her heart by his patience and engaging ways.

But Bob and Johnnie knew each other better than others knew them, and they were happy in each other's company. The time went much too fast, as they talked of many things; whilst Bob, in his blundering way, tried to repeat something of what he had heard at the Sunday-school.

Johnnie, however, looked so thin and ill and wasted, that Bob, after he had left the hospital, walked along with slow steps and bent head, full of anxious doubts and fears, whilst once or twice he put up the back of his hand to brush away some mist which had gathered before his eyes. And when he reached home, and took his place at tea among the band of noisy quarrelsome cousins, he remained unlike his wont, subdued and silent, taking little notice of what went on around.

But when the baby from his cradle set up a lusty cry, signifying his desire of having some attention paid to him, Bob took him on his knee, and gently rocked him to and fro in an absent manner, whilst still seeming to be occupied with his own musings. The refining touch of sorrow was upon him, and beneath it the rugged nature seemed to be softening and melting. And when the baby, clasping its tiny fingers around Bob's rough ones, laughed and crowed in his face, his lips parted into a half smile, which made him look altogether different from "Surly Bob."

And when bed-time came, as he crossed the yard on his way to his lonely room, he murmured to himself in a low voice more than once, the word "forgive."



CHAPTER IX.

VICTORIOUS.



THE week slipped away much as usual with Bob until Friday afternoon came round. It was already growing dusk, as, in returning from an errand on which his aunt had sent him, he found himself sauntering along an unfrequented road which led past the west front of the church.

Suddenly he was startled by hearing a crash as of broken glass falling from one of the windows in the tower. A disused churchyard surrounded the church, the whole being enclosed by a wall; but on this west side, on which was the tower, the building stood only a few paces back from the road, and therefore Bob could not help noticing the sound, and being attracted by it.

He stood still for a moment, glancing upwards, and then he fancied he heard his name called. The sound seemed to proceed from that same part of the tower; but the next minute he said to himself that it could only be his fancy, for it was impossible that any one could be in the church, which was always kept closely shut and locked.

At this instant, however, another crash of broken glass arrested him, whilst this time he distinctly heard his own name called, and he recognised the voice as Tom Lane's. He looked up in astonishment, but it was growing too dark to make out anything.

“I say, Bob Saunders, help a fellow, will you?”

“Where in the world are you?” exclaimed Bob, forgetting, in his surprise, the fact that he and Tom were sworn enemies.

“I'm shut up here in the tower; and I can't get out, for they've locked all the doors. And here I shall be left all night, unless you'll go and get some one to come with the key. Do, Bob, be a good fellow for once: for I've been here ever so long already, and master 'll be so

dreadful angry at my not coming back all this time, that like enough he'll turn me off outright. Run and fetch the sexton, Bob, and then I'll do you a good turn some day!"

The last words were uttered in imploring, half despairing tones, for Bob had already turned away, as if refusing to heed the entreaties of the other. He walked on a few paces, whilst a fierce struggle went on in his mind, Tom's reference to his master having recalled a new grievance. For Bob also had applied for this same situation as errand-boy to Mr. Cross, the chemist; and the latter having preferred the sharp-looking Tom Lane to the dull heavy-looking clumsy Bob Saunders, the former had exulted over the



THE OLD CHURCH.

defeated candidate, who had retired from the contest much disappointed.

And now here was a chance for Bob of getting the place after all; for if Tom never went back that night, it was not likely Mr. Cross would put up with such behaviour. He would be sure to dismiss him, and might then, perhaps, give Bob a trial. So he seemed to have Tom quite in his power; for if *he* did not release him, it was more than probable that no one else would be passing along that lonely lane that evening, and thus Tom would be left to his imprisonment all night.

But still all this time it was as if a voice were sounding in his ear, “Forgive—forgive. Be kind one to another, forgiving one another.” And yet another voice was urging, “Take your revenge; don’t be such a simpleton as to lose this chance of getting into Tom’s place; for he is sure to forfeit it, unless you are so foolish as to let him out.”

But the tumult in his heart was stilled, as he sent up an earnest cry for help: and, turning back with a resolute air, he only paused underneath the tower to cry out, “I’m going for the keys, Tom, and I’ll be back in no time,” and then ran off as fast as he could go to the sexton’s house.

He found him in, and explained his errand; but it was a good while before the old man could at all understand the case.

“A boy in the church tower d’you say! No, no; you’re a-making game of me! No boys couldn’t get into the church tower. It must ha’ been the owls you heard.”

“I tell you, master, ’twas Tom Lane. I know his voice well enough; he don’t hoot like an owl.”

“It must be Tom Lane’s ghost then,” returned the old man; “for fifty Tom Lanes couldn’t ha’ got into the church with all the doors safe locked, and they haven’t been opened since Sunday, ’cause there ain’t no week-service now the vicar’s away; and they won’t be opened neither till to-morrow, the day for cleaning, when my missus ’ll take the keys and let herself in. And if Tom Lane’s been in the church all this time since Sunday, why he must have been starved to death long ago, I should say.”

“I don’t know how he got there; but come along, and make haste and let him out, master, or else let me take the keys.”

“Oh, that’s what you’re up to, is it? and so you come making up this fine story about Tom Lane! No, no, I’m a match for you! and I ain’t a-going to trust any boy as I know in all the place with them ’ere keys. Fine tricks you lads ’ud be after playing in the church, if I let a whole tribe of you get in there! No, no; I ain’t a-going to trust my keys to the likes of you.”

“Then come along and see for yourself if ’tisin’t true what I’ve been a-telling of you.”

Still it was a long time before old Simon, who loved to be most unbelieving, could be prevailed upon to leave his warm fireside, and turn out in the cold; but at length he unwillingly yielded to Bob’s representations, and as his cottage was at no great distance from the church, they soon arrived there.

The old man had taken the precaution of bringing his lantern with him, so that on entering the building they were not in total darkness; but all was still and silent within.



“There ain’t nobody here,” muttered Simon, whose temper was none of the best. “I guessed you were up to some of your tricks, Bob Saunders, you always were a bad ’un; and now you’re come to play off your pranks on an old man, making him turn out this bitter night on a fool’s errand, and then you’ll go and set all the place a-laughing at him!”

“I ain’t going to do no such thing,” retorted Bob. “I told you ’twas in the *tower* I heard Tom, so come and look there first, master, afore you begin a-scolding of me.”

But by this time Tom’s attentive ear had caught the sound of their voices, and, descending the staircase, he suddenly commenced such a vigorous thumping and kicking at the door at the foot of the stairs, by way of attracting their attention, that old Simon was so startled by the unexpected noise, that he almost dropped the lantern he held in his hands. At length, however, he produced the key, and cautiously opened the door, when he found it was indeed Tom Lane who was standing there, and no ghost.

“How on earth did you get into the church?” was his first exclamation.

“Through the door, of course,” rejoined Tom.

“Now, none of your gammon for me. Don’t tell me you got in through the door, for we ain’t like to leave ’em open all week for you good-for-nothing young rascals to come in and play your tricks in the church.”

“It was though; or how else could I have got in?”

“Then if the door was wide open, why didn’t you go out again same way as you came in, instead of staying boxed up here, and fetching of me out in the cold to come and open it for you?” demanded the old man.

“I didn’t say as they were *wide* open; but as I was passing along I saw one of ’em ajar, and so I thought I’d slip in and have a look round about. And then I spied this tower door open, and says I to myself, ‘Here’s fun! I’ve always wanted dreadful bad to go up that ’ere tower, but I’ve never had a chance; now I’ll see for myself what it’s like up there,’ and so up I cut. But just as I was thinking of coming down again, somebody come and turned the key in the door; and, though I rushed down as quick as ever I could, and hollered, and kicked, and banged at the door, I couldn’t make nobody hear. And there I have been ever since, till I saw Bob Saunders coming along, and managed to make him hear me; but ’twas precious hard work.”

Tom did not go on to relate *how* he had made his presence in the tower known to Bob; but, picking up his basket of bottles, he rushed off to deliver his medicines, and then try to excuse his delay to his master as best he could. But before he went, he turned to Bob, saying, “ ’Twas real good of you, Bob, to help me out of this scrape; and I shan’t forget it. I’ll do you a good turn if ever I have a chance.”

The old man, meantime, on his return to his house, received from his wife, who had come in during his absence, an explanation which enabled him to understand the circumstance which had seemed so mysterious.

Simon, directly after their early dinner, had gone out on an errand which had detained him the whole afternoon, so that he had only been in about ten minutes when Bob came to fetch him. As he found his wife out on his return, he had heard nothing of what had taken place during his absence; but now she explained that a lady, for whom she worked as charwoman, had come soon after he went out, wishing to secure her services for the morrow, and as she did not like to refuse, having an eye always to making a little money whenever a chance of doing so presented itself, she had come to the conclusion that it would not matter for once if she went and cleaned the church that afternoon instead of the next morning, and this she accordingly did.

Having finished her work, she had come home and put the keys back in their usual place, so that Simon, finding them there, had naturally imagined they had never been moved since Sunday, and thus

had been at such a loss to account for Tom's having been able to find his way into the church.

But he told his wife that for the future she must never leave the door even ajar, "for them young rascals had such sharp eyes;" but she had better always lock it after her when she went in.

And as it was very rarely that any one went up the tower, or round that part of the churchyard which lay beneath it, the broken window was not discovered until so long a time had elapsed that Tom's adventure had been forgotten even by old Simon, and no one thought of inquiring who had been the author of the mischief.



CHAPTER X.

COMING TO THE RESCUE.



THE following Monday afternoon, Bob was going along one of the narrow back streets which led to his home, when, as he drew near to a greengrocer's stall, he caught sight of his cousin Sam standing looking longingly at some tempting apples displayed in a basket outside. As there was a long stretch of blank wall opposite, Sam, no doubt, thought himself unobserved; and seizing the moment when Mrs. Luke, who generally kept a sharp eye upon her property, had gone through for a

moment to her cottage at the back, he put out his hand, and taking some of the apples stealthily, slid them into his pocket. Emboldened by the success of his first attempt, he was preparing to repeat the action, when a hand was suddenly laid upon him, and turning round with a violent start, he found himself seized in Bob's grasp.

The latter held him firmly by the collar, as he demanded, "What are you after now, you young thief? Stealing old Mrs. Luke's apples, be you?"

"Let go!" cried the boy, angrily, as he tried to wriggle out of Bob's grasp. "'Tain't no business of yours what I'm a-doing; let go, I say!"

"Not till you've put back all them 'ere apples as you've taken. Come, turn out your pockets, or else I'll make you."

"You shan't!" retorted Sam, furious with passion, and preparing to use both feet as well as fists in his own defence. "I ain't a-going to do what *you* tells me, so you needn't think it."

But at this moment a third person, who was no other than Mrs. Luke's son, came up behind, unnoticed by the boys. Overhearing their words, which were spoken in no gentle tones, he at once perceived how matters stood.

"So I've found you out, you rascal! you thief!" he exclaimed, seizing a stout stick, with which he gave Sam a sound thrashing. "Let me catch you at these tricks again, and, I warn you, I'll hand you over to the police, and get you punished as you deserve. Turn out your pockets, you rogue; and remember, if you ever go trying these dodges again I'll do as I said. Take care I don't see you hanging about in these parts any more," he added, with a threatening look, as he flung the boy from him.

Sam, the moment he was released, darted off like a shot; whilst Bob, who followed more slowly, found himself, when he reached home, greeted with very black looks from his cousin, who muttered, as he passed him in the doorway, "Won't I pay you out for this, you great bully! See if I don't do something to you as *you* won't like! I'll have my revenge; and I knows *how* too."

The next day, instead of going to school in the afternoon, Bob was sent by his aunt on an errand for her. Having accomplished his business, he was sauntering up the High Street on his way back, when his attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of horses' hoofs. Looking round he perceived a pony running away, and tearing at full gallop down the street towards him. His rider was a little boy, whose face was blanched with terror, whilst he uttered loud cries for help, which only served still more to madden the frightened animal.

For one instant Bob stood still, taking in the state of the case; the next he had sprung forward just as the animal approached him, and calmly and coolly seizing the most favourable moment, had thrown himself in front of the pony, and laying hold of the bridle firmly, had thus brought him to a standstill.

Then he turned to the child—a handsome little fellow of only seven or eight years of age—who, overcome with fright, flung his arms round his preserver's neck, and, regardless of every circumstance save the fact that he was his preserver, in his gratitude gave him a kiss, and then, laying his head on his shoulder, burst into a fit of sobbing. He

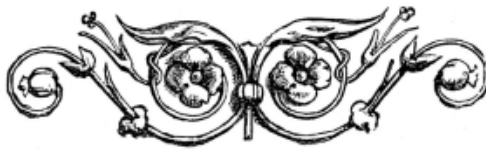
soon recovered himself, however; for Bob's strong arm was thrown round him with a protecting touch, whilst he muttered, in the soft tones he could sometimes use when his feelings were moved, "You be all safe now, little master; there's nothing to cry for. I'll take care the pony don't start off again. But let me lift you off; shall I?"

The child held out his arms confidingly to Bob, who gently set him down upon the ground. Just as he did so a gentleman, with a face almost as pale as that of the child, came hurrying up through the crowd, which made way for him to advance.

The little boy, on perceiving him, sprang forward, crying, "Papa, papa, here I am! I am all safe! This boy here stopped the pony, though he was going at such a pace! I was all but off. Oh, I was so frightened!"

The gentleman clasped his boy in his arms with exclamations of deep thankfulness, and then said a few soothing words to the little fellow, who was still trembling all over with excitement. For the moment he was too much engrossed in ascertaining if his child were really quite unharmed, to have room for any other thoughts; but the next instant he turned to thank his little boy's preserver.

Bob, however, had already disappeared.



CHAPTER XI.

A SORROWFUL HEART.



BOB meantime had slunk off, never dreaming of waiting for thanks, nor even thinking that anything he had done merited them; but his heart had been strongly moved and stirred, first by the sight of the child's danger, then by the sense of having rescued him from that peril, and lastly by that unexpected embrace of the grateful little fellow.

He seemed still to feel the warm soft lips pressed to his cheek; and to think of that lovely child having actually kissed him—"Surly Bob!" It did indeed seem very strange and unreal. And yet it was so pleasant too, it made his heart glow to think of it.

Full of these reflections, he scarcely noticed where he was going, until his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by his stumbling against some one who was coming at a quick pace from the opposite direction. Glancing up, he first of all perceived that it was a gentleman, and then that the gentleman was no other than Mr. Hill, the doctor who had been so kind to Johnnie, and about whom the latter had often spoken to Bob when he went to see him.

Covered with confusion, he was attempting some awkward apologies, when Mr. Hill began, "Why this is Bob Saunders, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just the boy I was wanting to see. Can you turn and walk a few steps with me, my lad, as I am in a hurry, and I have something I want to say to you?"

Bob turned in silence, wondering what Mr. Hill had to say, but little dreaming what it would be. He soon knew, however, for Mr. Hill, after a few words about Johnnie, went on, "I half feared from the first that we should not be able to save the poor little fellow's leg; and now that we have tried every means that could be thought of, we find there is no

course left us but to take it off above the knee. The injury received was too great, and the disease too deeply seated for a cure.”

Bob was slow in comprehending some things, but he understood what these words meant, and his heart seemed to die away within him. He did not speak a word or show any sign of grief, so that a stranger would have thought him utterly indifferent; but when Mr. Hill left him he turned to walk homewards like one half stunned, feeling as if a heavy weight had suddenly fallen upon his heart, crushing it and making it ache with a dull pain, whilst it seemed full to bursting with yearning love and tenderness towards little Johnnie. If he could but go to him and comfort him, and stay beside him and help him to bear it! but the doctor said he must not see any one until the operation was well over, and he was making progress towards recovery.

Oh, if he could but bear it for him! He would give his leg, he would give both of them, gladly, if it could spare Johnnie. And yet he could do nothing for him! That seemed the hardest part of all.

When Bob reached home, finding it was not yet tea-time, he went straight out to his den at the back; for he always preferred his own company to that of his cousins, more especially now that his heart was so sore and heavy. But no sooner had he opened the door, which, by the way, did not seem to be fastened so carefully as usual, than he perceived something lying on the ground, and stooping, he found it was their little dove—Johnnie’s pet—already cold and dead. Yes, there was no doubt about its being dead; for though Bob stroked it gently, and put his warm cheek down against it, and blew softly upon it, and spoke to it, and even kissed it, nothing was of any avail; the bird still remained motionless, not so much as a feather stirred.

At length Bob, seeing that the little pet was past recovery, laid him gently down; his face darkening meantime, as he muttered to himself, “There’s been foul play here, that’s plain enough. Somebody must have got in somehow, and killed Johnnie’s bird. Let me catch him, that’s all!” and Bob’s looks and clenched fists expressed pretty plainly what he meant by that word “all.”

But at that moment some slight sound attracted his attention; and glancing up at the little opening in the wall which went by the name of window, he found his cousin Sam’s face squeezed against the small

panes of glass, as he tried to obtain a view of what was going on within.

“So this is the revenge he threatened,” thought Bob, as their eyes met; when Sam fell back with a mocking laugh, which left the other in no doubt as to who had been guilty of the death of their favourite.

Bob’s wrath blazed out in uncontrollable fury; and before Sam could escape he had caught him, and was giving him such a thrashing as he had never before given to any one. Sam’s cries and howls were so loud that they drew Mrs. Saunders out to see what could be going on.

At length with a sudden jerk he flung Sam from him, and bolting into his room, slammed the door in the faces of the others, and then firmly secured it. To make it still more safe he planted his back against it; and remained standing thus, listening to the sounds outside, but paying no heed either to Mrs. Saunders’s demands to him to open, or to her threats of punishment, whilst Sam’s howls grew more and more dismal as he found his mother taking his part. So he made the most of his hurts, whilst Mrs. Saunders exhausted all her powers of eloquence, as, in her loud shrill voice, she set before Bob, in strong terms, the baseness of his ingratitude, “in turning thus upon the child of them as had clothed and fed him all these years. But Bob would come to a bad end, that was certain. She always did say so, and always would. He’d find himself in gaol some day with that temper of his, and ’twould serve him right too. And, moreover, the sooner he moved off and learnt to shift for himself the better; for ’twas high time he did so; and she knew it was very wrong of her to let him stop on, setting such a bad example as he did to her own children. But let him dare to lay a finger on one of them again, and she would take care he didn’t get off without a punishment! And his uncle should be told all about him when he came home; and she guessed he’d turn him out of doors that very day.”

The longer Mrs. Saunders continued to pour out her words, the more angry she seemed to get; whilst Sam (of whose late behaviour she was quite ignorant, or she might, if only for the sake of justice, have rebuked him as well) stood by whining, and trying to make out that he had been very desperately hurt.

How long this would have lasted it is impossible to say, had not Mrs. Saunders, pausing to take breath, suddenly become aware that some one was rapping loudly at her front door. She accordingly hastened to open it, followed by Sam, and found a gentleman standing there, who had dismounted from his horse, which he was holding by the bridle.

“Does any one of the name of Saunders live here?” he inquired.

“Yes, sir; that’s my name,” replied Mrs. Saunders.

“Then perhaps you may be the lad’s mother? It is a boy of the name of Bob Saunders I am seeking.”

“Oh then he ain’t *my* son, thank goodness!” ejaculated Mrs. Saunders. “What has he been a-doing now, sir? Something bad, I’ll be bound; for that boy wouldn’t stop at anything, it’s my opinion.”

“I am sorry to hear such a character of him,” returned the gentleman, who was no other than Mr. Deveron, “for he has just performed a very brave action, and I have come to thank him for it, as he slipped away before I had time to do so. This isn’t the lad, is it?” he added, turning to Sam.

“No, sir, not if his name’s Bob. This is my own boy, Sam, sir.”

“But does Bob live here? I was told he did. He is your nephew, probably.”

“Yes, sir; my husband’s nephew.”

“And is he in? Can I speak to him?”

Mrs. Saunders turned to Sam, saying, “Go and tell him to come here, will you.”

Sam went off slowly and reluctantly; for as his angry revengeful feelings had not yet cooled down, he by no means relished the idea of seeing Bob noticed, and praised, and even thanked by the strange gentleman, whilst he was totally overlooked. Therefore he obeyed his mother according to the letter, but that was all.

Giving a loud kick to the door, he cried out to Bob, “You’re to come, mother says,” and then ran off, seized with fear lest his enemy should suddenly pounce out upon him and give him another thrashing like the last, from which he was still smarting.

After lingering a few moments in the back kitchen, in order to make it appear that he had been all this time endeavouring to persuade Bob to accompany him, he returned to the other room, where Mr. Deveron meantime had been relating to Mrs. Saunders the part which Bob had been playing that afternoon, finishing by saying, "After taking my little boy home, and telling his mamma all that had happened, I came back here at once to seek Bob, as we both were so anxious to thank him."

"Well, is he coming?" asked Mrs. Saunders as Sam stole in.

"No; I've told him, but he won't come."



CHAPTER XII.

BOB'S DREAM.



BOB meantime, ignorant of what was going on, remained safely barricaded in his fortress. Finding, after a while, that all had grown quiet outside, he moved from his position by the door, and sank down upon the low stool with his face buried in his hands.

Very miserable he felt; perhaps more miserable than he had ever been before. His fit of passion was over now; and as he thought how he had been trying to revenge himself, forgetting all he had lately been learning about forgiveness, and had yielded to that fierce temper of his which had so often brought him into trouble, he felt humbled and sorrowful. For he had been grieving that Heavenly Friend, who had lately at times seemed so near, but Who now, if He treated him as he deserved, would go away and leave him. And it had been so sweet to think that there was *One* Friend who was ready to love him just as he was—so unlovable that none but little Johnnie cared for him! It had been such happiness to think that Jesus would not turn from him because he was clumsy, and awkward, and stupid, and ill-tempered; but in spite of all his badness would receive him and help him to grow better. And now this was the return he was making for that love!

His aunt's taunts and reproaches now came back to his mind, adding their sting to all these other troubles. His independent spirit had long chafed at the thought of being a burden to others; but to-night it seemed more intolerable than ever. Better would it be to beg his bread, he thought, than go on thus. Besides, after his treatment of Sam he should be in worse disgrace than ever.

For a long time he sat, running his fingers through his hair as if to assist his puzzled brains, whilst he tried to think of some plan for the future; but his efforts seemed in vain, as every now and then he gave a

dejected shake of his head. How long he remained thus he could not tell, but it had grown dark some time ago. At length he began to feel drowsy; his thoughts became more and more confused; his head dropped forward, and by degrees he slipped from his stool down on the ground, where he lay fast asleep.

Then it seemed to him that the little boy whose pony he had stopped that afternoon was standing over him, and bending down asking why he was looking so sorrowful. And he fancied that he replied, "Because he had no friends; for the only One who was willing to love him he had vexed so much that he didn't know whether He would be his Friend any more." The little boy's blue eyes filled with tears at the thought of his having no friend; and he stooped down and kissed him. The tears seemed to come into Bob's eyes now, as he felt the touch of those little lips, and he put up his hand to brush them away. And as he did so he saw another Form, more beautiful than anything he had ever beheld, standing behind the child, and the Form bent towards him with a face so kind and loving, and placed something in his hand, saying at the same time that he need never again feel that he had no friend, for He would always be one to him, and would never leave him nor forsake him. Then Bob looked down to see what it was He had placed in his hands, for at first he thought it must be their little dove come to life again, it appeared so like it, and felt so warm and soft. But as he looked it seemed to grow whiter and whiter, and larger and larger, until at last it folded its wings all round about him. Then he felt so safe and happy that he scarcely knew what to do for joy. And that Form seemed to smile upon him, whilst he fancied a voice said, "He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust." And then he thought he asked if Johnnie mightn't come in too, and have those wings folded round him as well; but before the answer came Bob awoke, and found it was nothing but a dream.

With the first faintest streak of daylight Bob rose, and prepared to put into execution the plan he had formed over-night, which was no other than to go forth and seek his fortune in the world. Various motives had led him to this resolve; and having once made it, he was not the boy to change his mind.

Gently picking up the dead dove, with a sorrowful glance at it he laid it in his pocket, and then paused to consider how to get away without being noticed. His only mode of escaping unobserved he saw was to climb over the garden wall. But having done that, he would find himself in a neighbour's garden, and have still another wall to scale before he could get into the lane; and if any of the neighbours happened to perceive him he should get into trouble, for they would be sure to say he had come after the hens or to steal the eggs. However, there was not much chance of any one's being about at that early hour; and as that was the only way of getting off, save by going through the cottage, which Bob specially wished to avoid doing, he determined to risk it.

Using all the caution he could he managed his escape in safety, and found himself free. But what should he do with his freedom? Whither should he bend his steps?

The hospital seemed more like home to him than any other place, for Johnnie was inside it; therefore he turned in that direction, though feeling so forlorn that he would at that moment have been willing to submit to any accident, pain, or suffering, if only he might be admitted within the building as a patient, and thus enabled to be with his brother.

The morning was wearing on, the sun had shone out brightly by this time, and people were going their various ways, some intent on business, others tempted out of doors by the fine weather; but all, whatever their errand or object, passing by without noticing the lad who was standing leaning against the railings of the hospital, wondering whether any who came by might be in want of a boy in some capacity or other, and might be induced to try *him*.

But none as yet had taken the slightest notice of him; and, meantime, he was growing more and more hungry, and longing more and more for some breakfast. But he had yet a deeper longing than that one for food, and that was for a kind word, for an encouraging look, for a helping hand stretched out to him.

All these wishes and longings, however, though unknown to others, even to little Johnnie, who would have been so grieved had he known that Bob was standing outside feeling so lonely and sorrowful, were

yet all known to the Great Father above, whose heart was sharing each pang that passed through that of the boy, whose eye was reading each thought and feeling, and whose hand was already bringing comfort near.

For as Bob was standing, full of anxious forebodings, looking up the street in one direction, a lady and gentleman and a little boy were approaching in the other. Suddenly the child, with the cry, "There he is, mamma! That's the boy that stopped my pony, papa!" darted forward, and seized hold of Bob's hand.

The latter turned with a start, and found himself face to face with the little fellow whose bright engaging countenance had haunted him in his dreams the night before. The next moment Mr. and Mrs. Deveron had also come up, and were overwhelming him with thanks for having done what he had thought such a simple thing that he never expected to hear of it again.

He grew quite shy and hot at finding himself made so much of, and fancied somehow it must be all a mistake, or he must be dreaming again; for the lady had actually taken his hand—his rough, coarse, dirty hand—in her small one, and was even holding it there as if she did not care even if the dirt did come off on to her light kid gloves. And she was not only holding his hand, just as if he had been a friend of hers, but she was looking down upon him with the sweetest face Bob had ever seen, and in the kindest of voices was saying, "How fortunate we were to meet you, for we were on our way to your home in hopes of finding you there. I could not rest until I had come to thank you for your brave conduct yesterday. It makes me shudder to think of what might have happened but for your help;" and she glanced towards her little son, who was standing by, bright and rosy, the picture of health, but who, had it not been for Bob's timely aid, might have met with a terrible accident. "I can never thank you enough for coming to the rescue as you did," she added.

"No, we cannot forget it," interposed Mr. Deveron; "and you must let us know in what way we can be of service to you, for you have a claim upon our gratitude, and we should like to befriend you."

Bob's heart gave a great leap, and even his face grew eager and animated for once. Could it be possible that the gentleman might help

to get him a place, or work of any kind? But no; that seemed too much to hope. For he was afraid there must be a mistake somewhere, or the lady and gentleman wouldn't be treating him like this. Perhaps they were taking him for some other lad; at any rate, they could not know how bad a boy he was. And his face fell again.

"Well, what is it?" asked Mr. Deveron. "What would you like us to do for you?"

"Please, sir, I'm only Bob Saunders," was the unexpected reply.

"Yes; I was told that was your name," returned Mr. Deveron.

"And I ain't a good boy, sir. I'm a reg'lar bad 'un, so they say. They call me 'Surly Bob.' "

"At any rate you're an *honest* fellow," said Mr. Deveron, with an amused smile, "you don't try to pass off for anything better than you are. And now you've told us thus much about yourself, tell us what it is you would like us to do for you? What was the wish that came into your mind just now?"

"Please, sir, it's a place as I wants so dreadful bad. But nobody won't take me 'cause I'm so slow and stupid you see, sir."

This was rather a long speech for silent Bob, and he seemed astonished himself at his courage in making it, for his face grew redder and redder as he went on.

Little Edgar standing by, looked as if he was wondering at Bob's strange request, and was, moreover, a little disappointed at it. "Why doesn't he ask papa for a nice new coat and trousers?" he was saying to himself, "for those he has on are so very shabby and ragged. And he might have asked for a better cap too, in fact a whole new suit of clothes. And then he might have said he'd like to have a jolly dinner, with plenty of plum-pudding and mince-pies, for I'm sure he looks hungry enough. Oh, he might have asked for such lots of things, and I know papa would have given them to him! But instead of that he just asks for some work. I'm sure I'd have said something very different!"

Mr. Deveron, however, did not seem to be of the same opinion as his little boy, for he looked pleased at Bob's request; whilst Mrs. Deveron, turning to her husband, said, "You'll be able to help him in that way, will you not?"

“I dare say I shall; I will see. But what sort of work are you wanting to find, my boy?”

“I’d do *anything*, sir, if somebody’d only try me. Leastways, I’d do my best, but I know I’m stupid, so p’raps there ain’t much as I *could* do.”

And as this view of his own qualifications presented itself to poor Bob, a hopeless look came over his face.

“A willing spirit is better than any amount of cleverness, my boy,” said Mrs. Deveron, laying her hand kindly on his shoulder. “So cheer up, for I dare say we shall be able to find some kind of work that you may be able to manage.”

“Yes, I will consider it over, and you can come out to my place this afternoon and ask for me,” said Mr. Deveron. And having told the lad his name, and described to him where he lived, he turned to go farther on.

But little Edgar, who had been listening attentively to the whole conversation, came running back before they had gone many steps, and holding out a bright new sixpence, he exclaimed, “There, Bob, that’s for you! for your own, to do what you like with. Mamma says I may give it to you. I’d meant to buy some chocolate with it, but I’d ever so much sooner you had it. And now you can go and get some buns, or something nice, can’t you? for you look so hungry, I’m sure you must want something!”

And the little fellow, scarcely waiting to be thanked, ran off again, though looking back once or twice to give a friendly nod and smile.

The tears fairly came into Bob’s eyes, and he almost forgot to brush them away as he stood looking at the bright coin lying on his palm.

“No; I ain’t a-going to spend that in buns, though I be hungry,” he said to himself, shaking his head at the idea. “I wouldn’t go and change away that in a shop for anything! but I’ll keep it all my life to ’mind me of that little chap. I never came across any fellow afore as made me love him all in a minute like that ’ere little ’un. My word! I *am* glad as nothing happened to him that day, and I wish there was something else as I could do for him, for I wouldn’t stop at anything. But to think of their coming and thanking of me! First time anybody’s

ever had anything to thank *me* for: it's been mostly cuffs and scoldings as I've always got—not as I mean to say I haven't deserved 'em; I know I've been a bad boy, and I know I've a reg'lar temper, but I means to try and be different now. But I wish the afternoon would come that I might go out to the house.”



CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW HOME.



BOB still lingered on where he was, but his mind now was full of pleasant thoughts of Mr. and Mrs. Deveron and Master Edgar. Their kindness had cheered and warmed his heart, whilst their words had excited bright hopes within him. And though all these agreeable reflections did not quite drive away his feeling of hunger, yet he still kept to his resolve not to part with that bright sixpence, which, after looking at it long and almost lovingly, he slipped into his pocket for safety.

Almost at that moment a gentleman on horseback came riding up, and, stopping at the door of a house opposite, looked around for some one to hold his horse. Bob sprang forward to offer his services, which were accepted; and when the gentleman again came out a few minutes afterwards, he slipped some coppers into the boy's hand before riding off.

Bob was indeed in luck to-day; and as the coppers had no special value attaching to them, like the sixpence had, he at once went off to an eating-shop, to indulge in a meal which was breakfast and dinner all in one. Then he thought it must surely be time to be starting in search of Mr. Deveron's house.

It was situated about half or three-quarters of a mile out of the town, and stood back in its own grounds, with a long carriage-drive leading up to the door. At the entrance to the drive stood a pretty Gothic lodge, all covered with ivy and creepers, which hung over the rustic porch, and climbed up the latticed windows. Evergreens grew plentifully around, so that, though the tall trees were bare of leaves, there was something green to look upon, even in this wintry weather; whilst in the little garden a few pure white Christmas roses were

rearing their lovely heads, and, in spite of all the cold ungenial weather, were expanding into beauty.

As Bob drew near a carriage passed through the gates, which were opened by a woman, who came out of the lodge on purpose. She did not immediately re-enter the house, but remained for a few moments looking about her, and then stooped to pick one of the Christmas roses.

Her face was so pleasant and kind-looking, that Bob felt encouraged to draw near and ask if this wasn't where Mr. Deveron lived.

"Yes," replied the woman, turning to look at him. "Do you want anything of him, my lad?"

"He told me to come out here this afternoon to speak to him. He thought p'raps as how he'd be able to find me some work," added Bob, with more unreserve than usual.

"Are you the boy he told me about then? The boy who stopped Master Edgar's pony?" asked the other, looking at him with interest.

Bob nodded his head.

"Come in here then, my lad," said Mrs. Heywood, leading the way in-doors. "Mr. Deveron said I was to keep you when you came; and he'd either speak to you himself, or ask my husband to see you. There, sit down," she continued, at the same time seating herself and taking up her knitting.

"And now tell me how it happened that Master Edgar's pony ran away, and you managed to stop it. I've never properly heard the rights of the story yet; but 'twas a brave thing of you, my lad! and a fortunate thing for you too; for Mr. and Mrs. Deveron will never forget it. You've made them your friends for life, if you'll only show yourself a deserving lad; for they aren't people to forget any service done them. And their hearts are bound up so in Master Edgar, that it makes me shudder whenever I think of the danger the little darling was in, with that pony of his running away. If any harm had come to him—but, there, I can't bear to think of that! only I've been giving thanks over and over again that somebody was at hand to come to his help. For he's the only child; so you may



MR. DEVERON'S HOUSE—(p. 85).

fancy how his papa and mamma dote on him; and he's such a darling, bless him, with his sweet little face and his loving ways, that we should all feel it pretty nigh as much as the parents if any harm came to him!"

Thus Mrs. Heywood talked on, as if for the purpose of setting Bob more at his ease; and her pleasant genial manner and kindly face were not without their effect upon him.

As he looked round upon the cheerful room, so neat and spotlessly clean, with a bright clear fire on the hearth before which a handsome black cat was sitting, and a pretty bay window, through the latticed panes of which the sun's rays were streaming, and reflecting themselves in the bright polish of the mahogany chest and table and comfortable Windsor chairs—as Bob looked upon all this, and then

glanced at the neat figure and comely smiling face of the mistress of the house, who sat beside the fire busily knitting as she talked, he thought to himself that he had never seen any place to be compared to this pretty lodge, nor any person, except Mrs. Deveron, at all equal to his new friend.

After a little while a step was heard on the gravel outside; and Mrs. Heywood, who seemed to know in a moment whose step it was, rose to open the door.

“Is the boy come yet?” asked a man’s voice.

“Yes, he’s waiting here, come in,” and Mrs. Heywood returned, ushering in a fine-looking man, who, Bob concluded, must be her husband.

He stood up, and pulled at his front lock of hair, by way of showing respect, whilst Mr. Heywood, looking kindly and yet searchingly at him, said, “So you are Bob Saunders, are you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Mr. Deveron says you are wanting to find some work.”

Bob nodded and then glanced anxiously at the speaker, as if entreating him to say some work could be found.

“Well, I’m looking out for a boy to help about the garden and the grounds, and go on errands sometimes, in fact, do anything that is wanted, and make himself useful in any way. Should you like such a place?”

Bob’s face expressed more than did his brief, “Aye, that I should, sir!” and Mr. Heywood, though not prepossessed with his appearance, yet remembering Mr. Deveron’s wish, and moreover the part the lad had so lately acted, expressed himself willing to try him, and teach him what would be necessary for his work, provided he showed himself steady and industrious, and willing to be taught.

That settled, he told Bob he was to go up to the house, to speak to Mr. Deveron.

Bob’s spirits and hopes were high, though it all seemed very unreal and like a dream, as he found himself walking along the beautifully kept and winding carriage-drive towards the great house, which, as he now caught sight of it, looked very grand and imposing. It was the

finest he had ever seen; whilst the grounds, which stretched out all around, were most tastefully laid out, and in exquisite order.

It had frozen hard the night before, and the hoar frost still lay round about upon everything, marking out each blade of grass as well as each leaf of every shrub, with its own silvery touch of beauty. The sun was still shining brightly, for he had yet some distance to travel before he



BOB AND MR. HEYWOOD—(p. 89).

would be hidden from sight; and as his beams fell around, the delicate crystals of the hoar frost, which lay sprinkled on the ground as if a fairy shower of tiny gems had descended in the night, sparkled and glistened, and seemed to rejoice when they caught his rays.

Moreover, the road under foot was hard and crisp, and the sky overhead of a deep blue, whilst the air was clear and bracing, and

everything combined to make Bob feel the exhilarating influences around him. He thought he had never enjoyed a walk so much, in spite of his shyness, which made him dread the task before him of knocking at the door of that great house—even though it were only the *back* door.

But to his relief he was spared that ordeal, for Mr. Deveron, who had seen him approaching, came to meet him by another path.

“So Heywood is willing to try you, I see, by his sending you up to me,” he began. “Well, my lad, I hope you will show yourself willing and industrious, and then you will always find a friend in me, and in Mr. Heywood too, I am sure. Only you must try and remember all he tells you, for he is very particular. But I can assure you, my boy, you couldn’t be under a better master; for if you do your best to please him, and make the most of your opportunities, he’ll turn you out a thorough good gardener; and, in time, who knows but you might rise to be what he is—head gardener to some gentleman.”

Mr. Deveron’s smile was reflected on Bob’s face; for these words had called up such bright pictures before his mind’s eye, that he could not but smile with pleasure at the mere idea of them. To think of his ever having a nice little lodge like Mr. Heywood’s to bring Johnnie to, where he could grow well and strong, whilst Bob maintained him by his work! Oh, how happy they would be together! and how many pets Johnnie could have, without the fear of losing them like the poor little dove. Why, the very idea of such delights was enough to make him feel ready to work day and night to please his new master, or masters.

Then Mr. Deveron went on to say that as he did not seem to have much of a home, and as, moreover, it was best for him to be as near his work as possible, he had, at Mrs. Deveron’s suggestion, asked Mr. Heywood if they would be willing to let him live with them, as they had no children of their own, and more rooms in the lodge than they used.

“Should you like that plan, my boy?”

Like it! No possible words could have half expressed Bob’s intense satisfaction at the arrangement, which was so very far beyond anything he had ever hoped, or thought of.

“You must pay something out of your weekly wages towards your board, and I will make up the rest for the present. So we may consider the matter settled, as Heywood agrees to my proposal, and I know he won’t meet with any opposition from his wife. You must try to be a good boy, Bob, and not give them cause to regret having consented to take you in.”

Bob tried to stammer out some words of thanks to Mr. Deveron, but altogether failed to express one-twentieth part of the grateful feelings that were stirred within him. For what a prospect was opening before him! To live in that pretty lodge which he had admired so much that he had felt half disposed to envy the cat which seemed so much at home there; to work in those beautiful grounds under such a master as Mr. Heywood; to be constantly seeing that kind Mrs. Heywood who had spoken so pleasantly to him; and, moreover, sometimes, perhaps, catch a glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Deveron and Master Edgar, and have a word from them! it all seemed such happiness that his heart felt quite full, whilst at the same time it was difficult to believe in it all. For that very morning he had stood hungry, homeless, friendless, and now home, friends, work, had all come to him. It must have been his Heavenly Friend who had sent them all. He had heard his cry that morning, and had taken pity on him. Oh, how kind of Him! how he must love Him in return!



CHAPTER XIV.

WORKING FOR HIS LIVING.



AT this instant little Edgar, who had come out to look for his papa, catching sight of them, came bounding towards them.

“Have you found a place for Bob, papa?”

“Yes; he is going to work under Heywood, and live with him too; so you will have frequent opportunities of seeing your new friend.”

“I’m so glad!” returned Edgar, with a frank pleasant smile, as he looked towards Bob. “And if he is going to work about the garden he may help me to keep mine in order, mayn’t he, papa?”

“You must ask Heywood about that, he settles those matters,” answered Mr. Deveron; “but I dare say he won’t object to give your small piece of ground into Bob’s charge.”

“Then I’ll show him where it is at once. He can come with me, can’t he, papa?”

“Yes; Heywood won’t expect him to begin work till to-morrow, so you can show him all round, and then he will feel more at home.”

Edgar, all eagerness, took his companion to his favourite haunts, and even led him into the conservatory, where Bob, who had never seen anything half so beautiful before, was struck dumb with wonder and admiration.

“My word, ain’t it fine!” he exclaimed, in a low tone, as if almost afraid to allow his voice to be heard in such a place. “It beats anything as I’ve ever seen!” And then, to himself, he added, “Don’t I wish as Johnnie could see this ’ere place too! Wouldn’t he be mighty pleased!”

“It is pretty, isn’t it?” said Edgar. “People say it’s the prettiest conservatory anywhere round about here; and it always seems to me like fairyland; doesn’t it to you?”

“I don’t know, ’cause I have never been to that ’ere country, nor ever heard tell of it neither. Where is it, Master Edgar?”

“I don’t know exactly; I have only read of it in fairy tales. But come along, we’ll go and see my garden.”

Arrived there, Edgar discovered something that needed tying up, and asked his companion if he had a bit of string.

The latter thought he might possibly have some, and putting his hand into his pocket to search for it, came upon the body of the little dove, which had lain there since he had picked it up so tenderly and placed it there so sorrowfully in the early dawn of that very day which had been so eventful and had seemed so long, that he could scarcely fancy it was that same morning he had been feeling so miserable and so lonely.

All that had been happening had to some extent drawn off his thoughts from the little dead favourite; but now the sight of it recalled not only its loss, but the fit of passion to which he had given way on the previous day. Therefore, humbled and ashamed, he gazed down upon the bird silently and regretfully.

“Why, what’s that?” exclaimed Edgar. “It’s a dove, I declare! a dear little ring-dove. And it’s dead! oh, what a pity! Did it belong to you, Bob?”

The latter, drawn on by Edgar’s questionings, by degrees gave the whole history of the bird, which, of course, led him to talk of Johnnie as well; whilst the other listened to all, deeply interested. But when he came to hear that Johnnie was to have his leg off, his tender little heart was so touched that the tears came into his blue eyes. And to think of his dear little bird being killed!

“Oh, Bob, how dreadfully sorry you must have been! and I should think you must have been angry too. I know I should have been; for ’twas such a horrid shame to kill a dear little dove like that! But you must bury it, Bob.”

“Yes; I’ve only been waiting for a chance; ’cause I should like it to be somewhere as I could know just where I laid it, and, may-be, show it to Johnnie some day.”

“I know what you shall do, Bob. You shall bury it here, in my own little garden, and we’ll put something over it to show where it is, so that we shan’t go digging it up by accident. And then when Johnnie gets well, and comes out of the hospital, you can bring him here—can’t you?—and let him see what a nice little grave we’ve made for his dove.”

Bob looked highly pleased at the idea, though it all appeared so strange that he—“Silent Bob”—should be telling his troubles thus to another, and moreover finding another entering into them so freely, that it still seemed to him, as it had done all that day, that he must be dreaming.



EDGAR HELPING TO DIG THE DOVE'S GRAVE.

“Which would be the best corner, Bob?” asked Edgar, looking round his little domain. “Oh, I know; just under my beautiful rose bush. We shall always know then just where we laid it; and in summer the rose leaves will fall down upon it, and strew it all over, and make it look so pretty!”

The boys had only just finished their task of digging a grave for Mary Jane, and placing her in it, when Edgar was summoned in-doors, and Bob, meeting Mr. Heywood at that moment, was told by the latter

to go back to the lodge, where Mrs. Heywood was expecting him, and say that he would soon follow, but she need not wait tea for him.

Bob set off at a brisk pace down the long carriage-drive, and then tapped gently at the lodge door.

“Come in,” said Mrs. Heywood, opening it to him; “and another time you can lift the latch yourself and come straight in; because this is to be your home now. And I hope you’ll be a good lad, and try hard to please those who are set over you, and then you’ll be happy, I know. And now, would you like to take a look at the little room you’re to sleep in?”

Bob signified that he should like to do so extremely; whereupon Mrs. Heywood, leading the way up-stairs, opened the door of a pleasant little chamber, neat and spotlessly clean, with a latticed window looking right over the grounds, and through which he could catch a peep of the sun, just at that moment sinking in the West like a glowing ball of fire. Compared with his late quarters it seemed princely accommodation; and as he looked at the snowy sheets, and pretty patchwork counterpane of the bed, he felt he should always be obliged to keep himself very clean, or he should never be able to venture to get into it. And, moreover, there was actually a strip of carpet by the bed, whilst the boards were so white any one might have eaten off them.

And this was to be his room! He could scarcely believe it all.

Then they went down-stairs; and Mrs. Heywood, taking the tea-pot from the hob where it had been standing, bade him draw his chair to the table, whilst she poured out a cup of tea for him and another for herself.

“Come closer to the fire, my lad,” she went on; for Bob still remained sitting awkwardly on the edge of a chair, as if he felt unworthy to take possession of the whole of it, at some distance from the table.

“There, take that seat,” continued Mrs. Heywood, placing one for him; “and drink off your hot tea, for I’m sure you look cold enough.”

Then she cut him some thick slices of bread-and-butter, and afterwards she knelt down in front of the clear bright fire and made

some delicious buttered toast for him.

Very cosy they were, with puss sitting between them on the hearth, and purring loudly whenever either of them stroked or noticed her. Moreover, Mrs. Heywood's kind motherly manner soon dispelled Bob's shyness, so that he found himself, before tea was over, talking freely to her about Johnnie; the interest and sympathy she showed leading him on to be more and more communicative, until he had told all about his little brother's illness, and the operation which the doctor had told him yesterday must be performed.

"Poor little fellow! poor little dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Heywood, feelingly. "But when is it to be, Bob?"

"Soon, he said. He didn't tell me what day."

"Well, I'm going into the town to-morrow, so I'll go and inquire for him, and bring you back word. For you'll be longing to know all about it, I'm sure. But it's quite true what the doctor told you, that he won't feel anything of it at the time, because they'll give him something that'll prevent his even knowing what they're doing to him; and as you say he has had to go upon crutches for a long time, that will be nothing new to him when he begins to get about."

Bob did not reply, but he looked as if Mrs. Heywood's words were comforting him a little.





BOB TELLING MRS. HEYWOOD ABOUT JOHNNIE—(p. 101).



CHAPTER XV.

BOB'S PROPOSAL.



A NEW life had begun for Bob now; and very different it was from the old one. The kindness shown him by all around seemed to act upon him much as the bright sunshine does upon the flowers, causing the better side of his nature to expand and unfold itself, and nourishing into fuller growth those desires and strivings after higher and holier things, which in his time of loneliness and trouble had sprung up.

And he was happy in his work. He tried hard to please Mr. Heywood, and never forgot anything he once told him; whilst Mr. Heywood on his side, though particular, and always expecting that everything should be done in the best manner possible, was kind and patient, and Bob soon learned to look up to him with respect and regard. To win a word of approval from him, was to the lad a sufficient motive and reward for any exertion or effort.

Then the quiet talks which he and Mrs. Heywood often had together in the evenings were a great help to him. Her kind heart had opened towards the motherless boy, and she had felt a warm interest in him from the first; chiefly perhaps because he seemed so much in need of some one to take him by the hand, and draw out the latent good that was in him, which had been so overlaid by the evil which had been uppermost, that at one time it had seemed almost as if it were quite extinguished.

He was grateful for her kindness; and his gratitude soon began to show itself in the attempt to render her any little service in his power. First he began by lighting the kitchen fire in the mornings, so that when she came down she might find it burning brightly, and be able to warm herself at once. Then he bethought himself that he might always

get in the coal and wood, and so provide her with a supply for the day, all ready to hand, before he went out to his work. Moreover, he took upon himself the care of the fowls, of which Mrs. Heywood had several; and he soon learnt to take the greatest interest in them.

Thus various little ways of helping her gradually occurred to him; until Mrs. Heywood declared she never had known such a useful boy, and she couldn't think how she could have managed to get on before he came; whilst Mr. Heywood would look pleased, and give an approving nod and smile to Bob when, morning after morning, he found his boots, at breakfast time, beautifully cleaned and polished, set beside the fire ready for him to put on.

"Where did you learn such thoughtful ways?" said Mrs. Heywood to him one day when they were alone. "Did your aunt teach you them? Did you use to do these things for her?"

"No," returned Bob, shortly.

"She wasn't so kind as you," he added, in explanation.

"But to have taken charge of you two boys all these years was a much kinder thing than anything I have done. I hope you always showed yourself grateful, Bob?"

The lad made no reply. He could not say that he had done so; but Mrs. Heywood's words had started a new train of thoughts, and placed things in quite a new light.

He pondered over it when he went to bed, and next day, as he went about his work, he still found himself thinking on the same subject. The result was that he came to the conclusion that he had been a very ungrateful boy. He had never done a thing of his own accord for his aunt, it had never occurred to him to do so. He had gone on errands for her when sent, but had never volunteered to render her a single service, when he might have done for her all that he now did for Mrs. Heywood.

But he hadn't loved his aunt, and he *did* love Mrs. Heywood! That, however, he was honest enough to acknowledge, was no excuse for him. He ought always to have remembered what his aunt had done in giving them a shelter, when otherwise they must have gone to the

workhouse. And he had left her without a word, and hadn't ever been back since.

Well, he would try if he couldn't make up for it. The first money he received should some of it go to buy some little present for her or the baby—for the latter, perhaps, would be the better—and he would take it in, and tell her, "he knew he had always been a bad boy to her, and she had been a deal better to him than he deserved." And then, perhaps, he should find some way in which he could be of use to her, for he knew she always had her hands full with all the children, and the baby so often ill. It had certainly been very bad of him never to have tried to help her before. But when he got on, and earned more wages, he would set aside some part for her as a little return for all she had done for them.



CHAPTER XVI.

WISHES FULFILLED.



JOHNNIE bore his operation well; and, owing partly to the extreme care that was taken of him, and of his own patient happy little nature, he went on favourably afterwards, and made steady progress towards recovery.

When Bob was first admitted to see him it was indeed a joyful meeting between the two brothers. Bob, for once in his life, talked quite fast, for he had so many questions to ask Johnnie about himself, and so much to tell him of all the good fortune which had befallen him since he had last seen him, whilst the little fellow lay, with a bright pleased smile upon his face, wondering at it all, yet rejoicing in it heartily.

“Dear old Bob, I *am* so glad! It must be fine to be you now!”

“Aye, I never thought as such luck would fall to my lot! I don’t know what to make of it all; they’re so kind, every one of ’em. You would love Master Edgar, I know; and Mr. and Mrs. Deveron are the nicest lady and gentleman as *I* ever came across. And Mrs. Heywood—don’t I just like living with her! And, Johnnie, she says she’ll come and see you some day, as soon as ever the doctor’ll give leave. But he said *I* was only to stay a few minutes this first time; and there’s the nurse, I do believe, coming already to say I must be a-going. But you’ll make haste and get well now, won’t you, Johnnie?”

That evening, as Bob and Mrs. Heywood sat beside the fire together, Mr. Heywood being out, the two had a long talk, as they often had when they were alone like this. For Mrs. Heywood had a way of winning confidence from every one—even little Edgar used to confide all his secrets to her, whilst Bob by this time had come to feel he could tell her anything almost as well as he could Johnnie.

They had begun by having a little reading, as Mrs. Heywood, for the sake of the lad's improvement, always made him read aloud whenever there was an opportunity, whilst Mr. Heywood used to set him copies, which Bob tried hard to write beautifully. But this evening the book was soon laid down, that they might talk about Johnnie.

Bob was in great spirits at having seen him again, and at having been assured by the nurse that he was going on well, and fairly on the road towards recovery. Without this assurance he would have been vexing himself, and fretting greatly over the pale thin little face which had looked so fragile and so delicate.

"I wonder how soon he'll be able to come out of the hospital," he was saying. "He says they've all been so kind to him there, he'll be quite sorry to leave 'em, only when I told him how dreadful bad I'd missed him, he said he'd wanted me too just as bad. But it's a puzzle to me," and Bob ran the fingers of both hands through his hair, making it in a state of wild confusion, "what he's to do when he comes out, and where he's to go."

"Won't he go back to your aunt's as before?" asked Mrs. Heywood.

"I s'pose he must," responded Bob, with a sigh.

Mrs. Heywood looked up from her work, and glanced at him.

"There's nowhere else for him to go, is there?"

"No. Not till I can earn enough to keep us both, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Well, I was a-thinking as p'raps——" and again Bob stopped.

"What were you thinking?" asked Mrs. Heywood, seeing that the lad had something very much at heart, but was hesitating about speaking it out. "What were you thinking?"

"Johnnie's such a little fellow; it wouldn't take more to keep him than me, would it?" was the unexpected inquiry.

"No; I should think it might take rather *less* than more," returned Mrs. Heywood with a smile.

"Then," continued Bob, making a bold plunge in a sort of desperate manner; "I've been a-wondering whether you'd let him come here in my place, and I'd pay all I earn every week for his keep."

“But what are you going to do? Where are you going?”

“Oh, I’d make shift somewhere; I shouldn’t care for anything so long as I could see Johnnie every day, and know as he was happy. And oh! wouldn’t he like to be here! why he’d get well and strong in this place in no time!”

“But though you seem to think you could do without a bed at nights—only I don’t see how you could manage to sleep out of doors this weather——” began Mrs. Heywood, when Bob interrupted her.

“Oh, I could find some barn, or place like that, perhaps. May-be Mr. Deveron would let me sleep in his barn out there, for I wouldn’t do no harm; anyhow, I could manage somehow!”

“But, supposing you could manage about the sleeping, how should you do about the rest? for if you gave all your week’s wages for Johnnie, what would you have to live upon yourself? How would you get your own food?”

Bob looked puzzled for a minute. He seemed to have forgotten that he could not live entirely upon air. But he was not to be daunted. His mind was too much set upon this plan of his; and now that he had once broached it, he seemed to desire it more eagerly than ever.

“Oh, I could do upon very little; next to nothing I dare say. And p’raps I could work more hours, or do something in the evenings just to earn a crust of bread. I’m sure I could pick up that somehow; and I shouldn’t want nothing else if only Johnnie could be here. Oh, he would like it so!”

Bob was looking eagerly and wistfully at Mrs. Heywood as he spoke, as if all his hopes depended upon her answer. But she did not at once give a direct one. Laying her hand kindly on the boy’s arm, she said, “You’re a good brother, Bob, to little Johnnie; and I’m glad to see it. It’ll keep you from a deal of harm to have always one soft warm place in your heart; and as long as he is your first thought and care, and you can put yourself aside for him, I shan’t fear much for you. Mr. Heywood says he never had a lad so steady and hard-working, and I expect little Johnnie is at the bottom of it. You’re always looking on to being able to make a home for him, isn’t that it?”

Bob nodded assent, whilst his cheeks glowed at Mrs. Heywood's words of praise. But after all, it wasn't praise for himself but permission to make that exchange with Johnnie which he wanted.

"Then may he come here in my place?" he asked, earnestly. "'Cause he'd be so miserable back at aunt's without me! He'd be worse off than he was afore, he couldn't nohow go back there all by himself!"

"Well, well, we'll consider what can be done," returned Mrs. Heywood. "But I should have thought the room and bed up-stairs was large enough for you both," she added, with a smile. "You are getting a big fellow I know, but still I should have thought you two could have managed there!"

"Do you mean——?" began Bob, with an eager look, and then stopping short.

"I mean that I'm not going to let you turn out to sleep in barns, or any such places as those you seem to have taken a fancy to. If Johnnie comes at all you must share your bed with him, unless, as I said before, you think it wouldn't be big enough for you both."

Bob smiled at the idea, as he exclaimed, "I never thought as you'd be willing to take the two of us; but Johnnie would be so good you'd scarce know he was in the house. Oh, how nice it would be!" and Bob's eyes grew bright at the thought of having his brother with him in that pretty little room upstairs. How snug they should be together! How different it would be from their late quarters, where they used to lie shivering with the cold in that out-house of theirs!

But nothing more could be said on the subject then, as Mr. Heywood came in at that moment, and his wife turned to speak to him.

One fine afternoon, a day or two afterwards, Bob was at work in the grounds, when he heard the sound of carriage wheels coming up the drive, and, lifting his head for a moment, he saw that it was Mrs. Deveron and Edgar returning from a drive. He again bent over his work, whilst the carriage drew up to the front door, and then drove round to the stables.

A few minutes afterwards he heard his name called by Edgar, who came running towards him.

“Bob, mamma wants to speak to you, so make haste and come to her. There she is, walking towards us; and she has something to tell you, Bob. We’ve been to the hospital and seen Johnnie;” and Edgar, who could no longer keep back this piece of news, turned to see what effect it had upon the other.

The latter looked surprised and pleased enough to satisfy the eager little fellow, and by this time they had reached Mrs. Deveron, to whom Bob touched his cap, after which he waited for her to speak.



MRS. DEVERON GOING TO THE HOSPITAL—(p. 117).

“I dare say my little boy has already told you where we have been this afternoon,” she began; “and I know you will be glad to hear that Johnnie is going on well, and getting on as fast as could be expected. He is a dear little fellow, Bob.”

How Bob’s face lighted up at these words! No one at that moment could have said it was either heavy or unpleasing.

“And now I want to have a little talk with you about Johnnie’s future prospect, and what he is to do when he is well enough to come out of the hospital; for I am quite interested in him, and so is my little boy here,” and Mrs. Deveron glanced at Edgar.

“Yes,” began the child, “and I want him to come and live here, because you know, Bob, you’d like to have him with you; and whatever would he do away from you!”

“Yes, it would never do to separate you two, as you stand so alone, and seem to be all in all to each other,” said Mrs. Deveron; “for he told me what a good kind brother you’ve always been to him, Bob. Besides, he will want good fresh air and food to help him to get up his strength, so we must have him out here, at least for a time, until we see what can be done. I know Mrs. Heywood will be willing to have him, for she was talking about it this morning. But she must go and see him herself, and then she will long to bring him out here, and do all she can for him. So I shall propose her paying him a visit to-morrow.”

“But if Johnnie comes,” she went on, “it must be at *my* expense, for you have as much as you can manage to pay for yourself. Mrs. Heywood told me of your plan,” added Mrs. Deveron, with a smile; “but we couldn’t allow any one working for us to have no place to sleep in at night, or to be going about half-starved by day. But you know if you go on steadily and industriously, you will soon be able to earn higher wages, and then you can help to maintain little Johnnie, and be as independent as you like.”

How happy Bob felt, when, after a few more kind pleasant words from Mrs. Deveron, he returned to his work, whilst Edgar followed him, and stood by, chattering fast, as he told him all about their visit to Johnnie, and how he had promised to go and see him again if his mamma would allow him, and then he would take him one of his picture books to amuse him.

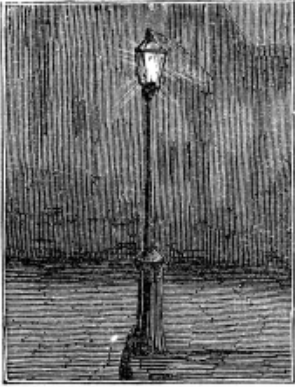
“Perhaps mamma will let me go to-morrow with Mrs. Heywood; I’ll run and ask her.”

And off flew Edgar, who, young as he was, had already learnt to feel and think for others, and found no pleasure so great as that of ministering in his little way to those around him.



CHAPTER XVII.

BOB AND HIS AUNT.



AS soon as work was over that evening, Bob, whose heart seemed to be overflowing with joy and happiness, determined to delay no longer paying that visit to his aunt which he had resolved upon. Moreover, having been saving up for the purpose, he had now enough to buy some little present to take with him, though what that present should be he was still in doubt; so, before he started he took counsel with Mrs. Heywood, who suggested two or three things which she thought might

be acceptable.

Bob was still pondering over the matter, and trying to decide the question, when on turning into one of the narrow back streets which led to Rope Lane, he came upon a boy groping in the gutter, as if in search of something which he was hoping to find by the light of the distant street lamp. He was crying, too, over his loss, and Bob, whose heart seemed wonderfully softened by his happiness, instead of passing him by in his trouble as if it concerned him not, paused, saying, "Well, what's the matter? You've lost something, have you? Tell me what it is, and I'll help you to hunt for it."

The boy raised his head, and as he did so Bob found he was no other than his own cousin Sam.

The looks of both expressed astonishment at this unexpected meeting, and for a moment Bob drew back, whilst a brief struggle went on within him. But it was only for one instant; the next he was helping Sam to look for the lost shilling, which was one his mother had entrusted to him for the purchase of various things needed to replenish the empty cupboard at home.

He had been told to go straight to the shop and back again; but Sam, not being of an obedient nature, had chosen to stop and play with some boys he had met on the way. When at length they went off, and he was about to proceed to the shop, he discovered that his shilling was gone. Nowhere could he find it, though he had been searching for it ever since, sobbing and crying at the same time, as he thought of the scolding he would get from his mother, who had declared this was her last coin, and the beating his father would be sure to bestow upon him when he came in and found there was nothing for supper.

Bob, who knew by experience that his fears were not exaggerated, after a little hesitation, drew forth from his pocket the shilling he had meant to expend in the present which was to be a sort of peace-offering to his aunt, and gave it to Sam, saying, "There, you can take that, and go and buy what you were sent for with it. I'd been saving it up, 'cause I wanted to do something with it; but I dare say I can save up another in time."

Sam eagerly grasped the proffered coin; but as his hand closed upon it, some feeling of compunction seemed to smite him. This conduct of Bob's was so different from anything to which he had been accustomed that he could not make it out. For it just then occurred to him that this was the first time they had met since he had killed Bob's dove; so he should have expected he would have been trying to revenge himself; instead of which he was offering to help him out of his difficulty. No one else he knew would have given him a shilling, or even offered to *lend* him one. It was strange—so strange that almost before he knew what he was saying, he had exclaimed, "You don't know then as 'twas me as killed the dove!"

"Yes I do," returned Bob. "I was sure of it."

Sam's face expressed increasing astonishment.

"And yet you gives me this!" he exclaimed, with a glance at the hand in which he was holding the shilling tightly clasped, lest even now Bob should wish to take it back. "Well, I won't never kill no more of your doves! And I wish as I hadn't touched that one!"

"Well, never mind now," answered Bob, "I've got over it by this time, so we'll let bygones be bygones. And now you go to the shop,

and I'll go in and see aunt a minute.”

Mrs. Saunders gave Bob but a cool reception at first; but when she heard of the motives which had brought him back to see her—that he had not come to ask for anything, but rather to see if he could not be of some service to her, she softened towards him, and the result of this visit was the establishing of a better feeling between the two. She even went the length of declaring that she would be willing to have Bob back again, if he wanted to come, as she used to be able to trust him to go on errands, which was more than she could do by Sam, who always loitered and stayed to play on the road, until she never knew when she should see him back.

Bob steadily kept to his purpose of trying to repay to her in some measure all he and Johnnie owed her; and many a little comfort she would not otherwise have had came to her as time went on out of Bob's earnings; until at length, instead of exclaiming, as she once had done, “Thank goodness he ain't *my* son!” she was often heard to wish that Sam and her other children would take after him, as then she should have some comfort in her life.

But we have been anticipating, and must now go back to little Johnnie.

It was a bright lovely day in early spring when he first came to his new home; and very delighted he was with it. It would be difficult to say which had looked forward to the day the most eagerly, he or Bob; but when it came at last both were as happy as it was possible to be, and could scarcely believe that such good fortune could be theirs.

“Hasn't God been kind to us!” exclaimed Johnnie, when they were alone together in their little room up-stairs, which he had admired so enthusiastically that even Bob was satisfied. “Hasn't God been good! 'Cause we didn't deserve anything like this, did we, Bob?”

“*I* didn't,” replied Bob, with a stress upon the pronoun, as if thoroughly convinced of his own unworthiness but unwilling to rank Johnnie with himself. “I was a dreadful bad boy in them days when we was at aunt's, afore you went to the hospital, when I never tried to please anybody, but just went my own ways, and was always a-quarrelling and a-fighting. I wouldn't go back to that 'ere time for

anything; for I've found out that it's a deal better and happier to try and please Jesus, and do what He tells me, even though 'tis dreadful hard to do what's right sometimes. But it's all along of you, Johnnie, that I began to try."

Johnnie lifted up his little face in surprise, as he exclaimed, "Along of *me*, Bob!"

"Yes; 'twas all along of your begging of me so to forgive Tom Lane, and your talking about that Good Shepherd as you loved so much, and was your Friend. And then, when you was gone to the hospital, and I missed you so dreadful bad, and was so lonesome, I began to ask Him to be my Friend as well. And I asked Him to take care of you too, and make you well again. And He has, Johnnie; He has done all I asked Him. And I thought I'd tell you some day."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Bob—so glad!" said Johnnie, heartily. "And He has done a deal more for us than we ever thought of asking, hasn't He, Bob?"

"Aye, that He has; for 'twould never have come into my head to ask for all this."



CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.



THE pure country air, the good wholesome food, and the happy way in which the days now passed, all did wonders for Johnnie, who seemed to gain health and strength with almost every hour, and thus did credit to the kind care which Mrs. Heywood bestowed upon him.

He speedily made his way to her heart, until she declared to her husband that she didn't think she could have loved him better if he had been her own child; certainly she could scarcely have been kinder or done more for him. But if it was upon Johnnie that her chief cares were lavished, owing to his helplessness and delicacy, she did not forget or neglect Bob, whose honest nature and true heart she had come to know and trust so thoroughly.

"He may be a bit rough outwardly," she remarked once to her husband, "but he has the making of a fine character in him; for he is upright to the core, and as tender-hearted as any lad that ever lived."

"Aye, aye; he's a good steady lad; and he's mightily improved since he's been here," responded Mr. Heywood. "I think you've had a hand in that, wife. You've smartened him up somehow, wonderfully."

"He only wanted a friend; some one to show him a little kindness, and help him on sometimes, and I'm sure he has proved himself a grateful fellow!"

Johnnie, whose presence they seemed to have forgotten, overheard this conversation, and a proud happy look came into his little face. How different this was from the time when he had never heard Bob spoken of but as the "bad boy" of the school, as the most troublesome and quarrelsome of all the scholars; in fact, as "Surly Bob."

The next morning Johnnie was sitting out in the garden, as the weather was so warm and fine that even puss was out basking in the sunshine. The little boy found plenty of amusement in looking round upon the flowers, or in playing with the cat, or in turning over the leaves of a pretty picture-book lying on his knee, lent him by Edgar.

After a time Mrs. Heywood came out to see how he was getting on; whilst just at that moment the large gates of the drive were pushed open, and a lad passed through, evidently bent on some errand to the house, for he was carrying a basket on his arm.

Hearing voices, he turned his face in the direction of the lodge, and at the same moment exclaimed in tones of astonishment, "Johnnie Saunders!"

"Tom Lane, I declare!" cried Johnnie at the same moment. "Why, whatever brings you here?"

"I've come with something for somebody up at the house," returned Tom, "for I'm errand boy now to Mr. Cross. But where have you been all this time? and how is it *you* come to be here?"

Johnnie began to explain; but when he came to tell of Bob's stopping the run-away pony, Tom interrupted him.

"I know more about that than you do, for I saw it all," he exclaimed; "and 'twas me as told the gent Bob's name. If 't hadn't been for me he wouldn't have known it; but I spoke up, and told him where he lived."

"That was right of you, my boy," said Mrs. Heywood, who was standing listening to the conversation.

"Well, I'll tell you why it was; 'cause if you knew how Bob and me used always to be a-fighting one another afore, you'd wonder may-be as I should have troubled myself about him. But he'd done me a good turn, and I'd promised to do the same by him if I had a chance."

And then Tom, who was fond of telling a tale, especially when he had two such interested listeners, went on to relate the affair of the church tower, and the part Bob had acted, whilst Johnnie, who had not heard a word of it from his brother, looked very pleased.

"Anyhow you're happy now," exclaimed Tom. "I shouldn't mind being you to live in this 'ere place!"

When Johnnie went on to explain how it was through his being in the hospital and losing his leg, that they'd come to be so kind to him and sorry for him, and so had brought him out there to be with Bob, Tom replied, "Well, I never should have thought all that harm could have come of a tumble! I remember that day we teased you so; but I didn't knock you down a-purpose, Johnnie! I just took it into my head to have a slide that minute, and I didn't notice as you were in the way till 'twas too late to stop myself. Besides, I thought you'd take care to move off in time. But I'm real sorry you should have got hurt so."

"I'm so glad you didn't do it on purpose!" exclaimed Johnnie, with a bright smile; "I told Bob may-be you didn't mean it; but he thought you did, and he was angry at first. So 'twas real good of him to help you, when he might have taken his revenge; wasn't it now?"

Tom nodded his head; whilst Mrs. Heywood remarked, "It was indeed; it was more than many a boy would have done. But we must tell Bob how you gave Mr. Deveron his name," she added, turning to Tom; "for I don't think he knows, and I'm sure he'd like to thank you for it. You must come out here again some day, when you've a little leisure and would like a walk."

"I'll come!" said Tom, preparing to depart; "for it's no end of jolly out here; very different from our place at home!"

And now we must take leave of Bob and Johnnie, after merely saying that the latter, for an amusement, as he sat in the garden, began to take to cutting out little things in wood with Bob's pen-knife, and he soon showed such a genius for it, that it attracted Mr. Deveron's notice, who determined to have him taught the art of wood-carving. Such rapid progress did the boy make, that not only was Bob prouder of him than ever—if that were possible—but Mr. Deveron himself was highly pleased, and prophesied that he would hereafter make himself quite a name among wood-carvers. At any rate he was provided with an interesting occupation, and would always be able to earn a comfortable livelihood, whilst Bob was steadily working on towards the object of his ambition, namely to become a first-rate gardener.

THE END.

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[The end of *Surly Bob* by Louisa Caroline Silke]