Title: 'Me and Nobbles'

Author: Amy Le Feuvre

Release date: August 10, 2007 [eBook #22290]
Most recently updated: January 2, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

NOBBLES WAS TIGHTLY GRASPED IN HIS HAND.

NOBBLES WAS TIGHTLY GRASPED IN HIS HAND.

'Me and Nobbles'

By

AMY LE FEUVRE

**Author of 'Probable Sons,' 'Teddy's Button,' 'Jill's Red Bag,'
'Odd,' 'His Little Daughter,' etc.**

**London
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
4 Beuverie Street and 65 St. Paul's Churchyard, E.C. 4.
1908**

CONTENTS

'ME AND NOBBLES.'

PROLOGUE.

[*To be skipped by children if they like.*]

It was a very silent old house.

Outside, the front windows stared gravely down upon the tidy drive with its rhododendron shrubberies, the well-kept lawn with the triangular beds, and the belt of gloomy fir trees edging the high brick wall that ran along the public road. The windows were always draped and curtained, and opened one foot at the top with monotonous regularity. No one was ever seen leaning out of them, or even pushing back the curtains to widen their view. There was a broad flight of steps, and a ponderous door which, when opened, disclosed a long hall, at the end of which was a gaily flowered conservatory. Instinct made people tread gently upon the thick Turkey rugs that were laid upon the polished floor; there was a stillness in the house that seemed to chill one. If you peeped into the big dining-room, the

portraits upon the wall eyed you with disapproval; the table, which was always laid with snowy-white cloth and shining silver, seemed severely austere and formal; the high back chairs and the massive sideboards bade you respect their age.

The drawing-room was quite as awe-inspiring, for the blinds were nearly always down, and it had a musty unused scent telling you that its grandeur was not for daily use. The library was gloomier still. Its windows were of stained glass; books of the dingiest hue surrounded you; they lined the walls; and the furniture and carpet matched them in tone. Ghostly busts on pedestals, scientific machines, and a huge geographical and astronomical globe added to its gloom. The sun had a way of only hastily shining in when he could not help himself, and he left it till the last moment just before he went to bed. He was not fond of that room, and there was no one in the house that was.

Then there was the morning room, and this was where old Mrs. Egerton spent most of her day. She was a tall severe old lady with no sense of humour and a very strong will. She spent an hour after breakfast with her cook, for housekeeping was her hobby; then she sat at her table writing letters and doing her accounts till luncheon, after which she always went for a drive. In the evening after dinner she read the paper or some solid book, knitted, and retired early to bed. Her daughter, Miss Anna Egerton, was very like her, only she was seldom seen indoors. She was full of good works, and was never idle, for she had more business than she could possibly get through, and her days were so crowded that meals seemed quite an effort. The man of the house, Mrs. Egerton's son, was also always out, and when at home spent his leisure moments in his smoking-room. London claimed most of his time, for he was in a government office, and went to and fro by train, thinking nothing of the hours spent twice a day in a railway carriage.

'A very dull house indeed,' a lady visitor thought at the end of her first day there; and yet, in spite of its quietness, there were just a few indications of another element that puzzled her.

Once she heard a patter of childish feet along the corridor past her door, but that was very early in the morning before she was properly awake, so she thought she must be dreaming. Then, in a secluded path in the shrubberies, she came across a child's glove and a toy watering-can, and as she was going downstairs to dinner, and was passing a broad staircase window, she noticed upon its broad ledge a little bunch of daisies. She looked at them and took them up in her hand. She fancied, as she noted the droop of their stalks, that she could see the impress still upon them of a hot, childish grasp, and as she mused, she distinctly heard a childish chuckle of laughter not far away.

'Is your house haunted?' she asked Miss Egerton at dinner.

'Indeed it is not. Why do you ask?'

'There is no child in the house is there?'

'Yes,' replied Miss Egerton, 'there is Vera's child.'

The visitor could not suppress her astonishment, and Mrs. Egerton, noting it, said with extra severity: 'I like children to be kept in their proper place. He has a good nurse, who looks after him entirely. And I am thankful to say that the nurseries are at the top of the house, so we are not being continually reminded of his presence.'

'He must be a very quiet child.'

There was no response. When Miss Egerton was alone with her friend she gave her a little more information.

'When Vera went abroad with her husband her child was only a few months old, and very delicate, so she was advised to leave him behind. She sent him here at once, without first asking mother's permission to do so, and mother did not like it. We do not care for children; but he is no trouble. Mother visits the nurseries every morning and sees to his comfort and health. When poor Vera died she determined to keep him for good and all. His father never writes to us, or shows the slightest interest in his child. We don't know in which quarter of the globe he is. Of course a child in a house is rather a nuisance, but in another year or two mother means to send him to a boarding-school.

'A child in the house.'

The words rang through the visitor's heart and brain. She began to listen for the faint tokens of the little one's presence. She meditated a raid upon the nursery, and a sally forth from it with the child into the old garden below, where she and he would enjoy laughter and play together. But a telegram called her suddenly away, and the quiet of the house and garden remained undisturbed.

The footsteps still pattered at intervals; the hushed little voice and gurgles of innocent laughter still echoed from distant corners. For the child in the house was not a ghost, and his life is the one of which I am about to tell you.

Chapter I.

'MASTER MORTIMER.'

He was known by the name of 'the Child' by his relations, but his nurse called him Master Bobby. He would say if he were asked himself:

'My name is Robert Stuart Allonby.' And he would raise a pair of wonderful brown eyes as he spoke, in anxious doubt as to whether his name would be liked.

Bobby showed a good deal of anxiety about different things. His favourite sentence was always, 'I wonder, Nurse ——' and very often, noting the impatient frown on his nurse's face, he would stop there, and turn away to his favourite corner in the window-seat, which he shared with 'Nobbles,' the comfort of his life.

Bobby was a very small boy, but a big thinker, and he would have liked to be a big talker, but grown-up people were not interested in what he had to say. So he talked in a rapid undertone to 'Nobbles,' who always understood, and who smiled perpetually into the earnest little face of his master. 'Nobbles' had been given to him a very long time ago by a sailor-brother of Nurse's, who came to tea at certain periods, and who related the most wonderful stories of foreign parts. Jane, the housemaid, always took tea in the nursery upon these occasions, and she and Bobby listened with awed admiration to the handsome traveller. 'Nobbles' was only a walking-stick, with a wonderful little ivory head. It was the head of a goblin, Nurse declared, but Bobby loved it. Nobbles had very round eyes and a smiling mouth, two very big ears, and a little red cap on his head. Bobby took him to bed with him every night; he went out walks with him; he always had him with him in his window corner; and it was Nobbles who was treated to all the delicious secrets and plans which only a very lonely little boy could have concocted.

Bobby's nursery was at the top of the house; he reached it by the back stairs, and had to open a wooden gate at the top of them before he could get to it. There were two rooms, one leading out of the other, and both looked out at the back of the house. Bobby spent hours by the window, and he knew every inch of the landscape outside.

First there was a paved yard with a high wall on one side, with a green door in it, through which you passed into a walled kitchen garden. This door was kept locked in fruit time; the gardener, old Tom, kept one key, and Bobby's grandmother the other.

Old Tom was generally working in the kitchen garden, and Bobby watched him from his window with keen interested eyes. Beyond this garden was an orchard which ran down to the high-road. Bobby could not see this road from his window, for a tall row of elms hid it from his view. In the summer, when the windows were open, he could hear the hoot of the motors as they tore along it. But he could see for miles beyond this road. There was a stretch of green fields, two farms, and a range of distant hills, behind which the sun always set. And when he got tired of looking at all this, there was the sky; and the sky to him was a never-ending joy. The clouds chasing each other across its infinite blue, presented the most entrancing pictures to him. Monsters pursuing their prey, ogres changing their shape as they flew, castles dissolving into ocean waves, mermaids, angels, hunters, wolves, chariots and horses. These, and hosts besides, all passed before him.

When it was dark in winter-time he would clamber down from his window-seat and content himself with his toys. The nursery was very plainly furnished. It had a square table in the middle of the room; there was one cupboard for Bobby's toys, another for the nursery crockery; a wooden rocking-chair, a low oak bench, and two rush chairs. The floor was covered with red cocoanut matting. The fire was guarded by a high wire screen, and above the mantelpiece hung a coloured illustration of the battle of Waterloo. Bobby knew every man and horse in it by name. He had his own stories for every one of them, and was found more than once dissolved in tears after looking at it.

'That captain under his horse is so dreadfully hurt, his bones is broken, and he was going home to his little boy!' he would say pitifully, when Nurse would enquire the cause of his grief.

Nurse was a tall thin woman with a severe voice and a soft heart. But though she adored her little charge she never let him know it, and the only time she kissed him was when she tucked him up in his small bed at night. Bobby was quite aware that the grown-up people in the house did not care for him. This did not trouble him; he took it for granted that all grown-up people were the same. With one exception, however. In the depths of his heart he felt that his unknown father loved him. One night after saying his prayers, and repeating the Lord's Prayer sentence by sentence after his nurse, he said:

'Who's "Our Father?" Is it mine own, who's far away?'

'Dear, no!' said the nurse, in a shocked tone. ''Tis God Almighty, up in heaven.'

'Then I shan't call him "Father," 'cause He isn't.'

'For shame, you wicked boy! God is everybody's Father, He loves you, and gives you everything you want.'

'Does fathers always do that?'

'Of course they do. Fathers always love their children, and work for them, and care for them. And the great God is called Father because He loves you.'

Bobby thought over this. And he hugged the thought to his heart that he had two fathers, both far away, but both loving him. He knew that God was the nearest to him; he was told that He watched over him night and day, and could always hear him when he spoke to Him. But his heart went out to his earthly father in an unknown country. And he used to be constantly picturing his return.

On the whole, though he had very big thoughts, and fits of dreaming, Bobby was a happy, merry little soul. Sometimes he strayed along the big passage and peeped through the green baize door which led down the front stairs. He had a way of asking Jane what 'the House' was doing, 'the House' being his grandmother, and uncle and aunt, and their visitors. Occasionally he would make breathless little excursions of his own into the rooms which seemed so strange and wonderful to him. This was generally in the very early morning, or in the afternoon, when everyone was out of doors. Nurse would soon pursue him and bring him back to his proper sphere; but he would have a delightful time whilst the chase lasted, and the very difficulties that beset his investigations made them the more exciting.

One bright spring afternoon he was turned into the kitchen garden to play. Nurse had placed him under the charge of old Tom, for she was busy with her machine, making some holland overalls for him, and she was glad to have the nursery to herself. Bobby was in the seventh heaven of delight. There was nothing he enjoyed so much as a talk with Tom.

'And what's the first thing nice to eat that's coming out of the ground?' he asked, his hands in his pockets and his legs well astride, as he watched Tom sowing some seed in long drills across the square of freshly dug ground.

Tom looked at him with a twinkle in his eye.

'Spring cabbages,' he said.

'But I mean fruit, not nasty vegtubbers! I sawed you taste a big white ball, and then you frew it over the wall.'

''Twas a turnip, likely.'

'Let me taste a turnip.'

But Tom shook his head.

'Shall have your nurse at me a-sayin' I'm a-upsettin' your little inside. Do you know who's a-comin' to-day?'

'No. Do tell me. Someone to the house?'

'It be Master Mortimer, the eldest son, who have been in furrin parts so long, him what hangs up in the hall along with the master. You've never seed him. He went off straight from school to India. He were a favourit' of mine were Master Mortimer.'

'And he's coming to-day? Oh, I do hope I shall see him.'

Bobby capered at the thought.

''Tis any time to-day may bring him. His ship comed in yester morn.'

'I wonder if he's seen my father anywheres.'

'Ah! Best ask of him. Master Mortimer be a merry young gen'leman, sure enough. But I reckon that time have sobered him!'

'Grown-up peoples aren't merry,' said the small boy, ''cept Sam Conway, when he's drunk!'

Sam Conway was the cobbler, who was the village drunkard. Tom shook his head reproachfully at the thought of him.

'And that there old soaker did marry my aunt's darter!' He continued a grumbling discourse upon the evils of drink as he turned to his sowing, and Bobby danced away down to the bottom of the garden, where he opened the door into the orchard and found his way to his favourite corner. This was an old apple-tree which grew close to the high wall that separated the orchard from the public road. It was an easy tree to climb, and from a comfortable perch upon the topmost bough he could look out along the high-road. It was a broad, white, dusty road; on market-days he was never absent from this seat; he loved watching the farmers' carts, and the carriers, and the droves of sheep and cattle that passed along to the town. There were other days when he watched there, days when only motors whizzed by, or a few carriages and an occasional cart rumbled along. But he never tired of his post, and his face was always full of patient expectancy. He got up in the tree now, and 'Nobbles' was tightly grasped in his hand.

'It may be "Nobbles" that they'll come together. It's a ship he'll come in same as Master Mortimer, and the ship comed in yesterday—Tom said so.'

His brown eyes scanned the horizon anxiously, and the hope that had never died yet in his childish heart leaped up anew. Nobbles was stuck into a crevice in the wall, and his smiling, ugly little head stared out in the same direction as his master's.

'It may be a station fly, and it may be our carriage, and it may be a motor,' pursued Bobby dreamily, 'but he's bound to come, I'm certain sure!'

He was called into his dinner before a single carriage or cart had passed him. But his little face was radiantly bright as he sat opposite his nurse and ate his hot mutton and rice pudding at the nursery table.

'I 'specs the House is very busy to-day,' he remarked with a knowing little nod of his head. 'Which is Master Mortimer's room, Nurse?'

'Master Mortimer, indeed! Who's been talking to you of him I'd like to know! You must be a good boy and stay quiet in the nursery. I've never seen your grandmother so upset. She's proper excited, and won't go out for her drive this afternoon, and I'm helping Jane get out all the old bits of furniture that used to belong in his room before ever he went abroad. 'Twas his only sending a telegram yesterday so sudden like, and no letter nor nothing to prepare us, that has taken us so aback. He's to have his old room, the one at end of the passage. It's going to rain, so you'd best stay in the nursery this afternoon, and I shall be busy.'

Bobby promised to be good, but with the sounds of such an unusual bustle in the house what small boy could resist peeping through the green baize door occasionally to see what was going on? And at last, thinking the coast quite clear, he made one of his rapid rushes along the corridor and into the room that was being prepared for the guest. Here he gazed round him with innocent admiration. The room was barely furnished, but a fox's brush and some sporting-prints round the walls, one of which depicted a cock fight, interested him greatly. He was standing on tiptoe at the dressing-table opening some little china pots, when approaching footsteps made him start. Then, as the door handle turned, he scrambled under the bed and lay still, hardly daring to breathe. It was his grandmother with Jane. She was speaking in rather an agitated voice.

'He slept in this room many years ago, Jane, and I wish things to be as he left them. Yes, even this cricket bat that I have just found in the attic. He used to have it in the corner by the fireplace, and I wish you to place it there now.'

She came up to the bed, smoothed the pillow with her hand, looked at the pictures on the walls, sighed, then went away, and Jane followed her. Bobby crept out of his hiding-place feeling very guilty. Then he eyed the cricket bat, lifted it, but found it very heavy.

'He won't be able to play with it if he hasn't a ball!' he said to himself. 'Perhaps he'll come and ask me for mine!'

Very reluctantly he left the room and returned to the nursery, quite unconscious that he had left behind him on the floor a tell-tale reminder of his presence there.

Ail that day Bobby watched and waited for the expected arrival. He was bitterly disappointed that bedtime came before there were any signs of his uncle. Early the next morning he woke, wondering whether he had come, and when Nurse told him that it was past ten o'clock before he arrived, he eagerly enquired:

'And did he come quite by himself?'

'Of course, he did. I haven't seen him yet, but Jane says he's wonderful good looking.'

When Bobby was dressed and Nurse had gone downstairs to fetch something from the servants' hall, he ran to the green baize door and crept along the passage to his uncle's bedroom. He listened outside, hoping he might hear a strange voice or cough, but there was silence. Then he peered down into a shining pair of boots which had evidently just been cleaned and placed outside the door upon the mat.

He wondered how long it would take for his foot to grow big enough to fill such a big boot. With a little chuckle of delight he slipped his tiny feet into them and managed to walk one step forward without making much noise. Finally, with another little snigger of laughter, he thrust his chubby hand into the pocket of his overall and produced two bright coloured marbles. He dropped one into each boot, murmuring as he did so:

'For Master Mortimer, with mine own dear love.'

And then, rather aghast at his audacity, he fled along the passage to his own territory, laughing softly as he went. After his nursery breakfast he was turned into the kitchen garden again. He was never supposed to play anywhere else, but he had a way of making little excursions into the shrubberies. There were a good many hiding-places in the old gardens. He considered it quite fairplay to haunt the shady paths and even to make daring rushes out upon the lawn when no grown-up was there. 'Children must keep out of sight,' had been dinned into his ears by his careful nurse, and as long as he did that, he considered that he played the game. He had no great desire to talk to any grown-up person; he knew that he was voted a nuisance, and was quite content to watch them from afar. But this

unknown traveller interested him greatly. He stole now into one of the shrubbery paths, and then suddenly, coming towards him, he saw a tall dark man with bronzed skin, a heavy moustache, and merry blue eyes. This much Bobby noted from the depths of a laurel bush in which he had taken refuge. He thought himself well hidden, and certainly his uncle was unaware of his close presence. Suddenly, as he was passing him, close enough to touch had he so wished, an impulse seized Bobby to speak.

Mr. Mortimer Egerton, sauntering lazily along in the morning sunshine and smoking his beloved pipe, was startled when he heard a lisping whisper:

'Where's mine father? Did you see him?'

It brought him to a standstill; there was a rustle in the bushes. He probed them with his stick, but could see nothing. Then he gave chase, and soon caught sight of a vanishing blue linen smock.

'I spy!' he shouted, and renewed his chase with vigour. But Bobby was an experienced hider. He was small, and the bushes were thick and high. Keeping well under cover, he reached the kitchen garden, and heard his baffled uncle take a wrong turn into the rose walk that stretched across the front lawn. Breathless and excited, the child reached Tom.

'He's run after me. He was the hunter and I was a tiger in the jungle! I seed him when he couldn't see me, and I likes him!'

'Which of course you is bound to do,' was Tom's ready response. 'Master Mortimer allays twisted most folk round his little finger.'

'I'll make him hunt me again,' said Bobby, a flush on his cheek and fire in his eye. 'He couldn't catch me, Tom. I won't be catched by him.'

'Master Mortimer allays used to do what he'd a mind to,' said old Tom again.

Bobby looked at him thoughtfully. He was beginning to be afraid of this uncle.

Chapter II.

'HE MAY COME TO-MORROW!'

That very same day in the afternoon Bobby was up in his apple-tree, when, to his consternation, he saw his uncle saunter into the orchard, shake hands with Tom, who was cutting the grass there, and begin an animated conversation with him. Bobby curled himself up well out of sight, and presumed upon his position, for when Mr. Mortimer came down to his corner and stopped for a moment under the tree, the little scamp again said, in as gruff a voice as he could assume:

'Have you seen mine father?'

In one second Mr. Mortimer's great long arm had shot up through the branches, and seized hold of one of Bobby's fat legs.

'Now, my little man, we'll meet each other face to face!'

Terror succeeded Bobby's audacity. He found himself on the ground, but, alas! in his rough descent Nobbles had been dashed from his grasp over the wall upon the high-road, and his anxiety over his darling's fate overcame his terror.

'Oh, save him! Oh, save mine Nobbles! Oh, he'll be hurt, he'll be run away with! Oh, please get Nobbles, and I'll never run away from you nevermore!'

Tears were crowding into his eyes as he spoke.

'Who's Nobbles?' asked the bewildered uncle.

'He's always lived with me for years—everlasting years!' repeated the troubled child. 'I couldn't live without him! Why, a big dog may eat him up, or a motor run over him! Oh, save him quick!'

It was Tom who understood and dashed through the gate at the far end of the orchard. In five minutes Nobbles was given into his hand, and a seraphic smile lit up his face as he hugged his treasure. His uncle did not smile. He sat down on one of the lowest limbs of the apple-tree and lit up his pipe.

'Is Nobbles fond of going off upon expeditions on his own account?' he asked gravely.

'Well, I *hope* he doesn't,' rejoined Bobby mysteriously. 'But I have my suspecs of him, acause I always make him sleep with his head on my pillow close to me, and two mornings I've found him on the floor, and once under the bed.'

'Ah,' said his uncle, shaking his head at Nobbles, 'I would quite believe it of him. You'll promise not to give him too hard a thrashing if I tell you where he was last night. He came into my room and had a fight with my old cricket bat. He got the worst of it, and went back to your nursery to get some help. He brought along a ninepin, and they fought two against one; the poor ninepin was nearly done for, and he rolled away under the bed and fainted. Then Nobbles slunk off and left him in the lurch. And this morning the young villain thinks he will play me a trick, so he put two marbles in my boots. He must have done that in the early hours before you were awake!'

Bobby's face was a study. Delight, horror, and confusion was depicted on it. He looked at Nobbles thoughtfully, then he announced:

'I didn't reely fight the cricket bat, I only felt him!'

'But I am talking of Nobbles.'

'He is wicked sometimes,' said Bobby, eyeing him wistfully, 'but I didded it all mine self to you.'

Then his uncle gave a hearty laugh.

'You and I are going to chum up,' he said, lifting him on the bough by his side. 'Now tell me more. I want to know you and Nobbles.'

Bobby's tongue was unloosed. For the first time in his short life he had found a grown-up person who did not consider him a nuisance. He poured out a strange medley into his astonished and amused uncle's ears. Imagination was much mixed up with fact, but the one theme that was the centre of the child's life was his absent father.

'I know he will come for me one day and take me away with himself! I finks every night when I'm in bed about it. He'll knock at my door sudden, and I'll say, "Come in." And then I'll see him!'

He gave a little wriggle of ecstasy as he spoke.

'He'll take me straight away. P'raps a cab will be at the door, or a motor, and we'll go off to the countries over the sea. Me and Nobbles lie very quiet and listen for the knock when we're in bed. I finks I hears it often, but it's been a mistake.'

'But I think I should be frightened to go off with a strange man in the middle of the night,' said his uncle, making a grimace. 'I would rather have him arrive in the middle of the day.'

'Well, sometimes I'd like him to. Just let me climb a little bit higher. Would I knock you down if I took hold of your solder very gently to help me? I want to show you the straight long road he'll come along. There!'

He had swung himself upon the bough above, his uncle having been equal to bear his weight.

And now, with eager face, he pointed out the white dusty high-road that went like a streak of light between rows of flat green meadows, and disappeared at the top of a hill on the horizon.

'He'll come!' he whispered into his uncle's ear; 'and I shall say good-bye to the House and go. I'm only waiting. He'll come along that road. I come here to expec' him every day.'

Not a vestige of doubt in the eager happy voice. His uncle looked at him in wonder.

'How do you know he hasn't forgotten you? You have never got a letter from him, have you? And he mightn't want to be bothered with a small boy.'

But no shadow came across Bobby's earnest, trustful eyes.

'He's my father. He likes me acause I belongs to him. He's the person that likes me in the earth, and God is the other Person. He's up in heaven, but I belongs to Him too. And God likes me very much!'

There was supreme self-satisfaction in his tone.

His uncle smiled.

'Your theology doesn't sound right to me. I was always told that it was only very good boys that were liked by God.'

'Yes, that's what Nurse says; but God says diff'unt to Nobbles and me. He talks to me sometimes when I'm in bed. He says He'll always like me for ever and ever, amen!'

There was no irreverence in his tone—only triumphant assurance; and his uncle was silenced.

'And so I'm just expecking,' went on the small boy; 'and he may come to-morrow while you're here.'

'That would be first-rate. Now, where shall I find you when I want a game of hide and seek? Where's your nursery?'

Bobby pointed to the window, which was plainly in sight from the orchard.

'But how do I get to it?'

'Through the green door.'

'Of course I do. Now I come to think of it, that is our old nursery. We were shut away from the rest of the house by the baize door. Here's your nurse looking for you. Good-bye for the present. I'm going out with your grandmother.'

He left Bobby looking after him with wistful eyes.

'He's just my sort,' he announced to his nurse in his old-fashioned way. 'Me and Nobbles and him will like each other very much.'

'Who are you talking about?' asked Nurse. And Bobby answered, 'Master Mortimer.'

It was two or three days before he saw his uncle again, for he went up to London on business. Then he entranced the child by taking him down to the river to fish. That was a red-letter day to Bobby; his tongue never stopped until he was told he would frighten the fish away, and then he sat on a fence and gazed at his uncle with adoring eyes. As he trotted home very tired, but very happy, insisting upon carrying two good-sized trout, he said, 'I shall do this every day with father, and we'll cook our brekfus ourselves.'

'May he never disappoint you!'

Mr. Mortimer murmured the words, and happily Bobby did not hear them. That evening he and Nobbles were too excited to sleep. In rehearsing his day to himself, Bobby began to think of many such blissful times in the future; he pictured them to Nobbles, his father being the centre-piece. And then he stopped talking and began to listen for the knock that was to come. There was great silence in the nursery. Nurse had gone downstairs to her supper, leaving the night-light as usual upon the washing-stand in the corner of the room. Suddenly Bobby sprang up, his cheeks flushed a deep crimson, his little heart galloping wildly, There was no possible mistake this time. A sharp rat-tat on his door.

'Come in!'

How often he had rehearsed his answer to the knock! Why was it that his voice was so husky? Why were his knees trembling so? He was out of his bed now, standing in the middle of the room, a pathetic little figure with his pink bare feet and tumbled curls, and Nobbles clasped in his arms.

The door opened. Bobby drew a long, shivering sigh. A huge, black-bearded man in a striped blanket came in. He carried a gun, and an axe was fastened to his belt. He was very tall, and his voice was very gruff.

'Are you Robert Stuart Allonby? I have come to take him away.'

In an instant, with outstretched arms, Bobby sprang forward, 'Father! I'm ready!'

That was all he said; but as the big man lifted him up Bobby buried his face in the bushy black beard and clasped him round his neck, and a quiver ran through his little body as he whispered in a fervour of joy, 'I'll come with you. Why have you been so long? Oh, father, darling, take me quick, and never let me come back to this old house again.'

'Are you ready to camp out amongst fierce Indians in the wild woods?'

'I'll love to.'

'Where the wolves prowl round at night?'

'I'll be with you.'

'You'll have to ride a wild pony; you will be out in the rain and cold. You'll have to cut down trees and earn your bread. Sometimes you'll be hungry and cold and tired; there'll be no one to look after you. You'll have to rough it. So you want to come? Now? Right away?'

'Right away!' repeated Bobby, squeezing tighter round the stranger's neck. 'I'll be with you, father. You'll never leave me again!'

There was such infinite trust and tenderness in the child's voice that the big man wavered, put Bobby down on the floor, tore off his beard and blanket, and revealed himself as Master Mortimer. 'Upon my word you're a plucky little 'un!'

Bobby stared up at him with horror-struck eyes. For the space of a moment his uncle felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, much as if he were meeting the gaze of a faithful dog he was ill-treating, for the look on the child's face was a broken-hearted one. He stood there with a quivering lip in perfect silence; then turned, crept into his bed again, and lay down with his face to the wall.

Nobbles was left upon the floor.

His uncle took a quick step up to the bed.

'Sorry, old fellow; it was a piece of fun. I didn't think you would take it so hard. Did you really think it was your father? I hoped I might put you off him.'

Bobby did not raise his head; he was terribly ashamed of tears, but his little chest was heaving with the bitterness of his disappointment, and he had stuffed a corner of his pillow into his mouth to stifle his sobs.

His self-restraint made his uncle feel more uncomfortable. He sat down by his bed and lifted him out bodily upon his knees, and he tried to soothe him as a woman might.

'I declare, if you were a little older you and I would go off on a tour round the world and search for this runaway father of yours.'

This idea was a risky one to propose, but he felt desperate at the sight of the child's grief.

Bobby raised his eyes for the first time. The tears did not hide the dawn of hope springing up in them.

'I'm old enough,' he said, choking down a sob; 'please take me.'

'It wouldn't do, and we might miss him; he might arrive after you had gone.'

'Me and Nobbles could go and look for him our own selves,' Bobby said very thoughtfully. 'We would just ask and ask till they told us where he was.'

His uncle began to feel uneasy. 'No, that's quite the wrong way about. He must come to you, not you go to him.'

'But,' said Bobby pitifully, 'he never comes, and I'm tireder and tireder of waiting.'

'You go to sleep, and perhaps you'll dream where your father is. Dreams are rummy things, and Nobbles is wanting his sleep, I know.'

Bobby was deposited in bed with his beloved stick, and his eyelids began to droop at once. In a minute or two, worn out with his excitement and consequent depression, he was fast asleep.

His uncle picked up his masquerading attire and left the room muttering, 'I never will play the fool again; it doesn't pay.'

A day or two after this his Uncle Mortimer departed. Bobby was very unhappy at losing him, for uncle and nephew were close friends, and not a day passed without their spending some of it together. The uncle promised to look for Bobby's father and send him to him as quickly as possible, and the child's hopes rose high, and he firmly believed that his father's return home would be hastened.

Upon the morning that his uncle left, Bobby's grandmother called him to her when she came into the nursery for her usual visit.

'I want to speak to you,' she said, putting on her gold spectacles and sitting down in Nurse's easy chair.

Bobby stood before her, his hands clasped behind his back.

'Are you not happy with us?' was the question put to him next, a little sharply.

'Yes, gran'ma.'

'Who has been talking to you about your father?'

Bobby was silent.

'Answer me, child.'

'I dunno—Master Mortimer.'

'Do you mean your Uncle Mortimer? He has only just come here. You have some absurd fancy in your head about your father fetching you away from us.'

'Yes, gran'ma.'

'It is quite ridiculous. Your father would not think of doing such a thing. You have been given over to me entirely, and he doesn't trouble about you in the least. I expect he forgets that he has a son. Do you understand me?'

'Yes, gran'ma.'

'I am only telling you this for your good. The sooner you stop thinking about such a foolish thing the better.'

'Yes, gran'ma.'

'You ought to be a very happy grateful little boy. You have a kind nurse and a comfortable home, and everything to satisfy you. Soon you will be going to school, and I hope you will try to grow up a credit to us.'

'Yes, gran'ma.'

'Can't you say anything but "yes"?'

Mrs. Egerton's tone was a little impatient.

'I don't know nothing but "yes" to speak,' faltered Bobby, hanging his head.

'You seem to have talked fast enough to your uncle.'

Mrs. Egerton regarded him closely for a minute. Bobby began to feel more and more uncomfortable. Then his grandmother got up with a little sigh.

'You are not a bit like your mother; you are an Allonby all over. Now don't let me hear any more of this nonsense! Your home is with me; we never talk to you about your father, because we do not even know if he is alive. He has never written or taken the slightest interest in you after your poor mother sent you to us.'

She got up and rustled out of the room. Bobby looked after her perplexedly.

Why didn't his grandmother want him to have a father, he wondered? And what else could he say but 'yes' to her? If he had said 'no,' she would have been angry. Grown-up people were very difficult to understand. He turned to Nobbles to console him. He always smiled at him, and loved him.

Chapter III.

THE BEAUTIFUL PICTURE.

And so the house slipped back again to its gravity and silence, and the child played about in the shrubberies and sat in the apple-tree gazing wistfully up the dusty high-road. And deep down in his heart the hope still lingered that his father would appear one day. Spring turned into summer, and Bobby spent most of his days out of doors. One afternoon his nurse took him to a farm. She was great friends with the farmer's wife, and Bobby loved a visit there, for he was allowed to wander about round the farm and watch the farm hands in their various occupations. This afternoon he crossed a field to see a young colt. He was laughing heartily as he watched its frisky antics, when from the lane that was on one side of the field, a big black retriever appeared, barking furiously.

Bobby was not accustomed to dogs. 'The House' kept none, and with his heart in his mouth he turned and fled. The retriever pursued him, evidently showing by his gambols that he wanted to play. Somehow or other Nobbles slipped from his grasp as he ran, and in an instant the dog had seized hold of him and, bounding over the hedge, carried him away in his mouth.

This awful tragedy brought Bobby to his senses. He was panic-stricken no more, but scrambled as fast as he could into the lane. He was the pursuer now; the big black dog was trotting slowly up the road, and he trotted as hard as he could go after him.

It was of no use to call after the robber. Once Bobby did so, but the dog only turned his head to look at him, and then began to trot faster than ever. Bobby's short legs did not make rapid progress. Soon he began to feel dreadfully tired. Up the lane, out on the highroad, up another side road, and finally through some big iron gates towards an old red-brick house that stood in the midst of bright flowerbeds and green lawns. The big dog led his pursuer deliberately on, and Bobby, heated and footsore, had no thought but to follow.

There was a lady sitting at tea under some shady trees upon the lawn. The retriever made his way straight to her, and dropped the stick at her feet. Bobby came shyly forward, and the lady looked at him in surprise. She was dressed in deep mourning, and had a very sad face, and, though she looked young, her hair was as white as snow.

'Who are you, little boy; and what do you want?'

'I'm Bobby, and that dog took away Nobbles. I've runned after him 'bout twenty miles!'

He picked up his beloved stick, kissed the ugly little smiling face, then produced a very small handkerchief from his pocket and began wiping Nobbles all over very carefully.

The lady looked at him with a puzzled smile.

'You look hot and tired,' she said; 'sit down, and I will give you some strawberries and cream.'

Bobby's eyes brightened. He sat down on the grass and looked up at the lady.

'Is that dog yours?' he asked.

'Yes; his name is Lucky. That's a funny name, isn't it? It was very naughty of him to run away with your stick. I must punish him by not giving him any cake.'

She shook her head at Lucky, who was sitting up on his haunches with his tongue hanging out, watching his mistress with beseeching brown eyes.

Bobby looked at him severely.

'He is a robber! Poor Nobbles must have thought he was being taken off by a lion. I expec' he was dre'ffully frightened. You see, Nobbles isn't just a stick at all.'

'What is he? I see he has a wonderful head!'

'Yes; he's Nobbles.' He paused, then added impressively: 'He's my 'ticylar friend; we always live together. He understands all I say, but he can't speak.'

'I see.'

The lady smiled upon him very pleasantly, then she handed him a delicious plate of strawberries, and Bobby set to work at once. He thought he had never tasted anything so nice, and in the middle of it he looked up a little anxiously.

'Poor Nobbles can't eat at all. It's such a pity. He doesn't grumble, but when I have anyfing *very* nice he looks in his eyes as if he could cry; only he doesn't, for he never leaves off smiling.'

'He's a splendid little friend to have,' the lady said cheerfully. 'I wonder where you live?'

'In the House, with nurse and grandmother.' He heaved a sigh. 'We shall have to go back soon.'

'I suppose you know the way; but you're a very little boy to be out alone.'

'I had to run after Lucky; Nurse was at Mrs. Tikes'.'

'Tikes' Farm? That is some way from here.'

'Is it twenty miles?'

'No, but it is nearly two. I expect your nurse will wonder where you are.'

'I expec' she will; but I likes being here. Are you a proper grown-up person?'

'How do you mean?'

Bobby frowned; he couldn't always put his thoughts into words.

'You talk so nice to me; I can't talk to grown-up people, acept Master Mortimer. At least I can say "Yes" and "No" to them. That's what children should talk, grandmother says.'

'I'm so glad you think I talk nice to you. I can't talk to grown-up people either. I live alone here—so alone now—so alone!'

She sighed, and fell into such deep thought that Bobby wondered if she would ever speak to him again. At last he ventured:

'I've got a father coming for me one day.'

'Have you really? Tell me about him.'

So Bobby told her of his never-fading hope, and she listened and smiled, and then ordered her pony-trap round, and tucking Bobby in beside her, drove him along the road by which he had come. They very soon met Nurse toiling along, with a heated, anxious face, and Bobby began to feel rather ashamed of himself. But the lady seemed to put matters straight at once with her soft voice and pleasant smile. And then she stooped and kissed the small boy by her side.

'I should like you to come and see me very often,' she said. 'I used to know your grandmother long ago, before I went out to India. Do you think,' she added, turning to Nurse, 'that he would be allowed to come to me?'

'I'm sure,' said Nurse, hesitating, 'that if you were to invite him——'

'Then I invite you, Bobby, at once to come to tea with me the day after to-morrow. I will write a note to your grandmother.'

Bobby's eyes shone with delight

'Me and Nobbles never go to tea with anybody,' he said. 'Do you think grandmother will say "yes"?'

'I hope she will.'

She nodded at him brightly, then drove off; and Nurse looked after her with a curious interest upon her face.

'That's the rich young widow, Lady Isobel, I've heard talk about. She shuts herself up, and won't go out nowheres.'

'Oh, no!' corrected Bobby. 'She wasn't shut up; I sawed her in the garden.'

'She's had a deal of trouble,' Nurse went on, more to herself than to Bobby. 'Her husband and only child and favrit sister were all drowned sudden in a boat out in them foreign rivers, and she come home, and found her old father dyin'; and she haven't got a relation left, and it have turned her head, and no wonder!'

'When peoples die,' said Bobby thoughtfully, 'they go away and never come back; don't they, Nurse? Jane says they're put under ground in the churchyard, but you told me the angels take them up to God.'

'Don't bother your little head about such things,' said Nurse hastily. 'And don't you be a naughty boy and run away from me again. I feel as if I shall never get cool. I'm regular done up, and 'twas only a chance I took the right road; but one of the farm hands saw you runnin' along.'

The next day was Sunday. Bobby never went to church in the morning, but very often his nurse took him in the afternoon. And Sunday morning was his opportunity to slip through the green baize door and wander over the house, for his grandmother and uncle and aunt always went to church, and the house was empty. Nurse did not mind his doing it, as long as he did not get into mischief. This morning he wandered into the dining-room; the family portraits on the walls always attracted him. Jenkins, the butler, was arranging the table for lunch, and eyed him morosely as he appeared.

'Now then, this ain't your nursery, you know,' was his greeting.

Bobby was so accustomed to this speech that he paid no attention to it. He sauntered round the room with Nobbles in his hand, and his eyes were riveted on the stern and gloomy faces looking out of their frames.

'Mr. Jenkins,' he said very politely, 'will your picture be put up there when you're dead?'

'Law, no!' said Jenkins testily. 'What a silly child you be! Tis only grandees can have their picters taken.'

'Has my father had his picture taken?'

'More'n I can say. He don't belong to this house. Your mother's picter were taken, and the mistress keeps it locked up. She were wonderful fond of Miss Vera.'

Bobby was not half so interested in his dead mother as in his living father.

'I don't belong to the House,' he murmured to himself. 'Father has got a big house somewheres where he'll take me when he comes home, and everything in that house will belong to me and father—all mine own!'

He reflected for a minute with shining complacency upon this idea. Then he looked up at the pictures again.

'I'm so glad they're all dead. I shouldn't like to see them going up and down stairs. I'm sure they'd scold me!'

'Don't you be abusin' your elders, Master Bobby; and liking them dead be not a right state o' mind at all.'

'But dead people are very happy in heaven. Nurse says so. Wouldn't you like to be dead, Mr. Jenkins?'

Jenkins put down the glass he was polishing, and pointed sternly to the door.

'Now you go off, Master Bobby, and don't you be asking imperent questions.'

Bobby trotted off. There was no love lost between him and Jenkins. He peeped into the drawing-room, then found his way to the library, and here he wandered about for some considerable time. The plaster busts were always a puzzle to him. Why had they no eyes? Were they born blind? Why had they no bodies? Had their heads been cut off? These and many other questions he would ask Nobbles, who could only grin at him by way of reply.

Then he began to pull out some books in the bookcase. He could not read very well himself, though

he spent half an hour with Nurse every morning over a reading-book. But he loved pictures, and he knew there were books with pictures in them. Once he had found a wonderful book here. It was bound in brown leather, and had filigree brass corners and clasps studded with blue turquoises. He had opened it and found pictures on every page, and the front page was illuminated in the most brilliant colours. His Aunt Anna had come into the room and taken it from him.

'That is a most valuable old Italian Bible,' she said. 'You are too little to be trusted with it. You must wait till you grow bigger.'

Now as he caught sight of it he said to Nobbles very gravely:

'I'm grown bigger now, Nobbles. We'll look at it. That was years ago when Aunt Anna said that.'

It was a heavy book to lift. He dragged a footstool close to the bookcase, then placed the Bible very carefully upon it, and sat down on the carpet in front of it prepared to enjoy himself. First he fingered the little blue stones in true childish fashion, then he laid his cheek on the soft leather binding, and told Nobbles it smelt just sweet. And then with the greatest reverence he opened the clasps and began to look at the pictures. They were wonderful! But some of them rather frightened him. The angels with their big wings he loved, but there was an awful picture of the ark floating over stormy waves through torrents of rain, and drowning people holding up their arms to be taken in; and there was one of a boy being tied to a heap of stones and his old father, with knife uplifted, just going to kill him.

Bobby did not like the look of that at all; and then noticing that, scattered through the book, were a few very beautifully painted pictures, he turned over the pages to find them first. At last he came to one at the very end of the volume that arrested his attention and held him spellbound.

It was shining with gold and glory, and was the picture of two golden gates guarded by white angels with glittering golden wings. Inside the gates was a broad golden road lined with avenues of fruit-laden trees, and crowds of white-robed people and children were walking along it, some dancing and singing, some playing harps and blowing trumpets, some resting under the trees, but nearly all making their way to a big tree laden with golden fruit that stood on the edge of a flowing river. In the distance was a beautiful golden city, which seemed to be sending its rays of light right up to this tree and surrounding it. Every face was smiling, every person seemed entrancingly happy, and all of them were dressed in white, and nearly all wore golden crowns on their heads.

Bobby drew a long breath.

'It's Fairyland!' he whispered to Nobbles. 'Oh, I wish me and you could walk straight in and be there! I would love to pick those golden apples, and to blow those trumpets, and to play about with the children by the water.'

He gazed with wistful longing in his eyes; then from the inside of the gates his glance tell upon a dark corner outside in the picture. And this was the angel shutting out a little group of people who were begging to be let in. They were dressed in filthy rags, their faces were wretched, and several were weeping bitterly. No light from the golden city seemed to fall upon them, and Bobby noticed, through the darkness that seemed all round them, that their feet were close to the edge of a precipice.

As he looked at them the tears came into his eyes; and when he heard Nurse's voice call to him he started violently. He could hardly believe he was in the library, and was going up to his sunny nursery. He had been in the picture for such a long time, and so very far away.

Very carefully he put the Bible back in its place and ran out of the room.

'Nurse,' he said a little later, as he was eating his dinner in the nursery, 'do you know a story in the Bible about some big lovely gates, and angels, and a street all gold, and trees with gold apples, and lovely flowers, and everybody smiling, and then, outside the gates, some poor, unhappy crying people being shut out in the dark and rain? It's rather near the end of the book.'

'Oh, I expect it's a picture of heaven,' said Nurse, 'and the wicked people being shut out.'

'But,' said Bobby, with anxious eyes, 'are many bodies shut outside of heaven? Can't they never get in?'

'Now, eat your dinner and don't talk so much! There are no wicked people in heaven. It is only good little boys who go there.'

An awful fear clutched at Bobby's heart, but he could not put it into words. He had taken it for granted that everybody who died went straight to heaven. The picture of those weeping men and women outside the gates, and the sad stern face of the angel who was shutting them out, haunted him. He was very quiet indeed; and when Nurse took him off to church a little later, he never spoke a word. They walked along the high-road for a short distance, then turned up a lane with high banks and hedges, and at last came to the little country church, with some shady elms and beeches casting cool shadows across the sunny churchyard. It was a children's service, and the Sunday-school children were filing in before them. Bobby followed his nurse up to his grandmother's pew. It was very near the pulpit, and when sitting down Bobby could not see over the top of it. He was not very fond of church. It was a long time to sit still, and Nurse would not let him talk to Nobbles. In fact she had threatened more than once to leave Nobbles behind when they went to church if he persisted in playing with him.

To-day Bobby was pleased by hearing one of his hymns sung that he knew by heart, and when the clergyman began to talk in the pulpit of this very hymn he could not help listening.

> There's a Friend for little children
> Above the bright blue sky,'

said the clergyman. 'Now I am going to talk to you about seven things you have above the sky. Will you say them after me? A Friend, a rest, a home, a crown, a song, a robe, and a harp with palms of victory.' Bobby's attention was fixed for a time as the clergyman spoke of these one by one. He described heaven with all its glories, and Bobby nodded his head as he listened.

'Me and you have seen it, Nobbles,' he whispered. 'We sawed it in the picsher.'

When the robe and harp were described Bobby drew a long breath of delight. It seemed all so certain that he was going to be inside the gates one day. He went into dreams after that, and then started in his seat as he heard the very solemn closing words of the sermon: 'So remember, dear children, you must have your white robe on *before* you enter those golden gates, or they will close upon you, and you will be left outside.'

Poor Bobby thought and thought of these words as he trotted home with Nurse; but he felt that if he asked for them to be explained Nurse would only tell him to be quiet.

When he was in bed that night he confided his fears to Nobbles.

'Me and you may be shut outside, like those peoples, if we don't have those white gowns. How can I get one, Nobbles, dear? I wonder if my father would give me one! And I wonder if you can buy them, and wheres they comes from!'

Tired out with such conjectures, he fell asleep.

Chapter IV.

HIS NEW FRIEND.

It was four o'clock, and Bobby was sitting out upon the lawn with his new friend, Lady Isobel. His grandmother at first told Nurse that she considered him too small to accept such an invitation; but Nurse for once spoke up for him, and said she thought it would do him no harm. It appeared she knew Lady Isobel's housekeeper, and was not sorry to have an excuse for taking tea with her. So Bobby and Nobbles, with smiling faces, presented themselves at the appointed time, and Lady Isobel greeted the small boy most affectionately, Nurse went off to the house, and then he lost all shyness, and was soon the greatest friends with the sad-faced woman. It was not very long before he told her of the beautiful picture he had seen.

'I wish I could read about it,' he lamented, 'but it's in a far away lang'age, Nurse says.'

'But if it is the Bible your nurse could read it to you.'

'No, it's a diffent Bible.'

He described the cover to her and the pictures. Lady Isobel seemed quite interested.

'I should like to see it,' she said. 'It must be a very valuable one, Bobby. I expect some old monks must have painted the pictures in it. I had a prayer-book once illuminated by them. They had plenty of time in those days to give to painting, and they did it beautifully.'

'What's a monk?' asked Bobby.

'A man with a bald head in a gown, who lives in a house away from the world, and makes it his business to be good.'

'In a gown?' repeated Bobby. 'A white one? Me and Nobbles want to know about white gowns, acause you can't get inside the gates if you haven't got one on, and'—his lips quivered—'I don't want to be shut out, I reely don't!'

'I'm sure you needn't be afraid of that,' said Lady Isobel, smiling, though she sighed at the same time. 'I have always been told that it is people's own fault if they are left outside.'

'I want to be certain sure I'll get inside the gates,' repeated Bobby, distress in his brown eyes. 'Me and Nobbles means to be there. I finks my father will help me get in.'

'I'm sure he will,' said Lady Isobel, cheerfully. 'Now would you like to come round my garden with me? Shall we pick some flowers for your nursery? Do you like flowers?'

Bobby assented eagerly.

'The House has a good many,' he said, 'but me and Nobbles never has none 'cept the daisies, and Tom always cuts them off d'reckly they comes up.'

He trotted after her along a gravel path that was edged by thick borders of flowers; roses climbed over arches across their heads. A smile came over his face as he gazed at the flowers to the right and left of him.

'Nobbles is rather naughty, sometimes,' he said, looking up into Lady Isobel's face with twinkling eyes. 'He does love to cut off flowers' heads, and I can't stop him. He cutted off 'bout a hundred dandelions one day in the orchard, he *would* do it, and when I looked at them their necks were bleeding white milk, and I picked up all the heads, and I made Nobbles dig and dig their graves, and we buried them all.'

Lady Isobel tried to look shocked.

Bobby had a bewitching smile, and twinkles of humour all over his face when he was giving free play to his imagination. He continued with a slow shake of his head as he looked down upon Nobbles meditatively.

'I tells him he mustn't be so fond of cutting off people's heads. You see he loves fighting. He's been a soger over the sea. He went into battle and cut off twenty fousand en'mies one day!'

Bobby stole a look up through his long lashes at Lady Isobel to see how she took this. Then he gained courage, and proceeded:

'Nobbles tells me I needn't never be 'fraid of lions or tigers or village boys, for he'd whack them all round, and the cocks and hens all rush away when they see me and Nobbles coming! Once in the land where the Indians are, Nobbles walked out in the night by hisself—he always walks when nobody sees him you know—and he met an army coming frough the jungle. They was all black men, and they were coming to kill all the white people and burn their houses; he just told them to get in one 'normous line, and he swished, and swished, and cut off their heads just like the dandelions, and then he walked back to bed and next morning, when everybodies knew what he'd done, they all called out hurrah, and gave him a gold crown. Nobbles said it hurt him, so he left it in a tree, and he likes his red cap best!'

'He looks very brave,' said Lady Isobel. 'May I hold him in my hand?'

'Just for one minute you may; but Nobbles doesn't like no one but me—no one 'cept father. Nobbles reely loves him!'

It was the same with all Bobby's stories; they invariably turned upon his absent father. Lady Isobel walked by his side and wondered much if the absent father knew what a wealth of love and devotion was awaiting him in his little son's heart and hopes.

Bobby enjoyed every minute of that visit of his. He talked without stopping; and Lady Isobel's grave sadness began to melt away. When Nurse at length came respectfully out of the house to take him home, she found the young widow and the child engaged in a merry game of 'touch-wood.'

'Oh, Nurse!' cried Bobby reproachfully, 'we're having such fun. I never has anyone to play with me like this?'

'You shall come another day,' said Lady Isobel stooping to kiss the eager radiant face. 'I don't know who has enjoyed the time most, you or I!'

The anticipation of another such treat sent Bobby home in smiling content, but it was some time before he saw Lady Isobel again, for a few days afterwards he was laid up with a mild attack of measles.

His grandmother and nurse were at first much concerned about him, then when the little invalid began to recover they regained their usual stolid composure. It was a very new experience to Bobby; at first he could not understand it, and thought he was going to die; then he declared that Nobbles felt much worse than he did, and the doctor must see him. The doctor, a grey-haired old man, humoured him, assured him that Nobbles must certainly lie in bed with him and be dosed, whereupon Bobby's smile shone out and he murmured:

'Nobbles and me is both very ill indeed.'

'Nurse,' he said, 'if I die, shall I go to heaven? I can't if I haven't a white robe. Do tell me how I can get it.'

'You're not going to die, Master Bobby; you're getting well fast.'

'I'm mis'rable and very ill,' said Bobby in an injured tone. 'Nobbles and me both is, and I want to see my lady!'

This cry was continually upon his lips, and at last one afternoon nurse opened the door and ushered in Lady Isobel.

'I am sure it is very good of you, my lady, to come to him; he is getting a bit fretful now that he's better.'

Bobby held out his arms with an eager cry to the first grown-up person who had shown a liking for him. Certainly his Uncle Mortimer had been interested in him, but he had never kissed him or petted him.

'You aren't afraid you'll catch the measles?' he asked as Lady Isobel kissed his little up-turned face.

'Not a bit afraid,' she said cheerily; 'and I think the doctor would say you were past the infectious stage now. Has the time seemed dull and long?'

'N-o-o,' replied Bobby slowly. 'I like my beef-tea and jelly, and so does Nobbles; but I'm tired of looking at my picsher-books, and I want to see those lovely picshers in the beautiful Bible downstairs. Could you fetch it for me to look at?'

Lady Isobel hesitated, and turned to Nurse.

'He's been on so for those pictures,' she said, 'that I think I'll venture to go and ask the mistress now.'

Nurse left the room and soon returned with the treasured book.

'His grandmother says he can look at it with you, and then I must put it back again, as it's a valuable book.'

Nurse deposited the Bible upon Bobby's bed, and left the room.

Lady Isobel took it carefully up and looked at the title-page.

'It is a treasure, Bobby. It is an old Italian Bible—Martini's translation, of course. I know Italian, and used to spend a good deal of my time in Italy when I was a girl. Now show me your wonderful picture.'

Bobby took hold of the Bible with flushed eager face, and turned to almost the last page of it. Then he drew a long sigh of admiration as he held it up to her.

'Isn't it beautiful?'

'Beautiful indeed,' said Lady Isobel, gazing upon the richly illuminated page with enjoyment. I don't wonder you like it, Bobby; it is a dream of glory.'

'It isn't a dream, it's a true picsher,' corrected Bobby. 'Nurse says everyfing's true in the Bible. Please read me what it says underneath.'

'I will translate it for you; you would not understand the foreign words:

'"Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."'

Bobby listened as if his life depended on the words.

'Tell me what it means. Does it tell me how to get a lovely white dress, like the people going up that beautiful road? What Lamb does it mean?' His little finger was pointing to the white-robed group in the picture.

For a moment Lady Isobel paused. She read the verse again slowly.

'I think it means this, Bobby, that no one has a right inside those gates except those who have had their sins washed away by the Lamb of God.'

'Who's the Lamb of God?' asked Bobby in a hushed voice. 'Does God keep sheep and lambs in heaven?'

'It is one of the names of our Lord Jesus Christ, Bobby, dear. I don't know how to explain it to you; but long ago people used to offer up innocent little lambs to God as a sacrifice for sins.'

'What's a sacrifice?'

Lady Isobel was not accustomed to a child's questions. She hesitated.

'It is an innocent thing suffering for a guilty, at least the Bible sacrifices were. I suppose they were just to picture the great sacrifice on Calvary. How can I put it simply? Sin made everyone black and wicked, Bobby, and God had to shut up heaven's gates and keep it outside. Nothing with sin upon it can be in heaven. These people in the picture who are being turned away are looking black and dirty and miserable, because their hearts are full of sin.'

'They want white dresses,' said Bobby, 'then they could go in like the others. The clergyman said in church—I 'members it quite well—that we must have white dresses on first afore the angel would let us

frough the gates. And me and Nobbles wants to get frough!'

'Yes,' said Lady Isobel softly, 'you are quite right, Bobby, that's what the text says, we must be washed white first before we have a right to go in.'

'How?'

'I am trying to tell you. God wanted us to come into heaven, so Jesus said He would come down upon earth and be punished instead of us. You will understand when you grow older what a big thing it was for Him to do. But He died for us, Bobby; He gave His life-blood for us; and it is by His death our sins can be washed away and our hearts made clean. That is what it means by washing our robes in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus was the Lamb, and our hearts must be washed white in His precious blood.'

'But it says robes,' said Bobby, with a puzzled frown. 'Does hearts mean robes?'

'I think it is like this, darling. Our hearts are black and soiled with sin. When they are washed clean it is just like a white covering over them, a white dress; and God looks down upon them, and says "that person can come inside the gates, because I see a clean white robe over him."'

'I see!' said Bobby, with quick comprehension. 'My heart has to have a white robe inside me, not outside; and the angel at the gate looks right frough me and sees it.'

'That is it, Bobby.'

'And how can I get it white?'

'You must just ask Jesus Christ to wash it in his blood.'

'Will He do it to-day? I would like it done now.'

He eyed the picture thoughtfully, then a pleased smile crept over his face.

'And then I shan't never, never be turned away. The angel will say, "Come in Bobby; I'm very glad to see you." And I'll walk up the road and be so happy!'

Lady Isobel did not speak for a moment. In explaining the old Truths to Bobby they seemed fresh to her own soul.

Bobby had no difficulty in laying hold of them.

Even now he was clasping his hands devoutly, shutting his eyes and bowing his head. He looked up for one moment.

'Nurse says I must say my prayers in bed. I've always said them to God afore. I think I'll say this one to Jesus.'

'Do, dear. It will be just the same.'

So Bobby spoke aloud. He had not yet got to the stage of praying in silence.

'Please, Jesus, I want my heart washed white, *quite* white, please, so that I shan't be outside the gate. And please will you do it now, for I don't like waiting, and tell me when you've done it, so that I can say thank you.'

There was great silence in that room. The earnestness of the child made the grown-up person very grave.

She had never yet in her life come to this crisis. And then in a very few minutes came an emphatic 'Thank you very much,' from Bobby's lips as he wriggled down amongst his pillows with a sigh of satisfaction.

'I feel Jesus has done it,' he said, with a nod of his curly head. 'He just put His hand on my heart, and it all turned white.'

'I'm so glad, darling.'

Lady Isobel stooped to kiss him with tears in her eyes.

'And now, Bobby, you must always try to be a good boy, and love Jesus Christ, and do what He tells you to. Isn't there a little hymn:

> Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,
> And we must love Him too,
> And trust in His redeeming blood,
> And try His works to do.'

Bobby nodded again.

'I says that to Nurse sometimes, but I never does understand it. And now let's look at the other picshers; but first, please, say the text to me again.'

Lady Isobel repeated it, and Bobby repeated it after her with quiet satisfaction:

'"Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."'

Then he wanted to know about the tree of life; and when at length Lady Isobel left him she said to Nurse:

'He is an extraordinary child, Nurse. I feel as if I had been teaching in Sunday-school. I have never done such a thing before in my life!'

Chapter V.

NOBBLES' MISFORTUNE.

Bobby was soon up and about again, but he had a great disappointment when one day his friend, Lady Isobel, came to him to wish him good-bye.

'I am going back to India,' she told him; and though her face was grave her eyes were glad.

'Oh!' cried Bobby, clasping her round the neck. 'Take me with you, and then I'll look for my father. Don't go away and leave me, you understand so!'

'If I had not met you I don't believe I should be going,' said Lady Isobel with a smile and a sigh. 'We have helped each other, Bobby. I have discovered that I was fast getting a very selfish woman, and so I'm going to join an old friend of mine in India who has a school for little black children and women, and I'm going to try to make them happy by telling them about your picture of the beautiful golden gates. Do you think I will be able to explain it properly?'

'Yes,' said Bobby, interested at once; 'same as you did to Nobbles and me. They've got black bodies as well as black hearts, haven't they? Nurse's brother tells me about black peoples. But, oh! I don't want you to go. Everybodies I like goes away; and my father is such a 'normous time coming!'

'Poor little Bobby!'

She caressed his curly head with her hand, and added:

'I will keep a sharp look-out for this father of yours, and send him home to you when I find him.'

'That's what Master Mortimer said; but he's never sent him.'

'Never mind! He'll come back one day,' and with that rather doubtful consolation Lady Isobel kissed him and said good-bye.

Bobby felt very unhappy for a few days after she left, then began to make the best of it, and turned more than ever to his beloved companion, Nobbles. One afternoon he sat up in his favourite apple-tree watching the white high-road. Presently two boys came along chasing a poor miserable-looking little dog whose tail was tied to an old saucepan. The boys were pelting the saucepan with stones, and more often than not the stones hit the dog, and a yelp of pain was the result.

Bobby's eyes blazed. He forgot his smallness; he only thought of the tortured dog.

Shaking Nobbles furiously at them, he leant over the wall and shouted:

'Stop it, you cowards! I tells you to stop! If you don't, I'll come and make you!'

The boys looked up and laughed at the irate little figure.

'Come on!' they cried. 'We're ready for you, little 'un!'

The dog had fled into a ditch now, and cowered beneath some bramble bushes. The boys began to pelt him with stones to make him come out, and Bobby scrambled down from his tree.

'Come on, Nobbles,' he said; 'we'll drive them off, me and you together!'

He ran to the orchard gate, clambered over it (for it was locked), and was soon standing over the dog protectingly.

'You shan't touch him. I'll hit you if you do!'

The biggest of the boys laughed at him, and advanced to seize the crouching dog.

Bobby was so angry that he sprang forward and hit him sharply on the shoulder. In an instant the boy, who was a bully by nature, had wrenched his precious stick away from him, and began to belabour him so unmercifully with it that in a moment poor Nobbles was snapped in two.

And at this juncture Bobby's aunt came upon the scene. She was returning from the village, and hastened to stop what she believed was a village fight. Her astonishment was great when she saw her small nephew. The village lads at once took to their heels. Bobby, in an agony of fright and woe, stooped to pick up the two pieces of his stick which had been flung upon the ground, and the wretched little dog crept out of his hiding-place.

'Bobby, what is the meaning of this? You fighting with boys on the high-road! Where is your nurse?'

Bobby was beside himself with passion and grief. He held out his broken stick.

They've killed mine Nobbles! I hate them! I wish I could kill them dead! They was teasing the poor little dog, and me and Nobbles ran out to make them stop, and he took Nobbles away, and he beat me with Nobbles, and broked him dead! And I hate him!'

Bobby literally was beside himself with grief. He flung himself down on the grass by the roadside, clasping the remains of Nobbles in his arms, and sobbed in the most bitter and heart-broken fashion.

Miss Egerton occupied herself with releasing the dog from the saucepan. It seemed to know who had befriended it, for it crept up to Bobby and began to lick his curly head with a little whine of sympathy. Then Miss Egerton spoke very sharply:

'Get up at once, Bobby, and don't be such a baby! Come indoors with me to Nurse. No, little dog, you are not to follow us; go home, and keep out of the way of boys in future.'

Bobby was too overwhelmed with the fate of Nobbles to think of the dog he had rescued, so he followed his aunt through the orchard and garden, and flung himself into the arms of his nurse, who, hearing his sobs, came to meet him.

'He's dead! He's broken in two! Oh, mine Nobbles! mine Nobbles!'

'Here, Nurse, take him up to the nursery. He has been trying to act as champion to an ill-used dog, and come off rather the worse in the encounter. You must not let him stray into the road by himself. I don't know what his grandmother would say if she had seen him just now.'

Nurse picked up Bobby as if he were a baby and carried him upstairs.

'Hush! now, Master Bobby. Tell me what you've been doing. Let me see Nobbles; I expect he can be mended.'

Hope leaped into Bobby's heart; he put the two pieces of stick upon the table. Nurse, seeing his grief, pointed triumphantly to Nobble's little smiling face, which was quite uninjured.

'Nobbles is all right,' she said. 'We can have a new stick put into him, and he will be better than ever. Look! he's smiling at you to tell you not to cry. Boys of your age ought never to cry; you don't want to be a baby.'

Nurse got her work-basket out, and very cleverly tied Nobbles together with a bit of tape.

'There!' she said, laying him in Bobby's arms. 'Be gentle with him, and he'll last like that till we get him mended; and now tell me all about it.'

The story was told; and Nurse was proud of her charge's pluck. When she undressed him that evening and found marks across his back and legs, which told of the beating he received, she declared she would find out the names of the cowardly bullies who had done it, and get them richly punished. But Bobby made light of his own hurt; he got into bed and clasped Nobbles to him, and after a long whispered conversation he suddenly called for Nurse.

'How does a heart get broken, Nurse? Jane said her mother died of a broken heart.'

'"Tis sorrow that does it generally,' replied Nurse. 'Now you go to sleep, like a good boy.'

But Bobby's brown eyes were very wide awake, and shining with a great light behind them.

'Nobbles isn't dead, Nurse; he's very, very hurt; but he's told me just how it was. That wicked boy took hold of him and made him hit me, and that just broked his heart in two. He couldn't bear to hurt me, so he broke his heart and snapped in two, because he wanted to stop it. It was sorrow that did it!'

'Oh! I see,' said Nurse, smiling. 'Now don't talk any more, like a good boy.'

Bobby drew Nobbles' ugly smiling little head close to his. 'I loves you, Nobbles, darling, I loves you; and we'll make you quite better soon; it is only your body, you see. Oh, I loves you for breaking yourself in two, so that you couldn't hurt me!' And then, tired and exhausted by his emotions, Bobby fell asleep,

and Nobbles lay and smiled by his side.

The next morning Nurse informed him that she was going to drive into the neighbouring town to do some shopping for his grandmother, and he was to go with her.

This was a great treat to the small boy, and it only happened on very rare occasions.

'And if you bring your stick with you we'll see if we can get it mended.'

So Bobby climbed into the dogcart with his nurse in the greatest delight, and John, the groom, drove them the five miles to the town.

When they arrived there, Nurse good-naturedly took him first to a little old man who mended umbrellas, and Nobbles was produced for his inspection. Bobby stood by trembling for his verdict, and Nurse said to the man, Jim Black by name, 'He's so terrible set upon his stick that we thought perhaps you might mend it. 'Tis the head he values; it's his favourite toy.'

Jim Black turned Nobbles' little head round in his hand with a smile upon his lips.

'Be this here a Chinyman?' he asked Bobby.

'Oh no,' said Bobby gravely, shaking his head. 'He came from over the sea; but he understands my English. He's dreadfully hurt; and he doesn't want to have a new body, it will feel so strange to him.'

The old man winked at Nurse. 'Ah, well, we'll see whether we can mend his old body first.'

He was untying Nobbles' bandages, and when he came in two, he inspected both pieces with great solemnity.

'What be you going to do with him? Keep him in a glass case?'

'Oh no; he always lives with me, and comes with me everywheres.'

Bobby looked up at the umbrella-mender with serious alarm in his eyes.

'Then this here broken body be of no manner of use. You leave him with me and I'll give him a good stout stick, and he'll be better'n new.'

'You won't hurt him doing it?'

'Bless your heart, he be proper enjoyin' the thought of it. Look at his smile! Ah, well! If so be that we could get new bodies so easy when ours be smashed up it would be a foine thing—eh, Nurse?'

Nurse assented with a smile; then telling the old man they would call again, she took Bobby out into the street and began her shopping. And the shops and the people were so full of interest to Bobby that after a short time he dismissed Nobbles from his mind and began to enjoy himself. His crowning treat was lunch at a confectioner's, and then soon afterwards the groom appeared with the cart, and they called for Nobbles on their way home. Bobby's hand shook with excitement as he held it out for his treasure. And certainly Jim Black had been very successful over his task. Nobbles' head was firmly fixed upon a very stout brown cane, and he looked very pleased with himself. But it was some time before Bobby could get accustomed to the change in him, and more than once he asked his nurse doubtfully if she thought he was just the same Nobbles as he used to be.

'I does hope Nobbles isn't very uncomf'able. I was telling him last night he must be very kind to his poor new body, for it must be a little shy of him at first. And he said' (here the twinkle came into Bobby's eyes as they stole a look at Nurse's impassive face), 'Nobbles telled me he'd soon make him mind him; and the first thing he wants him to do is to lick that big boy who hit me.'

'Oh, you mustn't talk of fighting; it's only wicked boys who do that. The Bible says, "Forgive your enemies."'

Bobby looked thoughtful.

'Shall I get my white robe dirty if I fight? My friend who read the tex' to me said wicked things made white dresses dirty.'

'Of course they do. Good boys never fight.'

'I don't think I'm a good boy,' said Bobby, shaking his head. 'Me and Nobbles would love to knock that boy down; but I don't want to dirty my dress—I reely don't.'

The very next day after this conversation, whilst he was sitting in his apple-tree, Bobby saw the big bully coming down the road. He hastily had a whispered consultation with Nobbles, and then, leaning over the wall, shouted to him to stop. Feeling secure in his position, he shook Nobbles threateningly at him.

'Do you see my stick? We wants 'normously to come down and lick you, but we aren't going to; but if you dare to touch me ever again I'll tell my father when he comes home, and he'll punish you well.'

'Yah, baby!' yelled the bully, taking up a stone to fling at him.

Bobby hastily scrambled down from his perch and ran indoors.

Somehow or other the mention of his father brought a forlorn longing to his small heart He saw his grandmother go off for her daily drive, and crept silently into the big hall. Sitting down at the foot of the stairs he heaved a big sigh.

'Oh, I wish he'd come! I can't do without him no longer! I'm sure, certain sure, I could find him if I went to look for him.'

For a long time this idea had been simmering in his head. This afternoon it took shape and form.

''Sposing, Nobbles, my father has forgotten the house? Why, one day he may drive right past it; and if I was out there to stop him, how lovely it would be!'

Bobby leapt to his feet. The front door was open; down the drive he sped to the big iron gate which led out to the high-road. And then the impulse seized him to go up the road himself and ask anyone coming along if they had seen his father drive by.

'Just fink, Nobbles, we shall see him coming along in a grand carriage with lots of horses; and he'll stop, and the horses will stop, and the coachmens; and he'll open his arms, and me and you will run straight into them; and we'll go right away, galloping on the road to a beautiful big house, and every room—*every* one, Nobbles—me and you will have for our own, and we'll never, never go back to the House again, never till I'm a very old man with a white beard, and have to lean very heavy on you, dear Nobbles; and then we'll come to make a visit, and we'll come in the big front door, and sleep in the best spare room, and I'll say, "This is where me and Nobbles lived when we was waiting for father."'

Talking rather breathlessly in this fashion, Bobby trotted along the road, perfectly oblivious of the fact that he was not allowed to wander out on the high-road alone. His little heart was bent upon bringing his long waiting to an end. There was no reason to his childish mind why his father should not appear any day. Every day he expected him, and it seemed a delightful and natural thing for him to be running along to meet him. From a trot he soon subsided into a walk. It was a hot day, the road was dusty, and few vehicles passed him. At length he paused to rest, and it was at this juncture that some drovers, taking some refractory cattle to market, came along behind him.

Bobby was in the act of picking a bracken fern from the hedge with which to fan his face when he heard an alarmed shout. Turning his head he saw that a young bull had broken loose from his captors and was making a dash along the road towards him.

For an instant he did not realise his danger, then another shout from the men, 'Get out of his way!' made him step aside. The bull had caught sight of him and lowered his head with an angry bellow.

And then, to the horror and amazement of the drovers, they saw the small child turn and walk into the middle of the road, where he stood confronting the animal with upraised stick.

At this identical moment the hoot of a horn and whiz of a motor was heard coming down the road. It slackened speed behind Bobby; then the little fellow never quite knew what happened, but it swerved past him and literally charged into the enraged bull, driving him into the hedge. For an instant the car seemed as if it was going to overturn, then it righted itself, and came to a standstill. Bobby was soon surrounded by a good many people, and for a moment he was a little dazed.

A gentleman was stooping over him, a tall man with very bright eyes, a bronzed skin and short curly golden hair. He was the owner of the motor; and the three cattle-drovers were all eagerly talking and explaining.

'Why didn't you run away, little chap?' the gentleman said; 'don't you know that you were just on the point of being tossed by the horns of that bull?'

'Oh no,' Bobby said in a confident tone, recovering himself; 'I was going to whack him 'cross the nose—least Nobbles was. Nobbles can kill bulls if he likes!'

He held out his stick with pride, then looked pityingly at the fallen bull, whose master was surveying it with some dismay.

'Is the poor cow quite dead? I was awful 'fraid when I saw you knock him over.'

The gentleman looked at Bobby very strangely, then turned back to his car.

'True!' he called, 'come and speak to this little boy. I've never seen such pluck before. Tell him he needn't waste his pity on the bull, which would have killed him had we not prevented it!'

A little girl, with a mop of unruly brown hair escaping from a quaint sun-bonnet, was still sitting in the car and regarding the scene with big awestruck eyes. In a moment she jumped out and approached Bobby. She was only half a head taller than he was, and now gazed at him with soft, sweet grey eyes.

'Poor little boy!' she said. 'What's your name?'

'I'm not a poor boy,' said Bobby with head erect; 'me and Nobbles will be walking on, for we're in a partic'lar hurry.'

A sudden panic had seized him that this gentleman might take him home again; he had a great dislike to be the centre of a crowd, and the cattle-drovers were all surrounding him now, gesticulating and talking loudly. And Bobby was rather shy of other children; he generally felt strangely antagonistic towards them. This little girl's gentle pity, and her desire to know his name, frightened and annoyed him.

He turned his back upon her and hurried off, with very little idea of the danger from which he had been saved. But he had not gone a hundred yards before, to his consternation, he met John, the groom, driving back from the town in the dogcart. He pulled up instantly.

'Why, Master Bobby, you ain't by yourself all this way from home?'

'Me and Nobbles are here,' said the small boy with dignity.

It did not take John long to get out and lift the little runaway up to the seat beside him, and Bobby was soon being driven home with a crestfallen unhappy face.

'Everybodies always stops me when I want to do fings!' he complained to Nurse when she took him to task for being so naughty.

And Nurse was so angry with him that she made him stand in the corner till teatime.

'For you're not a bit sorry, and will be sure to run away again directly you get a chance,' she said.

Bobby turned his face to the wall with heaving chest.

'I wants to find my father,' he said.

He little knew how very close he had been to the end of that search.

Chapter VI.

HIS FATHER.

'Master Bobby is wanted in the drawing-room.'

Jane brought this message up just as the nursery tea was being cleared away.

'Are there visitors?' enquired Nurse.

'Yes; a gentleman.'

It was only on rare occasions that the child was sent for. Nurse was in a flutter at once, putting on his best brown velvet suit, with his little cream-silk shirt, and brushing out his curls with great skill and care.

Bobby did not like the summons at all. He remembered the last time he had been in the drawing-room. It was to see an old clergyman who had patted him on the head and asked him if he knew his Catechism. He had wriggled away from him, and upset a vase of flowers upon a table near, and had been sent upstairs in disgrace, his grandmother declaring that 'children were always out of place in a drawing-room.'

'It's another old gempleum, Nurse. I don't like them at all.'

But when he opened the drawing-room door he saw his grandmother sitting in her stiffest sternest attitude, and, seated opposite to her, the tall man with the bright eyes and the curly hair who had rescued him that afternoon from the bull.

Bobby's heart sank into his boots at once. So he had come to tell tales of him to his grandmother. He had had one scolding and a punishment from Nurse, now he would get another!

'Come here, Bobby,' said his grandmother coldly. 'Your father has come to see you.'

He could not believe his ears. For an instant he gazed wildly and uncomprehendingly at the stranger, who turned and held out his hand.

'Why, upon my word! You're the little chap who withstood the furious bull! Come along. No wonder I felt as I did when I saw you!'

How often had Bobby rehearsed this scene to himself! He had pictured himself flinging himself with a glad cry into the arms of his father, and that father gathering him to his breast and smothering him with kisses. How different was reality to fancy! He was too dazed by the suddenness of the discovery to do more than stare stupidly up at his father, who drew him gently to him and kissed him on the forehead.

Then he heard his father tell his grandmother about the bull, and Mrs. Egerton said:

'What possessed you to do such a naughty thing as to go out on the high-road alone, Bobby? You might have been killed, and we should not have known where you were. What made you do it?'

Bobby looked up at his grandmother with big frightened eyes.

'I went to meet my father,' he faltered.

Mr. Allonby gave a short laugh; his grandmother looked quite horrified.

'You know that is an untruth,' she said. 'Your father must be quite shocked to hear you.'

Bobby did not attempt to defend himself. His under lip quivered, and in his small heart was a passionate desire to prove himself innocent of a lie.

His eyes turned to his father, who was looking down upon him with a strange gravity, but though he wanted to speak he could not.

'Never mind,' his father said cheerfully, 'he did meet me, and I cannot yet take in the strange coincidence of it. If I hadn't come by when I did—— Well, it does not bear thinking about. Did you know you had a father living, Bobby? For your grandmother seems to have thought I was dead. I suppose my long silence has seemed inexcusable, but I am positive that I wrote twice after your daughter's death, Mrs. Egerton, and to neither letter received any reply. Then I went off with an exploring party through South America, and have been out of touch with civilisation for the past five years. Last summer I took up life again in Canada, and only came home three months ago. I have been ill two months of that time.'

There was silence. Bobby felt uncomfortable; why, he did not know. His father looked at him again and sighed.

'Well, I see he is cared for, Mrs. Egerton, and had better fall in with your wishes. My wife——'

'Your present wife need not be brought into our discussion.'

Mr. Allonby rose to his feet, for Mrs. Egerton's words were bitter and proud.

'I'll see the boy once again before I leave this part, and now I'll wish you good afternoon.'

'I'm coming with you, Father.'

Bobby's voice rang out eagerly, expectantly. He had not a doubt but that he would be taken away at once.

His father looked at him astonished, then smiled and shook his head.

'Oh no, my boy; you belong to your grandmother, not to me. I hear you are going to school soon. I dare say you will find some boys there who will be as hard to tackle as a run-away bull.'

At this juncture Bobby's aunt entered the room, and the little boy slipped away unnoticed to the hall. His small soul was full of agonised dismay and bewilderment. Was this to be the end of all his hopes and expectations? His father did not want him; he said he did not belong to him. This last assertion was like a stab. Bobby stood looking out of the front door, which was open, into the sunny garden beyond, and there the sight of his father's small motor standing puffing away upon the drive filled him suddenly with a desperate resolve.

'I won't be left behind. I will go with father. I don't belong to this old House. I don't belong to grandmother. I belongs to him for ever and ever. Amen!'

He darted down the steps towards the motor. Then a fear smote him. The little girl. Who was she? Where was she? But the motor was empty, there was no sign of her. He climbed into the car, and in another moment was safely tucked out of sight under the seat. He had been accustomed to hide in out of the way corners in his grandmother's part of the house. He had often, when making secret excursions on his own account, been nearly surprised by the 'grown-ups.' Sometimes he had lain almost breathless under a chintz-covered couch, or crouched behind a curtain till the moment of danger was past. His whole soul was in revolt against his father's decision. He pitifully thought that if only he explained things to his father, if only he was granted a fair hearing, without feeling the cold disapproving gaze of his grandmother upon him, he might win his case.

So he lay, grasping Nobbles tightly in agony lest he should be discovered and dragged out of his hiding-place. It seemed hours to him before he heard his father's voice and step, and his parting words to his aunt, who had accompanied him to the hall door, were not reassuring.

'I must see him once again before leaving this part; but I'm quite satisfied that you can do better for him than I can.'

Then he jumped into his car, and in a moment they were gliding down the drive and out upon the high-road. A little exultant feeling came to Bobby when they were once away and going at full speed. His heart thumped loudly; he was extremely uncomfortable and dared not change his position, but he could not help whispering to Nobbles in triumph:

'We're on, Nobbles, and we never will go back to the House again.'

It did not seem very long before the car stopped. Bobby heard men's voices talking, but he did not move until his father had left the car. Then he peeped out and saw him going into the principal hotel of the market town. When he had disappeared through the door Bobby crept from his hiding-place, and, strangely enough, though there were two or three ostlers standing by, he escaped observation. He was very disappointed to find they were no farther away, for he dreaded being taken back to his grandmother again. Then his natural hopefulness came to his aid.

'Father will keep me when I tells him how I want him; and if he tells me to go home I'll come out and hide under the seat. Me and Nobbles don't mean to leave him now we've found him.'

He pushed the hotel door open, but there was no sign of his father. Nothing disconcerted, Bobby opened every door he saw and peeped inside the rooms, and when he did not find him downstairs, he climbed upstairs.

And at last he was successful. In a comfortable sitting-room his father was just in the act of drawing an easy-chair to the window, and the little girl was by his side.

'Did you see him, dad?' she was asking eagerly. 'Did you see your own little boy? And what was he like? Do tell me.'

Mr. Allonby dropped into his seat with a heavy sigh.

'Not a bit like his mother, True. Very like what I was at his age, I'm afraid.'

'I belongs to you, father.'

Bobby could keep silence no longer. Decision and some reproach was in his tone. His father started from his chair as if he had been shot. The little girl laughed and clapped her hands.

'You brought him as a s'prise, dad. You brought him to play with me!'

'On my honour I didn't, True. It's some magic, I think. Come here my boy. How on earth did you get here?'

Bobby marched up to his father. He wanted to show what a man he was, but his lips quivered, and his hand grasping Nobbles quivered too.

'I comed in your carriage under the seat. I didn't tell an untroof. I did walk out on the road to meet you. I've been waiting years and *years* for you to come for me.'

Then his self-control gave way; he grasped hold of his father's coat and burst into tears.

In an instant his father had lifted him upon his knee, and that was Bobby's happy moment. He tried to check his sobs.

'I belongs to you; I don't want to go back to the House nevermore; me and Nobbles have come to stay.'

Mr. Allonby put his hand on the curly head that was now burrowing itself into his waistcoat pocket.

'This is quite a surprise to me, my sonny. Bobby you're called, are you not? Aren't you happy with your grandmother?'

'I belongs to you,' Bobby repeated pitifully. 'I knewed you would come for me one day. *Every* day I've expecked you. I told Master Mortimer you couldn't be lost. I knewed you couldn't.'

He raised his face to his father's now, triumphantly, trustingly, and that look decided his fate. 'You do belong to me, Bobby, and we'll find a corner for you somewhere; but I mustn't kidnap you in this fashion. I'll take you back to your grandmother, and talk to her about it. She'll be alarmed about you.'

Bobby began to cry again in an agitated fashion.

'I can't go back! Me and Nobbles won't! If you take me back I'll be punished. The House doesn't want me; and Nurse can come and live with us, father; she'll understand. She know's how I've been looking for you *every* day.'

'But what made you look for me? Who put such an idea in your head?'

Bobby stopped his tears to consider, and a slow smile spread over his face.

'I reely believe it was Nobbles,' he said, holding up his stick to his father admiringly. 'It was ever so many years ago,' he added hastily. 'Me and Nobbles have always talked about you coming to fetch me away one day. I fink it was Nobbles who told me first.'

Mr. Allonby gazed at his little son with a comical look of dismay. Then he put him down from his knees and took a few quick turns up and down the room. At last he turned to the little girl, who was staring at Bobby in silence.

'I want your mother's advice, True; she says I am always making blunders. I think I'll send a note back to Bobby's grandmother, and instead of staying here the night we'll motor straight back to mother and ask her what we had better do. We'll take Bobby with us. I don't know whether that will be right though. I'm afraid you ought to go back, little chap.'

Mr. Allonby looked very much worried. Bobby shook his head emphatically.

'Me and Nobbles couldn't never go back. We belongs to you.'

'Oh, bring him to mother, dad. She'll love him; he looks so lovely. And isn't he very like that little boy who got nearly tossed with a bull yesterday?'

'He's the same; that's the extraordinary thing. Yes, I'll send the note, and we'll take him along to mother. His grandmother can send for him from there if she wants him.'

Mr. Allonby walked to a writing-table and began to write a letter in furious haste.

True put out her little fingers and stroked Bobby's velvet sleeve.

'What a nice coat you've got on!'

Boy-like, Bobby did not think much of his clothes.

'Who are you?' he asked curiously.

'Dad's little girl.'

'Father has no one but me,' said Bobby, with scarlet cheeks. 'I'm his own proper boy.'

'Yes,' said True meekly, 'I know you are. I don't think I'm quite a proper child, because my own father is dead, but dad is my next one, and mother's my *very* own. She doesn't belong to you at all, only to *me*.'

The relationship puzzled Bobby, and did not altogether please him. He had been so accustomed to think of himself and his father quite alone, that this little girl and her mother seemed quite unnecessary.

Conversation languished between them until Mr. Allonby had finished his note; then he left the room, found a messenger to take it at once, and then for the next ten minutes all was bustle and confusion getting ready for the return journey.

'If we are quick we shall get home by nine o'clock, True,' Mr. Allonby said as he wrapped a heavy rug round Bobby and tucked him in by his side in the car.

Five minutes afterwards they were going swiftly up the high-road. To Bobby it all seemed a dream. He grasped Nobbles tightly, but no fear assailed him. He had prepared himself too long for the possibility of going off with an unknown father to be much disturbed now.

And the strangeness of his journey fascinated him. True on one side of him, his father on the other —both strangers to him a few hours ago. They passed in the dusk the identical spot where he had stood confronting the bull that same afternoon. It seemed to be a year ago. True looked out as they passed, rather sleepily.

'That's where dad charged the bull! Oh, it was horrid! I thought we were going to be smashed up!'

Bobby snuggled closer to his father's side, and Mr. Allonby said shortly:

'We won't think any more about that, True.'

It grew darker as they flew along; trees by the roadside began to turn black and grim. A belt of pinewood looked as if it contained a band of robbers ready to spring out upon any unlucky passer-by.

The light from their lamps seemed to cast strange shadows across the road. They passed through two or three villages where the lights from the cottage windows looked to Bobby like fallen stars. True soon went to sleep, but the small boy sat looking out with wide awe-stricken eyes. He had never been out at night before, and everything he saw was absorbing. Mr. Allonby did not speak. He was very doubtful as to whether he had acted wisely in taking Bobby off in such a fashion, and was more than half inclined to turn back and hand him over to his grandmother again. He looked down upon him with a mixture of affection and anxiety. At last, meeting the steadfast gaze of two bright brown eyes, he said:

'Well, what do you think of your father, Bobby?'

'You aren't the same as I finked about,' responded the child readily.

'Tell me how I am different.'

'I finked you would be a big man with a black beard, who would take me to live in a cave in the mountains, or fight with the Red Ingines. Nurse's brother said he expecked you would be like that.'

'You want a life of adventure and travel!'

Mr. Allonby's eyes sparkled, though he was staring in front of him and making his car go beyond the limited speed at this juncture.

'Then you're a proper son of mine, Bobby, and I won't let you go. We'll do some travels together.'

And we'll leave the little girl at home,' suggested Bobby.

His father laughed aloud.

'True? Bless her heart! Do you know where I first met her, Bobby? Careering on a wild prairie; run away on a half-broken colt, and been lost for two days; and when I took her back to her mother——'

He stopped and smiled to himself in the darkness.

'Ah, well! That was a good day in my life, and better ones followed. No, you and True must be friends. Truant is her name by rights, for her mother never could keep her indoors or at home. Now, Bobby, look ahead! Do you see those lights? We go through the town; and just outside is our home—a very tiny one at present, for we move about; but we'll find a corner for you.'

He slackened speed. Slowly they passed through the streets of an old-fashioned cathedral town. Soon the houses became more scarce, and at last they came to a standstill before an iron gate in a wall. True woke up, and she and Bobby were bundled out.

'Go up to the door; I'll take the car into the shed and join you.'

True pulled Bobby after her up a narrow gravel path. It was dark, but there was a sweet smell of mignonette and of roses. Bobby was dimly conscious of two old-fashioned borders of flowers edging their path. A light shone out of a casement window on the ground floor which was open. True ran up to it and put her head in.

'We're back, motherums, and we've brought dad's little boy with us.'

Then she thumped impatiently upon the door till it was opened by an oldish woman.

'Now, Miss True, be quiet; and who's this without a hat?'

'I'm going to take him to Mother, Margot. Let us pass.'

The tiny hall seemed almost like a doll's house to Bobby. He hung back; sudden shyness seized him.

'I think I'll wait for my father,' he said.

True released his hand, and dashed into the front room. Margot looked down upon him in puzzled wonder, but a step outside made her smile.

'Ah! Here's the master,' she murmured; and Mr. Allonby's hand was upon Bobby's shoulder the next instant.

'Now, little chap, come and see your new mother.'

Chapter VII.

HIS NEW HOME.

Bobby's eyes blinked nervously at his father's words. A 'new mother' had never been in his calculations at all. A mother of any sort meant very little to him; he had never come across one, and vaguely put them in the same category as his grandmother and aunt. He clung hold of his father's hand tightly, and then the door was opened, and Bobby's brain received the first impression of cosy warmth and comfort, which never faded from him in after-life. The room was small compared with his grandmother's rooms, but, oh! so different. There was a tiny fire blazing in the grate, a little black-and-white terrier lay basking on the hearthrug, a lamp in a corner of the room, covered by a rose-coloured shade, shed its light on a pretty pink and white chintz couch underneath it, and upon this couch,

leaning back amongst pink cushions, was Bobby's stepmother. True was already sitting upon a footstool, and her head was in her lap, her mother was stroking back her hair gently and tenderly. Mrs. Allonby looked to most people a mere laughing high-spirited girl, with wonderful black hair and mischievous face and eyes, but that was generally the side she showed to outsiders. To her husband and child there was deep, never-dying love in her looks and tones; and Bobby caught a glimpse of this, small boy as he was, when she turned her face towards her husband.

'Come along, wanderer, and confess! Have you been guilty of stealing, and where is your prize? Oh, what a little darling!'

She opened her arms to Bobby, and True made way for him. Bobby found himself smothered with kisses; he was shy no longer, for he felt the atmosphere of love around him.

Standing, with his hand in his stepmother's, he heard his father telling his story, and all the time his eyes were roaming round the room taking everything in with admiration and delight. There was a canary in a cage, a globe of goldfish, bowls of pink and white roses, pictures and books, comfortable easy-chairs, and in the corner a delicious-looking table, spread with a white cloth and shining silver, with a large dish of strawberries in the centre, a junket, and a rich-looking plum-cake. Then his eyes came back to his stepmother. She was clad in a white gown, but a crimson wrapper round her seemed to match in colour the roses pinned to her breast, and her cheeks vied with them in hue.

'And so you have kidnapped your own little son! And he himself helped you to do it! How can you leave your dear old granny, my boy? She has loved you and cared for you all these years. Is it kind to run away from her?'

Bobby looked up wonderingly.

'I couldn't never be kind to grandmother,' he said; 'she wouldn't like it. And it's only fathers who love anybodies; Nurse told me they always did.'

'And not mothers? Ah! you poor little atom, I forgot that you have not known your mother.'

'How's the back?' asked Mr. Allonby, looking at his wife with a smile.

'Oh! very good to-day; I've been following you in thought all the time. You see, Bobby, I have to lie here on my back, and my truant and wanderer go out to seek adventures, and come back and amuse me by telling me all they have seen and heard. Then I mend them up, and send them out again, and that's how we spend our life.'

'Motherums hasn't always lived on her back,' put in True eagerly. 'She used to gallop everywhere on a lov-elly black horse till she got her fall. That was a dre'fful day!'

'So "dre'fful" that we will never talk of it,' said Mrs. Allonby quickly. 'Now, True, darling, take Bobby to Margot, and she will get a comfy bed for him in dad's dressing-room. And when he is quite tucked up in it he shall have a basin of bread and milk and go fast asleep till to-morrow morning, for I'm sure it is long past his proper bedtime.'

Bobby looked longingly towards the table, and Mrs. Allonby noted it.

'That is for father only; he is going to have some hot meat directly; but I think he can spare you six strawberries. True, you can have six too. Bring a plate over here and eat them together.'

So the two children sat down on the rug together, and Bobby felt he would like to stay there all night. But a little later, when he was going upstairs to bed, he felt very sleepy, and his head had not been upon his pillow for five minutes before he was fast asleep.

He was wakened the next morning by True's voice.

'Oh, do wake up! We've had breakfast already. And oh! you funny boy, you've got your walking-stick in bed with you.'

Bobby resented her tone.

'It isn't a stick, it's Nobbles,' he said. 'Me and Nobbles always sleep together.'

He fingered Nobbles' red cap lovingly, then held him out for True's inspection.

'He comed from over the sea. He's really alive, though he never speaks; but he finks a lot, and whispers to me, but nobody but me can hear him.'

True gazed at Nobbles' smiling face with fascination.

'What does he tell you?' she asked.

Bobby's slow smile came.

'He told me last night he liked this house very much; and—he ran away from me in the night—he very often does—he goes up the chimleys, and the wind takes him journeys. He went to the House to

see how Nurse was getting on.'

'Did he? To your grandmother's house? What did she say?'

Bobby considered.

'She said to Nurse, "I reely can't be troubled with the child, Nurse; it's your place to look after him."'

'And what did your nurse say?'

'She wented down to the kitchen and ate some apple tart. And then Nobbles said he came away "'cause nobody wanted me back," and I'm never going to leave my father no more!'

'Dad is going to see your grandmother now. Motherums told him he ought to. Do get up and come and see my rabbits. Oh! Here is Margot!'

Margot appeared with a breakfast tray, and Bobby lay still and ate an egg and some bread and butter with relish.

'The mistress said you was not to be called, for you were tired out,' said Margot, by way of explanation. 'And when you've had your bath, and dressed, you can go to her room and see her. Can you dress yourself?'

'I'm nearly sure I can,' said Bobby bravely.

But he was forced to let Margot assist him more than once; and when ready at last, paused before leaving the room, looking up into her face with a little uncertainty and doubt.

'Do you think they'll all like me here?' he said.

'Bless the child, this be a real home to everyone, though it be small. I've been with the mistress for twenty years. She were a wild slip of a girl when I took service out in 'Merica. She lost her mother when she were eight, and I mothered her after, for her father were a proper ne'er-do-weel, and were always moving from one ranch to another. Miss Helen took after her mother, and got everyone's love. And then her father got her to marry a rich old settler, so that some of his debts might be paid, and he died within a twelvemonth of the marriage, and Miss Helen kept the property together and did for her father till he broke his neck riding an unbroken horse, and Miss True was all the bit of comfort she had left. She could have married over and over scores of times; but not she; till Mr. Allonby found Miss True one day and brought her home, and then I knew how things would end. And when she would gallop off with him on her big horse, with her laugh and jest, I little thought she'd ever live to lie on her back and never move again.'

The old woman paused. Bobby had not been following her. He only repeated the question, which was an all-important one to him:

'Will they be sure to like me?'

'The mistress has the biggest heart in the world, my dear, and the master never says a cross word to nobody!'

Bobby felt cheered by her tone, and his doubts utterly vanished when he was held in the close clasp of his stepmother.

'We are going to keep you, Bobby, and I must be prepared to see two small children go off every day with my Wanderer. We are going to make this summer a holiday, to build up and strengthen your father, who has been very ill, and next winter, if we are spared, we must all set to work in earnest. Lessons and school for the little ones, real hard writing for your father and me. Now, darling, True is calling to you from the garden. Run out to her, and the air and sunshine will bring colour into those pale cheeks of yours.'

'Me and Nobbles likes to be darlings,' Bobby informed True a short time afterwards. 'We aren't darlings with Nurse or grandmother.'

When his father returned, Bobby approached him, almost trembling to hear his fate.

'Well, little chap,' Mr. Allonby said, 'it has been rather a stormy scene, but I've got you for good and all. And if I had known your grandmother considered children such a trouble I never would have left you with her all this time. Your nurse is going to drive over this afternoon and wish you good-bye. She will bring your clothes. Do you think you will get on with us without a nurse? We are very poor folk, you know, until I write this big book of travels that is going to bring us fame and money, and then—well, you ask True what will happen.'

Bobby smiled contentedly. Things had not turned out quite according to his expectations, but he was well pleased to have a little playfellow in True, and though she adopted a slightly superior and motherly air with him, she was a deferential listener to any of Nobbles' exploits. She had no difficulty in believing that he was alive; in fact she was quite ready to explain his existence in a manner quite new to Bobby.

'You see,' she said, 'a wicked fairy must have turned him into a stick. He really was a very brave good prince, but he set free a beautiful princess, who had been a prisoner in the wicked fairy's house, and the way he did it was dressing in her clothes and staying behind while she put on his and rode away. Then the wicked fairy was so angry when she found out the trick that she turned him into a stick and said he must stay like it till someone broke the spell.'

'What's a spell?' asked Bobby.

'Oh, there are lots of spells. The sleeping beauty was in one, you know. The spell was that she would sleep till a prince kissed her. What we've got to do is to find out the spell for Nobbles, and when we do the right thing to him he'll wake up, and come alive, and be a prince again.'

Bobby thought over this with a perplexed brow.

'But then he might ride away from me to find the princess, and I should be 'fraid of a grand prince. I like Nobbles best like he is!'

'Oh, but wouldn't you like him to be able to run about and take off his little red cap and bow? He wouldn't be any bigger you know; he comes from a country where they are all very tiny, and perhaps he will have forgotten all about the princess and will like to stay with you best.'

'I'll ask him to-night when we're in bed all about it. He'll be sure to tell me.'

And Bobby's face brightened at the thought. After all, Nobbles belonged to him, not to True, and if he didn't choose him to be a prince he need not be one.

Bobby's interview with Nurse was rather a trying one. He could hardly understand why he should be blamed.

'You knewed my father would come one day, Nurse. I had been expecking him every day, and of course I belongs to him, and I had to go after him. I was so 'fraid I might lose him again. And I can go all over father's house and sit in every room, and I've got a new mother and a little girl to play with, and they calls me "darling!"'

Then Nurse astonished him by clasping him in her arms and bursting into tears.

'I never thought you'd have left me. I've been as fond of you as if you'd been my own child. It's put me terrible about, losing you so sudden. Why, I meant to stay with you till you went to school.'

Bobby began to get tearful at once. He had a tender little heart, and to see Nurse cry was a great calamity. He was honestly sorry to part with her; but his father filled his heart, and, childlike, the new scenes and life around him were entirely engrossing him.

When Nurse had gone he was called to his father, who was sitting with his stepmother. True was still playing in the garden.

'I feel I must make acquaintance with my small son,' Mr. Allonby said, perching him on his knee.

'How is it you have thought such a lot about me?'

'I always knewed you would be nice,' said Bobby, with a slow shake of his head. 'I knewed fathers were.'

'How many fathers have you known?'

'Only God,' said Bobby, simply and reverently. 'He is my other Father, isn't He? And He's always good and kind to me.'

Mr. Allonby exchanged glances with his wife.

'You are a little character, I see. Tell me more. Are you a very good little boy?'

'Nurse says no boys are ever good,' said Bobby, not seeing the twinkle in his father's eye. 'I s'pose when I get to be a father I shall be.'

Mr. Allonby began to laugh. His wife shook her head at him.

Bobby knitted his brows, then turned questioner.

'Did you fink I would be like what I am, father?'

His tone was anxious. He added hurriedly:

'I'm not a baby now, I can walk miles and miles, and I'm going to dress myself all alone to-morrow.'

'That's right. I want my son to be plucky and independent and honourable. If you're that sort I shall be quite satisfied. What do you say, Helen?'

Mrs. Allonby looked at Bobby rather tenderly.

'I don't think he needs to be very independent yet,' she said.

'What does it mean?' asked Bobby. 'And what does honourable mean? It's plucky when you hurt yourself and don't cry, isn't it?'

'Independent is doing things for yourself and standing alone. Honourable is everything a gentleman ought to be—truthful, honest, and straight, with right thoughts about everything. I think you're plucky. You're not afraid of anything, I hope.'

Bobby did not answer for a minute. He had heard enough to fill his small brain with fresh thought.

'I'm not afraid of anybody if I have Nobbles with me,' he said.

His father laughed again, then put him off his knee.

'I have letters to write. Run away now and play with True.'

So Bobby went, revolving many things in his mind. And an hour later, when he was getting tired of romping with True, he sat down on the grass underneath an apple-tree.

'I like Nobbles to be good,' he confided to True; 'but I'm 'fraid he can't be ind'pendent. He's plucky, he's afraid of nobody, and loves to give anyone a good beating; and he's quite, quite straight, so he's hon'rable, but he can't stand alone, or do things for himself.'

'Can't he? You give him to me. I'll make him stand up.'

True had seized hold of Nobbles and stuck him triumphantly two inches into the ground, where he stood smiling at them.

Bobby did not approve of this treatment.

'You're not to touch him. He doesn't belong to you.'

'He's only a stick!'

True's tone was scornful. For the first time Bobby began to feel angry with her.

'He's my Nobbles, and I like him much better than you.'

He hugged his stick and walked off. True pursued him.

'He's only a stick,' she repeated. 'I could break him in half if I tried!'

'You're a horrid girl, and I wish my father would send you away. You don't belong to him and me at all!'

'You don't belong to us!' cried True excitedly. 'Dad and me always goes out together, and we'll leave you behind. We don't want you at all. We was ever so happy before you came. You'd better go back to that old House of yours. We don't want you!'

It takes so little to make a quarrel. Fiery little True rushed into her mother in a passion of tears, declaring that she hated Bobby and would never play with him again; and Bobby was found some minutes later by Margot lying face downwards in the garden crying as if his heart would break.

'I'll never be happy again. She says I don't belong here,' he sobbed.

Peace was made at last, for Margot took him straight into Mrs. Allonby, who talked to both children as only she could talk, lovingly, gently, but very firmly. When girl and boy were both safely tucked away in bed that night, she said to her husband:

'Oh, Frank, shall we have a divided house?'

'Never!' he said cheerfully. 'Both these youngsters have had things their own way. Now they will have to give and take, and it will do them each a power of good.'

She smiled, and her anxious look disappeared.

'If we are of one mind it will be easy,' she said.

And her husband replied:

'Your mind and will rule this household, darling. I shall leave my boy's training to you.'

Chapter VIII

A LETTER FROM ABROAD.

'They look like the gates in the City.'

Bobby and True were lying upon the grass under a shady group of trees. They had been out motoring with their father all the morning, and had stopped to have their lunch up a by-road. They had had a merry meal, and then after it was over Mr. Allonby told them they had better stay where they were whilst he took his motor back to the neighbouring village to get some slight repairs done to it.

'It is very warm, so stay here quietly, and don't wander far from this place, or I shall not find you again.'

He went. For a short time they amused themselves quietly by the roadside. Then they thought they would like to see where the road took them, and walked up it until suddenly they were stopped by some very tall white iron gates. They peeped through the bars of them. There was a small lodge inside, but there seemed no one about. A long, broad, beautifully-kept drive went straight up to a white, turreted house in the distance. It looked almost like a castle. They tried to open the gates, but they were locked. Then they threw themselves down upon the grass outside, and Bobby thoughtfully said, as he eyed the gates in front of them:

'They look like the gates in the City.'

'What city?' asked True.

'It's a Bible city. Do you know about the gates kept by angels? They lead up to heaven, and the road is just like that in there, only there are people walking up them in white dresses. We shall have to get frough them some day.

'It'll be very nice,' said True comfortably.

Bobby looked at her, and his mouth pursed itself up gravely.

'Everybodies don't get frough. Some are shut outside.'

'Oh! Why?'

'Because they haven't white dresses on. My grandmother has a beautiful Bible with beautiful picshers in it, and the picsher of the lovely gates says: "Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in frough the gates into the City." I learnt that tex'. Lady Isobel teached it to me.'

'What's the tree of life?' asked True.

Bobby pointed inside the gate to a big beech-tree halfway up the drive.

'It's like that, but it has lovely golden apples on it. And the angels stand at the gate, and won't let nobody frough with a dirty dress.'

True glanced at her brown holland frock, which was smeared with green.

'My frocks never keep clean after half an hour,' she said with a little sigh.

'You have to get a nice white frock from Jesus,' went on Bobby, pleased with his role as teacher.

'He washes your dirty one in His blood. You know, when He died on the cross, that's how He shed His blood. And it turns all dirty things white and clean. Lady Is'bel teached me it did.'

'I don't believe Jesus Christ really washes frocks,' said True. 'I've never heard He does. It would be—be like a washerwoman.'

Bobby leant across to her eagerly.

'You don't un'stand prop'ly. It's a inside white frock over our hearts. Nobody sees it but Jesus and the angels at the gate—and God. Our hearts are quite dirty and black till we ask Jesus to wash them and put the white dress on. Why, I had mine done long ago—d'reckly I heard 'bout it. You ought to have yours. You'll never get inside the gates if you don't, and it would be quite dre'fful to be shut out.

'When is it?' asked True, deliberating.

'When is what?'

'The gates being opened.'

'I think it's when you die, you want to get frough,' said Bobby.

'Then I can wait till I die!' said True.

'What a silly girl you are!'

Bobby's tone was almost contemptuous.

'I'm not silly.'

'Yes you are. Fancy waiting when you can have it now. Why, you might die in a hurry, and then Jesus might be doing something else, and mightn't come to you in time. I'm all ready now. The tex' says I've a *right* to go in at the gates *now*, if I wanted to.'

He stopped talking, for up the lane came a carriage, and it stopped at the gates.

Both the children sprang to their feet. They saw a woman in a white apron hurry out from the lodge and open the gate; they saw the carriage pass through and the gates close again. Then Bobby spoke very solemnly:

'Did you see who was in the carriage? A lady in a *white* dress, and she had a *right* to pass frough.'

'You are a funny boy,' said True with a little laugh. 'She belonged to the house, and she's just going home.'

'Well,' argued Bobby, 'I belong to the golden City, and I shall have a right to go in—the tex' says so; and I shall be going home; because you know, True, God is my other Father, and God lives at home in heaven.'

There was silence, then True said:

'We had better go back to dad. I'll ask mother next Sunday about those gates, and see if you've told me true. She always talks good to me on Sunday afternoon.'

Bobby turned away from the white gates with reluctance.

'Would it be wicked to play at going in at those gates?' he asked. 'We might come another day by ourselves and try to get in.'

'So we will,' said True. 'It couldn't be wicked if we play what's in the Bible, because everything is good there.'

They returned to the spot where Mr. Allonby had arranged to meet them. He was just appearing along the road, and when they were tucked safely in the car again Bobby said:

'Who lives inside the big white gates up that road, father?'

'I don't know, my boy. I don't know this part of the country.'

'How far are we from home?' asked True.

'About twenty miles.'

The children sighed simultaneously. Then True said:

'We'll never get there, Bobby.'

'P'raps we shall pass some other white gates nearer home,' he suggested.

'Why do you want them?' asked their father.

Bobby laid his hand on his coat sleeve impressively.

'They're so like the gates into heaven, father.'

Mr. Allonby looked startled.

'Have you been there, sonny?'

'No; but I've seen them in a picsher.'

'Well?'

'I was splaning to True about them.'

Bobby was a wee bit shy of his father. He could not talk quite freely to him yet. He was so terribly afraid of being laughed at, and Mr. Allonby was not good at hiding his amusement at some of his son's quaint speeches.

'It's kind of Sunday talk,' put in True eagerly, 'about angels, and white dresses, and washing.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Allonby, 'then you must take your puzzles to the angel of our house. She will tell you all you want to know.'

'That's mother,' said True in a whisper to Bobby. 'She's father's angel. He is awful 'fraid she will get some wings and fly away one day.'

Other topics engrossed their small minds; but upon the next Sunday afternoon, when they were both sitting by Mrs. Allonby's sofa and she was giving them a Bible lesson out of her big Bible, True brought up the subject.

'Will you read us about the gates of heaven, mother? Bobby says he'll be let inside, and I shall be shut out.'

'No, I didn't.'

'Yes, you did.'

'We won't have any quarrelling. What do you want to hear about?'

'The gates,' said Bobby, 'the beautiful gates. It's the last page of the Bible. I know it is. Will you read, True, the tex' about having a right to enter? It begins, "Blessed——"'

Mrs. Allonby had no difficulty in finding it. She read very slowly.

'Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the City.'

'There!' said True, 'it doesn't say anything about washing, Bobby.'

Bobby looked sorely perplexed.

'Lady Is'bel teached it to me out of the Talian Bible. "Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in frough the gates into the City." That's my tex', I know it is.'

Mrs. Allonby smiled at his disconsolate face.

'It is another version, Bobby.'

'But isn't it true?' he questioned. 'You see it's so 'ticular to me, 'cause I've had my robe washed. I knows I have, and I thought I was quite ready to go in.'

'You're quite right, darling. Listen to this verse about the City. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." No one can be allowed in if they are stained with sin, no dirt, no impurity. We must have had our hearts washed white before we can go in. Only Jesus can do this; but we must not think that is all we have to do. What makes our hearts dirty and black?'

'Being naughty,' said True.

'Yes. We must ask Jesus to help us do His commandments, so as to keep our hearts clean. The two go together; and it is very important they should. If Bobby says his heart is washed by Jesus, and then quarrels, and loses his temper and wants his own way, I shall know something is not right. Remember you must be washed, and you will want to be washed every day again and again, but you must try to keep clean by doing His commandments. Everyone you break leaves a stain upon your robe, and grieves your Saviour.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' sighed Bobby, 'He'll get quite tired of me, I know He will. I think I'm much wickeder here than I was at grandmother's.'

'And I'm wickeder since you came to us,' said True, nodding her head at him. 'You do make me so awful angry by things you say!'

Bobby looked quite crushed.

'Isn't it quite certain I'll be let inside?' he asked.

Mrs. Allonby smiled.

'Thank God you can be quite certain of that, Bobby. It doesn't depend on what we do, but upon what Jesus did for us. Let me tell you a little story. Two little girls were going to be taken out to tea one afternoon with their mother. Their names were Nellie and Ada. They were dressed in clean white frocks, and told they might walk up and down the garden path till their mother joined them. "But don't go on the grass," she said, "or you may soil your frocks. It has been raining, and it is wet and muddy." For a short time they walked up and down the path as good as gold. Then Ada saw a frog hop away over the grass. She forgot her mother's command, and ran after it. The grass was slippery; she fell, and her clean frock was all smeared and spoilt by muddy streaks. Her mother came out and was very vexed. "Now, Ada, you will have to stay at home. I can't take you in a dirty frock. It will serve you right for being so disobedient." Ada cried and sobbed, and said she was sorry, and begged to be taken. But her mother said no. Then Nellie, who loved her sister, and was an unselfish little girl, said: "Mother, dear, do take Ada, she is so sorry; let me stay at home, and then she can wear my frock." At first the mother wouldn't hear of this, but Nellie begged so hard that at last she consented. Ada's dirty frock was taken

off her and Nellie's clean one put on her. She went to the party and Nellie stayed at home. Now don't you think, as she walked along with her mother, that she would be very careful not to dirty Nellie's clean frock? I think she would be more careful than ever. Jesus Christ kept His robe pure and spotless. He never sinned at all, so His robe is put over us, and we can enter the gates. But oughtn't we to be very careful not to sin, just to show Him how we value our robe, how we love Him for being so kind and good to us?' Mrs. Allonby paused. Bobby nodded his head very solemnly at her.

'Me and Nobbles will 'member that story. I'll tell him it in bed. You know sometimes I make Nobbles do naughty things, but sometimes'—here the twinkle came into the brown eyes—'sometimes Nobbles puts naughty things in my head. He whispers them to me in bed.'

'That isn't Nobbles,' said True, in her downright fashion, 'that's the Devil, isn't it, motherums?'

'No,' asserted Bobby, 'it's Nobbles, all by himself. P'raps Satan may have whispered to him first. Shall I tell you what he wants me to do to-morrer?'

'Oh, do!' True's eagerness to hear Bobby's inventions got the better of her. Mrs. Allonby said nothing. She liked the children to talk freely before her, and she gained a good deal by being listener sometimes.

'You know those top pears on the wall what *won't* fall down? Nobbles says if I get on a chair and reach up he'll hit them down, and then I can pick them up. We was finking about doing it first thing before breakfus' to-morrer!'

'But it would be *you* that would do it; and dad said we weren't to touch them unless they were on the ground.'

'It wouldn't be me, it would be Nobbles,' insisted Bobby. 'I couldn't reach up half so high.'

'Then if Nobbles does it,' said Mrs. Allonby, very quietly, 'I shall have to punish him. I shall shut him up in a cupboard for a whole day.'

Bobby looked quite frightened.

'Me and Nobbles have never been away from each other, never once!'

'Then I should take care he does nothing naughty. After all, Bobby, darling, he can't do anything unless you help him, can he?'

'No,' said Bobby slowly; 'and if him and me knocked those pears down it would make a black mark on my robe, wouldn't it!'

'Indeed it would!'

'Then we'll 'cidedly not do it,' said Bobby with emphasis. 'I'm going to try hard to be always good—for evermore!'

It needed hard trying, poor Bobby found, especially when he and True both wanted their own way at the same time, and they could not make those ways agree. But gradually they learnt lessons of forbearance and patience, and mutually helped each other to be unselfish.

One morning Bobby had a letter brought him by the postman. He turned it over with the greatest pride and interest. It had been redirected to him by his grandmother.

'I've never had a letter from anybody,' he said.

'Oh, be quick and open it,' urged True, dancing round him. 'All sorts of things happen when you get letters. It might be from the King, or from a fairy godmother, or a princess!'

Bobby's fingers trembled as he opened the envelope.

'P'raps,' continued True, who was never wanting for ideas, 'you've got a fortune left you, and a lot of money will tumble out.'

But it was only a letter, and though the writing was very clear and plain, Bobby begged his father to read it to him.

The children had breakfast with their father always. Mrs. Allonby did not leave her room till later in the morning.

Mr. Allonby read the letter through, and Bobby leant forward in his chair listening to it with open eyes and mouth.

'MY DEAREST LITTLE BOBBY—

'Have you forgotten the sad lady in her garden, I wonder? The one you comforted by your sweet quaintness and loving-heartedness? I have often thought of you in this hot country, and now I am

feeling rather sad again, I thought I would cheer myself up by writing to my little friend.

'I had such a happy time when I first came out, Bobby. Do you remember the picture of the golden gates? I found the little black children and women here were so interested in hearing about it that I set to work and drew and painted a big picture after the fashion of that beautiful one in your grandmother's Bible. I used to draw a good deal when I was a girl, but my attempt is very poor when I think of the original. Still the children here were so delighted with it that I wondered if you would be too. So I set to work to paint another, and this one is coming to you through the post. Perhaps Nurse will hang it up in your nursery for you. How is Nobbles? Give him my love. I hope he doesn't cut off the heads of the poor flowers now. He will be older and wiser I expect. Are you still sitting up in bed at night and fancying you hear your father's knock? Or do you sit in your apple-tree and think you see him coming along the road? How I hope he will arrive home one day and take you by surprise! I have not forgotten that I am to try to find him for you, and curiously enough I heard his name mentioned the other evening when I was dining with some old friends of mine. And who do you think was talking about him, Bobby? Your Uncle Mortimer. Isn't it funny that I should meet him out here? I knew him when I was a little girl, but of course he did not remember me. There was a Major Knatchbull, who had met your father in South America, but he had not seen him for several years. I told your uncle that I wanted to find your father, and then we discovered that we had both promised the same small boy to do so. How I hope we shall succeed in our quest! Now I must tell you why I am feeling sad. I have not been well since I came out here, and the doctors tell me that I must not stay in India. So that means I must give up my work, which I was beginning to love, and come back to my empty house and home. Will you come and comfort me if I do? It won't be just yet, for I shall stay out here till the rainy season is over. Good-bye, my darling. If you can write me a little letter I shall be so glad to get it. Your Uncle Mortimer has just asked me to go for a ride with him, so I must stop.

Your very loving friend,
ISOBEL GRANTHAM.'

'Well,' said Mr. Allonby, 'that letter comes from a nice woman, Bobby. Who is she? And how many people have you set to work looking for your missing father?'

Bobby looked up gravely.

'Only her and Master Mortimer. I likes them both 'normously. Isn't it a long letter? And, oh dear! if she's home I shan't see her.'

'Would you like me to take you back to your grandmother?'

Bobby slipped down from his chair and caught hold of his father's hand with imploring eyes.

'Father, dear, you won't do it, will you? You'll never let me leave you?'

Mr. Allonby took him upon his knee and gave him one of his rare kisses.

'I'm afraid I'm not good enough to be your father, sonny. You expect such a lot from me, and I can only give so little. I shall be a terrible disappointment to you all round.'

But Bobby laid his curly head against his father's shoulder and clasped him round the neck.

'I belongs to you, and you belongs to me,' he said, with infinite satisfaction in his tone, and Mr. Allonby answered, with a little embarrassed laugh:

'And finding's keeping, my little boy. We'll hold together for the present, at any rate.'

Chapter IX.

'SHE HAS LEFT US!'

Of course Lady Isobel's letter had to be answered, and the wonderful news told of Bobby's change of home. His letter took him a long time to write, and True helped him a great deal. Mrs. Allonby sent it as it was, with all the imperfections of spelling and many a blot and erasure; but she added a little note herself, as Bobby's left much to be explained.

'MY DEAR LADY FREND—

'Me and Nobbles is kite wel, so is True. Father came at last. He tuked me in a motor home. I have a knew mother. She is very nice. We saw sum reel wite gates, but they was loked. We mene to find sum

more. Me and Nobbles runned away and hid under the sete. We did not go back no more. Plese come and see me in this house, and giv Master Mort'mer my best luv. I warnt to see him agen. I went in the rode to mete my father and he comed, but I did not no him. Thank you verry much for the piksher. I shall like it wen it comes and so will True. She spells my leter for me.

Your loving boy,
BOBBY.'

And when the letter was sent, Bobby set himself to watch for his picture.

It came very soon, and to his eyes was a miracle of beauty.

Mrs. Allonby had it framed for him and hung up over his bed in the dressing-room. He was never tired of looking at it, and what pleased him most was a little boy about his own age just being let inside the gates by a kind faced angel.

'Look at his white dress; not one tiny spot, Nobbles,' he would exclaim. 'That's me going in, and I shall walk right up the street to God like that.'

There was a dark corner in the picture, and two weeping people being turned away. In fact it was as nearly like the original as it could be, only it was much bigger, and the gates were lovely in their gold and white paint.

True admired it as much as he did, and would often come and stand and look at it with delight and awe.

'I wonder if I have a right to go inside,' she said. 'I love having a right to do things, then no one can stop me.'

'It's wearing a white robe gives you right,' said Bobby.

'Yes, and doing the Commandments,' responded True quickly; 'that's the differcult part. But I mean to be inside, not outside, I tell you that!'

Many delightful excursions did the children have with their father, but the summer days began to shorten and the sun appeared less often, and Mrs. Allonby kept them more at home. She herself did not get stronger. Her appetite failed. Gradually she came downstairs less, and kept in bed more. Mr. Allonby grew careworn and anxious, the doctor appeared very often, and still Bobby and True played together gleefully, with little idea of the black shadow that was going to fall upon their happy home.

Then one bright sunny morning True asked Mr. Allonby if he would give them a ride in his car.

He looked at her for an instant in silence, then said slowly:

'No, we must do without motor drives now; I am going to sell it.'

'Sell it! Oh, dad, you mustn't!'

'I must,' he said; 'I want to give your mother all the comfort and ease I can, and we are poor people. Besides, I shall have no heart for anything now.'

'Why?' questioned True.

'Don't ask so many questions,' Mr. Allonby said sharply, and he was so seldom vexed with them that the children looked at each other with dismayed faces.

Later that morning Mr. Allonby was wandering moodily up and down his strip of garden smoking his pipe; his head was bent, his hands loosely clasped behind him. Suddenly he felt a soft little hand take hold of one of his.

'Father, dear, do tell me about your sad finks. I know they're sad from your face.'

It was Bobby. His father looked down upon him for a minute, then without a word led him into a field which ran up at the back of their garden. He paced the whole length of the field with his little son before he spoke again, and then, leaning against a five-barred gate, he said heavily:

'I can't hold up against it, sonny! I was a worthless creature till she took me in hand, and now, when she is making something of me, when we are going to peg away together at the book which is going to make our fortune, she is going to leave me. I can't live without her! I shall go to the dogs!'

'Is it mother you mean? Oh, father, we won't let her leave us! Why does she want to go?'

'She doesn't; it is cruel fate. Bobby, my boy, life is an utter failure. Oh! I don't know what I am saying, or why I am talking like this. Your mother is dying fast, can't you see it? I hoped she was getting stronger, but the doctor says it has only been her strong will that has got her downstairs at all. Oh, Helen, you're too young, too full of life and spirit to be taken! I will not believe it!'

He folded his arms on the top bar of the gate and dropped his head upon them with a groan. Bobby stood perfectly still; the news was so astounding, so bewildering, that he could hardly take it in.

'Is mother going through the golden gate now?' he asked.

There was no answer. Then Bobby climbed up on the gate with a longing desire to comfort his father. He had never seen a grown-up person in trouble before, and it was with the greatest effort he prevented himself from bursting into tears.

'Father, dear, don't cry! It's a lovely thing when God calls people. Mother tolded us herself last Sunday it was. And p'raps God will take her for a visit, and then send her back again. Is she reely going into heaven soon? Oh, wouldn't it be nice if we could all go with her! May I run and tell True; and may we just ask mother about it a little?'

'Leave me, child! Run away!' And when his pattering footsteps had died away Bobby's father said in bitterness of spirit: 'Heartless little scamp! He is enjoying the sensation of it!'

But he misunderstood Bobby. The child had never seen death, and did not understand it in the least; his vision was steadfastly fixed on the life hereafter. What wonder that the glories of it eclipsed the present shadow!

True received his news first incredulously, then stamped and stormed in helpless passion.

'Mother shan't die! She shan't be put in the ground! Bobby, we'll keep her from going. Oh, mother, mother! we couldn't live without you!'

A burst of tears followed, in which Bobby joined her from very sympathy. Then softly they stole up the steep narrow stairs to their mother's room. They met Margot at the door.

'Oh dear!' she sighed, as she saw their faces, 'I s'ppose your father has been and told you. The missis is quite nicely this morning, and wants to see you. Now if you go in, no tears, mind—nothing to make her sad. You must make believe you're glad she's going, same as I do.'

A husky sob broke in the faithful servant's voice. She signed to the children to go in, and turned away abruptly herself.

Hand in hand, on tiptoe, they stole to their mother's bedside.

Surely she was better with such a pink colour in her cheeks! She smiled brightly at them, but her voice was weak and low.

'I haven't seen you for two days, darlings! Tell me what you've been doing.'

'I've been in the field with father,' said Bobby, taking one of Mrs. Allonby's hands in his, and very gently raising it to his lips to kiss. 'We've comed to tell you that we are very glad you're going through the gates, but we would like you to ask God to let you come back to us very soon.'

Sudden tears came to Mrs. Allonby's eyes.

'I think you must come to me,' she said almost in a whisper.

'We should like to do that very much, said Bobby bravely. 'True and me are ready, we fink.'

'But, darlings,' went on Mrs. Allonby, 'you must not feel impatient if God does not send for you just yet. I want my little daughter to grow up to be a comfort to her father, to keep the house tidy, do his mending, have comfortable little meals for him, and let him always feel he has a home and a little daughter waiting for him.'

'And me?' questioned Bobby eagerly. 'What must I do for him? I belongs to him besides True.'

'You belong to him more than True does. I want you to be his little companion. Go out with him, talk to him, tell him about your lovely picture, let him feel he cannot get on without you. Oh, Bobby, dear, you love your father with all your heart and soul! Show it to him by your life. I want you two to be inseparable. I shall pray you may be.'

A glorious light dawned in Bobby's eyes. He caught Mrs. Allonby's meaning.

'I'll die for him if I can,' he said fervently; and deep down in his heart he meant what he said.

True stood looking at her mother with sadly pathetic eyes.

'When are you going, mother? Oh, I think God might do without you a little longer. I won't pretend I want you to go; I won't.'

'My little girl, I know you don't want me to leave you; and at first I felt just like you do. But I have been lying here talking to God, and He has been talking to me, and now I know that He makes no mistakes, and is doing the very best for all of us by taking me now. I shall look for you and father, and one day we shall be all together again, I hope, in that beautiful country that now seems so far away.'

There was a little silence in the room; then Mrs. Allonby turned to Bobby.

'Bobby, dear, will you say me that verse in that old Italian Bible of your grandmother's? Somehow, now I am so near the gates, it seems to bring me more comfort than our English version. I have so often broken God's commandments. But the other—is so simple—so comforting!'

Bobby repeated his favourite verse with glad assurance.

'"Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Allonby when he had finished, 'when we come near the gates, Bobby, and all our life rises before us with all our sins, it is the thought of the Lamb's precious blood that brings us peace and courage. I like the verse about doing His commandments for life; but for death your verse is far and away the best.'

The children could hardly follow this. True climbed upon the bed and sat close to her mother.

'Is it a very nice thing to die, mother?' she asked.

'My darling, it is nice to feel that our dear Saviour is holding me tight. "Lo, I am with you alway," He says to me. And so I am content.'

'Oh,' said Bobby, 'I should like to see the gates open and let you in. Will you walk up the street by those lovely trees? And will you come to the gates to meet us when it's our time?'

Mrs. Allonby smiled her answer, and Margot now crept softly in and told the children they must go.

'I must have a kiss from each of them,' Mrs. Allonby said feebly. 'I don't think—I never know, Margot, whether I shall get through another night.'

So they kissed her, and reluctantly left the room. That was a strange, long day to them. Mr. Allonby came in and spent the rest of the day in his wife's room. The children had to go to bed without wishing him good-night. Bobby unhung his picture and placed it on the dressing-table opposite his bed, where he could look at it. In the early morning he lay gazing at it with fascinated eyes. He followed in thought his mother's arrival there, her entrance through the gates, and her triumphal march up to the shining, golden throne in the distance. He seemed to hear the blast of trumpets, the rapt singing of the angels attending her, and he was completely lost in his vision when he was suddenly roused by his father's entrance. He looked strangely untidy and wretched, his little boy thought. Bobby was peculiarly susceptible to outside appearances. His father was dressed in his ordinary tweed suit, but his eyes were haggard, his hair rough, his white collar crumpled, and his face heated and tear-stained.

He came in impulsively and threw himself on his knees by his child's bed.

'Oh, Bobby, little chap, she has gone, she has left me, and I've promised to meet her again! We must help each other. May God Himself teach me, for I'm not fit to teach you. I don't know how I shall get through life without her. I always felt that since her accident she has been too good to live. She never made one murmur.'

Bobby opened his mouth to speak, then stopped, and tears crowded into his eyes.

'Is she really gone, father? Oh, how could God take her so quick? I did want to say a proper good-bye. Look, father, dear, at my picsher. Is she inside by this time, do you think? How long does it take to go to heaven?'

Mr. Allonby took up his little son's picture and gazed at it with keen interest, then he put it down with a heavy sigh.

'Yes, she's there right enough, sonny. I don't doubt that. Shall we say a little prayer together—you and I—for I feel quite unable for what is before me.'

So the grown-up man knelt by the small bed, and Bobby jumped up and knelt by his side, and in very broken, faltering accents he prayed:

'Merciful God, have pity on me and my children; be with us now she has left us. Help me to do my duty; forgive my selfish life. I want to be different; change me; set me right; make me what she wanted me to be. Bless this boy here, make him a better man than his father. And the little motherless girl—how can I take care of her? Have pity and help us all for Christ's sake. Amen.'

It was a prayer that Bobby never forgot all his life, and he never spoke of it to anyone. Childlike, he kept it wrapped up in his heart. He was puzzled at his father's distress; he thought no grown-up person ever cried; but his whole being quivered afresh with loving devotion to the father who now had only himself and True to comfort him.

Chapter X.

'WE'RE GOING TO FIND A GOVERNESS!'

Those were strange sad days to Bobby and True. But one engrossing thought helped them along, and that was how they could be a comfort to their father. Margot ordered the household. Mr. Allonby came in and out, speaking little to anyone. He took long walks by himself, and would shut himself up for hours in his den writing, or trying to write, the book that was going to bring him a fortune.

Autumn crept on; the days grew short, and dark, and at last Margot ventured to have a talk with her master.

'It will be about the children's schooling,' she said hesitatingly. 'Miss True is getting a big girl—and Master Bobby——'

'Oh!' groaned her master, 'how am I to send them away from me? But I am thinking over plans, Margot. I want to get away from this tiny house. I think of going to London, and perhaps going abroad again. Let the children run wild a little longer, then when we move to London I can settle something.'

Margot withdrew. She had said her say, and dreaded any change herself.

One evening after their tea was over, Mr. Allonby broached the subject to the children himself. The little sitting-room was very cosy in the firelight. True was sitting with an air of immense importance trying to darn a worsted sock of her father's. Margot had been giving her lessons, and with a very big needle, and a thread that was so long that it continually got itself into knots, she worked away at an alarming looking hole in the heel.

Bobby and Nobbles were lying on the hearthrug; they had been looking at a picture-book together; but directly Mr. Allonby spoke, the book was shut and Bobby was all attention.

'I'm afraid your idle time must soon come to an end,' he said. 'Margot is reminding me what little dunces you are. Can either of you read a book properly yet?'

'I can,' said True. 'I read to Bobby often; but I'm rather tired of my books. I know them all by heart.'

'I can nearly read,' said Bobby. 'I reads to Nobbles often.'

'Oh, that's only your make up!' said True, a little scornfully. 'You can't read long words at all; you know you can't. But, dad, you won't send us to school, will you—not away from you?'

'I'm afraid I must.'

Bobby's look of horror made his father smile. He lifted him upon his knee.

'Every boy goes to school, Bobby. You don't want to be a baby always, do you?'

'Mother said,' asserted Bobby gravely, 'that I was to be your little kerpanion; she didn't want me never to leave you.'

'You're a first-rate little companion, sonny. I shall miss you very much; but I must think of your good first. There don't seem to be any nice schools near here, nor do I know of anyone who would come and teach you for an hour or two. And I can't afford to live on here. I must go to London, I think, and set to work at something. I heard to-day from an old friend of mine who wants me to join another exploring party. Perhaps I may do this. In any case I fear our little home will be broken up.'

Bobby looked up into his father's face with a quivering under lip.

'Are you going to send me back to grandmother? I've had such a tiny, weeny time with you. I reely don't think I'll live away from you, father, again. I couldn't expeck and expeck every day for you to come back to me, and then have you never come. And I'll promise true and faithful to be good if you'll take me with you.'

'And I promised mother faithful I'd have a comf'able home for you always, dad. She told me I was to. I don't think she'd like it at all if we was sent away from you.'

Mr. Allonby looked at the eager children's faces thoughtfully.

'I shouldn't be going abroad till the spring. If I could find someone to teach you we might be together for the winter. But I can't stay here. I must be nearer town. We never meant to stay here after the autumn. We came down because of my health. I am well now. Perhaps I can get some cheap lodgings just out of town, where Margot would look after you. We will see.'

'That will be very nice,' said True, darning away with increased speed and importance. 'I'm growing awfully fast, dad, and I'll be able to look after the lodgings for you.'

'And you won't never send me back to grandmother's?' said Bobby anxiously.

No, indeed, I won't. I heard to-day, by-the-bye, that your grandmother was very ill.'

Bobby did not speak for a minute. Then he said slowly:

'I wonder if she'd like to see me afore she dies.'

'Oh, we won't think she is as bad as that,' said his father cheerfully.

He went up to London the next day, and stayed away three whole days. True and Bobby felt very forlorn. They quarrelled a good deal, and Margot at last lost patience with them.

'Ain't you ashamed of yourselves? And the grass not green yet on your mother's grave. What must she think if she's allowed to get a glimpse of you?'

'It's all Bobby; he's so mastering,' said True; 'and I'm the oldest; and he ought to do what I tell him.'

'And you angerise me,' said Bobby, determined to use as long words as True did; 'and you make my white dress all dirty. I try to be ever so good; but you go on and on, and I'm getting wickeder and wickeder!'

A little sob came up in his throat. Bobby had the sincere desire to be good, but he found it very hard to knock under to True, who was quite determined in her own mind that she ought to be the ruler.

They welcomed their father back joyfully. He seemed very tired, but more cheerful than he had been for a long time.

'I have found some rooms in West Kensington quite cheap, and I really think we shall be very comfortable there. It will be cheaper than living out of town. I can only manage three rooms; but Margot will have one with you, True, and Bobby and I will have the other; and there's quite a nice front sitting-room. You will be able to watch all the traffic in the street from its window.

'Are you very, very poor, dad?' asked True.

'I have enough to keep you in food and clothes,' said Mr. Allonby, 'and for schooling, I hope; but it will be a tight fit until I get my book written.'

Margot sighed when she heard they were to go to London, but True and Bobby were delighted. They enjoyed the bustle of packing; and when, one dull November day, they were whirled away in the train towards their new home they were beside themselves with delight. It was dark when they got out of the train. The drive across London in a cab through the brilliantly lighted streets was enchanting to them; and when they reached their lodgings, and were allowed to sit up to a late supper with their father, consisting of mutton-chops and cheese and pickles, Bobby informed his father that it was better than any birthday treat.

They went to bed very happy but very tired, and for the next few days the novelty of their surroundings kept them quiet and good. Bobby had a real thirst for information, and, when his father took him out, proved a very interesting little companion. True was delighted to go shopping with Margot, who was so disgusted with the landlady's cooking, and so miserable at having so little housework to do, that she never gave Mr. Allonby any rest till he arranged that she should have the use of the kitchen stove for a part of the day.

It was about the second week after their arrival that Bobby heard of his grandmother's death. It awed him, but did not affect him much. She had never shown any love for him, and was almost a stranger to him. But he was surprised when he had a letter from his old nurse telling him that his uncle and aunt were going to leave the house, and his Uncle Mortimer coming home from India to take possession of it.

'I should like to see Master Mortimer again,' Bobby said; 'me and Nobbles was so very fond of him.'

'I don't know what he will do with himself in that big house,' said Mr. Allonby. 'He ought to get married if he settles down there.'

'It is not a very nice house,' Bobby asserted gravely; 'it's so stiff and partic'lar, and all the chairs and furnesher are so proper. I always have to go on tiptoe. But Master Mortimer did used to play hide-and-seek with me in the garden. But I don't want never to go back again.'

'It's time you were at school, sonny; your grammar doesn't improve. I wish I could hear of someone who would teach you; but I'm afraid it must be school.'

Now True and Bobby had decided together that school was a horrible place, and at all costs they must try to keep from going to it. They had many an anxious talk about it, and at last, one morning after Mr. Allonby had gone out for the day and left them to their own devices, True announced her plan.

'We'll find a nice kind of governess ourselves, Bobby. Come and look out of the window. Why, there must be millions and billions of governesses in London! We'll go out by ourselves and find one. Wait till Margot has gone down to the kitchen, and then we won't say anything to anyone, but will go out and get one.'

Bobby clapped his hands. 'I should fink they would keep some in a shop,' he said; but True did not feel at all sure about this.

They accomplished their design most satisfactorily, and, wrapped up in their warm coats, they slipped downstairs and down into the street without being noticed.

'Now where shall we find one?' enquired Bobby.

'We'll go in a 'bus,' said True. 'I've brought some pennies, and the 'busman will tell us where to go.'

'Let Nobbles call one,' said Bobby eagerly; 'that's what father always does, holds up his stick, and they waits till we get in.'

So Nobbles was waved frantically in the air when the first 'bus appeared.

And though it was not at the proper starting point, the driver saw the two small children and good-naturedly pulled up for them. They were helped in by the conductor. There were only three other people inside, an old lady, a young girl, and a man. The shining, radiant faces of True and Bobby attracted attention; still more their whispered conversation.

'She must be very cheap. Dad has *so* little money.'

This from True, with great emphasis.

'And she must be very smiling, and 'stremely fond of me and Nobbles.'

This from Bobby, with a wise nod of his curly head.

'We'll choose the one we like best,' said True.

And then they were asked by the conductor for their money.

'We'll have a white ticket please,' said True grandly.

'Oh, I likes the pink ones best,' exclaimed Bobby eagerly.

The conductor eyed them with some amusement.

'Where do you want to go?'

Bobby was silent, and so was True for a minute, then she said:

'We want to go to the place where they keep governesses.'

The three other passengers looked at the children in astonishment; the conductor laughed.

'Did your mother send you?' he asked.

True looked down upon her black frock and then up at him.

'Don't you know that mother is dead?' she said. 'That's what I wear my black frock for.'

'Do you know your way about London, little girl? You are very small to be out alone.'

It was the old lady who spoke.

'The 'busmen and policemen always know,' said True cheerfully. 'Dad told us so.'

'Oh, you have a father——'

'Come,' said the conductor, interrupting, 'give me your pennies; you'd best get out at the next stop and go home again.'

'We're going to find a gov'ness,' said Bobby, glaring at the conductor rather angrily.

The young girl looked at him over the book she was reading.

'You want a registry,' she said. 'There's a good one in Kensington High Street. I'll show it to you if you get out with me.'

True looked relieved.

'Is that the place where you find them?' she asked.

'I never heard of such a thing as children looking for a governess!' ejaculated the old lady. 'Poor little motherless things, their father ought to be ashamed of himself sending them out on such an errand!'

'Dad didn't send us,' said True, feeling she must defend her father at all costs. 'We knew he wanted us to have one, so we came ourselves.'

'And then we won't be sent to school,' put in Bobby.

True gave him a sharp nudge with her elbow.

'Don't talk so much,' she said.

Bobby subsided meekly. He felt this strange experience was rather bewildering, and wondered at True's calm composure.

'I'll help you to find one,' said the young girl. 'I'm studying to be one myself, so I know the sort you ought to have.'

True looked at her with interest. She was in a shabby blue serge coat and skirt, but she wore a bunch of violets in her buttonhole. Her hat was dark blue, her gloves were white worsted ones, and her face was bright and smiling. Her whole appearance was pleasant. When she got up to go, she held out her hands to them.

'Come on. I'll show you where governesses can be found, and perhaps help you choose one. It will be great fun!'

True and Bobby followed her delightedly. The old lady shook her head after them with a sigh.

'The irresponsibility of men! It's to be hoped that young person won't decoy them away and rob them. I think we ought to have handed them over to the police to see them safely home.'

The man at the farther end of the 'bus spoke for the first time. As the old lady addressed him he was obliged to do so.

'The rising generation can soon dispense with their fathers,' he said. 'Those are small specimens of a type.'

Meanwhile the girl in blue serge had walked True and Bobby up a side street, and in at an office door.

'This is one of the best registries in this part of the world,' she said. 'Now we'll tell Mrs. Marsh what you want, and see if she knows of one. When I get the certificates I am working for, I mean to come to her to find me a situation.'

An elderly woman behind a table looked up at them as they entered. The girl spoke to her brightly.

'Good morning, Mrs. Marsh. I have brought you two young people who want a governess. I don't know whether they can pay your fees. But perhaps you can make that right with their father.'

'We want a very cheap governess,' said True, looking up anxiously into Mrs. Marsh's face. 'Dad is very poor, but he'll pay her something.'

'I think your father will have to write me some particulars,' said Mrs. Marsh, looking at the small children with some amusement.

Oh, we'll be able to choose her,' cried Bobby. 'She must be 'ticularly kind and nice.'

'And what will she have to do?'

Bobby looked at True.

'*You* say. She'll teach me to read, won't she?'

True tried hard to put on a grown-up air. She did not like Mrs. Marsh's amused smile at all.

'Margot says we ought to have a governess to teach us in the morning, and we shan't do any lessons in the afternoon; and she mustn't stay to dinner, because Margot says she doesn't know how to cook for us; we seem to eat more than we ought to. And she mustn't have a cross face, and mustn't wear spectacles.'

'And she must be 'normously fond of Nobbles,' said Bobby, thrusting Nobbles' ugly little face up close to Mrs. Marsh's.

'And we're to learn French and sums—and—dancing,' said True, suddenly struck with a bright thought.

'Yes,' exclaimed Bobby, with a beaming smile, 'dancing, o' course, mostly dancing, me and Nobbles finks!'

The young lady in a blue serge broke into a rippling laugh.

'Oh, Mrs. Marsh, I wish I could teach them myself. Aren't they delicious!'

'Well, why shouldn't you?' said Mrs. Marsh, looking at the speaker with good-natured interest.

'But you were the one to advise me to stick to my studies,' said the girl. 'You said I could never command any salary worth having till I was thoroughly certificated.'

'Yes, I did say so, Miss Robsart; but you could give these children a couple of hours every morning and still pursue your studies.'

The girl turned to the children.

'Do you think I would do?' she said, a pink colour coming into her cheeks and making her look very pretty. 'I could come to you from ten o'clock to half-past twelve every day. We could get through a lot of lessons in that time.'

True looked up at her with rapturous eyes.

'Me and Bobby would love you!' she said. 'Oh, please come straight back with us, and tell dad you'll come.'

Two other ladies entered the office at this juncture. Mrs. Marsh dismissed the children hurriedly.

'There, run along, my dears. There'll be no fees; and you couldn't have a kinder lady than Miss Robsart to teach you; and tell your father that her father was vicar of our church near here many years ago, and she's the nicest young lady I know.'

The children hurried out with their new friend.

'There, Bobby!' True said, a little triumphantly. 'See how easy it is to find a governess!'

And Bobby took hold of Miss Robsart's hand confidingly.

'Me and Nobbles likes you 'ticularly,' he said.

Chapter XI.

BOBBY'S VISITOR.

Mr. Allonby had been considerably startled by many things that the children had said and done, but he was never more so than when they appeared before him in the sitting-room with a strange young lady. He had not been in long, and thought they were with Margot. Miss Robsart began to feel a little uncomfortable when she realised her position.

'It's a guv'ness,' Bobby said eagerly; 'me and True went out and finded her ourselves, and she'll come to teach us all the morning.'

'We do so hope you'll like her, dad, because we do. We thought we'd get her as a surprise for you.'

'I really——' began Mr. Allonby, then his eyes met Miss Robsart's and they both laughed aloud.

'I must explain myself,' she said, checking her laugh and speaking hastily and nervously 'I met your little boy and girl in a 'bus and heard them say they had come out to look for a governess. Of course they had not the smallest idea how to set about it, so I took them to a very good registry. I fancied you must have been wanting to have one from what they said, and then, as we were all talking about it, I wondered if I could undertake the situation myself. I am very anxious to earn something, as I have an invalid sister at home, and we are very badly off. I can give you good references. My father was a clergyman. I have been educated in the Kensington High School.

She stopped. Mr. Allonby drew a chair forward for her, then turned to the children.

'I don't know what you two scamps have been doing,' he said; 'something of which I had no conception, I know; but I should like to have a talk with this lady, and you can both go off to Margot, who must be wondering where you are.'

True and Bobby obeyed instantly. They were extremely pleased with themselves, and burst in upon Margot, who was in the bedroom tidying herself to bring in dinner.

'We've got ourselves a governess, Margot.'

'We finded her in a 'bus.'

'She has a smiling face and doesn't wear spectacles or grey hair.'

'She'll teach us to dance round the room.'

'She's talking to dad now; and I believe she will be cheap, because we told her she must be.'

'And me and Nobbles loves her already.'

Margot put her hands up to her ears.

'I think you're quite demented!' she said. 'You've never been out in the streets alone?'

'We went in a 'bus.'

They told their tale. Margot was horrified at their daring.

'You've picked up a strange young woman in the streets and brought her here? She'll maybe belong to a band of burglars! Your poor father is too easy-going. To think of his talking to her at all! Let me see the young hussy, and I'll send her packing! To trade on your innocence in such a fashion!'

Margot grew quite vehement.

True tried to soothe her.

'You don't understand. You haven't seen her. Oh, come downstairs and just look at her.'

'I'm going this very minute. I have to lay the cloth for dinner. 'Tis time she was off; and it's well you've got one person who's wide awake to look after you all in this wicked London!'

Margot stumped down the stairs, her cap quivering with excitement. The children hung over the banisters watching her. They saw the sitting-room door open, and Miss Robsart came out.

'Then I will send you my references tomorrow morning. I shall prefer to do so. Good morning.'

'Margot, show this lady out.'

It was their father who spoke, and Margot moved down the passage slowly. She opened the hall door and eyed Miss Robsart up and down with grim eyes and lips, then she suddenly followed her out on the door-step and half closed the door behind her.

'She's scolding her,' said True.

They waited anxiously. Presently Margot came in and shut the door. She shook her head doubtfully, then went into the sitting-room, and the children heard a long conversation going on between her and their father. When they came to the dinner-table with him, True asked him, 'Did Margot say nasty things about our governess?'

'Our governess, indeed!'

Mr. Allonby leant back in his chair and gave one of his hearty laughs.

'Margot told her she was a wolf in sheep's clothing, I believe. I don't know what she'll say when she knows. I have practically engaged her on the strength of her frank honest face and gentle voice. Fortune favoured you, young pickles, for you tumbled against the right sort. She may not be very learned or experienced, but she knows enough to teach you, and I am glad to have the thing settled.'

The children clapped their hands.

'She's coming, and we won't have to go to school.'

'I'll keep you with me this winter, but I shall really have to take an extra room for my writing; this one sitting-room will never hold us all.'

A few letters with references passed between Miss Robsart and Mr. Allonby, and then, in spite of Margot's prejudice, she came every morning and gave the children their lessons.

The novelty kept them good. Miss Robsart was young and bright, and had a real love for children, and a gift for imparting knowledge, so things went smoothly. Mr. Allonby took himself and his writing into a small back room, which was the delight of True's heart. She dusted it, and tidied it, and cleaned everything she could lay her hands upon. Bobby was jealous of the time she spent in there.

'I ought to be there more than you,' he argued; 'it's a man's room.'

'Mother told me I was to keep dad's rooms tidy, and I will, and dad likes me to do it.'

'I could clean his brass fender, I'm sure.'

'No you couldn't; only girls can clean; boys can't, never!'

'Boys clean shop windows and sweep floors, I've seen them.'

'Well, anyhow you can't, you don't know how, and mother said I was to.'

This unanswerable argument always crushed Bobby.

Saturday afternoons were a great delight to the children, for Mr. Allonby always gave himself up to them then, and took them out with him sight-seeing. They visited the Zoo in this way, the Tower, Madame Tussaud's, the British Museum, St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, and many other places of interest and amusement.

On Sunday morning their father always took them to church. In the afternoon he would smoke in his little study; and they were allowed to be with him, and have their tea there as a treat. Occasionally Mr. Allonby would try to give them a Bible lesson; very often they would tell him a Bible story.

'I want to bring you up as your mother would have done,' he said to True one day.

'We'll bring ourselves along, dad,' she responded cheerfully; 'we're trying hard to be good, and we pray to God to manage us when we can't remember in time.'

'Father,' said Bobby one Sunday afternoon, 'do you fink I could ever save your life?'

'I don't know, I'm sure, sonny. What makes you ask?'

'In my reading lesson yesterday—it was about the mouse who saved a lion—it was very difficult to think how he could; but he reely did it, didn't he?'

'Yes, and I suppose you think it applies to you. Well, now, let us think. I must be put in prison somewhere, and you must come and let me out.'

'But you'd have to be wicked to be put in prison,' objected True. 'You couldn't be wicked, dad.'

'I hope I couldn't, but I don't know. I think I would rather not get into such a scrape, Bobby.'

'I should like to do somefing for you,' said Bobby with wistful eyes.

'Why?' asked his father.

Bobby coloured up. If he had followed his natural instinct he would have flung himself into his father's arms and exclaimed, 'Because I love you so.'

But Mr. Allonby was not a demonstrative father, and Bobby was learning to control and hide his feelings.

'Well, I promise you, sonny, to call upon you when I do get into trouble,' said Mr. Allonby, with a twinkle in his eye.

And Bobby hugged this promise to his heart and waited in content.

One afternoon True and he were looking out of the sitting-room window very disconsolately. It was raining fast, and Mr. Allonby had that day gone away to see a friend in the country. He was not coming back for two or three days. Margot was in one of her cross moods. She had taken the opportunity to have a thorough clean and turn out of the two bedrooms, and had forbidden the children to leave the sitting-room for the whole afternoon.

'It's like a prison,' said True rebelliously. 'I hate being shut up in one room. Mother never did. I could run in and out all day long. I hate this old London. I should like to be in the country. I'll run away one day if Margot keeps shutting me up.'

'Where will you go?' asked Bobby, with interest.

'I'll go to the railway station and get into a railway train and stay in it till it gets quite to the end of the journey, and then I'd get out.'

'And where would that be?'

True considered.

'The very end of England, I s'pose—near the sea.'

'I've never seen the sea,' said Bobby.

'Fancy! Why we came right through it all the way from 'Merica. I'll ask dad to take us to the seashore one day. He loves a day out, and so do I. I wish he had his motor.'

'Yes,' sighed Bobby, 'we never does nothing nice now, and if it hadn't been for this horrid old rain we'd have gone to tea with Miss Robsart.'

'Well, p'raps she'll ask us to-morrow. Look at that funny old woman, Bobby, she's trying to hold up her umbrella and drag her dog with a string and hold up her dress with the same hand. There! Now look, the dog has got between her legs! Oh, there she goes! Oh, look! she's tumbled right over, and there's a gentleman picking her up!'

Bobby pressed his face against the glass to see the catastrophe. Then he started.

'It—it strikes me that's Master Mortimer.'

'Oh, where? Isn't he your uncle?'

'Yes, it's him! It's him! Oh, True, let's run out and bring him in!'

'Is it the gentleman who picked the old lady up? He's looking across at this house now. He's coming, Bobby, he's coming to see us!'

Bobby rushed to the hall door. He was so excited that he hardly knew if he was on his head or heels, and he literally tumbled down off the doorsteps into his uncle's arms.

'Well, well! This is a welcome! Hold on little man, you'll have me over if you don't take care. Let's come inside and do the affectionate, or we shall be collecting a crowd. Why, who is this?'

'She's True, she's a kind of sister,' explained Bobby, pulling his uncle breathlessly into the sitting-room and shutting the door. 'Oh, we do want you to sit down and talk to us; me and Nobbles is 'normously glad to see you!'

'Ah! where is that young gentleman? I see he looks gayer than ever. Now give an account of yourself and this wonderful father of yours.'

Mr. Mortimer Egerton was taking off his great-coat as he spoke. He stepped out into the narrow hall and hung it up deliberately on the hall pegs there; then he returned to the sitting-room and sat down in the one easy-chair that it possessed, and pulled Bobby in between his knees.

'Let us see what freedom and fatherly care has done for you,' he said. 'Now, then, tell your story. Did your father come to you in the good old style? Is he here now?'

Bobby began to tell his tale very rapidly and eagerly, with shining eyes and burning cheeks. Occasionally True corrected or added to his statements.

Mr. Egerton listened with laughter in his eyes; gravity settled there when he heard of Mrs. Allonby's death; but when he heard of the find of the governess he was enchanted.

'And now,' he said, 'would you like to hear my news? Do you remember Lady Isobel, Bobby?'

'Of course I do. She sended me a beautiful picsher of the gates. She's coming home from India very soon.'

'Very soon, indeed! She arrived yesterday.'

'Oh, Master Mortimer!'

Bobby's rapt tone made his uncle laugh.

'Why does Bobby always call you Master Mortimer? Aren't you his uncle?' enquired True.

'It's a way he has. We understand each other. Well, I'll go on with my news. Lady Isobel thinks it would be very nice to live in the old house, Bobby, where we saw each other first, so we've arranged to live there together.'

'In grandmother's house?' questioned Bobby, with perplexed eyes. 'I don't fink it's a nice house enough for Lady Is'bel.'

'Oh, we'll make it nice; we'll have boys and girls to stay with us to play hide-and-seek with. We'll chase each other round every room.'

'And knock over the big chairs,' cried Bobby, 'and slide the banisters, and make as much noise as ever they likes? Oh, Master Mortimer, will you ask me to spend a day?'

'A good many days after we're settled in.'

'And when will that be?'

'Well, you see, we shall have to get married first, and that takes time. I think you'll have to come to the wedding.'

Bobby's face was a picture of shining joy.

'I finks your news is lovely. Me and Nobbles have never been to a wedding.'

'Will you ask me, too?' asked True.

'Yes, I will. I want to have it very soon, and here in London; but Lady Isobel wants to wait a little. If you persuade her to let me have my way, Bobby, I'll give you seven slices of our wedding cake—one to be taken every day for a week!'

'When shall I see her?'

'I'll bring her to see you to-morrow.'

'How did you find us out?'

'I got your address from your aunt. Any more questions?'

'Do you know Margot?'

'I have not that pleasure.'

Bobby looked at True apprehensively, and True said hastily:

'He's afraid Margot will come in and find you here. She'll be coming in with our tea soon, and she said Miss Robsart was a burglar. Margot thinks everybody is a burglar in London!'

Mr. Egerton got up from his chair, and pretended to be seized with a fit of trembling.

'Can you hide me anywhere? I'm so frightened of her. Tell me if you hear her coming.'

'Oh, let's hide him, True! It will be such fun. I hear her thumping downstairs. Oh, where shall we put him?'

True looked wildly round the room.

'There are no big cupboards. Under the table, quick! Quick, or she'll see you!'

'I'm afraid I couldn't crumple up small enough,' said Mr. Egerton, looking at his long legs and the small round table in front of him.

'Behind the door!' cried Bobby. 'Oh, make haste; she's coming!'

When Margot came into the room three minutes later she said:

'What a noise you children have been making. I thought you must have someone with you; it sounded like a man's voice.'

Bobby's cheeks were scarlet. True began to laugh nervously.

'Give us something very nice for tea, Margot, in case a visitor comes to see us,' she said.

'Why, who would come, you silly children, a wet day like this?'

Margot was producing a white cloth from the chiffonier drawer, and taking out cups and saucers from the cupboard below it.

'And you'll have no visitors whilst your father is away, you may be pretty sure,' Margot continued. 'Give me London for loneliness, I say.'

She went out of the room and down to the kitchen. Bobby and True burst into peals of happy childish laughter.

'You are a good hider; she never saw you.'

'No,' said Mr. Egerton, coming out from behind the door and sitting down in the easy-chair; 'I know how to keep quiet when I'm hiding, but I can't keep it up for long. She'll get you some cake for tea if she sees me, so I won't hide any more.'

Margot's face was a picture when she returned.

'I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, sir!' she said sternly, after a severe scrutiny.

The children kept a breathless silence. They felt that 'Master Mortimer' would be quite equal to Margot. His very coolness inspired them with confidence.

'I'm not a burglar,' he said smiling; 'I'm a genuine relation. Bobby and I are old friends. I'm his mother's brother.'

Margot dropped an old-fashioned curtsy, but she looked rather puzzled; and then Bobby took courage and explained.

'He's my uncle Mortimer, Margot; and he's comed to see me, and we sawed him out of the window and opened the door to him, and then we was afraid you wouldn't like him, so we put him to hide behind the door. And he's come from India, and we're asked to the wedding, and Lady Is'bel will be here to see us tomorrow. Isn't it all puffickly splendid!'

'And we thought you might give us cake for tea, please,' said Mr. Egerton, with twinkling eyes.

'Oh,' whispered True to Bobby, 'he's the most 'licious man I've ever seen!'

And Bobby nodded emphatically to such a statement.

Margot lost her suspicious look when Mr. Egerton turned to her and talked to her. She knew a gentleman when she saw him, and she produced cakes and hot-buttered toast, and smiled as she waited upon the merry little party.

Bobby was in the seventh heaven of delight, and when he went to bed he confided to Nobbles, 'I even feel, Nobbles dear, that I wouldn't mind if me and you wented back to the House, for with Master Mortimer and Lady Is'bel there, we shouldn't have to step on tiptoes any more.'

Chapter XII.

'A DELIGHTFUL TIME.'

When Miss Robsart came the next morning she found her pupils in a great state of excitement, and she seemed quite as interested as they were in their news.

'I wish I could give you a holiday,' she said; 'and I should like one myself, but it wouldn't be right, so we'll set to work and get lessons done as quickly as possible, and then you'll be ready for your uncle if he comes again.'

'And,' suggested Bobby earnestly, 'you'll put down a nice short little sum for me to do, mostly twos and fours; me and Nobbles does not like the figures past six, they want such a lot of finking about.'

Miss Robsart laughed, but promised she would do the best she could, and lessons went very smoothly on the whole. When they were finished she said a little wistfully:

'I was hoping you would come to tea with me this afternoon, my sister wants to see you; but now your uncle and this Lady Isobel has arrived, you will be occupied with them.'

'I expecks we shall have tea with them today,' said Bobby.

'Will you ask us another day?' asked True. 'Isn't it funny? Yesterday we were quite miserable because nothing nice was happening, and to-day we're too full. But Bobby and I want to come to tea with you very much, we reely do, and we'll ask if you may come to the wedding.'

She jumped up from her chair and gave Miss Robsart a loving hug as she spoke, and Bobby forthwith followed her example. Miss Robsart went away from them with a cheerful face.

Margot dressed them in their best clothes directly their dinner was over. It was in honour of Lady Isobel's expected visit.

'We haven't had a lady of title to the house since we've been in England,' said Margot reflectively. I can't say I've run up much against them, but I believe they're pretty much the same as other folks; still a lady is a lady, and I wants her to see you looking like your dear mother would have you, and you just sit still, now you're clean, and don't dirty yourselves up with playing about.'

'It's like the story mother told us of the two little girls with their clean frocks,' said True.

'Yes,' responded Bobby; 'I wonder how our inside frocks are to-day, True.'

True shook her head doubtfully.

'I s'pose God has such *very* good eyes He always sees spots and stains; but I don't think mine is very bad to-day. I can't remember anything just now.'

'Oh, I can. You stamped when the comb pulled your hair!'

'A stamp wouldn't make a very black mark,' said True. 'You were beating the sofa with Nobbles this morning, and Mrs. Dodds would be awful angry if she knew.'

'That was Nobbles.'

'Ah, that's another spot on your dress; you're making 'scuses, and blaming Nobbles when it was reely you.'

Bobby hastily changed the conversation, and then there was a knock and ring at the hall door, and in another moment Mr. Egerton and Lady Isobel were in the room, and Bobby was in the arms of his friend. She looked younger and prettier than when he saw her last. She was in a long white coat and black hat. A big bunch of violets was in her button-hole.

'Oh, Bobby, you darling, how glad I am to see you again! I can hardly believe I may one day be your

aunt.'

'That day will very soon be here,' said Mr. Egerton.

She laughed, and a pink colour stole into her cheeks.

Bobby's arms were tightly clasped round her neck.

'I never did forget you,' he assured her, 'not before your letter came; and my picsher is lovelly.'

'And who is this little girl? Is she your little step-sister? How delightful to have a playfellow. May I have a kiss, dear?'

True willingly submitted to be embraced.

This sweet looking lady won her heart at once.

Then Nobbles was brought forward, and Lady Isobel kissed his little ugly face.

'Oh, how often have I thought of you and Nobbles when I was so far away from you!' she said, sitting down and drawing Bobby to her. 'And do you know, I think it was you who brought your uncle to me. He wanted to hear about you——'

'Oh, come,' interrupted Mr. Egerton, 'we were old friends; you stole my best caterpillar when you were a girl. I remember to this day my wrath when you made your confession.'

'Yes,' said Lady Isobel laughing; 'and I remember why I did it. Because you tied my best doll round the neck of our old gander, and he drowned her in a pond.'

The children were enchanted at these reminiscences, but a shadow almost immediately fell on Lady Isobel's face.

'Ah,' she said with a little sigh, 'that was many years ago. I have been through a good deal since then.'

'And are you reely going to live in grandmother's house?' questioned Bobby.

'Your uncle wants to,' said Lady Isobel softly, looking across at Mr. Egerton as she spoke. 'It is his old home, Bobby; he played in your nursery many years ago.'

'Yes, I know,' said Bobby. 'Tom said "Master Mortimer be a merry young gentleman."'

'Ah,' said Mr. Egerton, knitting his brows fiercely, 'wait till I catch Tom cutting some of my shrubs, he won't find me very merry then.'

'Don't you think you will like to pay us a visit one day, Bobby?'

'I mustn't leave father,' said Bobby promptly. 'May he come too?'

'If he likes; we shall be delighted to see him,' said Mr. Egerton. 'How I wish he was here. Does he have a big beard, Bobby?'

'No, not a little bit of one.'

'But that is quite wrong. You always told me he would wear a beard and carry an axe and pistol in his belt.'

'Yes,' said Bobby; 'me and Nobbles finked quite wrong about him; only he's nicer and better and gooder than anybody else. And we sometimes finks'—he dropped his voice and spoke in a hushed whisper—'that he is nearly as kind as my Father—God.'

No one spoke for a moment. Lady Isobel bent down and kissed the curly head.

'My little Bobby,' she said; 'how happy your father must be to have you with him!'

They talked for some time, and then the children were told that they were going to be driven round to the hotel where Lady Isobel was staying, and have tea with her.

'I want you to know my great friend who has come all the way from India just to see me married,' she said to Bobby with a laugh and blush. We have often talked about you, so you must not feel her a stranger.'

It was a delightful afternoon, and True enjoyed it as much as Bobby. Lady Isobel's friend was a sweet-faced grey-haired lady who was very fond of children, and knew how to talk to them. They had tea in a private sitting-room, and came home laden with chocolates and sweets.

'Margot, just listen! Bobby and I are going to be bride's-maid and bride's-groom, and we shall walk up the church after the bride.'

'I'm sure Master Bobby won't be the bridegroom,' said Margot.

'No, she said a page,' corrected Bobby. 'What's that, Margot? I thought it was a leaf of a book.'

'We shall be all in white,' said True.

'Like angels,' said Bobby.

And so they chattered on, the only regret being the absence of their father.

The next day they had another excitement. They went to tea with Miss Robsart.

For some time past they had looked forward to this, and truth to tell, Miss Robsart was quite as eager as they were for the treat.

She called for them at four o'clock, and they walked to the house in which she and her sister lodged. It was a quiet little street leading out of Kensington High Street. She took them upstairs to a very pretty sitting-room with three large windows in it, one of which was filled with flowers and plants. By the fireside in an invalid chair was Miss Robsart's sister. The children felt shy of her at first, but she had such a bright smile and voice that they soon became at ease with her.

'I have heard so much about you from my little sister Daisy that I feel I know you already. Do you wonder that I call her little? I am ten years older than she is, and she always seems a little girl to me.'

'Now Kathleen, respect my office, and don't be giving me away to my pupils. Bobby, show my sister your wonderful Nobbles, and tell her about him while I get tea ready.'

True was looking with admiring eyes round the room. On the walls hung numbers of beautiful water-colour sketches; there was a piano, two little love birds in a cage, some old carved furniture, and numbers of pretty foreign curiosities.

'I wish we had a room like this,' she said admiringly.

'Ah! but you see this is our own furniture, and that makes such a difference,' said their Miss Robsart. 'We took two unfurnished rooms and put our own furniture into them, so of course it looks homey. And all those pretty pictures were painted by my sister. Before she met with her accident she used to go down to the country and sketch. She longs to do it now, but we cannot manage it. Now would you like to help me get out some cakes and jam from that cupboard for tea?'

True was only too delighted to do something. Whilst Bobby chatted with the elder sister she helped the younger to lay the tea.

And then Miss Robsart was wheeled in her chair to the table, and Bobby and True began to enjoy the jam and cakes provided for them. They talked a good deal about Mr. Egerton and Lady Isobel, and the eldest Miss Robsart asked Bobby about his grandmother's house in the country.

'What a happy little boy you must have been,' she said, 'to have enjoyed a country life! I used to live in the country when I was a little girl, and I have never forgotten it.'

'Why don't you live in the country now?' asked True.

'Ah!' said Daisy, 'we mean to one day, when our ship comes in. If only that time would come soon! And then, Kathleen, you would be able to make some sketches again, and get a sale for them!'

Her sister laughed.

'People would say I could sketch in London if I chose, and perhaps if I were not such a cripple I could.'

'I've seed a cripple do lovelly picshers on the path,' said Bobby eagerly; 'he did them all in red and blue and yellow! How did you get a cripple?'

Daisy looked at her sister anxiously, but she smiled at her.

'I was run over by an omnibus only four years ago, Bobby. It was a frosty day, and I was crossing the road in a hurry and slipped under the horses' feet. I don't think I could sit on the pavement and paint pictures, so I must hope that some day I may be able to get to my beloved hills and trees and water again. Those are what I paint best, and I cannot get them in London.'

'Lady Is'bel can paint picshers of gates and angels and heaven,' said Bobby.

And then he began to describe the golden gates, and Miss Robsart listened with amused interest. After tea they had games of different sorts, and then at seven o'clock they were taken home, having thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

When Mr. Allonby returned to them a few days later there was a great deal to tell him. He took the children more than once to see Lady Isobel at her hotel, and Mr. Egerton got into the way of coming round in the evening to have a smoke with him. Bobby and True thought this winter was a delightful time altogether, and when the wedding-day drew near they could hardly contain themselves for

excitement.

It was to be a very quiet one, and the guests were few in number. Miss Robsart was to be one of them. Lady Isobel had met her by this time and took a great liking to her; she went to see her sister, not once only, but a good many times, and when she came round to see Bobby and True the day before the wedding, she said to them, 'Do you know I have my head full of plans for you all? I will not tell you now, but perhaps when the spring comes you shall hear.'

'Father is going away from us in the spring,' said Bobby sorrowfully. Then a twinkle came into his brown eyes: 'Me and Nobbles makes up plans too in bed; we runned after father once, we hided from him in his motor, and then he had to keep us.'

'Yes, but you aren't going to do that again,' said True, looking at him severely. 'Dad is going across the sea; you couldn't follow him there.'

'I could follow him anywheres!' said Bobby earnestly.

'Ah! but you wouldn't like to displease your father by doing so,' said Lady Isobel. 'He wants you to stay at home and learn as fast as you can, and grow as fast as you can. And then when you get quite big and clever you will be able to go about with him.'

'Mother said I was to be his kerpanion,' said Bobby. 'I don't want to go to school.'

'Ah! my plan is better than school,' said Lady Isobel.

She would say no more, and Mr. Egerton, happening to come into the room and hear her, turned the whole thing into a joke at once.

'Yes, Bobby, I'll whisper some of her plans for you. She is going to start a school on new principles. It's a school for grown-ups; you are to be the schoolmaster and True the mistress. You will have to teach the old men how to slide banisters and play hide-and-seek. There will be a class for those who don't know how to make up stories in bed; they must be taught how to do it. Another class will have to learn how to see robbers and Indians when it's getting dusk. It only needs a little explanation and then it is quite easy. True will have to teach the fine ladies to make daisy-chains and drink tea out of thimbles. There is a lot that grown-ups have learnt and forgotten, and a lot they have never learnt at all. And of course Nobbles will give them a rap over the knuckles for every mistake they make.'

Bobby laughed delightedly.

'Go on! Tell us more!'

'I can't. My brain is so frightened at all it has to do to-morrow that it has stopped working. I want to give it a rest to-day, poor thing. It is never very bright. You ask Lady Isobel what she feels like.'

'What do you feel like?' asked Bobby promptly, turning to her.

'Very much inclined to shut myself in my room and not come to church at all to-morrow,' she replied with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks.

Mr. Egerton shook his head at her.

'If you play me false,' he said, 'Bobby will have to fill his bath full of water, and I will come and drown myself in it!'

'Do!' cried True; 'and then we will take you out and hang you up to dry!'

'We won't be too silly,' said Lady Isobel.

'And a wedding is a very solemn thing, isn't it?' said Bobby. 'Mrs. Dodd telled Margot that she cried more at weddings than funerals.'

'I shan't cry,' said True, 'because I would spoil my white frock.'

She was delighted with her white costume, which Lady Isobel had insisted upon providing. Margot at first shook her head over it.

''Tis too soon after the dear mistress's death to put off her black,' she said; but True had retorted instantly:

'Mother wouldn't mind, I know. She's in a white dress herself now; she doesn't wear black, so why should I?' And Margot was silenced.

Bobby was to wear his best white sailor suit. He had coaxed Margot to buy him a white piece of ribbon with which Nobbles was to be decorated, and he and True spent quite half an hour in arranging it in the form of a rosette.

Mr. Allonby was the only one in the house who did not seem impressed by the excitement and stir about the important event. His face was a shade graver than usual when Bobby went to wish him good-night.

'I am going to cut and run to-morrow, sonny. Your uncle understands. I can't be with you. I shall be out of town.'

Bobby's face fell tremendously.

'Oh, father, I did think you'd come with us. Shall True and I have to walk up the church all alone?'

'There won't be many people there, my boy. And they will send a carriage for you. You won't miss me. Don't look so doleful.'

'Shall I stay with you, father? I would like to 'stremely.'

'No, my boy; I'm going out of town for the day.'

'Do take me with you. Are you going to picnic somewhere?'

Mr. Allonby was silent for a minute, then he said:

'I am going to see mother's grave, sonny. I want to put a stone over it. Can you think of a text she would like written upon it?'

Bobby's face was a picture of sweet seriousness.

'She loved my tex', father. Would it be too long? She made me say it to her before she went away.'

'What was it?'

'"Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."'

Mr. Allonby's face lit up with a smile.

'Thank you, sonny; that will do beautifully. I will have it put over her grave.'

Bobby stole up to bed in an exalted frame of mind. When Margot came to wish him good night, he looked up at her with big eyes.

'You go to sleep, Master Bobby, or you will never be ready to get up to-morrow.'

'It's a most wunnerful day coming,' said Bobby, 'but I wish I could cut myself in halves. The wedding will be lovelly, but seeing my very own tex' being written on mother's grave by father himself would be almost lovelier still. He's going down to do it, Margot; he told me so.'

Margot left him, muttering to herself:

'Such a jumble children do make of things! Weddings and graves be all the same to them; they speak of it in one breath, and would as soon be at one as the other! And of all queer children, Master Bobby be the queerest, though I love him with all my heart! That text of his be all the world to him.'

Downstairs a tired, sad man was gazing into the fire and repeating softly to himself the text that was going to be as precious to him as to his little son:

'"Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City."'

Chapter XIII.

THE WEDDING.

At ten o'clock the next morning two little white-clothed children were standing at the sitting-room window waiting for the carriage that was going to take them to the church.

This was the most enjoyable part of it, for they were going to drive alone, and, when it came for them, they went down the steps proudly conscious that several errand boys, and a few heads out of the opposite Windows in the street, were watching their departure.

Margot did not drive with them, but she was going to walk to the church and witness everything from a back seat.

'Now,' said True as they drove off, 'what do you feel like, Bobby?'

'Very kercited!' said Bobby, sitting back with red cheeks and shining eyes.

'I feel we're going to be married ourselves,' said True; 'or, better still, we're a prince and princess going to a fairy ball.'

'Or,' said Bobby gravely, 'we might be going into the Golden Gates, True. We look quite fit to-day.'

True stroked her white silk dress thoughtfully, then she lifted her bouquet of flowers and smelt them. The bouquet was a lovely surprise to her, as it had only arrived about an hour previously.

'Yes,' she said, 'you always think of the best things, Bobby. 'It would be very nice if it could come true, and we could go straight through and see mother. Do you think she would come to meet us if we did?'

'I'm sure God will tell her to,' said Bobby confidently. 'You see He always is so kind. He'd know we would like to see her.'

They arrived at the church, and to Bobby's astonishment his Uncle James came down the path and took them out of the cab.

'You did not expect to see me here,' he said, 'but your Uncle Mortimer is my brother, you know. Your aunt is abroad, or she would have been here too. Now come along and I'll show you where you're to stand. There aren't more than half a dozen people in the church.'

True and Bobby stepped into the rather dreary-looking church with great awe. A few children had congregated round the doors, but inside the church looked almost empty. Then their faces brightened as they saw Mr. Egerton come down the aisle towards them.

'That's right, youngsters. Tell them where to wait, Jim, and look after them. Oh, how I wish this affair was over!'

He ejaculated this more to himself than them, and paced up the aisle again. Bobby looked after him with perplexity.

'He doesn't seem to like it,' he whispered to True.

'No,' said True, who always liked to imbue Bobby with a sense of her superior wisdom. 'Men always hate waiting for anybody, and Margot says a bride always keeps them waiting, for if she didn't it would look as if she were in a hurry to be married.'

Bobby's Uncle James told them where to stand just inside the door, and presently up drove the bride's carriage. She was very quietly dressed in a grey cloth dress and hat, and was accompanied by an old gentleman, a cousin of hers, a General Seaton. She looked very sweet, but very pale, though she smiled faintly at the children. Then hand in hand they walked up the aisle behind her, and the service began. Bobby recognised Miss Robsart in one of the seats at the top of the church, there was also Miss Denton, Lady Isobel's Indian friend; the rest of the company were not known to the children. Much of the service was unintelligible to Bobby, but he drew a sigh of relief when he saw his Uncle Mortimer take Lady Isobel's hand in his.

'She won't be frightened now he's holding her,' he whispered to True; 'but I seed her hands quite shake just now.'

It was soon over, and the little party went into the vestry. Then it was that Lady Isobel put her arms right round Bobby and kissed him passionately, and when he looked up at her he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

'Aren't you happy?' he asked.

She gave a little sob.

'Oh yes, darling; but grown-up people always have sadness mixed with their gladness,' she said.

Bobby pondered over this. It all seemed bustle and confusion now. He and True drove to the hotel with a strange lady and gentleman who discussed the bride and bridegroom without taking any notice of the children.

'I'm thankful she has married again. She was not cut out for a solitary woman.'

'He's a very decent chap—known her all his life, hasn't he?'

'Yes; I always did think they were attached years ago; but he had no money, and her parents were ambitious and kept them apart. I was at her first marriage, and she seemed almost afraid of her bridegroom, I fancied. I believe affection came afterwards, but it certainly was a match made up by her parents in the first instance.'

'A wedding is a severe ordeal.'

'I love a wedding,' announced Bobby, staring at the speaker solemnly. 'When I grows up I shall have as many as I can of my own.'

The laughter that followed this statement offended him. He relapsed into silence, even though he was pressed to say how many wives he was intending to have. They reached the hotel, and went into lunch with the other guests.

'It is a real old-fashioned wedding breakfast,' said one lady. 'Why have you had the ceremony so early, General Seaton?'

'They want to catch the midday train for the Lakes,' he responded.

Bobby and True were well looked after, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Just before bride and bridegroom departed, Mr. Egerton called Bobby to his side. He was standing by Lady Isobel, who was beginning to take her farewell of her friends.

'Do you think we have behaved ourselves well?' he asked him.

'Oh, I think it's been lovelly!' exclaimed Bobby with rapt eyes. 'Haven't you enjoyed it 'normously? Me and Nobbles have.'

'Let's see Master Nobbles! I really believe, Bobby, that he has had something to do with this wedding. It was he who took you to see Lady Isobel, remember, and she says it was the result of a certain text of yours that took her out to India. If I hadn't met her—well, who knows. Anyhow, I'm a lucky man to-day.'

Bobby was enchanted to think that Nobbles had a share in the wedding. When Lady Isobel bent over him to wish him good-bye, she said:

'I shall look forward to see you soon again, Bobby darling. We're only going to be away about three weeks, and then we're going straight to your old home. I don't think I shall like to go into your empty nursery and not find you there. God bless you, my sweet!'

She had kissed him and was gone. Bobby felt inclined to cry for the first time. Then rice was put into his hand to fling after the carriage, and his spirits rose again.

Miss Robsart took them home, and all the way she and they talked over every detail of their enjoyable time. Even Margot acknowledged that, for a quiet wedding, it was very well done, and that the bride did look the sweetest lady that she had seen for a long time. It was natural that after such excitement the next few days seemed dull and flat, but gradually the children settled down to their lessons, and the weeks went quietly by.

One afternoon Margot took them for a walk in Kensington Gardens. This was always a treat to them; they would pretend they were in the country; and though the trees were bare and lifeless, and there were no flowers in the neatly kept beds, the round pond and the grass and the long walks, which were so good for races, were a great delight to them. They soon found their way down to the pond; for though it was a cold day it was a sunny one, and several men and boys were launching small sailing-boats. Bobby stood looking on with great fascination. There was one boat which took his fancy. She was painted scarlet, and had a miniature Union Jack attached to her mast. A little boy, not much older than himself, was the owner, and he, with a young maid-servant, was watching her journey across the pond with some anxiety.

Suddenly a gust of wind seized her, and she capsized, then she entangled herself in some weed and lay helpless just out of reach. The little boy turned to Bobby:

'Lend me your stick, will you?' he said. 'Jane has run round to the other side with mine. I thought my ship would go straight across to her.'

Bobby handed him Nobbles very reluctantly. The little fellow stretched Nobbles out, but just failed to reach his boat, then he lost his balance, tumbled into the water himself, and though he scrambled out again the next moment, he left go of Nobbles, who floated out of reach at once. Bobby was frantic with grief. He wailed out:

Oh, Nobbles, Nobbles! Save him! Somebody save him!'

Nobody knew who or what Nobbles was for some minutes, and when they did know they began to laugh. Away he floated. Would he go across the pond and land safely the other side? At one time Bobby thought he might, and held his breath whilst he watched him. Alas! he began to circle round and round and finally remained almost stationary in the middle of the pond. And then it was that Bobby burst into tears.

'He'll never come back no more! He'll be drownded; he'll go down to the bottom, and I shall never see him again!'

'It's only a stick!' said a ragged-looking urchin, looking at Bobby curiously. 'You can easy get another.'

'Oh, I can't! I can't! Do get him back for me! I love him so!'

The boy laughed, then surprised everyone by throwing off his jacket, splashing into the pond, and

swimming like a fish towards Nobbles.

Of course a policeman immediately appeared on the scene and was very angry.

But when the boy returned to shore and presented Nobbles to his little master, Margot protested against the hard words that were hurled at the rescuer.

'It isn't many boys would get a wetting for a stick, so don't scold him, poor boy! I'm sure Master Bobby is ever so grateful to him, for he treasures that bit of stick like nothing else. What's your name, my lad, and where do you live?'

'"Curly," they calls me, lidy, otherwise John Hart, I lives on my wits most of the diy.'

'He's all wet,' said True, looking at the boy pitifully; 'how will he get dry, Margot; he will catch cold.'

Bobby was so occupied in drying Nobbles with his pocket-handkerchief that he hardly thanked the boy; now he looked up, and was quite as distressed as True.

'He must be dried, Margot; let's take him home; it was so very good of him.'

Margot hurriedly produced her big purse and handed the boy one shilling. He stuck his hands in his pockets and grinned at her.

'I ain't goin' to take a bob for that!' he said.

Margot put back her shilling, the policeman moved away.

'Come along, Master Bobby, we had best go home; if that boy likes to follow us he can, and I'll give him an old pair of trousers that your father gave me to give away. If he's too high and mighty to take them he can go his own way. Many of these London boys dress themselves in rags on purpose to excite pity.'

'Do come home with us,' said Bobby, turning to Curly appealingly.

He grinned, made a dart in the opposite direction, and was soon lost to view. The children walked home soberly, but their astonishment was great when they were going up the flight of steps that led indoors to turn and find Curly standing behind them.

'You are a funny boy,' said Bobby; 'I finked you had gone home.'

'I wish he had,' muttered Margot; 'there's no trusting these sort.'

But she told him he might come in and sit in the hall, and told the children to stay with him while she went to get what she had promised him. True made her way to the landlady to get a piece of cake for him. Bobby stayed by his side and talked, as only Bobby could talk.

'Tell me where you reely lives. I am so very glad you saved Nobbles' life; he's my dearest, bestest friend in the world!'

'He's a rum 'un!' said Curly, regarding Nobbles' little head with some interest. 'Well, when I lives at 'ome it's 7 Surrey Court. Now you ain't no wiser, I bet!'

'I could find it if I wanted to. I'd ask a policeman to take me,' said Bobby confidently. 'Do you go to school, or are you too grown-up?'

'Much too grown-up by long shakes!' said Curly with his broad grin; 'no school for me if I know it.'

'And what do you do all day long?'

Curly winked his eye at him, then said grandly: 'My occypations are warious. Tomorrer I sweeps my crossin' in the High Street.'

'High Street Kensington?' questioned Bobby. 'Oh, I'll come and see you, and walk across your crossing.'

'The day hafter,' went on Curly, 'if it be fine I may be a hawkin' horinges. I likes a change o' work, and another pal takes my crossin' when I'm elsewhere. Day follerin' I may be out o' town.'

'In the country? I wish you'd take me. How do you go?'

'I rides mostly,' said the boy, with another wink. 'I ain't perticlar as to my wehicle!'

'And when you get into the country what happens?'

Curly gazed up at the ceiling reflectively. 'I takes my holiday. On occasions I brings up hivy, and berries, and 'olly, and hawks 'em round nex' day 'stead of horinges.'

'I'd like to be you,' said Bobby admiringly. 'Have you got a father?'

'No, 'e was dead afore I were twelve months old.'

'I've got two fathers,' said Bobby proudly, 'and I especks you have one same as me. God is my Father. Isn't He yours?'

Curly gave a kind of snort.

'That's Sunday-school jaw!'

'It isn't jaw,' said Bobby, gazing at him solemnly. 'It's quite true; and God looks after everybodies who's in His family. And if a boy hasn't any father, God is 'ticularly kind to him to make up for it. Once my father was far away, and God was ever so kind to me. I used to feel He was. He never goes away, so you can always have Him to talk to.'

Margot came downstairs at this juncture and put a parcel into Curly's hand.

'There, my lad, that's for helping Master Bobby. And now run off, for I'm sure our landlady wouldn't like to see you here.'

'Stop!' cried True, coming up the kitchen stairs; 'see what I've got for him! It's scalding hot!'

She was carrying very carefully, in both hands, a cup of cocoa, and Curly's eyes lit up at the sight of it.

'And a piece of cake,' she added, producing a slice from her pocket.

Curly took the cup from her with a gruff 'thank 'ee.' He made short work of both cocoa and cake, then took his parcel and made for the door.

Bobby laid his hand on his coat-sleeve.

'You've saved Nobbles' life,' he said, 'and I shan't never, never forget it.'

Curly grinned and departed.

'They've no manners, those street boys,' said Margot; 'but it was a kind thing to do for you, Master Bobby.'

'He's going to be one of my friends,' said Bobby firmly; 'and I shall go and see him to-morrow at his crossing.'

He accomplished this, for he persuaded Miss Robsart to go with them. She very often took them for a short walk if Margot was busy, and she became interested in the boy at once.

'I have a class of rather ragged boys on Sunday,' she said; 'and if he doesn't go anywhere I will get him to come to me.'

It was rather a muddy day, and Curly was hard at work with his broom when they caught sight of him. He grinned when they came up, and first pretended to be too busy to speak to them; but presently he paused for breath, and stood resting on his broom. Bobby insisted on shaking hands with him, and was ready with a heap of questions to which he expected replies. Miss Robsart, in her bright, happy way, began to talk to him too, and she soon found out that his mother worked at a factory, that he had two little sisters at school, and that he was wanting to get into steady work if he could, only no one would start him.

''Tis the charac'er they'll be on about,' he said, laughing and showing an even set of white teeth; 'they looks at the clothes and shakes their wise 'eads! "Must have a respec'able by," they says; but bless'd if I don't mike more some dys than some blokes dos if they works a week on hend!'

Then Miss Robsart discovered that he had left off going to Sunday-school, and after a good deal of persuasion he promised to come to her class the following Sunday.

As they walked home she said to Bobby:

'I like his face so much; he looks honest; and I shall go and see his home and his mother if I can get at her. We may be able to help him to get a place, Bobby. I always feel so sorry for the boys who have no one to start them in life.'

'I fought God always started us from heaven,' said Bobby.

Miss Robsart smiled. True remarked:

'I don't believe he knows about the golden gates, Bobby. You might show him your picture, one day; and p'raps he'd try to keep himself a little cleaner.'

True never could quite distinguish the difference between the outside and inside cleansing.

Bobby looked up thoughtfully.

'I'll tell him 'bout it. He's going to be my friend, True; and me and Nobbles means to see him very often.'

And when Bobby said a thing he meant it.

Chapter XIV.

'NEARLY DROWNED.'

The winter was nearly over when a sudden sharp frost set in. Bobby and True were delighted to see the snow fall, and walk out when the pavements and roads were slippery with ice; and, when their father took them to the Serpentine to see the skating on the ice they were enchanted. Then, as the frost continued, he got them each a pair of skates, and gave them their first lessons in the art. He himself was a beautiful skater, as he had done a great deal of such sport in America; and then one Saturday he announced to them at breakfast that he should take them by train to a large piece of water in the country, and they should stay there the whole day.

'We will have a winter picnic; Margot must pack us up some sandwiches, and we shall not come back till dark.'

It was the first time he had proposed a whole day out, and the children were of course delighted.

As they were starting Mr. Allonby looked at his little son, who had skates in one hand, Nobbles in the other.

'I think you had better leave Nobbles at home, my boy; he will be in your way.'

'Oh, please let me take him! He would be so 'normously disappointed if I left him behind; he does love the country.'

Mr. Allonby laughed.

'Have your own way then.'

They set off in high spirits. Every bit of the day was a keen pleasure to them—the train journey, the walk from the station to the old country house belonging to Mr. Allonby's friend, and then the adjournment to the artificial lake in the park, where a large number of skaters were assembled. There were other children there who at once made friends with Bobby and True, and, when luncheon time came, they were asked to come up to the house. This, however, Mr. Allonby declined, and a few others besides themselves preferred to lunch on the banks of the bit of water.

'I like this much the best,' said Bobby, snuggling close to his father; 'it's as hot as fire, isn't it?'

His father looked at his rosy cheeks with content.

'I wish I could give you children an out-of-door country life,' he said; 'that's what you ought to have.'

'Yes,' said True; 'I don't like houses at all. I should like to be a gipsy!'

'When we grows up, father, we'll come over the sea with you, won't we? And couldn't we go to the North Pole and skate? Miss Robsart was telling us yesterday about the poor little fat Eskims—I forgets the name of them—who're in the dark so much. I should like to see them and the whales.'

'I should like the hot places best,' said True, 'where you lie in the sun, and monkeys and parrots swing in the trees above you, and you eat cocoanuts and dates!'

'Yes,' said Mr. Allonby; 'we'll do some travels together later if we're spared. But the North Pole would be a big order, Bobby; it has never been found yet.'

'I espec's God has got hold of it in His hand, and twists the world round with it,' said Bobby with knitted brows.

His father laughed.

'Finish your lunch, sonny, and we'll be moving; your theories are quite beyond me.'

So they took to the ice again, and Bobby flew here and there on his skates, one of the jolliest little figures to be seen.

Later in the afternoon a certain piece of the ice was roped off as being unsafe. Mr. Allonby warned the children not to go near it; and then, only a short time afterwards, a cry and a crash startled

everyone near. A daring schoolboy had ventured beyond the rope and crashed through the ice into deep water. Mr. Allonby was close by with Bobby; in an instant he had dashed forwards, and after a breathless minute or two to Bobby, and before others had hardly taken in what was happening, he had dragged the boy safely up again. But, to Bobby's horror, as his father was coming back, the ice gave way in a fresh place under his feet, and he disappeared.

The child raised an agonising cry.

'Father's drowing! Father's drowing!'

Then ensued wild confusion. Ladies shrieked and rushed to the banks, there were loud cries for a ladder or a rope, but, as is often the case in private places, none were forthcoming in the spot in which they were required. In an instant one little figure went to the rescue, strong in his own willingness to save. He reached his father first. Holding out Nobbles to him, he cried:

'Catch hold, quick, quick, father! I'll pull you out! Oh, catch hold!'

Mr. Allonby was struggling to raise himself, but the ice kept breaking under his grip.

'Go back!' he shouted to Bobby. 'Go back!

But for once the child disobeyed.

When he saw his father sink before his eyes he raised a most piercing cry. In the distance they were bringing a ladder. Men were rushing frantically back to get it.

'Father! Father! Don't sink! Oh, do catch hold of Nobbles!'

'Hi, you little chap, you'll be going in yourself! Come back! Give me your stick! Here, Allonby, catch hold!'

Mr. Allonby's head appeared above the surface again, and in an instant the man behind Bobby had placed Nobbles across the hole in the ice. Exhausted as he was, Mr. Allonby gripped it, keeping himself afloat till a few men and boys formed a human ladder, and he was slowly drawn out of his perilous position. Bobby meanwhile was struggling madly in the grip of a youth.

'You little fool, keep still! Do you want to drown yourself! You were within an ace of it a minute ago! Your father will be all right in a minute. See—that's—the way. Hurrah, Selwyn—he's got him. Now pull together—hurrah! He's out, and none the worse, I bet!'

Bobby was screaming frantically: 'I wants to save him. Me and Nobbles can save him!' but when he saw his father rescued he stopped his screams and struggled to get to him. His little face was white to the lips. His father stooped to reassure him.

'I'm all right, sonny. Here's your stick! Come along up to the house with me! I'm too wet to stand about. They'll give me a change.'

He took hold of Bobby's hand and led him to the bank whilst they took off their skates together, and then they walked through the park, young Alan Daubeney, the son of the house, accompanying them.

'It was that little brute, Jim Carlton, he always disobey orders if he can! I'm thankful you were on the spot, Allonby, though it would have been a near case for you if we hadn't got at you when we did. Father will be furious with the gardeners. They were told to have ladders as a precaution, but it seems they left them at the other end.'

'Well, no harm's done. I don't think much of a sousing. I dare say you'll give me a change.'

'Of course.'

Then young Daubeney looked at Bobby.

'Your stick proved useful, youngster; a good thing you were by.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Allonby, with a little smile, 'it was all the support I needed. I should have gone entirely under if I had not had it at that identical minute.'

Bobby did not answer, but he tried to smile. It had been more of a shock to him than to his father, and it was not till he and True were in the train coming home that he ventured to speak of it.

'Father, you were nearly drownded!'

'I suppose I was, sonny, or I might have been.'

'Oh, what should I've done! what should I've done! That awful crackly ice!'

'I wish I'd seen it,' said True; 'a lady had such tight hold of my hand, she wouldn't let me go, and I never knewed it was dad tumbled in. I saw a boy come along dripping wet, and he looked awful frightened. If I'd known it was dad I'd have screamed!'

'Nobbles saved father,' said Bobby in an awestruck whisper. 'I believe he reely did!'

'I think he really did, my boy,' said Mr. Allonby, putting his arm round Bobby and drawing him to him; 'he and you together. We little thought this morning, when I told you to leave him at home, what he would be the means of doing.'

A slow smile spread over Bobby's face. The joy of this discovery quite wiped out the horror of the scene from his mind. He laid his curly head against his father's strong arm in infinite content.

'Me and Nobbles is 'stremely happy,' he said.

And then Mr. Allonby stooped and kissed him.

'Oh, Bobby, what a pity it is that lessons must separate us.'

But Bobby was too absorbed in his happiness to heed what his father said.

When they reached home Margot had to be told the whole story, and the next morning it was poured into Miss Robsart's ears, and then an expedition was made to Curly's crossing to tell him about it.

'For acourse you ought to know,' said Bobby, 'for you saved Nobble's life, and he saved father's, so it's got to do with you as well as me.'

And then True suggested that Lady Isobel should be written and told about it.

'And we'll make it up like a story, Bobby, for it's quite fit for a book, and I'll help you write it.'

Three afternoon's hard work in the sitting-room produced the following epistle, which went down to the country and greeted Lady Isobel one morning at breakfast:

'MY VERY DERE ANT ISBEL,—

'Father says you are my ant now. A wunderfull day hapend. Father and True and me and Nobbles went on our skats to skat in the cuntry. It was a very big pond, and a lot of pepul, and we went in the trane. Nobbles kam with us. The ice began to brake when a boy went on it where he was told not, and he went thro. It was an orful moment. And father and me saw him do it. Father gumped in the water and kort him and lifted him up, and he krawled out, and Father kam out too, and there was anuther crack, and Father went down and onley his head remaned and sum fingers. Me and Nobbles nerely burst with terrerr, but we went up very quik, and I held Nobbles out to dere father, and we was going to pull him out, but it was orfull, and sum men came up, and Nobbles was tuk and lade on his chest flat across the hole in the ice. Father's head had gorn down twice for the ice crakkeled in his fingers, but he tuk hold of Nobbles, and Nobbles smild and held him fast for hes so strong, and then a man lade down on his chest flat and held out his hand to Father and anuther man pulled hold of his legs, and anuther man pulled him, and I was pushed away for I wanted to pull too, but I did not cry but I was 'normusly fritend, and at larst Father was pulled out safe, but they saide if Nobbles had not been there he wood have drownded, so dont you think that me and Nobbles saved Father's life? He saide we did, and I am so glad for I luv him the best in the wurld, him and God in Heaven. It was an orful excedent, and Margot says we were nerely orfans, and me and Nobbles dremes of it nerely every night, so Nobbles is a herro, wich True says is anybuddy who saves life, and I helped him to do it. Plese rite to me soon.

Your luving little
BOBBY.'

Lady Isobel handed this letter to her husband.

'Oh, Mortimer! we must have him here. I simply ache to have him every time I go up to his nursery.'

'Patience, my lady!' said her husband, laughing as he read Bobby's quaint production.

'"All things come to him who waits," and a bride of two months' standing ought not to ache for anyone but her husband!'

Bobby got a long and loving letter back from his new aunt, and he showed it to his father with great pride.

Lady Isobel's last sentence in her letter was, 'Ask father to tell you my plan that I talked to you about the day before I was married.'

'What is it, father?' asked Bobby.

I'll tell you this evening,' his father responded. 'True and you and I will have a confab over it.'

These confabs were a delight to the children. They had many of them on the hearthrug in the

firelight, their father leaning back in his chair and smoking his pipe whilst he listened and talked.

'A plan is sure to be nice,' said True, 'and Lady Isobel's will be much better than the ones we make up, Bobby.'

So all that day they puzzled their heads over what it could be. And when at last the happy moment arrived they sat in rapt anticipation of their father's disclosure.

'I hope to sail away from England about the middle of May,' Mr. Allonby said, looking at the children gravely.

Bobby's lower lip began to quiver at once.

'I knewed that drefful day would be coming,' he said; 'but me and Nobbles tries to forget it.'

'This plan has to do with that day,' his father said cheerfully. 'What is going to become of you when I go off, do you think?'

'Oh,' said True, 'we've plans for that. Miss Robsart is coming to live with us, and she and Margot will look after us till you come back.'

Mr. Allonby shook his head.

'No, that won't work,' he said.

'Shall we be sented to school?' asked Bobby in a trembling voice.

'Now, listen! Your Uncle Mortimer and Aunt Isobel have said they will take care of you and True whilst I am away. Your Aunt wants you back in the old house, Bobby, and Miss Robsart is to go down there too, and go on teaching you till you've mastered your Latin declensions, and are ready for school.'

True clapped her hands delightedly, and a smile broke over Bobby's serious face.

'And will Miss Robsart's sick sister come too? She always said if she got into the country she could paint again.'

'I believe the idea is that she should go too. Your uncle has a cottage near that he is going to let them have. Margot will take charge of you still in the nursery, and I shall feel that you are being looked after well whilst I'm away. Do you think the plan will work?'

'Yes,' the children cried simultaneously; for Bobby had outgrown his dread of the silent house now, and the idea of going back there, and showing True all his old haunts filled him with delight.

'I wish,' said Bobby slowly, 'as we're all going there, that Curly could come too. Do you think, father dear, we could make a confab about him?'

'Go ahead, then. From your account he is quite a reformed character; but I don't see how he could form one of your party.'

'He's so very clean now,' continued Bobby earnestly; 'and Miss Robsart has got him into a shop. He dusts and sweeps and runs errands, but he told me yesterday he wants a run into the country awful bad. He would like to come with us.'

'Yes, he might black our boots and work in the garden,' said True. 'Will Lady Is'bel ask him, do you think, father?'

'No, I think she is doing quite enough if she takes charge of you two young pickles.'

'I shan't like leaving my friend behind,' said Bobby solemnly. 'You see, he saved Nobbles' life. He deserves me to remember him, and not go away and forget him.'

'You send him one of your letters,' said his father smiling, 'or a present. You needn't forget him because you're away from him. Is that what you are going to do with me?'

A look from Bobby was sufficient reply to this. Then, lapsing into his worst grammar, in his excitement he said, 'I never forgetted you one day since I was borned! It's like a bit of my puzzle map,' went on Bobby after a pause. 'It's a plan with a piece left out, and it isn't finished till it's putted in. Curly must be in our plan, father dear.'

'He may be in yours, but not in Lady Isobel's, I think,' said Mr. Allonby.

'We'll make a confab with Lady Is'bel about him when we get to her house,' suggested True. 'I believe she'll find a way to have him.'

Bobby cheered up at once.

'I believe she will. We'll ask her.'

And then, dismissing the one flaw in the delightful plan, they talked of Bobby's old home with

enthusiasm till Margot came to take them to bed.

Chapter XV.

THE OLD HOUSE AGAIN.

It was a typical spring day. The old house stood in the midst of its rhododendrons and azaleas; the red brick wall round the kitchen garden was almost hidden by the masses of pink and white bloom upon it; the orchard was a picture of beauty, whilst the flower-beds in front were masses of late bulbs and forget-me-nots. The house itself was the same, and yet not the same. It seemed as if it were waking up from a long sleep. Every-one of the windows was open; the hall was filled with the scent of flowers, and, as the dock in it struck five, Lady Isobel came to the door, and shading her eyes with her hands looked out along the drive. The sun was getting low, but it sent its slanting golden rays across her pretty blue gown. Her face had lost much of its sadness, and her lips were parted in smiling expectancy now, for she had caught the sound of wheels. In another moment a big dogcart swung up to the house, and the cheery voice of her husband called to her.

'Here they are safe and sound! And Margot is following with the luggage cart.'

The next minute two pairs of childish arms were embracing her.

'Oh Aunt Is'bel, we're so glad to come!'

'And Bobby hasn't cried a tear since dad went away, for we mean to be so happy.'

'That is splendid, my darling! Come along in and see some changes we have made, and then Bobby shall take us to the nursery and tell us how he likes it, and whether he thinks Margot will be happy in it.'

Bobby looked about him with eager delighted eyes. There was no question of his not noticing the changes. He remarked on every one.

'You've got new stair carpets; the walls are papered quite different. You've got flowers in the staircase window. Oh, what pretty pictures!'

He was upstairs like lightning, none of the rooms appealed to him like his nursery. The green baize door was there still, but when he came into his old domain he drew a long breath. Pretty chintz curtains were in the windows. There was a thick soft red carpet under foot, a bookcase with delightful looking story-books, a stand of flowers, a globe of goldfish, and several fresh pictures on the walls, which had been papered with pink roses to match the chintz.

'It's like a fairy book!' said the delighted Bobby. 'She waves her wand—the fairy, you know—and all the old things come new, and the ugly things come pretty!'

'Lady Isobel is the fairy,' said True. She was looking about her with great curiosity.

'I never have lived in quite such a big house,' she said, as, after having seen the nursery, she followed Lady Isobel downstairs again, and they went in and out of all the rooms.

Bobby was still exclaiming as he went about.

'Look, True, those were the pictures which used to frown on me in the dining-room when I went in. Me and Nobbles finked we heard them say, "Run away; you've no business here." But they seem quite smiling now, and what lovely flowers on the dinner-table! There never used to be such pretty ones when I sawed them before. And the blinds are up, and the sun is coming in, and, oh! do come to the libr'ry and see what it's like now. There, look, True! those horrid blind heads are nearly all gone; and it's got a new carpet and pretty curtains and flowers. Oh, it's so 'normously diff'rent!'

'We are not going to have any gloomy rooms here if we can help it,' said Lady Isobel smiling; 'and now come into the drawing-room. You are going to have tea with us there for a treat.'

It looked quite a new room to Bobby. All the furniture had been altered; magazines and books, work, and flowers gave the impression that it was a room to be lived in. It seemed to reflect some of Lady Isobel's sweet cheerfulness upon those who came inside it.

Bobby wandered round it, noting all the changes, and touching with reverent fingers many of Lady Isobel's pretty knick-knacks.

'It looks like your pretty house that I sawed when I went to tea with you long ago,' he said.

Lady Isobel nodded.

'I hoped you would like it, Bobby, darling. Your uncle and I want to have a happy home, with plenty of sunshine in it.'

'Will it be always summer?' asked True reflectively.

'Always in our hearts, I hope,' answered Lady Isobel.

Bobby sat down in a low, cushioned seat and put on his thinking cap. Past and present presented many pictures. His uncle coming in noticed a gravity about his small face that he wished to remove. He spoke to him with a twinkle in his eye.

'Will you promise me not to put marbles in my boots to-morrow morning?'

Bobby started; then he chuckled.

'You finked it was Nobbles. I needn't hide from peoples now. Me and Nobbles can walk over the house, where we likes. Aunt Is'bel says so.'

'Do you like coming back to the old house again, darling?' asked Lady Isobel, for she had noted a certain wistfulness in Bobby's gaze.

'Yes,' he said; 'but it's a new house to me. The old one has died with grandmother; and Jenkins has gone, and Jane. Is Tom here?'

'Yes, Tom is here still, and looking forward to see you so much.'

'And the apple-tree is here,' said Mr. Egerton.

Bobby's eyes shone.

'I'll teach True how to sit on it and look over the wall,' he said.

The children ran out to the garden directly their tea was finished. Old Tom seized hold of Bobby by both hands.

'Ay, the good old times are coming back to this house,' he said.

'I think these are new times,' said Bobby.

'No, no. I mind when the house were full of children's voices and laughter before the old master died. There's a stir that does my heart good, Master Bobby; and the master be right down hearty with all on us. He be the proper man to be here, sure enough!'

True's delight at exploring the gardens and climbing into the apple-tree infected Bobby.

'I never had no one to play with before,' he said. 'Me and Nobbles used to make up plenty, but we wanted someone else to do it.'

He showed her all his old haunts with the greatest pride, then, tired out with their journey and excitement, they returned to the house and willingly went to bed. Lady Isobel paid Bobby a visit the last thing at night.

'I hope you will be happy, darling, here.'

Bobby clasped both arms round her neck.

'Me and Nobbles have been talking about it. We did feel a little funny when we comed in. I was so 'fraid in this house before, but it's all quite, quite different!'

'I hope it is. I don't want you to feel that you have to creep about on tiptoe and keep out of sight. I shall like to hear your steps and voices all over the house. Isn't it strange, Bobby, that you and I should be here together? How little we thought it would come to pass!'

'I was always looking out for father,' said Bobby slowly. 'I shan't be able to do that now, acause I knows he won't be back for free years.'

'No; but you can be learning lessons as fast as you can so as to be getting ready for the time when you will be with him again. And then you'll have to write him letters, Bobby, and he will write to you. That you could never do before!'

'No. That will be lovelly! And please Aunt Is'bel, may I ask you about Curly? He was so dreadful sorry to say good-bye, for Miss Robsart teached him on Sunday, and we talked to him always when he was on his crossing. Me and Nobbles is 'ticularly fond of him, and True says he could work in the garden here. You would like him; he has curly hair, and he can whistle any tune you ask for, and—and—he's very mis'able we've all gone away from him.'

'How did you come to know him?' asked Lady Isobel with interest. So Bobby plunged into the story of the rescue of Nobbles, and she listened to it with smiling sympathy.

'I must talk to Miss Robsart about him when she comes here. Now go to sleep like a good boy, and to-morrow morning, if it is fine, you must come with me and see the dear little cottage that Miss Robsart is going to live in.'

So Bobby gave her a hug and kiss, and, clasping Nobbles in his arms, laid his head upon his pillow, murmuring:

'Me and Nobbles is 'stremely glad to be in the house where we growed up in, and it's much better than we ever espected!'

The nursery breakfast the next morning was a very cheery one. Margot's round smiling face was a picture.

'Ah!' she said, 'there's a verse in the Bible about lines falling in pleasant places, and that is just what I feel like now. I won't deny I was getting a bit old for much housework, and as to that crowded dirty London, I only hope I shan't ever set foot in it again! And I won't deny that a house, where every penny has not to be thought of, is a very pleasant place to live in!'

We're going to see Miss Robsart's little cottage after breakfast,' said True. 'Will you come too, Margot?'

'Oh, no, I'm going to unpack you both, and settle your things in all the nice drawers and cupboards we have. Dear heart! I begin to think it was a good day that brought Master Bobby to us!'

A short time afterwards both children were walking with Lady Isobel down the road to see the cottage. Bobby eagerly pointed out to them familiar landmarks.

'That's where that horrid boy broke poor Nobbles! And that's our milkman's house, and there's the chestnut tree where I pick up chestnuts when they drop.'

Then Lady Isobel turned up a lane out of the high-road. A little white gate stood in the quickset hedge, which Lady Isobel opened, and there, in a pretty rustic garden, was a white-washed cottage with a thatched roof and old-fashioned casement windows. A jasmine and rose climbed over its porch. The door was painted green, and everything looked fresh and clean. Lady Isobel unlocked the door, and Bobby and True stepped in with exclamations of delight. One sunny sitting-room on either side of the door, a tiny kitchen behind, and three bedrooms above, were all the rooms the cottage contained, but it had a sweet old kitchen garden behind, and three apple-trees were brightening the background with their snowy blossoms. It was on a hill, and the view from the front looked over a lovely expanse of buttercup meadows, and the river beyond.

Bobby's little face looked solemn for his years as he turned and faced his aunt.

'It's a *beautiful* place. Miss Robsart's sister will be able to paint her trees again. I fink, Aunt Is'bel, you'll be filling us too full of happiness.'

'There's just one person more who ought to be here,' said True.

'Yes, I've tolded 'bout him; and when Miss Robsart comes it will be talked about. Then we shall all be, like Margot says, a happy fam'ly.'

'A country happy family,' said True.

Lady Isobel laughed merrily.

'Did you never see this cottage before, Bobby? I believe your grandmother's coachman lived here?'

'He was a cross man,' said Bobby promptly. 'I never comed near him. He said he couldn't bear boys, and nurse wouldn't take me to any cottages—grandmother said she wasn't to. I never comed up this lane once.'

Then they went back to the house, and Lady Isobel left them in the garden to play. In the afternoon they drove into the town with her and helped to choose a pretty invalid couch for the eldest Miss Robsart.

'I shall have it put in the window ready for her,' Lady Isobel said. 'And she can lie on it and paint her pretty pictures, Bobby.'

The days that followed were delicious ones to the children; and in due time the Miss Robsarts came down with their pretty old furniture and took possession of the cottage. The children were allowed to run backwards and forwards, and help with the move. When they were thoroughly settled in, lessons began. Lady Isobel had put aside a special room for the schoolroom; and though at first Bobby and True found it a little irksome to get into their regular hours of work again, they soon became reconciled to it.

Miss Robsart was as happy as the day was long, and as for her invalid sister, she could not express her thankfulness. She broke down when Lady Isobel went to see her.

'I never expected such bliss in this life,' she said. 'I don't know what we have done for you to do all this for us.'

But the crowning joy to Bobby and True was when Lady Isobel told them that she was going to have Curly down, and let him help old Tom in the garden.

'If he likes it, and works well, we will keep him. He is coming on a month's trial, and he will live with Tom and his wife.'

'I'm afraid we shall soon have the whole of London swooping down upon us,' said Mr. Egerton when he heard the news.

'How many more friends have you, Bobby? For I see your aunt is going to grant you every desire of your heart.'

'I haven't any more friends,' said Bobby gravely. 'You don't make many in London, but Curly ought to come, because he saved Nobbles' life.'

'I believe Nobbles is at the bottom of everything,' said his uncle; and Bobby nodded, well pleased.

'Yes, Nobbles is very erportant to me,' he said; 'and if Curly hadn't saved him, my heart would have broke!'

It was Sunday afternoon. Lady Isobel was sitting in the drawing-room, and the children were by her side.

'It makes me think of mother,' said True, with a little choke in her voice. 'She always used to give us Sunday lessons.'

'I want to follow her teaching, darling. I am going to keep this hour especially for you. Now, what shall we talk about this first Sunday? Would you like to choose a Bible story?'

True looked at Bobby. He thought deeply for a minute, then he said:

'May we look at the lovely Talian Bible?

'Yes. Go to the library and bring it here. True can help you to carry it.'

Away they ran, and soon returned with the precious Book, which they placed upon a small table by her side. Then Bobby reverently and carefully turned over its pages till he came to the picture of the golden gates. He and True hung over it with admiring eyes.

'Talk to us about heaven,' said Bobby, 'because mother is there, and we love it.'

Lady Isobel did so. She read them verses of its beauty, of the white-robed throng who were singing the praises of the Lamb of God, of the tears that would be wiped away, and the darkness that would be made light, and of the happiness of all gathered there.

'I would like Curly to hear about it,' said Bobby with a sigh.

'You must tell him about it, darling.'

'I will say my tex' to him, and make him learn it, and und'stand it.'

'Does blessed mean happy?' asked True.

'Yes.'

'I didn't think I'd ever be happy again when mother went away, but I feel a little better now. Will you take us one day to see her grave, or is it too far?'

'I think we must manage it one day, dear,' said Lady Isobel drawing the little motherless girl near her. 'We might go by train a part of the way.'

'I would like to see her grave very much,' said Bobby, 'because father went to put my tex' upon it. He liked my tex' very much.'

'I think we all like it, Bobby.'

'I wonder which is God's favourite text in the Bible,' said True.

Lady Isobel was silent; the children sometimes puzzled her.

'God never makes any faverits,' said Bobby. 'My old nurse telled me that once. He loves ev'rybodies and all alike, doesn't he, Aunt Is'bel?'

Then without waiting for her to reply he proceeded:

'I try to love ev'rybodies alike, but I love God first, and then my father.'

'And who next?' asked True curiously.

'I finks,' said Bobby, hesitating, 'truthfully, I finks I loves Nobbles next best.'

'I'm sure you oughtn't to,' said True; 'he's just a stick.'

Bobby shook his head. 'I loves you, Aunt Is'bel, and Master Mortimer, and True, but Nobbles comed to me first, and I couldn't stop loving him. He's a kind of part of me, you see, and ev'ryfing I does he does too.'

'He's only a stick,' repeated True.

'Who saved father's life?' said Bobby with sudden warmth.

'Well,' said True, slowly, 'it was you who put Nobbles on the ice.'

'Yes,' said Bobby, 'it was what I'd been longing and wanting to do, and I was always finking and finking how it could be done, and then all of a sudden it comed, and who saved father's life? Why, me and Nobbles.'

True was crushed. Lady Isobel said softly:

'Shall we repeat the text together, children, in this old Bible, and ask God to make us not only love it ourselves, but pass it on to those who do not know how they can have a right to enter in through the gates into the City?'

'Are there many bodies that don't know that?' questioned Bobby.

'A great, great many. Some who miss the happiness that God means them to have in this world by not knowing it.'

'We must try and tell them,' said Bobby earnestly. 'It's a pity if they don't understand prop'ly.'

Then slowly and softly the children repeated their text after Lady Isobel:

'Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, that they may have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the City.'

FINIS.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR

ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.