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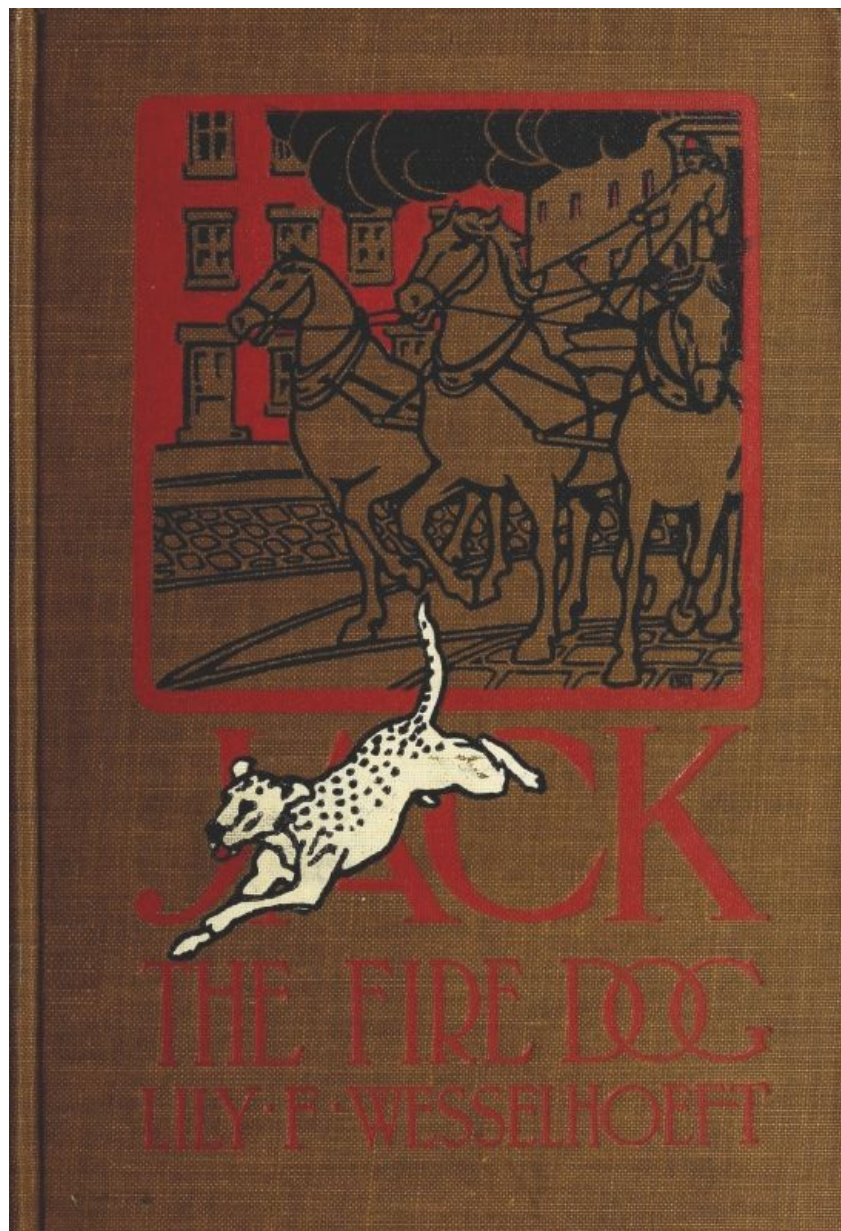
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK, THE FIRE DOG ***



JACK, THE FIRE DOG



JACK, THE FIRE DOG

BY
LILY F. WESSELHOEFT
AUTHOR OF "SPARROW THE TRAMP," "JERRY THE BLUNDERER,"
"DORIS AND HER DOG RODNEY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
C. W. ASHLEY

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ILLUSTRATIONS

With a clatter of hoofs out they dashed, Jack bounding ahead
The young fireman bears the motionless form of the boy to the street
The sleigh stopped, and Sam and his grandpapa got out
Sam was allowed to stay to lunch with Billy
His large, mild eyes had the sorrowful look that all dumb creatures have at leaving
old friends

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JACK THE FIRE-DOG

[1]

CHAPTER FIRST



ENGINE 33 was kept in a substantial brick building that stood on a little hill in a pleasant part of the city. The brass shone so brightly that you could see your face in it, and not a speck of dust or rust was to be seen on any part of it, as it stood ready for use at a moment's notice. Directly over the shafts hung the harnesses, to be lowered down upon the horses when they took their places in front of the engine; and this was the work of an instant.

The floor was just as clean as the engine; and so were all parts of the building. Three strong beautifully groomed gray horses stood in their well-kept stalls, ready to dart out at the sound of the gong and fall into their places before the engine.

[2]

Not a boy or girl in that part of the city but thought that Engine 33 was superior to all the other engines in the big city. She was always the first at a fire, and she could throw a stream higher than any of the others. One boy made a little verse on the subject, and his companions thought it very beautiful, for it expressed their views about Engine 33. This is the verse,—

“Number Thirty-three
Is fine as she can be.
She's never late
And plays first-rate.”

Not only did the children think there was no other engine equal to theirs, but so did Jack the Fire-Dog. Why, it was *his* engine! Jack lived in the engine-house and went to all the fires just as the horses did. He never ventured far from the engine-house, but kept within hearing of the gong that struck the alarm. How fast he raced back when he heard that well-known sound, to be ready to start with the engine! So eager was he to be on hand, that on one occasion when he could not get the screen door at the head of the stairs open, he went *through* it. Sometimes in winter Jack was harnessed to a little sled and carried salt for the firemen to melt the snow on the hydrants, to keep them clear in case of a fire.

[3]

Jack was a dog of no particular breed, spotted black and white like a coach-dog, but larger and heavier in build. Those who knew Jack did not care if he were not a well-bred dog, they loved him for his intelligence and affectionate nature. The children in the neighborhood were as proud of him as they were of the engine.

Our story opens on a cold evening in winter. The wind had been blowing fiercely all day, catching up the light snow and scattering it wildly about, until it was hard to tell whether it were snowing or not, so full of snow was the sharp air. Toward the latter part of the afternoon the wind began to go down, but as it grew less the air became colder, and the mercury fell lower and lower, until it reached zero. It went even lower than that, and at seven o'clock stood at eight below. A dreadful night for our brave firemen to work in, but they never fail us.

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Below, in the engine-house of Number 33, stands the engine ready for duty, her shining brass reflecting a hundred-fold the lights that shine on her. The horses are warm and comfortable in their stalls, and still, except when one gives an occasional stamp or rubs against the side of his stall. On the floor above, in their cosy, warm room, the firemen are assembled. Some are reading, others talking together. One young man is putting Jack through his tricks, of which he has a long list. He has just told to what engine he belongs,—not in words, for Jack cannot speak the human language. When he is asked what is his engine, and the numbers of several are mentioned, he is silent until Number 33 is called, then he gives a sharp bark.

This evening no sooner has he given his answer than the gong below strikes, and in an instant men and dog are on their feet, and on the way to the floor below. Jack rushes headlong down the long, steep flight of stairs, while the firemen take a shorter cut by sliding down the pole. In a very few seconds the horses have taken their places in front of the engine, the harness is let down and fastened into place. The fire is started under the boiler of the engine, the driver is in his seat, the men in their places, and the three splendid grays dash out of the engine-house, Jack circling about in front of them, almost crazy with excitement, or running ahead to bark indignantly at any team that happens to be in their path. Not long does he keep up his circling and barking, for by the time they are at the foot of the hill the horses have broken into a run, and Jack has all he can do to keep up with them. He has worked off his excitement and is ready for business.

[5]

Such a stinging, cold night! The engine-wheels crunch the frozen snow with a sharp, creaking sound, and the warning notes of the bugle ring out loud and clear on the still air.

Sometimes an answering bark comes from the houses they pass, as the engine dashes by. No

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dogs are out on such a night, but they all know Jack and envy him his position as engine-dog. It is not always such fun for Jack as they think it is, particularly on such a night as this. However, Jack has a duty to perform as well as the firemen have, and he does it just as fearlessly and nobly as they do.

The fire is at one of the extreme ends of the city, a small theatre in a narrow street where tenement-houses and small shops are crowded together regardless of regularity,—a court here and a narrow alley-way there, but every square inch taken up with a building of some kind. When our engine arrives, it is to find others that have not come from such a distance hard at work, the deep throbs of the working engines reaching far through the crisp air.

Engine 33 takes her stand, and while her men are attaching the hose to the hydrant and preparing for action, Jack, as is his custom, makes his rounds to see if all is going on as it should. He sees the horses standing with their legs drawn closely together under them, as they always do in cold weather, and well blanketed by the men who are detailed for that purpose. Frozen pools and rivulets are standing on the sidewalks and streets, and as the water comes out of the hose it is turned to frozen spray. Jack's thin coat of hair does not keep out the cold very well, and he shivers as he steps over the icy ground. There is no time to be wasted, however, and as soon as he is satisfied that all is in working order, the Fire-Dog joins his own company. They are ordered into a tenement-house that adjoins the burning theatre, and from which smoke is thickly pouring.

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The inhabitants of the tenement-house have thrown their bedding and many other articles from the windows, or carried them down to the street. Groups of people, lamenting and terrified, are huddled about their property, hoping to save it. Scantly clothed in their sudden exit, they shiver and moan in a manner pitiable to behold. Many children are among the number, either in their mothers' arms or huddled together among their household goods, vainly trying to escape from the biting air.

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The men of Engine 33 are ordered to the roof of the tenement-house; and in they rush, dragging the hose after them, plucky Jack keeping close behind them. They have no easy task, for the narrow halls and stairways are filled with smoke that blinds and suffocates them. It is slow work, too, for they must stop occasionally to take breath at an open window. Sometimes, too, one of them sinks to the floor, overpowered by the thick smoke. On they go, however, dragging the long hose after them, with valiant Jack always close behind them. At last the upper story is reached, and the skylight through which they must reach the roof is thrown open. Here, however, Jack stops, and running up to a closed door sniffs for a moment, and then begins to whine and scratch.

It is only a kind of store-room, without windows or any opening to admit the light, and is built under the stairway leading to the roof. It seems impossible that any one could be there, but Jack's whines and scratching must mean something, and one of the men throws the door open.

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Through the smoke and darkness nothing is seen at first; but in rushes Jack, pounces upon something in one corner, tugging at it until he succeeds in dragging it to the door. Then they see what it is,—a child; and one of the men, the young man who put Jack through his tricks in the engine-house, picks it up. Through the smoke and darkness they make out that it is a boy, tall enough for a boy of seven, but how thin and light! He is either in a stupor from the effects of the suffocating smoke that filled the close room in which he was found, or else in a faint. At all events, he lies motionless in the fireman's arms.

It takes more time to write the event than it took for it to transpire. The other men mount to the roof through the skylight, while the man who picked up the boy forces his way through the blinding smoke down to the street, closely followed by Jack. If it were not for the responsibility for the boy he discovered, Jack would have followed the men to the roof, for wherever they went he always followed.

The young fireman bears the motionless form of the boy to the street, and singles out the group of tenants who had succeeded in escaping in safety from the tenement-house.

"Which of you has left this child behind?" he sternly asks, looking at the different family groups crowded together, vainly trying to keep warm. "Whose is he?"

They are silent, and after waiting in vain for an answer he continues,—

"If you can't answer, there are those who will know how to make you. You can't leave a child shut up like that in an out-of-the-way room without being called to account."

"Why, it's the blind kid!" exclaims one of the men. "I forgot all about him."



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"People are not apt to forget their children at such a time," replies the fireman, looking about him at the children who are crowding around their mothers. "This case shall be looked into."

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"He doesn't belong to any of us," replies the man.

"How came he to be shut up in that hole under the stairs, then?" asks the fireman. "If it hadn't been for the dog, he'd have been dead by this time."

"He followed some of the children home," replies the man, "and has been sleeping there for a few nights. I don't know anything about him. I forgot he was there, or I'd have looked out for him."

The cold air seems to revive the child, for he stirs and moans.

"It's the smoke," says the fireman. "You are all right now, ain't you, young chap?"

"Yes," replies the boy in a faint voice, but he makes no attempt to rise to his feet.

"I'll fix you up in good shape," replies the fireman, carrying him toward the engine. A wagon with blankets for the horses stands near by, and a few are still left. One of these the fireman wraps about the boy, and lays him on the floor of the wagon.

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"Watch him, Jack!" he says to the Fire-Dog; and in an instant he is back in the tenement-house to join his company on the roof and help them fight the fire.

Faithful Jack cast a longing glance after the fireman's retreating figure, for it was the first time he had failed to follow at his heels; then with a deep sigh he turned to the duty before him. With one bound to the shaft of the wagon and another to the seat, he jumped down beside the still form rolled up in the blanket.

Jack had heard the conversation between the fireman and the man from the tenement-house, and he understood that this was a child without friends or home, and with another sigh of disappointment he crept up to the little figure that lay so still in the bottom of the wagon. The blanket was drawn over the boy's head, but Jack pushed his nose in to see whether the little fellow were alive, he lay so quietly. He found he was alive, though, for he started when Jack's nose touched his face. He felt very cold, and the Fire-Dog crept closer still and lay beside him, hoping to add some warmth to the cold little figure.

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For a time the two lay silently there, Jack keeping his intelligent eyes open to everything that went on. He shivered with the cold, but still kept his post. The horses stood with heads drooping and tails hugged closely to them, and the deep, loud thuds of the working engines stationed near the burning building seemed echoed by those at work farther off. After a while the glare and showers of sparks ceased, and dark volumes of smoke rose in their stead. Then the Fire-Dog knew that the fire was out, and that Engine 33's men would before long be released. The engines still played upon the smouldering embers, however, and it was some time before he was relieved.

They took the boy with them to the engine-house, for they knew that the homeless tenants of the empty house could not take care of him, even if they had been inclined. He could stay at the engine-house that night, they decided, and in the morning they would hand him over to the public charities. So he was wrapped up well and brought home in the wagon, while Jack ran along by the side of the engine. Jack always started out, as we have seen, bounding and circling in front of the horses, but he came home sedately. The excitement was over, and he was as tired as the men were.

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They brought the boy into the engine-house and carried him up to the warm room where we first made Jack's acquaintance. He was placed in a chair and the blanket taken off.

"Now let's see what you look like," said the fresh-faced young man who had rescued him. "How are you now?"

"I'm all right," replied the boy.

"Well, that's hearty," said the man.

He did not look hearty, though. His face was very pale and thin, and he did not look about him as children do who have the use of their eyes.

[15]

"Can't you see anything at all? Can you see me?" asked the young man.

"I can see a little mite of light if the lamps are lighted and if the sun shines very bright," replied the boy.

"I suppose you are hungry, aren't you?"

"Not very," replied the boy.

"When did you eat last? What did you have for supper?"

"I didn't have any," replied the boy.

"Well, what did you have for dinner, then?"

"I didn't have any dinner, either."

"Didn't have any dinner, either?" repeated the young fireman. "When did you eat last, for goodness' sake?"

"Some of the children in the house brought me some of their breakfast. They were very kind to me."

"Well, that beats the Dutch!" exclaimed the young man. "You sit right there till I come back!" and he rushed out of the room as speedily as he answered the summons of the big gong below. In a short time he was back with his arms full of packages which he proceeded to open hastily. In one were sandwiches of thick rolls with pieces of ham in between, in another a loaf of bread, some butter in another, and a small can of milk in another. These he proceeded to place on a small table which he drew up before the blind boy. [16]

"There, begin on that," he said, placing one of the sandwiches in the boy's hands.

"Thank you, sir," said the boy; "you are very good."

"You needn't call me sir," replied the young man; "my name is Reordan."

"You don't intend to have the kid eat all that stuff, do you, Reordan?" asked one of the other firemen.

"Why, he hasn't eaten anything since morning, and this such a cold day," replied Reordan.

"That's no reason why you should kill him. He ought to come around to it gradually. That's the way they do when people are starved." [17]

So the boy was given another sandwich followed by a glass of milk, and the firemen and Jack made a lunch off the rest. Then a bed was made up for the boy in a snug corner, and he was covered with plenty of warm clothing. He was so comfortable, from the warm air of the room and the hearty meal, that it was not many minutes before he was in a deep sleep. The Fire-Dog seated himself near by and watched him earnestly.

"I'd give a good deal to know what Jack is thinking about," said one of the men.

"He's probably thinking over what's best to do for the kid, and will settle it in his mind before he goes to bed himself," replied Reordan.

Jack responded by an appreciative glance and a wag of his tail, that said as plainly as words could have done,—

"That is just it!"

CHAPTER SECOND

 [18]

HE next morning when the firemen were up and dressed, the blind boy was still asleep. He looked even paler by daylight than he had the night before, and his thin cheeks and the dark circles under his eyes gave him a pathetic look.

"It would be a pity to send the blind kid off while he looks like that. Let's put some flesh on his bones and some color into his cheeks first," said soft-hearted Reordan.

"How do you propose to manage? Taking care of kids and running fire-engines don't go very well together," said the captain.

"The work sha'n't suffer," replied Reordan. "A chap of his age, and blind at that, that has looked after himself, won't need much tending, and the little he'll need to eat won't lighten my pocket much." [19]

"Well, then, keep him for a day or so if you like, I've no objections," replied the captain. "Here's something toward his keep;" and he placed a bill in Reordan's hand.

"We'll all chip in," said another. "Here, Jack, pass around the hat for the blind kid."

The Fire-Dog took the hat in his mouth with great alacrity, and gravely went from one to another of the men, each one of whom put in some change.

"Reordan shall be treasurer of the blind kid's fund," said one.

"There's enough already to buy more than he can eat in a week," replied Reordan, shaking up the hat to enjoy the jingling sound of the coins.

"Please will you show me where I can wash?" asked a gentle voice; and there stood the blind kid, who had approached unnoticed. "If you will show me once, I can find it for myself afterwards."

"Here you are, young man," replied Reordan, leading him to the sink where the men washed. "Here's the water-faucet, and here's the soap; and while you're making your toilet I'll step out and fetch your breakfast." [20]

"Why not take him along with us?" asked one of the men.

"He isn't in just the rig for a cold morning," replied Reordan. "The looks of the thing, to say nothing of his own feelings, goes against it. Wait till he has a hat and coat. I'll fetch his breakfast, and while he's eating it we'll go for ours."

"And when we come back we'll hear his story, and see what account he has to give of himself," said another.

The boy made himself quite tidy, considering the poor clothes he had on; and the men, after seating him at the table with a good breakfast before him, went out for theirs.

How good it did taste to the poor little waif! Only hot coffee and buttered rolls, but it was a feast for the poor child, who for several weeks had eaten his meals whenever he could get them, and little enough at that. [21]

As the boy sat contentedly eating his breakfast, a slight sound near his feet attracted his attention. "Is that you, Jack?" he quickly asked.

Jack replied by licking his hand and pressing closely to his side.

"Dear Jack!" said the blind boy, fondly laying his cheek upon the faithful dog's head. "If you hadn't nestled so closely to me last night and kept me warm, I believe I should have frozen to death. Here, you shall have part of my breakfast, I don't need it all;" and he offered the Fire-Dog a generous piece of his buttered roll.

Jack took the offering very reluctantly, as if he would have preferred to have the blind boy eat it himself, but accepted it in order not to hurt his new friend's feelings.

"You eat so slowly, I don't believe it tastes so good to you as it does to me, Jack," said the blind boy, as Jack slowly chewed the soft roll, "and it has butter on it too. I should think you would like that." [22]

Jack was trying hard to dispose of a mouthful his kind little friend had just given him when the firemen returned from their breakfast. In fact, Jack *did* like the bread, but he thought he ought not to take the blind boy's breakfast. He looked really ashamed of himself when the men entered and Reordan remarked,—

"Why, you mustn't give your breakfast away to Jack, young chap, you must eat it yourself. We've brought him some leavings from the place where we take our meals, that he likes a great deal better than what you've got. Aren't you hungry, kid? Don't you like your breakfast?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the boy, quickly. "It tastes splendid; but Jack was so good to me last night that I wanted to give him some of it."

"Don't you worry about him, Sonny," replied one of the men. "We'll look out for Jack all right;" and he opened a package of bones and scraps of meat which he set before Jack. [23]

"Now, if you've had all you want to eat," said the captain, who just then entered, "suppose you give an account of yourself."

"Yes, sir," replied the boy.

"Well," said the captain, after waiting a moment in vain for the boy to begin his story. "Where do you come from, and what's your name? Haven't you got any father and mother?"

"My name is William," replied the boy, "William Blake. I haven't got any father. He used to go to sea, and his ship got lost and they were all drowned."

"Haven't you got any mother?" asked the captain.

The boy hesitated a moment. Then his lips began to tremble with emotion, and after making several attempts to answer, he put his hands before his sightless eyes and burst into violent weeping.

The tender-hearted men were overcome at the sight of the child's grief. He tried to stifle the sobs that shook his slender frame, but his grief was too great for him to master. The brave men who never hesitated to enter a burning building to rescue those who were in danger, who never thought of their own lives when those of others were menaced, broke down to see a little blind boy crying for his mother. [24]

"Is your mother dead too?" asked the captain in a low voice, a great contrast to his usual hearty tones.

"No, I don't think she is. I don't know," sobbed the boy.

"Don't you know where she is?" asked the captain, gently.

"No, sir," replied the boy, trying hard to speak distinctly. "She fell down, and she couldn't speak to me nor move, and then they carried her off in a wagon."

"Don't you know where they took her?"

"No, sir, they didn't say anything about it."

"Wasn't there any one to look after you?"

"No, sir. There wasn't any one who knew me."

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"What did you do then? Where did you go?"

"I didn't know where to go. Some children came along and found me crying, and they were real good to me. They said they knew a place where I could stay until my mother came back. So they took me home with them, and put me in a little room there was at the top of the house."

"How did you manage to keep warm in this cold weather?"

"The children found some things to put over me. They got some hay from a stable and made me a bed. It wasn't very cold after I got used to it."

"They probably took his mother to a hospital," said the captain, "unless she was—" He didn't like to finish his sentence, for he had not the heart to tell the poor boy that his mother might be dead.

"Come, little chap," he continued, "dry your eyes and put a good face on the matter. We will try to hunt up your mother, and we'll look out for you."

[26]

"This is no place for a child," said the captain later to the men. "You can keep him here a day or two, and then you must turn him over to the charities. Perhaps they'll find his mother; at any rate, it is their business to attend to such cases."

The men thought this doctrine rather hard, and grumbled at it somewhat among themselves. When, however, the next day, the captain brought in a large bundle, saying briefly, as he laid it down, "Here is something for the kid," they changed their minds. The bundle contained a warm overcoat, cap, and mittens.

The blind boy began at once to show the effects of the kind treatment he now received. A better color came into his pale face and he grew stronger every day. With this improvement of his body, his mind, too, underwent a change. His face became cheerful and happy, and he was soon playing about the engine-house with Jack.

"He begins to seem something like a child," remarked Reordan one evening, as Jack and the blind boy were playing together at "hide and seek," and the boy's laugh rang out joyously whenever Jack found out his hiding-place. "If he could only see, he'd be all right."

[27]

It was astonishing how much the blind boy could do without the aid of eyes, and in how many ways he succeeded in making himself useful. He was never so happy as when he found he could do something for his kind friends, and they often called upon him for little services that they could have done much more quickly themselves, in order that he might have the satisfaction of thinking he was of some use to them.

William was too long a name for such a small boy, in the opinion of the firemen, so they used Billy instead. Several days passed, and yet Billy was not turned over to the charities. An engine-house seems a strange place for a child's home, but Billy soon thought it the pleasantest place in the world. Whenever the alarm sounded, Billy was as excited even as Jack over it, and after the engine had clattered out of the house, and the last sound of wheels and horses' hoofs and Jack's barking had died away in the distance, Billy waited contentedly alone; and every one, including Jack, was glad to see Billy's face light up with pleasure on their return. It was a touch of home life that was very pleasant to these sturdy men who were denied the privilege of a home.

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"You ought not to keep the boy cooped up in this hot room all the time," remarked the captain one day. "Put on his things and send him out on the sidewalk in the sun. No harm can come to him if he keeps in front of the engine-house."

So Billy had on his new coat and cap and mittens, and was led down to the sidewalk, where the sun was shining brightly.

"Watch him, Jack!" was Reordan's order, as the Fire-Dog followed them.

So Billy and Jack walked up and down in front of the engine-house, Billy with his hand resting on Jack's neck, and the intelligent dog marching him back and forth with the regularity of a sentinel on guard. The fresh air brought the color into Billy's cheeks, and he looked very happy and bright. When they had kept up this exercise for about half an hour, two persons appeared, at whose approach Jack showed decided symptoms of pleasure. He wagged his tail very fast, and whined with joy.

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The new-comers were a middle-aged gentleman and a little boy somewhat younger than Billy, — a bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked boy, with a very independent air, and he carried a little basket in his hand. The gentleman was the little boy's grandfather. I wish I could describe him as he really was, but the nearest I can come to it is to say that he was just the kind every boy and girl would choose if they had a whole world full of grandpapas to choose from. Such a pleasant smile when he looked at you! And such a pleasant voice when he spoke to you! Why, you felt happier all the rest of the day after meeting him if he only shook hands with you and said, "How do you do?" His laugh was even pleasanter still, and he laughed very often; and when he was not laughing his eyes were, they had such a happy, cheerful expression.

[30]

Billy could not *see* the pleasant face, but he could hear the pleasant voice, and those who have

not the use of their eyes have something within them that tells them how people look. So Billy formed a picture in his mind of the little boy's grandpapa, and Billy smiled too when the little boy's grandpapa spoke, as everybody else did.

"Jack, Jack, I've brought something nice for you, old fellow," said the little boy, whose name was Sam, and who had been eying Billy very intently.

"What little boy is this?" asked Sam's grandpapa. "Seems to me this is a new face."

"Yes, sir," replied the blind boy. "I am Billy."

"Oh. You are Billy! Well, where did you come from?"

"It's a boy we found one night at the North End, Mr. Ledwell, and he is blind," said Reordan, who stood in the door of the engine-house and now approached, touching his hat respectfully. "He didn't have any one to look after him, and some children took him in tow and hid him in a kind of closet at the top of the tenement-house they lived in. When the house got on fire, they cleared out so sudden that nobody thought of the blind kid. If it hadn't been for Jack here, he'd 'a' been smothered in a short time, the smoke was so thick. It isn't the first life Jack has saved."

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"Good old boy," said Mr. Ledwell, patting the faithful dog's head; while Jack wagged his tail gently and looked modestly down, for it always embarrassed him to be praised for what he considered his duty.

Meanwhile Sam was unpacking his basket, and Jack tried to be polite and not to stare greedily at the tempting contents. He could not resist the temptation, however, of looking out of the corner of one eye. What he saw fairly made his mouth water. There were slices of cold meat, none of your thin delicate ones, but nice *thick* slices, just the kind every dog likes, and, most delicious of all, there was a large bone with tender morsels of meat on it, to say nothing of several mouthfuls of gristle. Jack couldn't help lapping his chops, as he thought of the good time he would have gnawing that bone and cracking it to get at the rich tasting marrow inside.

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Sam handed Jack a slice of the meat, and he gave it just one roll with his tongue and then swallowed it whole. Meat tastes better to dogs eaten in that way,—they think it takes the taste out of it to chew it too much. Another and still another slice followed, while Sam looked contentedly on, enjoying the operation as much as the dog did.

"I think you'd better save the rest for his dinner, Reordan," remarked Sam, with his decided air. "He can have this bone, too, then, and I have brought some of the cake he likes so much. You had better keep that for his dessert;" and Sam took out a package of cake neatly wrapped in paper.

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The crumbs that remained in the basket were emptied upon the snow in front of the engine-house, and the crumbs from a roll added to them. Several sparrows seated on the roof of the building peered anxiously over, intending to seize the first opportunity that presented itself to eat them.

"Don't let the sparrows eat all of them, Reordan," said Sam, who had very strict ideas of justice; "they must save some for the pigeons. How's the little lame pigeon?"

"He seemed to be all right the last time I saw him," replied Reordan.

"Does Dick the Scrapper fight him away as much as ever?" asked Sam.

"Well, yes, he does hustle him around considerable when they are feeding and he gets in the way; but that's always the way with animals, you know. The strongest ones get the first chance, and the others have to take back seats."

"I think it's a very mean way," said Sam. "I should think you'd stand there with a stick and keep the Scrapper off while the lame one eats."

[34]

"Oh, we'll look after the little lame fellow, never fear. He's as fat as a partridge. He gets tamer every day, too. Yesterday he lit right on my hand and stayed there quite a spell."

"I wish he'd come around now," said Sam.

"He will turn up very likely before you go. They come around pretty often. The sparrows get ahead of them, though, they are so cute."

Meanwhile Sam's grandpapa was talking to the captain about the little blind boy who had been so suddenly thrown upon their hands. Sam knew what they were talking about, and he felt sure that his grandpapa would find some way to make the blind boy happy, for Grandpapa could do anything, he thought. Sam felt very sorry that the little boy could not see, and he looked at him a long time. At last he said,—

"Hallo, Billy!"

"Hallo!" answered Billy in his soft voice; and the acquaintance was begun.

[35]

"Here come the pigeons," said Reordan, as a flock of birds came sweeping around the corner of the street, and alighted in front of the children. They at once began gobbling up the crumbs scattered for them, while the sparrows flew down, and darting in among them, seized upon the largest ones right from under the pigeons' very eyes, flying up to the roof to eat them in safety.

Among the pigeons was a speckled black and white one with very pink feet; but one of his feet he kept drawn up against his soft feathers and hopped about on the other one. He did not have a very fair chance with the other stronger pigeons, for they crowded him out of the way, and even pecked him when he attempted to seize upon a piece of bread. The most quarrelsome of the pigeons was a handsome dark blue one with rainbow feathers on his neck that glistened in the sunlight. This was Dick the Scrapper. He had a very bold air, as if he had a better right to the food than the others had. Sam was very indignant at his treatment of the lame pigeon, and suddenly drove them all off except the little lame one. The little speckled pigeon seemed to understand what this was done for, and remained behind and ate a hearty meal. The others were not much afraid of Sam, for they were very tame, but every time they attempted to alight he would shoo them away. This he kept up until he thought that the lame pigeon had eaten all he wanted, and then he allowed the others to return. He picked up the lame pigeon and it nestled contentedly in his arm. Billy caressed it too, and the two children began to talk together, while Jack stood near by, wagging his tail approvingly.

[36]

At last Mr. Ledwell came back to where the children were playing with the lame pigeon, and they heard him say to the captain,—

“This will do very well for a little while, but of course you can’t keep him here. We must find some other place for him.”

These words made Billy feel very sad, for he had become much attached to his new home, and thought that if he were sent away, he would be homeless and friendless again. The little pigeon who was lying in his arms heard it too, and his bright eyes saw the look of disappointment that came over the blind boy’s face. Jack, too, heard it, and made up his mind that Billy should not leave the engine-house unless he went too.

[37]

“I rather think that as I was the means of saving the boy’s life, I have a right to say something about the matter,” said Jack to himself. “They all think a great deal of me, and if I say he shall stay, I rather think he *will* stay.”

CHAPTER THIRD

[38]



RANDPAPA,” said Sam, as the two walked home together, “isn’t it too bad about Billy?”

“It certainly is,” replied Grandpapa.

“Something must be done about it,” said Sam; then he walked silently for a while, thinking very hard. At last he said,—

“Grandpapa, God made me. Did the same man make you?”

“Yes,” replied Grandpapa, “I suppose he did.”

“Don’t you know for certain?” asked Sam, for Grandpapa’s eyes were smiling hard.

“Oh, yes,” replied Grandpapa, “of course I do.”

“Well, I’ve been thinking it over,” said Sam, “and I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to pray to God every night to make Billy see.”

[39]

“It will be a very good plan,” replied Grandpapa.

“You see I always pray for what I want most at Christmas time,” said Sam.

“And it comes, doesn’t it?” asked Grandpapa.

“Yes,” replied Sam, “it always comes. I prayed real hard for a pony last Christmas, and I got one, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” said Grandpapa, his eyes still smiling as he watched the earnest face of his grandson.

“I asked for a black pony with a star on his forehead, and it came just exactly right. So, you see,” continued Sam, “that if I ask God every night to make Billy see, He will be sure to do it.”

“I hope so,” said Grandpapa.

“Why, it wouldn’t be half so hard as it was to hustle around to find just the kind of pony I asked for.”

“So I should think,” replied Grandpapa. “Black ponies with white stars on their foreheads are not so easy to find.”

[40]

“No,” said Sam, thoughtfully, “I know it. How long will it be before Christmas comes, Grandpapa?”

“Only a very short time,—about two weeks.”

"Well, I shall just tell God that He needn't bother about that dog-cart," said Sam, with his determined nod. "I shall tell Him that I would rather He would make Billy see."

"That is a good idea, Sam," said Grandpapa. "I know you would enjoy having poor Billy see as you do, much more than you would to have your dog-cart."

"Yes," replied Sam with a little sigh, for he had been looking forward for a long time to the pleasure of driving his pony in a dog-cart. "I can ride him just as well as not."

By this time they had reached home, and Sam hurried up the steps, he was so eager to tell Grandmamma about Billy. Sam's papa and mamma were travelling in Europe, with his little sister Anne, and he was staying with his grandparents. He was so fond of them that he was not at all lonely. [41]

"I miss Anne very much, and I should like to see Papa and Mamma," he had remarked to his nurse Mary one day; "but grandpapas and grandmamas let you do a great many more things than papas and mamas do."

"Oh, you mustn't say that," Mary had replied.

"Mary," Sam had said very earnestly, "how would you like to be spanked with a hair-brush?"

Mary had made no reply to this argument; and Sam, in response to her silence, had said with the positive air of one who has had experience,—

"Well, then!"

On this day Sam found his grandmamma seated in her sunny sewing-room, and he was in such a hurry to tell her all about Billy that he gave her a very confused idea of the matter. The fire and Jack and the little blind boy became so mixed up in his story that it was some time before she understood the case. [42]

Now Sam's grandmamma was just exactly as nice for a grandmamma as his grandpapa was for a grandpapa, and Sam loved one just as well as the other. "The only difference is that Grandmamma was never a little boy like me, same as Grandpapa was," Sam used to say.

"We must see what can be done for the poor child," said Grandmamma when Sam had finished his story.

Then Sam told his plan about asking God to make Billy see, and Grandmamma thought it an excellent plan, only that perhaps it couldn't be brought about by Christmas, because the time was very near.

"But don't you see, Grandmamma," said Sam, "that if God doesn't have to hunt around for the dog-cart, it will be a great deal easier to make Billy see?"

So, when Sam went to bed that night, he said his simple prayer in this way,—

"Oh, dear God, you needn't bother about that dog-cart, if you will only make poor Billy see as I do; and please take care of Papa and Mamma, and don't let the ship tip over; and take care of Grandpapa and Grandmamma too, and make Sam a good boy." [43]

"You haven't prayed for your little sister," said Grandmamma, as Sam's prayer came to a sudden end.

"Oh, Anne sleeps with Nora, she's all right," replied Sam, confidently.

The next day Sam said to his grandpapa,—

"Can't I go to the park to-day to feed the birds and squirrels?"

"I think you can," replied Grandpapa, "and how should you like to take Billy too?"

"Why, he can't see, you know, so it wouldn't be any fun for him," said Sam.

"But *you* can see," said Grandpapa, "and you can lend him your eyes."

Sam looked so puzzled at this that his grandpapa explained: "You can tell him what you see, and he can imagine how everything looks. He will see the picture with his mind instead of with his eyes. That is imagination." [44]

"It is a very strange thing," said Sam, thoughtfully.

"You see that blind people think so much about what they cannot see, that they make a great many pictures in their minds. If they were not able to do that, they would be very lonely."

Then Sam hurried down to ask Cook to give him some bread for the birds, and to fill a basket with nuts for the squirrels. He also took some canary and hemp seeds in a little package. By the time this was done, the sleigh had driven up to the door, and Sam and his grandpapa started on their expedition, Sam throwing kisses to his grandmamma at the window so long as the house was in sight. Then they turned the corner and soon reached the engine-house.

Billy's pale face grew quite rosy when he was told of the sleigh-ride he was to have, and in a moment his warm coat and cap were on and he was led to the sleigh by Sam, who took great care of him for fear he should make a misstep. The Fire-Dog followed closely at his heels, and watched [45]

him put into the big sleigh and securely tucked in with the warm fur robe.

"Can't Jack go too?" asked Sam, as he saw the wistful expression in the faithful dog's eyes.

"Certainly, if he will," replied Grandpapa.

Jack, however, was not the dog to neglect his duties, and in spite of Sam's and Billy's alluring calls, he gently but firmly wagged his tail, to express his regret at being obliged to refuse their invitation. As they drove off, he looked mournfully after them so long as the sleigh was in sight, then he gave a sigh of disappointment and lay down in front of the engine-house, where he could enjoy the passing, and occasionally pass the time of day with some dog friend, or make the acquaintance of some stranger passing through the city, for Jack was a social dog. Here, too, he was within hearing of the gong. [46]

Meanwhile the sleigh continued on its way to the park, the faces of the two little boys beaming with pleasure,—Billy's at the unusual treat of a sleigh-ride, and Sam's from watching the happiness of the little blind boy.

Sam was so eager to point out to Billy everything of interest to him, that he was kept busy describing the objects of interest they passed. The grandpapa's face reflected the happiness in the two boys' faces, and his pleasant smile grew very tender as he saw the delight of the blind boy in the scenes his poor blind eyes could not see.

When, as they passed a group of merry, shouting boys building a snow fort which Sam reported faithfully to his little friend, and Billy, quite excited at Sam's description had wistfully asked, "Are they all seeing children, Sam?" Sam, greatly distressed at the question, had replied, "There is one fellow that looks kind of blind,—he's having an awfully good time, though;" then Grandpapa's smile grew more tender still, and he told the two boys about the schools where those who could not see were taught to do whatever those who could see did. [47]

"Can they play the way the seeing children do?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"Yes," replied Grandpapa, "and we will send you to one of them."

Billy was silent, and seemed to be thinking about something.

"Should you not like to go, Billy?" asked Sam's grandpapa. "The children are very happy there."

"I would rather find my mother," replied Billy, with a quiver of the lips.

"We will find her, never fear," replied kind-hearted Mr. Ledwell, who could never bear to see anybody unhappy; and he began a story so interesting that Billy was soon listening intently and had forgotten for the time about the dear mother whom he wanted so much to see. By the time the story was ended, the houses were farther and farther apart, then snow-covered fields were passed, and Sam was kept busy in describing the frozen ponds where boys and girls were skating and playing, and the hillsides down which they were coasting. Then woods with real forest trees appeared, and Sam explained that they were now in the park. Here and there a gray squirrel's bright eyes peeped down upon the sleigh, and Sam reported just how they whisked their bushy tails and ran from bough to bough, occasionally stopping to take a peep. [48]

As they went farther into the park, a colony of sparrows would now and then fly up from a clump of bushes, and hurry away as if the sleigh contained a party of ferocious hunters, instead of two kind little boys bringing them food. They took care to keep the sleigh in sight, for Sam and his basket were old friends, and they knew the feast in store for them. So they followed at a distance, for sparrows like to consider themselves martyrs, and to act as if they were a persecuted set. This is not to be wondered at, when we remember the way they have been treated. Their nests have been torn down, they have been driven from one place to another, and they have been made to feel that they are not wanted anywhere. [49]

Suddenly there arose on the still, frosty air discordant cries, and Sam exclaimed,—

"There come the blue jays, Billy! Oh, you don't know how handsome they are, with their tufts standing straight up on their heads, and their beautiful blue and white bodies and wings!"

"Are they as big as the pigeons?" asked Billy, for he had held the little black and white lame pigeon in his arms and knew just what size they were.

"Not quite so large as a pigeon," replied Sam, "but fully as large as a robin. They are awfully quarrelsome fellows, though; just hear how hard they are scolding now."

"Will they come and eat the crumbs?" asked Billy.

"Yes, and get the biggest share of them too," replied Sam.

"We had better stop here," said Mr. Ledwell, as they came to an open, sunny spot. [50]

So the sleigh stopped, and Sam and his grandpapa got out and helped Billy out, who looked as happy and eager as Sam did. He did not look about him, though, as Sam did, and see that the sparrows had stationed themselves on neighboring trees, all ready to begin their feast so soon as the crumbs were scattered. Neither did he see the bright flashes of blue as the jays alighted on the trees near by, nor the tame and nimble squirrels



who came closer than the birds, hopping over the snow to Sam's very feet. All these things Sam explained, however, and Billy understood.

Billy, too, threw the crumbs, and held nuts in his hand for the squirrels, laughing with delight as he felt the trusting little creatures eat from his fingers.

All at once arose a blithe song of "Chickadee-dee-dee-dee;" and a flock of little chickadees came flying up, quite out of breath with their hurry.

"Chickadee-dee-dee-dee," they all cried together, as they hustled about to pick up what crumbs they could; and their song said as plainly as words could have done,—

[51]

"Are we too late? I do hope you have left some for us."

They were so sweet-tempered about it, not even losing temper when the greedy sparrows darted in and seized crumbs from under their very beaks, that it was impossible not to love them.

"Such dear little black caps as they have!" said Sam. "Here, you great greedy jay, you let that little fellow's crumbs alone!"

A blue jay had snatched a crumb away from one of the little chickadees, but the chickadee only replied blithely, "Chickadee-dee-dee-dee!" which in bird language meant: "No matter! Plenty more to be had! A little thing like that does not matter."

This both the little boys understood the chickadee to say, for those who love animals learn to understand much of their language.

Then arose a hoarse cry of "Caw! caw! caw!" and several coal-black crows flew down at a distance. They did not come boldly into the midst of the group of feeding birds, because they preferred always to conduct their business with great secrecy. One would occasionally walk on the outskirts of the party with an air of great indifference, pretending not to see what was going on; then suddenly he would dart in their midst and seize upon a particularly large crumb, and, hurrying off with it, stand with his back to the others, eating it in the slyest manner, as if he expected at any moment to have it taken away from him.

[52]

There was one bird that even Sam's bright eyes did not see. He had a timid look, as if he could not make friends so easily as the social chickadees. He crept along a large tree that grew near the spot where the birds and squirrels were feeding, and creeping in the same cautious manner on the under side of a large bough that stretched out toward the spot, hung head downward, watching intently what went on beneath him. None of the birds took the slightest notice of him, but his quick eyes glanced at them all, and finally rested on the face of the blind boy, who patiently listened to the explanations of the kind friend who loaned him the use of his eyes.

[53]

This shy little bird who watched the two boys so narrowly, was the nuthatch. As soon as the sleigh had driven away, the nuthatch came down from the tree, creeping along the trunk, head downward, and seized upon the fine kernel of a nut a squirrel was eating.

The chickadees were loudly singing the praises of the visitors who had brought them such a delicious treat. Even the blue jays, who were usually very chary of their praise, had a pleasant word for their friend Sam, who so often brought them food.

"There was a strange boy with him," cawed an old crow. "Who knows anything about him?"

"He was not a seeing child," chirped the nuthatch. "He could not see the blue sky, nor the trees, nor any of us. Who can he be?"

[54]

"We know all about him," twittered the sparrows. "It is the blind boy who lives in the engine-house. Fire-Jack saved his life; we see him very often."

Then an incessant twittering arose from the sparrows, who were in such a hurry to tell all they knew that they all talked at once.

CHAPTER FOURTH

[55]

FTER the two boys had driven off to the park to feed the birds, Jack, as we have seen, watched the sleigh so long as it was in sight. Then he lay down in a sunny spot in front of the engine-house door, where he would be warm and at the same time see the passing. Dogs, of course, interested him most, and this was such a thoroughfare that he saw a good many of them.



The dogs that interested him the most were those from out of town who were passing through the city, following a carriage or team. It was very pleasant to meet an old acquaintance in that way, and exchange a few words with him, for Jack was such a business dog that he allowed himself few pleasures, and did not have the opportunity of roaming about the city that dogs enjoy so much. Out-of-town dogs were very interesting because they didn't take on any airs, and often told him things about their country homes that he liked to hear.

[56]

The most irritating of all dogs are the dogs that are in carriages. They take on a very superior air that all dogs who are not driving dislike particularly. In fact, as they pass, they often make insulting remarks to the less fortunate dogs who go on foot. Also dogs who are driving are very jealous of others who are enjoying the same privilege, and often talk most impertinently to one another.

Several dogs in carriages passed while Jack lay in the door of the engine-house, and they either looked straight ahead and turned up their noses, pretending not to see him, or else they made some insolent remark. Jack paid no attention whatever to them, knowing that nothing would irritate them so much as to find that their impertinence had no effect upon him.

A large, amiable farm-dog following a charcoal wagon particularly interested the Fire-Dog. He stopped a few minutes in order to tell the little news he had, which was that the hens were on a strike and had refused to lay any more until they were furnished with warmer quarters.

[57]

"That accounts for the high price of eggs," said Jack; "I thought something was wrong. Well, I hope they will get what they want. Give them the compliments of Jack the Fire-Dog, and tell them to *stick*."

"There is one other piece of news," said the farm-dog. "One of my neighbors is missing. He is a little yellow dog with a black pug nose, and answers to the name of Toby. Followed his team into the city with a load of wood one day last week and hasn't been seen since. If you come across him, let us know, will you? The city is awfully confusing to country dogs."

"I will be on the lookout for him," said Jack. "'Yellow dog with a black pug nose, answers to the name of Toby.' Say," continued Jack, as the other was starting to run after his team, "what shall I do with him if I happen to find him, which isn't at all likely?"

[58]

"Keep him till I come by next week, or send him home if he knows the way;" and the farm-dog ran after his team, that was now nearly out of sight.

For a while nothing of especial interest happened to divert the Fire-Dog. He took several naps, keeping one eye open to see what was going on about him. Suddenly he started and opened both eyes. A group of children were coming toward him, one of them leading a dog by a string. Something about the children attracted Jack's attention. They were not very warmly clothed for the season of the year, but they seemed happy and good-natured. They were evidently very fond of their dog, for they stopped often to pat him and speak to him.

"Where have I seen those children?" asked Jack of himself. "I am sure I have seen them before;" and he tried hard to recall their faces.

[59]

"I have it!" he exclaimed at last. "It was the night of the fire when we found the blind kid, and they are the children who looked after him."

He looked at the dog the children were leading. "'Yellow dog with a black pug nose, answers to the name of Toby.' Well, who would have thought I should hear from him so soon? Hallo, Toby! is that you?"

"Yes," replied Toby; "but who are you, and how do you happen to know my name?"

Jack quickly arose and stepped up to the little yellow dog. The children good-naturedly waited for them to exchange the time of day, during which time Jack managed to explain to Toby his interview with the large farm-dog. "I did not expect to hear from you so soon," said Jack, "but now that I have, we must make our plans in a hurry. I suppose you want to go back to your old home?"

"Of course I do. After having a whole town to roam about in, it isn't very pleasant to be tied up in an old shed."

[60]

"Why didn't you run away?" asked Jack.

"I wasn't sure of my way. It is terribly confusing to a country dog to find his way about in a city. Besides, these children are very good to me, and I was afraid of falling into worse hands."

"You know how to slip your collar, I suppose?" asked Jack.

"Sometimes I can, but this strap is pretty tight," replied Toby.

"I see that your education has been neglected, so I will give you a few instructions given me by an old bull-dog, Boxer by name, who could slip any collar that was ever invented."

"I should be very glad to hear them," replied little Toby.

"Well, first you back out just as far as your rope will allow you to go. Then you gradually work your head from side to side, with your chin well up in the air, kind of wriggling your head free. If your collar is tight, that doesn't always work; so next you lie flat on your back, keeping your nose as high up as you can get it. You can kind of ease it up with your fore feet, too. You do just as I've told you and you'll find yourself free in time. I stump any one to make a collar that these rules won't work on."

[61]

"I'll do my best," said little Toby.

"The bull-dog I told you of, did a thing once that I wouldn't have believed if I hadn't known it to be a fact. He had slipped so many collars that they had a sort of harness made for him with a strap that went back of his fore legs. Well, one morning they found that he had slipped that. It beats the Dutch how he managed to do it, but he did it all right. It took him all night to do it, and in the morning they found him all used up, and lying as if he were dead. He was quite an old dog then, and not so strong as he used to be, but you know bull-dogs never give up anything they undertake."

"Did he get well?" asked Toby, much interested.

[62]

"I'll tell you. As I said before, he lay like a dead dog, and it was warm and sunny out of doors, so they carried him out and laid him in the sun. After a while he seemed to take an interest in things about him,—wagged his tail when they spoke to him and all that. Bull-dogs are awfully affectionate, you know. Then they began to have a little hope for him, when who should come along but another dog he knew? There had been some bad blood between the two, and what do you think? No sooner does my old friend catch sight of the other than up he jumps and runs after him. Of course he was too feeble to do anything in the fighting line, but his intentions were good."

"Wasn't the excitement too much for him?" asked Toby, anxiously.

"Not a bit of it. It did him good,—limbered him up and set him right on his legs. Bull-dogs are tough."

"I should like to know him," said Toby, modestly. "He must be a remarkable dog."

[63]

"He certainly is," replied the Fire-Dog. "I should like to introduce you, but the fact is, we are not on speaking terms now. He means well, Boxer does, but he's kind of jealous-minded. You see it gives me quite a position to run with the engine, and Boxer, he feels equal to the business, and it kind of riles him to see me setting off to a fire. I suppose he thinks I feel smart of myself and am taking on airs. It is just as you have been brought up. Now, if Boxer had been brought up in the Fire Department, his natural pluck would have taken him through the worst fire that ever was. The more he got singed, the farther he would venture in."

"Do you ever meet now?" asked Toby.

"Yes, quite often; he lives near by. We don't look at one another, though, as we pass, except perhaps out of the corners of our eyes. Boxer, he always shivers and his eyes kind of bulge, and he walks on tiptoe. You know that bull-dogs are awfully sensitive, and they always shiver when they are excited, but it isn't the shiver of a cowardly dog. You had better look out for a bull-dog when you see him shiver, for he isn't in the state of mind to take much from another dog when he's in that condition. He laps his chops too, then."

[64]

The children had been waiting all this time, the boy who held Toby by a string occasionally giving him a gentle pull as a reminder that it was time to go. They patted Jack, while they peered curiously in through the open door at the engine that stood ready for use at a moment's notice. They thought it was time to start for home, as they had quite a distance to go. So Toby took leave of his new friend, casting longing glances behind him as he was pulled along.

"He appears to be a well-meaning sort of fellow," said Jack to himself, "but he doesn't look to me smart enough to apply the rules I have given him. A dog of character like Boxer would have brought it about by himself. However; it's as well that we are not all made alike."

[65]

Jack's attention was before long diverted from the subject of his new acquaintance by the return of his charge Billy, who greeted him so affectionately that warm-hearted Jack forgot everything else and escorted his charge into the engine-house to see that he got safely up the steep stairs.

Meanwhile Mr. Ledwell and Sam drove down town to do a few errands. One of them was to leave an order at a bake-shop, and as the sleigh stopped before the door, they noticed a group of children, one of them holding by a string a little yellow dog with a black pug nose. They were gazing eagerly in at the tempting display of cakes in the large windows, and Sam noticed that the little dog seemed to eye them just as longingly as the children did.

Now Sam's grandpapa was just the kind of man that any child or animal would appeal to if he were in trouble, and as he stepped out of the sleigh and walked by the group of children, he looked at them in his usual pleasant manner.

[66]

"Mister," said a voice very timidly, "will you please to give me a cent to buy something to eat?"

The voice came from a little girl, the youngest of the children.

"Why, Maysie, you mustn't ask for money; that's begging," said the boy who was holding the dog.

"What do you want to eat, little girl?" asked Mr. Ledwell's kind voice.

"Cake," replied Maysie, emboldened by the pleasant eyes that seemed to be always smiling.

"Well, look in at that window," said Mr. Ledwell, "and tell me what kind of cake you think you would like to eat."

Maysie's mind was evidently already made up, for she at once pointed to a plate of rich pastry cakes with preserve filling.

"That kind," replied Maysie, promptly.

"Could you eat a whole one, do you think?" asked Mr. Ledwell.

"Yes," replied Maysie, eagerly. [67]

"Could you eat *two*, do you think?" asked Mr. Ledwell.

"Yes," replied Maysie, promptly.

"Do you think you could eat three of them?" asked Mr. Ledwell.

"Yes," replied Maysie.

"Well, do you think you could eat four?"

"I'd try," replied Maysie, confidently.

"Wait here a minute," said Mr. Ledwell, "and I will see what I can do."

The children crowded around the window, and eagerly watched the young woman behind the counter fill a large paper bag with cakes from every plate in the window, the largest share being taken from the plate of pastry cakes that had been Maysie's choice.

Mr. Ledwell glanced at the faces peering in at the window, following eagerly every motion of the young woman with the paper bag. The little yellow dog was no less interested than the children, and had been held up in the boy's arms, that he might obtain a better view. From this group Mr. Ledwell's eyes fell on his little grandson, who was standing up in the sleigh to see what was going on, and whose bright face was aglow with pleasure at the prospect of the treat in store for the group at the window. [68]

"It would be hard to say whether they or Sam are the happiest," said Mr. Ledwell to the young woman behind the counter, as he took the paper bag and left the store.

"Or the generous man who takes the trouble to give so much pleasure to others," added the young woman to herself, as she glanced at his kind face.

"Here, little girl," said Mr. Ledwell, handing the paper bag to Maysie. "Now what will you do with all these good things?"

"We'll divide them between ourselves," replied Maysie, promptly.

"And the dog," said the boy. "He must have his share, because he's seen them same as we have."

"Yes, Johnny, of course the dog," assented Maysie.

"And Mother," said the older sister.

"Of course, Mother," agreed Maysie. "Come on!" and off started Maysie, firmly grasping her bag of cakes. [69]

"Why, Maysie, you forgot to thank the gentleman," said the elder sister.

"Her face has thanked me already," said Mr. Ledwell.

Maysie, however, thus reminded of her manners, turned and said,—

"Oh, thank you, sir, *so much*."

Instantly Maysie was off, followed by her brother and sister.

"Grandpapa," said Sam, as Mr. Ledwell took his seat in the sleigh, "I think you are the very best grandpapa in town."

"I am glad you do, Sam," said Grandpapa.

"Now, if God will only make Billy see, we shall be all right," said Sam, with his decided nod. "I shall pray to Him every night and ask Him to, and He is so good and kind that I'm pretty sure He will do it."



AYSIE, firmly grasping her bag of cakes, rushed through the crowded sidewalks and street-crossings, darting in among the carriages and teams with the skill that only a child brought up in a large city possesses. Sometimes she passed under the very nose of a horse, and it seemed as if she must certainly be run over, but she always came out safe and sound. Her brother and sister, with Toby, followed wherever she went, but found it difficult to keep up with her. She was always some distance ahead of them, and paid no attention to their calls to stop for them to catch up with her.

"Stop, can't you?" called out Johnny, who was leading Toby, and who always picked him up and carried him across the most crowded streets. "Stop and divy up! They ain't all yours." [71]

"I'm going to, Johnny," replied Maysie, still continuing her rapid gait. "Just a few blocks more, and then I'll stop."

So away they all went once more, little Toby as eager as the children for the share that had been promised him. They had gradually left behind them the pleasant part of the city where the bake-shop was situated, and had reached a part where the streets and sidewalks were narrower and the houses smaller and closer together. When they came to a place where building was going on, Maysie came to a stop, and seating herself on a low pile of boards, announced her intention of dividing the contents of the paper bag. Johnny seated himself by her side, placing Toby in his lap, and Hannah, the elder sister, took a seat near by.

They were not a quarrelsome family, and seemed to feel perfectly confident that Maysie would do the right thing by them and divide fairly. They edged as closely to the paper bag as they could get, and took long sniffs of the delicious odors wafted toward them. [72]

"The dog has got to have his share, too," said Johnny, as Maysie had helped them all around and had not included Toby.

"Each of us can give him a piece of ours," replied Maysie, breaking off a generous piece of hers and handing it to the little dog.

"No," said Johnny, firmly, "you agreed to go divies with him, and he heard it, and you've got to do it;" and Johnny hugged Toby closely to him, while the little dog looked gratefully into his face and wagged his tail in response.

"Well, then," said Maysie, "he can have his share;" and she placed one of the largest cakes before Toby, who ate it in such large mouthfuls that it had disappeared and he had lapped up all the crumbs before the children were half through with theirs.

"He eats so fast," said Maysie, "that he can't get the good of it."

Toby tried to explain in the animal language that she was mistaken,—that dogs had proved by experience that they got more taste from their food by swallowing it whole than they did by eating it slowly, and that every sensible dog ate in that way. "A few lap-dogs and such as that may nibble at their food," explained Toby, "but you can't go by them." [73]

This explanation was lost upon the children, however, because they couldn't understand the animal language Toby spoke in. They thought he was asking for another cake.

"You must wait until we are ready for the second help," said Johnny, at the same time offering him a piece of his own cake.

Toby tried to make them understand that this was not what he said, but it was of no use, they didn't know what his whining meant.

"I shouldn't wonder if he were cold," suggested Hannah, whereupon good-hearted Johnny unbuttoned his coat and wrapped it around the little dog as well as he could.

"How can I be so mean as to leave these kind children, when they share everything with me?" said Toby to himself. "I do miss those fields to roam about in, though!" and he sighed as he thought of his country home. [74]

At last the cakes were eaten, and one of each kind left to be taken home to Mother. These were carefully wrapped up, and the party started for home.

It was a poor place, their home, but they had never known a better one, and they were such happy, contented children that they really enjoyed more than some children who have beautiful homes and clothes, and everything that money can buy; for, after all, it is not money and beautiful things that bring happiness. Often those who have the least of these are the most contented and happy, if they are blessed with sweet tempers and cheerful natures.

In the rear of the tenement-house where the children lived, was a shed. It was a dark, cheerless affair, but in it the children had made a bed of some straw that a stable-man near by had given them, and here they had kept Toby. It was not very warm, but it was better than no shelter; and then Toby had been brought up in the country, and he was not quite so sensitive to the cold as dogs who are kept in city houses are. [75]

"It seems awfully cold here," said Johnny, as he looked about the bleak shed. The door had long since disappeared, and the raw winter air entered through the large opening.

"He looks kind of shivery," said Hannah. "Perhaps, if we tell Mother about him, she will let us keep him in the house."

"I don't believe she will," said Johnny, "because whenever I have asked her to let us keep a dog, she said we couldn't afford it, they ate so much."

"Let's try," said Hannah. "It is going to be awfully cold to-night. Maysie can tell her, because she lets her do so many more things than she does the rest of us."

This was true. Little Maysie, the baby of the family, had been indulged and petted more than the rest, because she had not been so rugged as they were. When they all had the measles and whooping-cough, Maysie it was who had them the hardest. Maysie, too, had been very ill with pneumonia. Thus they had gotten into the habit of letting her have her way whenever any important question was at hand. So it was not strange that Maysie, in spite of a happy and generous nature, had taken advantage of the situation and become a little wilful. It is quite natural it should be so, when she so often heard Mother say, "Oh, give it to Maysie, she has been so sick, you know;" or, "Let Maysie do it, because she isn't so strong as you are."

[76]

So, when Hannah proposed that Maysie should be the one to tell Mother that they had been keeping a dog for the last week, and ask her to let them take it into the house to live, Maysie answered confidently,—

"All right, I'll ask her."

"That will settle my business," said Toby to himself, as the children trooped up the dark and narrow stairways of the tenement-house. "No chance for me now to slip my collar. So here I shall have to stay, and good-bye to the fields I love so much."

[77]

The children went up to the very top tenement of the house, and stopped a moment before opening the door.

"Give her the cakes before you tell her about the dog, Maysie," said Johnny in a loud whisper.

"Of course I shall," replied Maysie, shrewdly. "Don't I know she will be more likely to give in after she sees the beautiful cakes?"

They found the table set for the simple supper, and their mother busily sewing. The father of the family worked in a machine-shop, and in busy seasons the work went on by night as well as by day; so the children saw little of their father, who, when he worked nights, was obliged to sleep part of the day.

The mother looked up as the children entered the room. Care and hard work had left their impress on her face, for it was thin and worn, but it brightened as her eyes fell on the faces of the happy children.

"I was afraid that something had happened to you," said the mother. "What kept you so long?"

[78]

"We couldn't find the house at first," said Hannah; "and when we did find it, they made us wait until the lady looked at the work to see if it suited. She says she shall have some more for you in a few days."

"And we stopped to look in at the windows of a fine shop where they sell all kinds of lovely cakes, and a beautiful, kind gentleman asked me would I like some, and I said I would, and he went inside and bought me a great bag full of the most beautiful ones you ever saw, and we brought one of each kind home to you, Mother dear," said Maysie, putting the package of cakes in her mother's lap.

"I hope you didn't ask him for any?" said Mother.

"N—o," replied Maysie, somewhat embarrassed. "I didn't ask him for cakes, did I?" she asked, turning to her brother and sister.

"You didn't ask him out and out, but you asked him for a cent, and he asked what did you want it for, and you said, 'Cake,'" replied Hannah.

[79]

"Why, Maysie," said Mother, reproachfully, "that is real begging! The gentleman thought you were a little beggar girl."

"I can't help it," said Maysie, beginning to cry. "The cakes did look so nice, and I wanted to see if they would taste as nice as they looked. He needn't have given me so many. I only asked for just one cent."

"Well, don't ever do it again, dear," said Mother; for Maysie was making herself very miserable over the affair, and she couldn't bear to see Maysie unhappy. "I guess that there's no harm in doing it this once. I don't wonder you wanted to get a taste of the nice cakes. It's kind of tantalizing to see them before your very eyes and never to know how they taste."

"I will never ask any one to give me a cent again," said Maysie between her sobs; but Maysie was never unhappy long at a time, so she soon regained her cheerfulness, and came to the conclusion that she had not done such a very bad thing after all.

[80]

All this time Johnny had been standing behind the stove, keeping Toby out of sight. This was hard to do, for Toby was a restless little fellow, and Johnny knew that if he should move about much, his feet would make such a noise on the bare floor that he would be discovered before Maysie would have time to plead for him. Johnny at last succeeded in catching Maysie's eye, and gave her to understand that it was high time to broach the subject; and Maysie, who never allowed the grass to grow under her feet, began at once.

"Mother dear," she said, going up to her mother and giving her an affectionate hug and kiss, "we saw a poor little dog who didn't have any home, and he was so cold and hungry! Can't we just take him in? He won't be any trouble at all."

"No," replied Mother, firmly, "we haven't any room for dogs. They eat a lot, and are a great [81] bother. No, you can't."

"But he is so little he will hardly eat anything, and we can each of us save him a little mite from our share every day, and then you see it won't cost anything. Do say 'yes,' Mother dear;" and Maysie grew more affectionate than ever.

"No," said Mother, firmly, "you mustn't think of it. Father would never allow it. He doesn't like to have dogs around."

"We will keep him out of Father's way," pleaded Maysie. "He would be ever so much company for me when I am sick and have to stay in, and the others away at school. It's awfully lonesome for me then."

Mother thought of the many days when little Maysie was laid up with the colds that always lasted so long and made her so pale and weak, and she began to give way. It was true that a little playmate at those times would amuse the poor child, and after all it could not cost much to keep a little dog. The greatest obstacle in the way was Father. What would he say? [82]

The children, eagerly watching their mother's face, saw these signs of weakening, and were sure that they had gained their cause. Toby, too, with his true dog's instinct, saw it even sooner than the children did, and before Johnny knew what he was about, gave a sudden jerk to the cord that held him. It slipped through Johnny's fingers, and Toby, finding himself free, quickly ran up to the mother's side, and sitting up on his hind legs, begged with all his might to be allowed to stay.

"Mercy on us," exclaimed the astonished mother. "You don't mean to say that you have brought him here already?"

Toby looked so small and thin, and his eyes had such a pleading expression, that the mother's soft heart was touched. "You poor little fellow," she said, picking him up and stroking him gently, "I think we can spare enough to keep you from starving."

"We have kept him tied up in the shed a whole week," said Johnny, boldly, "and it hasn't cost a [83] bit more. I wouldn't mind being a little hungry myself, to save something for him."

"I don't think it will be necessary to go so far as that," replied Mother. "What troubles me most is to keep him from annoying Father. You know he isn't fond of dogs, and he mustn't be troubled when he works so hard."

"He is a real quiet dog," said Johnny. "I don't believe he will disturb him a mite."

So Toby's fate was settled, and he had a good supper and a share of the cakes besides, for Mother could not be prevailed upon to eat them all herself, and divided them with the others, Toby included.

Then came the important question of sleeping quarters. The cold shed was not to be thought of, and it ended by the indulgent mother consenting to his sleeping at the foot of Johnny's bed. This was good news for Toby, who was always lonesome when he had to sleep all by himself. So the dog's heart was no less happy than the children's, and they all went cheerfully to bed so soon [84] as it was decided what was to be done with Toby.

Johnny's room was small and dark, not larger than a good-sized closet, but it seemed as luxurious as a palace to little Toby after the dark, cold shed. He was put to bed at Johnny's feet after an affectionate leave-taking by the two girls. For a while he lay very still, but as soon as Johnny was asleep, he crept toward the head of the bed, and at last settled himself so closely to the sleeping boy that he could lick the hand that lay outside the bed-clothes.

"You are so kind to me," said Toby to himself, "that I don't believe I should have the heart to run away, even if I could. I should like to get a glimpse of the beautiful fields, though."

So saying, the grateful little dog closed his eyes, and in a few moments he, too, was fast asleep, and dreaming that he was racing over his beloved fields, with Johnny close at his heels.

CHAPTER SIXTH

IND-HEARTED Mr. Ledwell had already started inquiries concerning the blind boy's mother. In a [85]



large city where there are so many institutions for receiving these unfortunate cases, this takes much time. Then, at the time the sick woman was taken away, she was unconscious, and, if she were still living, perhaps she was still too ill to tell her name. Mr. Ledwell also consulted an oculist in regard to Billy's eyes, and he expressed an opinion that Billy's sight might be restored. First, however, there must be an operation, and, to prepare for that, Billy must have the best of care, in order to become as strong as possible. Life in an engine-house, kind as the men were to him, was not the place to bring this about. He ought to have a woman's care,—one who would bathe and dress him, and give him the most nourishing food to eat.

[86]

Such a woman Mr. Ledwell found. She had been nurse to Sam's father, and had received so many kindnesses from the family that she was only too happy to return some of the favors she had received from them. She was now a widow, and lived in a quiet street not very far from the engine-house.

At first Billy took the idea of the change very much to heart. He couldn't bear the thought of leaving his kind friends and Jack. He was a very obedient little fellow, though, and when the state of affairs was explained to him, and he was promised frequent visits from his friends, Jack included, he tried to make the best of it.

"Only think, Billy, you will be able to see the blue sky and the faces of your friends," said Mr. Ledwell, "and your good friend Jack who saved your life; and by and by we shall find your mother, and you can see her, which will be the best of all."

Billy had used the eyes of others for so long that he did not realize how much he should gain; but he tried to be as cheerful as possible, because he wanted to please those who had been so good to him.

[87]

One morning Mr. Ledwell and Sam called to take him to his new home. As Reordan dressed his little friend for the last time, it was well that Billy could not see; for the tender-hearted fireman was so sorry to part with his little charge that he looked very sad. Although Billy could not see the grief in Reordan's face, he felt it in the tones of his voice and in the gentle touch of his hand, and the tears were running down the blind boy's face. This sight was too much for tender-hearted Reordan, whose own eyes began to look very moist.

Sam looked from one to the other, and his usually bright, happy face grew serious. He tried hard to keep back the tears, but they would come, in spite of the effort he made. At last, with the tears running over his cheeks, he burst out,—

"I don't see what there is to cry about. I am praying to God to make Billy see, and I know He will do it."

[88]

"You are right, Sam," said his grandpapa. "There *isn't* anything to cry about. Billy is going to a pleasant home, and by and by he will see us all, and we shall find his mother, and he will be as happy as he can be."

Jack all this time had been eagerly watching the faces about him. He could never bear to see anybody unhappy, and there he sat, softly crying to himself, and doing his best not to make any noise about it. He looked as if he wanted to remind them that all would come out right in the end, but they were not thinking of him. So, when Mr. Ledwell expressed exactly what Jack wanted to say, he could not contain himself any longer and broke into a loud howl.

"There!" exclaimed Reordan, "now that we have set Jack going, I guess it's about time for us to stop. You're all right, aren't you, Kid?"

"Y—s," sobbed Billy.

[89]

"So there isn't any need to worry. Come on, Kid!" and suddenly catching up the little boy, Reordan seated him upon one of his broad shoulders, and set off at a rapid gait for the sleigh.

"Good-bye, Kid! Come and see us soon!" the firemen called out; and the blind boy answered their good-byes all the way to the sleigh.

There was such a bustle in starting, the horses, who had grown impatient at waiting, setting the sleigh-bells a-ringing as they pawed the snow and fidgeted about in their harnesses, that Billy grew quite excited, and became cheerful again. He waved his farewells as the sleigh drove off, and called out "Good-bye" so long as his voice could be heard.

"Poor little kid!" said Reordan; "I wouldn't have believed that it would be so hard to part with him."

Jack looked after the sleigh with sad eyes and drooping tail, then silently went back to the engine-house and lay down where he could hear the bell if it struck. He hoped it would, for Jack was so strictly business-like that he never liked to give way to his feelings. He lay still for some time, thinking of Billy's pleasant ways and the good company he always was, and he grew sadder and sadder. Hardest of all was it to hear the firemen say that they didn't believe the operation on his eyes would be successful, and that he would probably always be blind. Jack was beginning to think that he would not be able to bear the suspense much longer, when all at once the gong in the engine-house struck.

[90]

In an instant the firemen and Jack were all on their feet, every thought of the blind boy lost in the hurry and excitement of starting to the fire. A minute more, and the engine was on its way, the horses dashing along at full speed, with Jack tearing madly ahead, the notes of the bugle clearing the crowded streets as if by magic.

It was a hard fire to fight, for the building was high and lightly built, and by the time our engine reached the spot, flames were pouring out of the lower stories. Ladders were placed against the burning building, and the firemen mounted them to reach the roof. Among the men on the roof were those of Engine 33. Jack watched them hard at work, and longed to be with them. Sometimes they had carried him up the ladders, but not to such a height as this. [91]

Jack felt hurt and neglected, for was he not one of the company? He was anxious, too, for how could they manage without him? It would not look well if any of his friends should see him standing there safely on the ground, while the lives of the rest of the company were in danger. Jack would have preferred to walk into the midst of the blaze rather than be thought a coward.

All at once a thought struck him. The next building was of the same height as the burning one. Jack remembered that when a building was burning in the lower stories, so that the firemen could not enter it, they often reached the roof through a neighboring one. The Fire-Dog always acted promptly, and in an instant he was at the door of the adjoining building. It was an hotel, and he had not many seconds to wait before some one came out. In a twinkling in crowded Jack, before the door had time to swing back, and he was on his way to the stairs. [92]

In the excitement caused by the fire, nobody noticed a strange dog hurrying through the halls and up the stairways, and Jack soon reached the upper story. The firemen were there before him, and the skylight through which they had gone was left open. They were playing on the roof of the hotel as well as into the burning building.

Jack crossed over the streams of water that were running over the roof, and joined his company. Keeping as close as possible to his particular friend Reordan, he followed his every movement; and Reordan, hard at work, with no thought for anything but the duty before him, was glad of the dog's company. This feeling was not expressed in words, but a glance of his eye as the Fire-Dog found him was as good as words for faithful Jack, who held himself ready to share the fireman's fate, whatever it might be. [93]

While hard at work, the chief espied Jack. "How did that dog get up here?" he asked in astonishment.

"Up the ladder, sir," replied Reordan, promptly; for he never lost an opportunity to show off Jack's intelligence.

"Well, that beats the Dutch," said the chief. "It isn't natural for a dog to mount ladders. He'll come to a bad end."

"The chief doesn't like Jack," said Reordan to himself. "I must keep him out of his way, or there'll be an order to get rid of him. Keep close, Jack, old boy!"

Jack too understood by the chief's tone and by the expression of his face that he was no favorite with him, for dogs often *feel* the way people think of them even more than people do. "I shall take care to keep out of *his* way," said Jack to himself, as he followed his friend Reordan about.

The firemen's work was over at last, and Jack betook himself to the street by the way he had come, and by the time his company had reached the street there was Jack, standing by the horses' heads ready to start. The men, wet and tired, jumped upon the engine, and they started for home, Jack trotting leisurely along the sidewalk, as was his custom after a fire. Now that the excitement of the fire was over, he was beginning to think how lonely it would be in the engine-house without his little companion Billy. [94]

"Nobody there to hug me and say, 'Glad to see you back, you brave old Jack! I wonder if you saved any little boy's life to-day, Jack.' No, I shall not hear those pleasant words any more. How lonesome it will be!"

With these thoughts in his mind, whom should he see coming towards him but his old friend the bull-dog Boxer? He was a white dog, and he usually looked very clean, for he was always bathed once a week. He had told Jack about it, for he didn't enjoy the operation, they scrubbed him so hard and used carbolic soap, which was very disagreeable to him. They usually managed to let some of the suds get into his eyes, and it made them smart dreadfully. This bath always took place on Monday, after the maids were through washing, and Jack smiled to himself as he recalled how Boxer often managed to be out of the way when washing morning came around. This was Monday morning, and Jack said to himself, "I'd be willing to bet a good-sized bone that Boxer got around that bath to-day." [95]

It certainly looked as if he had, for Boxer's white coat looked very dingy against the white snow. It looked rough, too, and there was an ugly gash over one of his eyes. "He's been in a fight," said Jack to himself. "I don't doubt he's been having a beautiful time."

So soon as Boxer espied Jack coming towards him his whole appearance changed. His tail stood up straight and stiff, his hair rose in a ridge along his spine, and he walked on tiptoe as if he were treading on eggs and didn't want to break them. His eyes grew fierce-looking and [96]

seemed to bulge more than ever, although he had naturally very full eyes. He licked his chops, too, and seemed to swell to twice his usual size. All the time he looked straight ahead as if he didn't see Jack at all.

"Now this is too absurd, to keep up such a feeling," said Jack to himself, for thinking about little Billy had put him in a very soft mood. So he stopped just as he was opposite his old friend.

"Hallo, Boxer!" he called in a pleasant voice.

Boxer, however, did not return the salutation, although he settled down to a walk and seemed to be shivering.

"It seems to me that such old friends as we ought not to pass one another in this way. What's the use in quarrelling? Life is too short for that. Come over this afternoon and see me. I've got some fine bones that have been buried a long time, and they must be about mellow by this time. Come over, and we'll try 'em and talk over old times together."

[97]

While Jack was making this amiable speech, Boxer was walking on tiptoe in a circle about him, and looking at him out of the corners of his eyes. When a dog does that it means that he wants to pick a quarrel, and he holds himself ready to spring on the other dog at the first disagreeable word he utters. Jack, however, would not utter that word, he was determined to make peace.

"There are no friends like old friends," said Jack, pleasantly, "and I can't afford to lose any of mine. Don't let a few hasty words keep us apart any longer. I'm sure I'm sorry for my part of the affair, and I can't say any more than that."

Boxer stopped walking about in circles, and seemed to be swallowing something that stuck in his throat. The ridge on his back went down, too, and his tail didn't stand up as stiffly. These are signs that a dog has given up his intention of fighting.

[98]

"The quarrel was not of my making," he growled at last.

"I'm willing to take all the blame of it," replied Jack, who was thankful to find his old friend coming around, for he knew that a bull-dog couldn't be expected to do this at once. "I've lots to tell you. You don't know anything about the blind kid who's been stopping with us. I'll tell you about him and about the little yellow dog Toby who was lost, and how I happened to come across him. I gave him your rules about slipping a collar. You know you taught them to me. I doubt if he's a dog of enough character to carry it out. He looked kind of weak in his mind."

"If he's that kind of a dog, he'd better stay where he is," growled Boxer.

"I wouldn't wonder if he did," replied Jack, "but we'll see. He seemed to have a great respect for you when I told him about you, and said he should like to meet you."

This was very gratifying to Boxer's feelings, and his reserve began to thaw still more. Good-natured Jack saw the advantage he had gained, and took his leave, saying,—

[99]

"Well, be sure and come over this afternoon and we'll talk things over. The blind kid's story is very interesting. I should like to do something for him, and we'll think what can be done. Two heads are better than one, you know, and yours is worth more than mine any day."

"I'll come around if I find time," replied Boxer, for Jack's tactful words had done their work, and Boxer's voice had lost so much of its growl that it sounded quite natural again.

"Good-bye, then," said Jack; and Boxer responded cheerfully, for at heart he was glad to be at peace with his old friend, although his nature was such that he could not have brought it about by himself, even if Jack had met him two-thirds of the way.

"Now he'll go home and have his bath, and it will cool his brain, and he will be all right by afternoon," said Jack to himself, as he betook himself to the engine-house. "He gave in pretty well for a bull-dog, and it didn't hurt me a bit to take more than my share of the blame. My shoulders are broad enough to bear it."

[100]

CHAPTER SEVENTH

[101]



It is time to follow the little blind boy to his new home. After a short time the sleigh turned into a quiet, narrow street and stopped before a small house. There was a look of unusual neatness about it, from the carefully brushed steps to the freshly washed windows and spotless curtains. The small bay window of the front parlor was filled with plants and trailing vines, and in the midst of them hung a shining brass bird-cage, the bird singing so loudly that his blithe voice reached the ears of the occupants of the sleigh.

The front door was thrown open, not just far enough for a person to enter, but *wide* open as if in welcome, and in the doorway stood a stout woman with gray hair and a motherly, smiling face.

[102]

"Here is the new boy I have brought you, Mrs. Hanlon," said Mr. Ledwell, "and I think you will

find him as good as they make them.”

“I am sure I shall, sir,” she replied in a cheery voice that just suited her pleasant face; as she looked down at the blind boy’s patient face, she added to herself, “poor little soul!”

“You must manage to make him as plump and rosy as Sam is,” said Mr. Ledwell. “If you can’t do it, I don’t know who can.”

“I will do my best, sir, never fear,” replied Mrs. Hanlon; “but come in out of the cold, sir. I hope you will be satisfied with the room I’ve fixed up for the little boy. I took the front chamber up one flight, because you said he must have all the sun he could get, and the furniture you sent for it is beautiful.”

She led the way upstairs, holding Billy fast by the hand. The blind boy’s keen instinct, as soon as he heard the pleasant voice and felt the kind touch of her hands, told him into what motherly care he had fallen, and he followed her with perfect confidence. She opened the door of the chamber that was now to be his, and even Sam, accustomed to every luxury in his beautiful home, thought this one of the prettiest rooms he had ever seen. [103]

“Oh, Billy,” he exclaimed excitedly, “you don’t know how pretty it is. There’s a little white bed with beautiful pink roses all over it, and a little white bureau, and white chairs, and there are pretty white curtains at the windows tied back with pink ribbons; and there are such be-au-ti-ful plants in the window, and there are real nice pictures hanging around. There’s a dog that looks just like Fire-Jack.”

“This is your own little room, Billy,” said kind Mr. Ledwell, “and I hope you will be very happy here. Before long, you know, you will be able to see for yourself how everything looks.”

“Yes,” said Sam, eagerly, “it’s only a few days now until Christmas, and I’m praying away like everything.” [104]

“Oh, the dear child!” said Mrs. Hanlon, watching Sam’s excited face.

“It may not come quite so soon as Christmas, Sam,” Grandpapa said.

“Oh, yes, it will, Grandpapa,” replied Sam, confidently. “It’s to be my Christmas present, you know. Didn’t my little pony come when I asked for it?”

“Well, I hope it will,” answered Grandpapa, “but you mustn’t be disappointed if it doesn’t come the very day you expect it.”

“Why, of course it will! You see if it doesn’t!” said Sam, with his decided nod.

Mrs. Hanlon had indeed made a very attractive room with the aid of the furniture Mr. Ledwell had so generously given. “He is one who never does anything by halves,” Mrs. Hanlon had said, when she saw the neat white furniture. A cheap, brightly figured spread for the bed and simple curtains for the windows, in which she placed a few of her many plants, made a pretty, cosy room. Mr. Ledwell had also sent a few pictures of children and animals that would take the fancy of any boy or girl. [105]

“Well,” said Mr. Ledwell, at last, “now that we have seen Billy so comfortably settled in his new home, we must be thinking about our own home. Grandmamma will think we are lost if we are not in season for lunch.”

“Oh, no, I don’t think she will,” answered Sam.

Then Grandpapa saw that Sam evidently had something on his mind, because he was not ready to start, as he usually was. “What is it, Sam?” he asked.

“I am thinking that it will be kind of lonesome here for Billy the very first day,” replied Sam. “Couldn’t I stay to lunch with him?”

“I think it would be more polite to wait till you are invited, Sam,” said Mr. Ledwell.

“Oh, do let him stay to dinner, sir,” said Mrs. Hanlon, eagerly. “He hasn’t been here for a long time, and I have missed him dreadfully.” [106]

“I am afraid it will put you to too much trouble,” answered Mr. Ledwell.

“No, indeed, sir, it’s no trouble at all. It’s a real pleasure.”

“Well, if you are sure he will not be in the way, I will leave him.”

So Sam was allowed to stay to lunch, with Billy, and it would be hard to say which was the more pleased with the arrangement.

One of the greatest treats Sam knew, was to occasionally make a visit to this old friend of the family. He was treated like a king on these visits, for Mrs. Hanlon thought that nothing could be too good for the son of the baby she had nursed. She always cooked the dishes she knew he liked, and then followed what he liked best of all,—stories about his papa when he was a little boy.

“I think these are the very prettiest dishes I ever saw,” said Sam, as they sat down at the neatly spread table in the cosy dining-room. “I wish we had some just like them.”

"They ain't much by the side of the beautiful ones you have at home."

"Oh, yes, they are," replied Sam. "You ought to see them, Billy. They've got beautiful red and yellow flowers painted all around the edges."

"Things always look and taste better to us when we're out visiting than when we're at home," said Mrs. Hanlon. "I don't see what makes you like to come here so well, Sam, when you have everything so nice at home."

"I like your *food*," replied Sam, "it is a great deal nicer than what we have."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Hanlon.

Somehow it happened that the dinner was what Sam liked best, and he thought it very strange; but Mrs. Hanlon wanted the little blind boy to feel at home as soon as possible, and she had what she thought the boys would like.

There was beefsteak that Sam liked so much, and baked potatoes, that Mrs. Hanlon always let him open and spread himself, and sweet cranberry sauce, exactly the way he liked it, and hot biscuits, as white and fluffy as cotton wool when he broke them open, so much nicer than the cold rolls or bread and butter he had at home. Then, when they had eaten all these things, there was a nice little pudding with the cold, hard sauce Sam liked so well.

The best part of this was that Sam was allowed to prepare his own food all by himself, instead of having it cut up for him just as if he were a baby. To be sure, his knife sometimes slipped when he was cutting his meat, and a little gravy would be spilled on the white tablecloth; and once or twice a piece of meat flew off his plate and lighted in the middle of the table, but Mrs. Hanlon didn't care one bit, and she thought he did splendidly, so Sam didn't feel badly at all about it.

Poor Billy had to have his food prepared for him, but he managed to feed himself very well, and everything tasted as good to him as it did to Sam. There was very little talking during the dinner, both boys were so hungry, but when they were through and Mrs. Hanlon was washing the dishes in the little pantry, they followed her there. Sam told her all about the Christmas presents he was to give, all except the one he had for her, and he told her she must hang up the very largest stocking she had, and he was afraid the present wouldn't go in then. She must hang up one for Billy, too, he said, because he would have some presents.

"Does Santa Claus bring all the presents, Sam?" asked poor little Billy, whose experience in presents had been very limited.

"No," replied Sam, very decidedly, "I don't believe he does. Why, he couldn't get around to all the places, you know. Even God Himself would have to hustle."

"Did I ever tell you what your papa did one Christmas, Sam?" asked Mrs. Hanlon.

"No, you never did. Do tell us, please."

"Well," said Mrs. Hanlon, as she wrung out her dishcloth, "you two boys go into the parlor, and just as soon as I get my dishes put away I'll come in and tell you about it."

So the two boys went into the parlor to wait for the promised story, and Sam, to while away the time, told Billy about the present he had for Mrs. Hanlon, first extracting a solemn promise that he would keep the secret to himself, and not on any account breathe a word of it to Mrs. Hanlon. Billy having pledged his word, Sam in a loud whisper, which could easily have reached the ears of their hostess if she had happened to be listening, explained that his Grandmamma had bought a warm fur muff for her, and that he had bought her a beautiful necktie, all with his own money which he had saved for the purpose.

"Now be sure you don't tell her, Billy, for it would spoil all her pleasure if she knew what was coming;" and Billy once more promised solemnly not to breathe a word about it.

"You mustn't hint, either, Billy, for that is just as bad; she might guess, you know;" and Billy promised to be on his guard.

Soon Mrs. Hanlon came in, and seating herself in her sewing-chair, took up some mending and announced that she was ready to begin her story. Sam drew a low chair close to hers for Billy, seating himself directly in front of her, where he could keep his eyes on her face and not lose a single word.

"We're all ready, Mrs. Hanlon," said Sam, hitching his hassock a little nearer in his impatience to have her begin.



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"Well, Sam, when your papa was a little boy younger than you are, he had a little bank made of iron and painted to look just like a real bank where they keep money. It had a chimney on top with a hole big enough to drop a nickel in, and he used to save all he got and drop them in that way. He said he was going to keep putting them in until it was full, and then he was going to open it and buy Christmas presents with the money. It would have taken a bank as big as the State House to hold nickels enough to buy all the presents he promised. He was going to give me a gold watch and chain and ever so many other things that cost ever so much. And he was going to give Cook a silk dress and a pair of gold spectacles, and if he had money enough he said he should buy her a little horse and carriage to take her to church in, because she had grown kind of lame standing on her feet so much cooking. He had promised all the others just as handsome presents, and he was so happy talking about them that we enjoyed them as much as if we really had them.

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"Well, a few days before Christmas he was out walking with me, and we passed a store not far from where we lived that was full of beautiful candy of all kinds. In front of the windows there was a group of poor children looking in and enjoying the bright paper boxes and plates piled up with tempting candy.

"They were all talking together and saying what kinds of candy they would give one another if they had money enough to buy it. They looked real happy, too, choosing the candy they didn't have any money to buy.

"'Poor things!' I said, 'I don't suppose they will have any Christmas presents at all.'

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"'Haven't they got any money at all?' your papa asks.

"'No, I don't suppose they ever had a cent of their own, unless somebody gave it to them.'

"'Don't they ever have any candy at all, or any Christmas presents?' asks your papa.

"'I don't believe they do,' I answers, 'but they look just as happy as if they did, and candy isn't good for little folks, it makes them sick.'

"'It doesn't make me sick,' says your papa, 'and it tastes real good.'

"He looked very hard at the children, and I could see he felt very badly about their not having any candy, and pretty soon I took him home, for I didn't want him to worry.

"Well, after we got home, your grandmamma called me into her chamber to do something for her, and I left your papa looking out of the nursery window at the passing. I often left him alone with the door open, and he played nicely by himself. It took me quite a little time to do what your grandmamma wanted of me, and when I went back to the nursery, not a sign of your papa was to be seen. I thought perhaps he had slipped down to the kitchen, he was so fond of talking to Cook, so I didn't feel anxious about him; but when I went down to the kitchen and found he was not there, I can tell you I was pretty well scared. I hunted through the house, but not a soul had seen him. The parlor girl said she had heard the front door open a little while before, but she didn't notice who went out.

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"All at once I thought of those children looking in at the candy store, that your father had felt so sorry for. So off I started for it, and I can tell you it didn't take me very long to get there. Well, what do you think I saw?"

"I don't know," replied Sam, breathlessly; "what was it?"

"Well, there stood your papa without any hat or coat on, and with his little bank under one arm. He had unlocked it, and he was giving out the nickels to the children just as fast as he could take them out, bless his warm little heart! I never saw such a sight of children as there were about him; where they could come from in such a little time was a mystery; but there they were, crowding around him, and as fast as one got a nickel, off he would run, and I don't doubt sent others back too.

[115]

"I can see your papa now just as plain as if it was yesterday. There he stood in his little black velvet suit, with his hair blowing every which way, and his eyes shining like stars, he was so happy.

"He didn't seem at all surprised to see me, and called out, just as happy, 'They can have Christmas presents now, Mary. They have all got some money, and they can buy just what they've a mind to.'

"'What in the world shall I do without my gold watch and chain, and all the other nice presents you were going to give me?' I says.

[116]

"He looks rather crestfallen for a minute, as if that side of the question hadn't occurred to him before; then he says brightly,—

"'You won't mind waiting till next Christmas, will you, Mary? Papa will give me some money to buy something for you with, and these poor little children didn't have any money at all.'"

"What did Grandpapa and Grandmamma say to him when he got home?" asked Sam.

"Oh, bless you, they didn't mind. He was a real chip off the old block. In their family giving comes as easily as breathing."

Other stories followed this one, and by and by the sleigh came to take Sam home; and Billy bade him good-bye without a single homesick feeling. What little homeless child *could* have failed to feel at home in such surroundings?

CHAPTER EIGHTH

[117]



FLOCK of pigeons were walking about in front of the engine-house, picking up the handful of grain that one of the firemen had thrown out to them. They were not *all* walking about, to speak accurately,—one, the little black and white lame pigeon, was hopping, with one little pink foot held closely against his warm feathers. Jack the Scrapper, the large handsome dark-blue pigeon with the rainbow neck, was darting in and out among the flock, seizing upon the largest grains, and pecking at every pigeon who came in his way.

The pigeons always got out of the way when they saw the Scrapper coming towards them. Sometimes a bold young pigeon would face him, and stand his ground for a while, but he didn't keep up his resistance very long. The Scrapper was so much stronger and bolder that he always got the better of the others in the end, and was worse than ever after these triumphs.

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The nearest the Scrapper ever came to defeat was when he was attacked by the six-months white squab. The squab was large and strong for his age, and as *good*-natured as the Scrapper was *ill*-natured. He had long borne the Scrapper's bullying ways with an ill grace, and once seeing the bully peck sharply one of the mother pigeons who had meekly brought up several broods in a most judicious manner, the spirited squab could contain himself no longer, and flew at the bully with great fury. Young as the white squab was, the Scrapper had to exert himself to subdue him, and the valiant squab held out to the last. Although conquered by brute force, his spirit was as dauntless as ever, and he vowed dire vengeance so soon as he should have grown to his full strength.

The white squab had mild eyes and a gentle disposition. He never picked a quarrel, but never took an insult or saw the weak abused if he could help it. These traits made him very popular with the flock, and many of the older pigeons, as they saw him growing stronger and larger, foretold that Dick the Scrapper would have to look out for himself when the plucky squab should have attained his growth. Meanwhile the squab himself said nothing on the subject, but went on his way good-naturedly, growing stronger every day and pluming his feathers with great care. He showed no fear of the Scrapper and never got out of his way as the others did, but it was noticed that the Scrapper never tried to take the white squab's food away, nor ever pecked at him to make him get out of his path. Perhaps he too saw how strong and big the plucky squab was growing.

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This day the flock of pigeons were feeding in front of the engine-house, and the sparrows soon joined them, hopping in and out among the pigeons so adroitly that even the Scrapper often found his food vanish from before his very eyes just as he was on the eve of picking it up. While they were thus engaged, the two dogs, Jack and Boxer, came around the corner of the engine house, each with a bone in his mouth, and they lay down in the sun in front of the engine-house to eat their lunch in quiet.

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The sparrows eyed the two dogs eagerly, hoping that something would be left for them, for sparrows like to pick a bone as well as dogs do; and the pigeons walked about, bobbing their pretty heads and cooing to each other in low tones.

The two dogs were a long time at their repast, for it takes time for a dog to crack a bone and get at the marrow, which is the sweetest morsel of all. Not a word passed between them until the bones had been cracked and the marrow eaten; then they allowed the sparrows to approach and get what morsels they could from the pieces left.

After they had both lapped their chops in a genteel manner, they began to talk about the matter that so interested the Fire-Dog.

"Now that the blind kid is so well looked after, the next step is to find his mother. Mr. Ledwell is trying to hunt her up, but it takes time."

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"The humans go about those things in such a round-about way," said Boxer, who was in an excellent humor after his savory lunch. "If they knew enough to trust us a little more, they would do better."

"I believe that the woman is dead," said the Fire-Dog.

"No, she isn't," twittered a voice near by, and one of the sparrows lighted in front of the two dogs. "No, she isn't dead, for I've seen her, and know just where she is."

"How did you happen to find out so much?" asked Jack. "It is more than likely that it isn't Billy's mother at all. You never saw her."

"Yes, I have seen her," twittered the sparrow. "We were there when she fell down on the

sidewalk, and we waited around until the ambulance came and took her away. We flew after it, too, to see what was going on, and we saw it stop before a big building, and saw them take her out and carry her in.”

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“Very likely she was dead,” said Jack. “*You* couldn’t tell that, or she may have died since.”

“No, she wasn’t dead. I could tell by the way they carried her. I know she hasn’t died since, because I’ve seen her since through the window. I light on a big tree that grows in front of the window, and I can see just as plainly as if I were in the room.”

“It all sounds very well,” said business-like Jack, “but for all that you may be mistaken. It may have been some other woman.”

“I am *not* mistaken,” chirped the sparrow. “Here is a pigeon who has talked with her, and he can tell you more about her than I can. I don’t believe in trusting people too far, so I keep out of reach, but this speckled pigeon can tell you more about her than I can. Come on, Pepper and Salt, and tell Jack the Fire-Dog what you know about the blind kid’s mother.”

The black and white pigeon hopped fearlessly up to the two dogs, and modestly began his story:—

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“You see, I can go ‘most anywhere because I’m lame and nobody would hurt a lame pigeon.”

“Except Dick the Scrapper,” cooed a young pigeon in tones too low to reach the Scrapper himself.

“Our friend the sparrow here had told me about the sick woman. He was pretty sure it was the blind kid’s mother, but he didn’t dare to go too near. (You know some people don’t like to have sparrows around.) So I agreed to light on the window-sill and try to find out more. The sick woman has begun to sit up now, and every day at about noon she sits in an armchair close to the window. She looks awfully sick yet. Well, the nurse who takes care of her sprinkled some crumbs on the window-sill, and when I ate them she was ever so pleased. ‘I believe he would let us touch him, he looks so tame,’ she said one day; and the nurse said, ‘I don’t believe it, he’d fly off if you put your hand out towards him.’ I didn’t, though, and she was more pleased still when I hopped in and let her stroke my feathers. ‘Poor little thing, he’s lame!’ she said when she saw my crippled foot. ‘Oh, how my poor little boy would love you! He couldn’t *see* you, though, for he’s blind!’ and then she fell to crying and wondering what had become of her poor blind boy. The nurse tried to comfort her, and I did my best to make her understand that the blind kid was all right; but she didn’t take in what I said. I go to see her every day, and rack my brains to think of some way of bringing them together. I’ve tried to make Reordan follow me, but he hadn’t sense enough to know what I wanted. So what can we do about it?”

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“Nothing that I know of,” replied Jack. “So long as humans can’t understand our language so well as we understand theirs, they will be greatly hampered. It is a great misfortune.”

The bull-dog Boxer had listened with much interest to the stories of the sparrow and the pigeon, occasionally licking his chops or shivering slightly,—signs that he was deeply moved. As the Fire-Dog finished his remark, he growled out,—

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“Force them to it! That’s the only way!”

“But how?” asked the Fire-Dog. “That’s easier said than done. How would you propose going to work?”

“Seize them by the trouser’s leg and *make* them follow you.”

“And be taken for a mad dog,” remarked Jack.

“I shouldn’t care what they took me for,” replied Boxer, “so long as I carried my point. If I once got a good grip, they’d follow.”

“Unless the trousers gave way,” remarked the Fire-Dog. “I’d bet on your grip, Boxer. But, after all, that wouldn’t work, you know. We’ve got to wait until the humans find out about it in their own slow way.”

A country wagon came by just then, and away fluttered the pigeons and sparrows. Under the wagon trotted the large farm-dog who had told the Fire-Dog about Toby.

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“Any news of Toby?” he called out when he caught sight of the Fire-Dog.

“Not much. I know where he is, though. I’ve seen him.”

“You don’t say so? Well, why doesn’t he come home? He hasn’t gone back on his old friends, has he? They say city life is kind of enticing. I never had any desire to try it myself.”

“He has fallen into kind hands,” replied the Fire-Dog. “They are poor people, but kind. I gave him your message, and he said he meant to escape the first chance that offered. He may and then again he may not. He struck me as kind of soft. Not a great deal of spirit, I should say.”

“You struck it right,” replied the farm-dog. “There isn’t a better-meaning dog than Toby, but he isn’t very strong-minded.”

“From what I have heard about him, he must be a perfect fool,” growled Boxer.

"Have you seen him?" inquired the farm-dog, bristling at once, for dogs don't like to have their friends insulted.

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"No, and I don't want to," growled Boxer. "Hearing is bad enough, let alone seeing."

"Will you be kind enough to make that statement again?" asked the farm-dog, marching up to the bull-dog with his legs and tail very stiff, and a ridge of hair standing up straight on his back.

"As many times as you like," replied the bull-dog, who had risen to his feet and had begun to walk in a wide circle around the farm-dog.

"Now look here," said the Fire-Dog, "fighting isn't allowed on our premises. If you want to fight, you must do it somewhere else. For my part, I don't see any occasion for fighting. I've led such a busy life that I haven't had any time to waste in that way, even if I had had the inclination for it."

"This is a question of honor," replied the farm-dog, "and there is only one way for dogs of spirit to settle it. Your friend there has insulted a friend of mine, and unless he takes back his words we will fight it out."

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"Take back my words?" growled Boxer. "What do you take me for?"

At this point a sudden and unexpected interruption came. The gong in the engine-house struck sharply. The three grays came rushing out of their stalls, and took their places in front of the engine. The harness was let down from the pulleys that held it, and fastened into place. The fire under the boiler was lighted, the driver was in his seat, the men on the engine, and with a clatter of hoofs out they dashed, Jack barking his maddest and bounding ahead in such excitement that all other thoughts were driven out of his head.

As for the two dogs who a moment before were ready to engage in mortal combat, they were so engrossed by the sudden interruption and the excitement, that for the time everything else was forgotten. To the farm-dog this was a novel sight, different from the way they did things in his quiet town, and not a particle of the scene escaped him. The bull-dog, with his natural pertinacity, was the first to return to the subject of their late quarrel; but the farm-dog's owner, who had missed him, came back to hunt him up, and led him off, much to his disappointment and the bull-dog's also.

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"Wait till the next time!" he snarled as he was led away.

"You'll find me on hand!" growled Boxer.

Boxer was not usually so ill-natured as he appeared in this episode, but it is true that he was of a peppery disposition, and not averse to picking a quarrel. He would have given anything to have been a fire-dog like Jack, and his disposition had become rather soured in consequence. He was a steadfast friend, on the whole, and would have given his life, if necessary, for his old friend Jack, whose good disposition made him beloved of all.

So Boxer departed for home, thinking hard all the way, for he was a conscientious dog in spite of his pugnacious temper, and, although he would not have acknowledged it, he secretly wished that he had not been so disagreeable to the farm-dog.

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"What is the reason," said Boxer to himself, "that when I so much desire friends, I do the very thing to turn them against me? I suppose it is because I was born so and can't help it."

If the farm-dog had seen the bull-dog on his return, playing with his master's little children, he would never have recognized him as the same dog. They rolled over together on the floor, and no lap-dog could have been gentler or more considerate than the bull-dog with his massive jaws and grim expression. Thus it is with bull-dogs.

CHAPTER NINTH

[131]



E must not forget Toby, the little yellow dog with the black, turned-up nose. We left him comfortable and happy in his new home. The children grew fonder of him every day, and their mother found him no trouble at all and a cheerful companion when her children were at school. He was a quiet little fellow, and after the children had left for school and the morning's housework was done, the mother would take up her sewing, while Toby would seat himself near by where he could watch her as she sewed. Whenever she looked up and glanced toward him he would wag his tail and smile in the way dogs smile. If she spoke to him, how fast his tail would go, and he would almost lose his balance on the chair, he wriggled so hard. The affectionate little dog had not forgotten how kindly she had received him the night the children brought him into the house, and he felt very grateful to her.

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Then, when the children came home, what a rejoicing there was! Little Toby always heard their steps on the stairs before the mother did. At the first sound he would prick up his ears and move just the tip of his tail, for he was not *quite* sure if the steps he heard were really those of

the children. Then, as the steps came nearer and he felt a little more certain, his tail moved a little faster; and at last, when there was no longer any doubt, his tail wagged as fast as he could make it go, and he would run whining to the door. How he did wriggle his little body as he jumped on them and tried hard to tell them how glad he was to see them!

Then Johnny, and usually the two girls also, would take him out for a run before supper. It was not like the runs he used to have in the fields in his country home, but it was very pleasant after being pent up in those small rooms. [133]

The most unpleasant part of this new life was the fact that great care had to be taken in order to keep him out of the way of the father of the family, who did not like dogs. Whenever the children heard their father's step on the stairs, they always caught Toby up and whisked him into Johnny's little dark room, where he had to stay, as still as a mouse, so long as the father was in the house. This was easily enough done at night, but in the daytime it was pretty hard for the active little dog to stay quietly in the dark room where there was not even a window to look out of.

The father of the family, who didn't like dogs, was just the kind of man whom dogs didn't like any better than he did them. Somehow or other he always found dogs to be in his way. If a dog happened to be taking a nap on the floor or on the sidewalk, instead of stepping to one side so as not to disturb him, he always growled, "It is strange dogs always manage to lie just where they are most in the way." Or if a dog barked to let people know somebody was coming, he would exclaim, "What a nuisance that dog is with his barking!" In fact, whatever a dog does is considered to be the wrong thing by such people, so it is no wonder that dogs are not fond of them. [134]

Toby had seen the father through a crack of the door and had heard his voice, and he understood just what kind of a man he was, and that it would be safer for him to keep out of his way.

Things went on in this way for almost a week, Toby being always hustled out of sight so soon as the father's step was heard on the stairs. At last, however, Toby forgot all prudence and betrayed himself.

It was a clear, cold night, and Toby had been taken out by Johnny for a run. The air was so crisp and cold that it was just right for a smart run, and the boy and dog returned with sharp appetites for supper. Toby's keen little turned-up nose smelt the savory fumes of sausage long before they reached the top story, and he knew that a portion of it would be his—it would be mixed with bread and moistened with hot water and perhaps a little gravy, but Toby knew just how good it would taste. His sense of smell had not deceived him; as they entered the kitchen, there were the sausages still sizzling on the stove and smelling better even than they had at a distance. [135]

"You shall have your share when we are through, little fellow," said the mother in her kind voice; and Toby knew she would keep her promise, even if she went without any herself.

The table was set, the sausages dished, and the family seated around the table, while Toby watched them with greedy eyes and watering mouth. Suddenly the mother exclaimed,—

"There is Father coming! Run and put the dog out of sight, Johnny; he mustn't be bothered by him."

So Johnny caught Toby up in his arms and hustled him off into his dark room. He couldn't bear to leave the little fellow alone in the dark; so he left the door just ajar, that a crack of light might enter to comfort him. [136]

Toby had heard the step and recognized it long before the mother had, but he didn't want to leave those tempting sausages. They didn't come his way every day.

"Father is tired to-night," said the mother in a low tone to the children, "so you must be very good and quiet."

The children knew by experience that when Father was tired he was always cross and easily irritated. Mother was often tired, too, but it did not make her cross, and the children learned to keep out of the way as much as possible when Father came home "tired," as he so often did.

There was never much conversation when Father was "tired," and Toby in his dark hiding-place could hear the rattling of dishes and could smell the delicious odor of the sausages. Father had not been expected so early, and Mother had bought a nice piece of steak for his supper, but there was not time to cook it then, so the supply of sausages was rather short. Each of the children, as was their custom since Toby had been an inmate of the family, saved a little piece for him; but they were very fond of sausages, and they did not have such luxuries very often, so it really required no little sacrifice on their part. As for Maysie, the piece she laid aside for Toby grew smaller and smaller as she made up her mind to take just one more taste and then another. At last it dwindled down to almost the size of a pea, and Maysie said to herself,— [137]

"It isn't worth while to save such a little piece, it won't be even a taste;" so she ate that too.

The mother, however, seeing how small a portion the little dog was likely to receive, ate very little of her portion.

At last the silence was broken by Maysie, who could never keep still very long.

"There was a fire to-day right back of our schoolhouse, mother," she said, "and there were ever and ever so many engines there, and do you mind the big black and white dog that came to our fire and found little blind Billy? Well, he was there, too, and I patted him and he was very kind to me." [138]

"He probably belonged to one of the engines," replied Mother. "I have heard that dogs sometimes do and that they go to fires whenever the engine goes."

"And a fine nuisance they must be, too!" muttered Father. "The men must be fools to stand it. They always manage to get in the way when they are least wanted."

Now Toby from the next room had heard every word of the conversation. When Maysie told about the black and white dog that belonged to one of the fire-engines, Toby at once recalled the dog answering to that description whom he had seen lying in front of the engine-house, and who had taken such an interest in him. When he heard Father speaking of him as a "nuisance," it was too much for Toby, and, forgetting that he was not to show himself, he darted through the partly opened door, and boldly presenting himself before the startled family, declared that it was not true, that the black and white engine-dog was *not* a nuisance, but a kind and obliging fellow! [139]

"Where in the world did that dog come from?" demanded the father, angrily. "How comes he to be snarling and growling around here?"

Although Toby was doing his best to defend the character of his friend and was quite eloquent in dog language, it sounded to the ears of the family like snarling and growling.

The children were too frightened to answer, and Mother undertook to explain.

"It is a poor little lost dog the children found," she said. "He was half-starved and cold, and I let them take him in. He is a good little fellow and doesn't do any harm."

"Doesn't do any harm!" growled Father. "It is no harm, is it, to eat us out of house and home, I suppose? I don't work hard to feed lazy dogs, let me tell you."

"He eats very little," said Mother, as she looked at poor Toby, who stood shivering with fear as he heard the harsh tones of the father of the family, and began to realize how imprudent he had been. "The children each save a little from their portions, and it doesn't cost any more to keep him." [140]

"Turn him out!" ordered Father. "Here, you cur! you get out of this;" and as he held the door open, out darted the little dog, expecting to feel Father's heavy boot as he went through.

Downstairs rushed poor Toby, so frightened it was a wonder he didn't fall headlong on his way. When he reached the street and felt the cold night air, he stood still, uncertain where to go. The cold air had seemed very pleasant to him when he had run races with Johnny, with the prospect of a good supper and warm quarters before him; but now what had he to look forward to? Roaming about the streets all night, hungry and cold, was very different. The wind was sharp, and it blew through Toby's thin hair as he crouched on the steps of the tenement-house. All at once he bethought him of the old shed where he had been tied before the children had taken him into the house. It was cold and cheerless, but better than nothing. [141]

Toby groped his way to the shed, and sought the farther corner where his bed had been made before. As he approached, a large rat started up. Toby could hear him as he scurried away. There was a very little of the straw left that the children had made his bed of; probably the rats had carried the rest off to make their beds.

Toby sat down and tried to think what he had better do. He thought of the warm, light kitchen from which he had been so cruelly driven, and of the children crying to see him sent out into the cold. He recalled, too, the kind and patient face of the mother of the family, and the many kindnesses he had received at her hands.

"What a difference there is in people!" murmured poor Toby to himself, as he thought of the kind reception he had met from the mother, and then of the harsh voice that had sent him out into the cold night. [142]

"Well, crying won't mend matters," said Toby to himself. "I'll wait until daylight, and then I'll try my luck at finding my old home."

He crouched upon the thin layer of straw which was all that protected him from the cold floor of the shed. The bleak wind blew in through the door, and forced its way through the large cracks in the sides of the building, and Toby grew colder and colder. To stay there and perhaps freeze to death some cold night was out of the question, and Toby made up his mind that he would start out as soon as daylight dawned, and try to find his way to the kind engine-dog who had been so good to him.

"If I were not so small that anybody could easily pick me up and carry me off, I shouldn't care so much; but I'm so small I shouldn't stand much chance."

By and by Toby's quick ears caught the sound of footsteps that he knew were coming his way. "I thought she would hunt me up," said Toby to himself; "it is just like her." [143]

The steps came nearer and nearer, and at last, standing in the doorway of the shed, he could see in the darkness the dim outlines of the form of the children's mother. "Doggy, Doggy!" she called softly, "are you there?"

"Here I am!" answered Toby with a bark of joy, and with a bound he was at her feet and trying to jump up and lick her hands.

"I have brought you something to eat, poor little fellow!" said the kind woman, as she set a plate before him. It was the larger part of her sausage that she had saved for him, mixed with bread and potato, and it was warm. How good it did taste to the hungry little dog! and it put warmth into his half-frozen little body, too.

The kind woman stayed for some time, petting the little dog and telling him how sorry she was for him; and Toby tried hard in his dog's way to say that she need not feel so bad about it, and that he didn't mind it much, for he couldn't bear to see her kind heart so touched. She had brought a piece of an old woollen shawl with her, and before she left she wrapped him up in it and told him she would bring him some dinner the next day. [144]

Then Toby was left alone once more, and the wind blew in at the open door and through the wide cracks, and the rats scurried by him; but Toby didn't mind all this so much as he did before, because the warm food had put warmth into his body and the kind words had warmed his heart. He even fell asleep under the old woollen shawl, and when he next opened his eyes the first rays of daylight were stealing in through the doorway.

Toby started up at once, for he had intended to start even earlier than this. As he passed to the street, he glanced up at the home from which he had been driven. He had hoped to catch a glimpse of one of the children or of the mother, but instead of that he heard on the stairs the heavy tread of the father starting out to his work, and away sped Toby without stopping to look behind him. [145]

Jack the Fire-Dog was right in his estimate of Toby's character. He was not a dog of much strength of mind, and instead of hiding out of sight until the man he so dreaded had passed, and then quietly making up his mind which way he should go, as a stronger-minded dog would have done, he rushed blindly along until he was out of breath. Then he stopped and looked about him. Everything was new and strange to him. What should he do?

CHAPTER TENTH

 [146]

THE more Toby tried to think out a plan for action, the more undecided he became, as is always the way with weak natures. The sun was now up, and the great city was stirring with life. Wagons from the outlying towns were coming into the city, shops were being opened, and sidewalks and front steps were being washed and swept. But in the midst of all this busy life not a soul had a thought for the poor little lost dog. One boy, carrying a can of milk, did stop to pat him, but he had no time to waste, and passed on.

"Oh, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?" moaned Toby, helplessly. "Such a big, big world, and no place for me!"

At the corner of a distant street he saw a group of dogs, all larger than he was. They seemed, by the sound of their voices, to be quarrelling, and Toby did not dare venture near them. He knew by experience that when dogs are in a quarrelsome state of mind they are on the lookout for some object upon which to vent their excitement, and it was more than likely that they would turn the current of this excitement upon him, a stranger in the city. City dogs, too, as a general thing, do not like dogs from the country. [147]

While Toby looked, the voices grew louder and more angry, and Toby knew that the next move would be a general scrimmage, in which each dog would blindly fight with the one nearest him, or, what was worse still, all of them would attack one of the number. It is only the meanest kind of dogs who do that, but tramp-street dogs are apt to do it. "What if they should all fall upon me?" said timid little Toby; and without stopping to see more, off he set at full speed.

The streets were now broader, and there were dwelling-houses everywhere, instead of shops. Gradually the city was growing farther and farther away, and before long fields and groups of trees were seen. Toby turned into a broad avenue, and suddenly found himself in the country. Broad fields lay around him, and just beyond appeared forest trees. A pond, now frozen over, stood in one of the fields, and on it were groups of happy children skating or playing games. Toby had never heard of a park, and he wondered to see the roads so level and everything so trim and neat. He stopped to rest and watch the children on the ice. Soon the attention of the children was attracted to him. [148]

Toby was fond of children, and when he saw a little boy coming towards him he began to wag his tail in greeting. Then he jumped upon him and tried to express his pleasure at meeting anybody who had a kind word for him.

"Poor little fellow!" said the boy, stooping to pat the lost dog. "I am afraid you are lost, and I

think I had better take you to the Home." As he spoke, he took a leash from his pocket and was about to fasten it to Toby's collar, when away darted Toby as fast as his legs could carry him.

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"The foolish little dog!" exclaimed the boy, as he rolled up his leash and put it back in his pocket. "I could have found a nice home for you if you hadn't been so silly."

Toby did not know that this boy had saved the lives of many stray dogs by taking them to the Home provided for those unfortunates. He always carried a leash in his pocket for that purpose, and his bright young eyes were very quick to detect a stray dog.

All that Toby knew about these public homes was what he had seen and heard of the poorhouse in his native town. He had seen old men and women sitting out on the benches under the trees in the summer time, and he had seen their faces looking out of the windows in the winter time. They looked to him very listless and forlorn, but he did not know what would have been the fate of these aged people if they had not had the shelter of this home. He had also heard people say, "Why, I had rather go to the poorhouse than do that," and so he had come to consider that going to such an institution was about the worst thing that could happen to anybody. A poorhouse for dogs Toby thought must be a dreadful place, and he resolved that he would rather roam the streets at the risk of starving or freezing than allow himself to be taken to one.

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So Toby ran until he reached the woods that he saw before him, and when he found that the boy was not following him he slackened his pace. Everything seemed very quiet and peaceful about him. Occasionally a crow cawed from one of the tall hemlocks, the harsh voices of blue-jays reached him from the clumps of neighboring trees, and the squirrels, running along the branches or jumping from tree to tree, chatted in a friendly manner with one another. Sparrows were there also, as happy and satisfied with themselves as if their constant twittering were melodious songs.

Toby watched all these inhabitants of the woods with great interest, for the country-bred dog had often watched them, and he knew their ways. It was soon evident to Toby that these little creatures were expecting something to take place, and something of a pleasant nature, too, for they were all in a happy mood. The sparrows flew backward and forward, sometimes disappearing for a while, but always turning up again as cheerful as ever. A flock of pigeons also appeared, and, alighting on the snow, some walked about in search of any stray morsels of food which might have been overlooked, while others took advantage of this opportunity to put their plumage in order.

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Toby, curious to see what it could be that these little creatures were expecting, secreted himself behind a clump of barberry bushes and waited. He thought his presence was not noticed, but he was mistaken. The bright little eyes of the nuthatch were on him, and he was trying his best to find out something about the stranger. Creeping along the under side of a large limb that grew near the spot where Toby sat hidden, the bright eyes watched every motion, for nuthatches are timid birds and very suspicious of strangers.

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All at once the sparrows who had disappeared from sight came flying back in great excitement, twittering as they flew: "Coming! Coming! He is almost here!" and immediately secured favorable positions on the outskirts of the party.

No sooner had the sparrows settled themselves, than a sleigh drawn by two handsome horses was seen approaching at a rapid rate. In the sleigh were two little boys and a middle-aged gentleman. One of the boys sprang out as soon as the sleigh stopped, and Toby noticed that he had a basket in his hand. The other boy sat still until the gentleman alighted and lifted him carefully out.

"Here they are, Billy!" exclaimed the little boy who had jumped out. "They are all here, and Dick the Scrapper is here too, just as cross as ever. Oh, you ought to see how handsome the squirrels look!"

[153]

"Can't he see for himself, without that smart little chap telling him?" muttered Toby to himself.

"No, he can't," replied a voice from above. "Don't you see that he is not a seeing child?"

Toby started, to find that he had been overheard, and looking up saw the little nuthatch hanging head downward, eying him sharply.

"I didn't know you were there," murmured Toby, taken greatly by surprise.

"I know you didn't. I've been watching you for some time, and I can see that you are a lost dog."

Meanwhile Sam was scattering the contents of his basket far and wide, reserving the finest of the nuts to tempt the squirrels to eat from his hand. He did not forget the little blind boy, and gave the largest share to him to hold.

As Toby looked from the face of the little boy who was lending his eyes to his blind friend to the genial one of his grandpapa, he began to be puzzled. "Where have I seen those faces before?" he said to himself. "I am sure I have seen them somewhere. I know I have heard the gentleman's voice, too. You don't hear such a pleasant one every day;" and Toby shuddered as he recalled the harsh tones of the father of the family.

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Suddenly the vision of three children and a little dog looking longingly in at the tempting display of a bake-shop rose before Toby's eyes, and he exclaimed aloud: "I have it! That is the

gentleman who gave the cakes to little Maysie! and how good they did taste!"

"I thought I heard a dog bark!" cried the little boy who had brought the basket. "Didn't you hear him, Grandpa?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman, "and it came from behind those bushes."

Sam ran around the clump of barberry bushes, and there crouched Toby, trembling with excitement and anxiety. The kindly expression in the little boy's face, and the pleasant tones of his voice, however, won the confidence of the timid little dog, and he made no resistance when Sam stooped and took him up in his arms. [155]

"He is a lost dog," said Grandpapa, gently stroking Toby's head. "It will never do for him to wander around in this bleak place. We must look after him."

"I will wrap him up in the fur robe, and then he will be as warm as toast," replied Sam, carrying the little dog to the sleigh. When he was placed in one corner of the roomy sleigh, on the soft cushion, and the warm fur robe securely tucked about him, Toby was as comfortable as any dog could hope to be.

Sam did not linger so long as usual this morning, feeding the birds and squirrels. Finding a stray dog was an unusual excitement for him, and he was eager to look after him. So he quickly emptied the contents of his basket upon the snow, and the party started for home, leaving the crumbs and nuts to be eaten at leisure. [156]

Toby sat between the two boys, each having an arm around him, and the sleigh started. Toby had never had a sleigh-ride before, and the rapid motion of the sleigh, with the jingling of the bells quite excited him. He sat up very straight, and pricked up his ears, while his little black turned-up nose sniffed the fresh cool air.

"I can keep him, can't I, Grandpapa?" asked Sam, hugging the little dog closely to him; and Toby listened anxiously for the answer.

"I am afraid Grandmamma would not like the idea of having him around the house," replied Grandpapa. "A city house isn't a good place to keep a dog in."

"But I could keep him tied up in the washroom." Toby looked anxiously from one to the other, while his fate was being settled.

"Oh, he would be a very unhappy little dog tied up by himself, Sam," said Grandpapa.

"Well, he could play out in the back yard, you know, and he could go to drive with us," pleaded Sam. [157]

"He wouldn't be happy kept so, Sam. He would feel like a little prisoner. I am sure by his looks that he came from the country, and he has probably had open fields to run about in. I don't believe he was ever kept tied."

"What can we do with him, then?" asked Sam. "If he can't tell us where his home is, how can we take him back? I hope you don't mean to have the poor little fellow lost again;" and Sam's face grew as anxious as Toby's.

"Of course I mean to provide for him, Sam," said Grandpapa. "It is true we can't take him to his own home, as he isn't able to speak and tell us where it is, but we will do the next best thing. We will take him to the Home that receives all the stray dogs and cats that are taken there. It is called the 'Animal Rescue League.'" [158]

At these words Toby took alarm and gave a great bound to free himself. In another instant he would have leapt from the sleigh, but Sam was ready for him and tightened his grasp on the foolish little fellow.

"Why, he tried to jump out of the sleigh," said Sam. "Do you suppose he heard what you said, Grandpapa?"

"Dogs often seem to understand what is said about them," replied Grandpapa; "but he would be very foolish to object to being taken to such a pleasant place. He will have the kindest care until a good home is found for him."

"Will they let him play?" asked Sam, greatly interested, and continuing to keep a strong hold upon the struggling Toby.

"Certainly they will, and he will find other dogs there too. I don't doubt he will have a fine time."

Foolish Toby kept up his struggles at intervals, for he couldn't bear the thought of being taken to the Home. "A dog's poorhouse, that is what it is," he said to himself.

"I wonder how they happened to think of making a home for dogs that are lost," said Sam. [159]

"I can tell you what I know about it," said Grandpapa. "A very tender-hearted lady who loves dogs and cats, thought there should be some place in the city where lost and neglected animals could be sent. So she went about to see people, and wrote letters about it until she got people sufficiently interested to give money towards it. Then they hired a house in the middle of the city,

and all the stray dogs and cats people find are taken there and kindly cared for.”

“That lady must be very kind,” said Sam, thoughtfully. “I should like to see her.”

“Perhaps you will some day. They had a Christmas-tree for the dogs and cats last year, and I’m told they all had a fine time.”

Sam burst out laughing, and Billy laughed too, to think of a Christmas-tree for dogs and cats.

“I suppose they put on it all sorts of things that dogs and cats like,” said Sam, “bones and cakes and all such things.” [160]

“Perhaps they put on some things for them to play with,” said Billy, who had listened with great interest to all Mr. Ledwell had said about the Home.

“I shouldn’t wonder if they did,” said Grandpapa.

“And I guess they put saucers of milk and plates of nice food under the tree,” said Billy, who had a good deal of imagination.

Toby listened to this conversation and ceased to struggle. All this sounded very well, if it were true, but he expected to find at the Home dogs sitting about listlessly, just as he had seen the old people at the poorhouse in his town. The story of the Christmas-tree pleased him greatly. “Perhaps, after all, it is not so bad as I expected,” said Toby to himself, as the sleigh stopped.

“Here we are!” said Grandpapa, as he got out and took Toby in his arms.

“It doesn’t look like a Home,” said poor Toby to himself. He had expected to see a large brick building standing by itself like the poorhouse. “It looks just like the other houses.” [161]

“Don’t be afraid, little fellow,” said Mr. Ledwell, as he felt Toby tremble. “Nobody is going to hurt you. You stay in the sleigh with Billy, Sam. I will bring you both to see the little dog when he feels at home.”

Mr. Ledwell entered the house and set the little dog on the floor. Poor Toby was so limp from fear that he could hardly stand, but remained in the spot where he was placed with drooping head and tail.

“I have brought you a new dog,” said Mr. Ledwell, addressing a rosy-cheeked young woman. “Have you a place for him?”

“He doesn’t take up much room, that is certain,” replied the young woman, stooping to pat the frightened little creature. “Yes, I guess we can manage it.”

At these words in rushed two little terriers, and bouncing upon the limp and terrified Toby, at once knocked him over in their attempt to engage him in play.

“You ought to be more polite to strangers,” said the rosy-cheeked young woman, picking up Toby and putting him on a chair out of the reach of the two lively terriers, who pretended that they had treed their game and took short runs up to the chair, barking themselves into a state of great excitement. [162]

“We’ll give him something to eat, and he’ll soon be all right,” said the pleasant young woman.

The excitement of the terriers over the new arrival had telegraphed the news throughout the Home, and the deep voices of large dogs and the high voices of smaller ones all extended a welcome to the little wanderer. Their tones told of kind treatment and comfort, and Toby was comforted. “How different,” he thought, “from a poorhouse! This must be a good place!”

CHAPTER ELEVENTH

 [163]

IN the morning of the day before Christmas Sam awoke unusually early, and jumped out of bed so soon as his eyes were fully open.

“I must hurry as fast as I can,” he said to Mary, “for I shall be awfully busy all day;” and while he was dressing he talked about the presents he was to give. “And the best of all is the present I am going to have myself,” he added. “I suppose you know what that is.”

“Is it the little dog-cart for your pony it is?” asked Mary.

“No, indeed it is not!” exclaimed Sam, contemptuously. “It is something ever and ever so much better than that. Just think, poor Billy is going to see, and I sha’n’t have to lend him my eyes any more.”

“Won’t that be nice!” said Mary; but his grandpapa from the door of his dressing-room heard Sam’s words with a heavy heart. [164]

“What shall we do about it?” he asked Grandmamma when he had repeated their little grandson’s words. “I think we ought to explain about the operation that Billy must undergo; but

we have let him think so long that Billy will see by Christmas he will take it very hard. I thought the boy would be all right by Christmas time, and I wanted Sam to be spared the pain of knowing what poor Billy would have to go through."

"I thought so, too," replied Grandmamma, "and I don't like to disturb Sam's innocent faith. I don't know how he will take it."

At this point in burst Sam, full of excitement.

"I shall have to hustle around to get through before night," he said in his decided way. "We shall have to start right after breakfast to get the wreaths and things to hang up, sha'n't we, Grandmamma? And we mustn't forget to bring some for Billy, too, you know." [165]

"Wouldn't you rather spend the money in something Billy could enjoy more?" asked Grandmamma. "You know wreaths and garlands are only to look at, and poor Billy can't see yet."

"But he *will* see them to-morrow, don't you see?" said Sam, triumphantly. "You forget, Grandmamma, about my Christmas present, I guess."

"My dear boy," said Grandmamma, gently, "don't feel so sure about Billy's seeing exactly on Christmas Day. It may come a little later, you know."

"Oh, no, it won't!" replied Sam, decidedly. "You will see, Grandmamma!" and he was off before his grandmother could answer.

So soon as breakfast was over, during which Sam was so excited that he ate very little, the sleigh came around to the door, and Sam and his grandmother started for the evergreens. It was quite a long drive to the big market, for they always bought them there, because the little boy enjoyed so much seeing the large building arrayed in its Christmas dress. [166]

The streets, as they approached the business part of the city, were crowded even at that early hour. Everybody carried packages, and every face seemed to have caught the spirit of Christmas, which is a loving and generous spirit. The shop windows were gay with bright colors and garlands of evergreen, and groups of people were collected in front of the most attractive of these windows. In one of them was a real Christmas scene, and Sam wanted so much to look at it that his grandmother told the driver to stop. By standing up on the seat of the sleigh, Sam got a splendid view. It was a winter scene, with snow on the trees and on the ground, and there was Santa Claus sitting in his little sleigh, which was piled full of presents, and four beautiful little reindeer were harnessed to it. The crowd in front of this window reached out to the street, and on the outside, waiting to take advantage of an opening to slip through and get a view of the window, were three children, a boy and two girls. [167]

Mrs. Ledwell, who was always ready to see just what was needed, caught sight of these children who were waiting so patiently for their turn to come. Seeing them look toward the sleigh and at Sam, who was so intent in watching the beautiful Santa Claus that he had not noticed them, she saw that they looked as if they recognized her little grandson.

"Say, Maysie," said the boy, pulling his little sister by the sleeve, "do you mind the time when the gentleman gave us the nice cakes?"

"Of course I does," replied Maysie, promptly.

"That is the same sleigh he was in, and the same horses, and it is the same boy, for I minded the fur cap of him."

Mrs. Ledwell beckoned to the children to come nearer. "Did you say you had seen this little boy before?" she asked kindly.

"Yes, once," replied Johnny, promptly.

"It was the time the gentleman gave us the cakes," said Maysie, eagerly. "They tasted awful good;" and Maysie almost smacked her lips at the thought of them. [168]

The elder sister gave Maysie's dress a little pull. "I'm not going to ask for any," replied Maysie, in a loud whisper, "so you needn't twitch my dress so hard."

A smile came over Mrs. Ledwell's face. "Would you like to buy some cakes to-day?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Maysie, promptly, "but I'd rather buy a doll."

"Why, Maysie," said her sister, reproachfully, "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself."

"I ain't," replied Maysie, without any appearance of mortification. "She asked me, so there!"

"Yes, I asked her," said Mrs. Ledwell, "and there is no harm in telling what she wants most, for Santa Claus is about, you know, at this time, and he has very sharp ears."

"Do you suppose he heard what I said?" asked Maysie, straining her neck to get a glimpse of the Santa Claus in the window. [169]

"I shouldn't be surprised if he did," replied Mrs. Ledwell. "You will find out to-morrow. Now tell me where you live, Maysie."

Maysie rattled off the address in a loud voice, for she hoped that Santa Claus would overhear it

and send the doll she wanted so much.

Mrs. Ledwell then left Sam sitting in the sleigh, and entered the store. She picked out a beautiful doll, a pretty chatelaine bag, and a boy's sled, and ordered them to be sent to the address Maysie had given her. Then with a glow at her warm heart, to think of the pleasure these gifts would carry with them, she joined her little grandson.

"Do you remember to have seen those children before, Sam?" she asked, as they drove along.

"Yes, I remember them," replied Sam. "They were looking in at the cakes in the bake-shop window, and Grandpapa bought them a great bagful of them. They looked as if they didn't have cakes every day, Grandpapa said." [170]

Sam had taken no special notice of the dog the little boy had with him on that occasion, or he would probably have recognized the lost dog he had found in the park as the same one.

The market was soon reached, and Sam and his grandmother went up the steps. The front of the large building was piled high with long garlands of evergreen for trimming, and green wreaths bright with red berries. Christmas-trees and branches of holly filled every vacant nook. Here also were groups of children, eager to obtain as many glimpses as possible of the Christmas pleasures they could not expect to have.

Mrs. Ledwell's tender heart was touched at the sight of the little patient faces, and her ready hand went straight to her well-filled purse. She knew by experience that these little people would be there, and had provided a goodly supply of change. "Sam," she said to her little grandson, "would you like to give those children something for Christmas?" [171]

"Yes, indeed I should, Grandmamma," replied the little boy, delightedly.

Each child seized the coin Sam held out to him, and darted away with his prize with the speed of the wind. Very few stopped to express thanks for the gift, but the happy faces spoke more eloquently than words could have done.

"They remind me of chickens snatching up a worm and running off that the others may not take it away from them," said Mrs. Ledwell to herself, as she watched the little waifs darting off with their presents.

"I just wish Grandpapa could have seen how happy those little children looked to think they could buy something for Christmas," said Sam, as he followed his grandmother into the market.

"Oh, Grandpapa is feeling very happy to-day," she replied, "for he has been sending Christmas dinners to a great many little boys and girls." [172]

"It *smells* just like Christmas here, doesn't it, Grandmamma?" said Sam, as they passed down the long building, the stalls on both sides tastefully decorated with evergreens and bright berries.

"Now, Sam," said Grandmamma, stopping before one of the stalls, "we must pick out a nice turkey for Mrs. Hanlon and Billy."

"You must give me a very nice turkey, Mr. Spear," said Sam, trying to talk as Grandpapa did.

"I'll do the best I can for you," replied Mr. Spear; and after looking over a pile of turkeys he selected a fine, plump one and placed it before the little boy.

"I don't like the looks of that bird," said Sam, with a very decided air.

"Why, Sam," said his grandmother, "what do you mean?"

"I don't like the looks of those legs," said Sam in the same decided manner.

"What is the matter with them?" asked Mr. Spear, greatly amused at the little boy's grown-up air. [173]

"I don't like the color of them," persisted Sam.

"Why, what color do you expect them to be?" asked Mr. Spear, trying to keep from smiling. "I don't know what other color they could very well be."

"Oh, yes, they could!" replied Sam, shrewdly. "I want a turkey with yellow legs, because they are the best."

"I don't know as I ever saw a turkey with yellow legs," replied Mr. Spear, gravely. "If I had one, I would give it to you."

"Why, Sam," said Grandmamma, who had been greatly amused at the conversation, "what made you ask for a turkey with yellow legs? They are always lead-color, like this one."

"Grandpapa always asks for *yellow*-legged ones. He says the blue-legged ones are not fit to eat," replied Sam, "and you know that Grandpapa is *very particular*."

"I guess he's thinking of *chickens*," said Mr. Spear, "and has got 'em kind of mixed up with turkeys in his mind." [174]

"That must be it," replied Mrs. Ledwell. "Well, I will have this one and another just like it. You would like to send one to the little children we saw looking at Santa Claus, wouldn't you, Sam?"

Then cranberries and apples and potatoes were bought to go with the turkeys, and some huge squashes took Sam's fancy so greatly that one was sent with each turkey.

After that, wreaths and garlands were selected and piled upon the seat opposite Sam and his grandmother, and they drove home, the fragrance from the evergreens mingling with the crisp air.

After lunch, came what Sam considered about the best part of Christmas, the pleasant task of distributing presents at the houses of their friends. Sam liked to do this all by himself, it gave him such a grown-up feeling. So soon after lunch the sleigh was brought around and piled high with packages of every size and shape, each one neatly addressed. Then Sam was tucked in on the back seat all by himself, and he looked like a little rosy Santa Claus, with his fur cap, the fur robes, and the presents piled high about him. [175]

Whenever they stopped to leave a present, Sam would run up the steps and always leave word that the present must not on any account be seen until Christmas morning. He left Billy's and Mrs. Hanlon's presents until the last because he took the most interest in them and wanted to make a call on them, besides.

Sam found them both in the cosy parlor, Mrs. Hanlon sewing and at the same time telling stories to the little blind boy. Billy had improved very much in appearance in this new home. He was never left alone, as he had to be so much of the time at the engine-house, and his face lost much of the sad expression it had before he came here. Both Mrs. Hanlon and Billy were delighted to see their little visitor, who came in with his arms piled high with packages and his face beaming with happiness.

"You mustn't either of you look into the packages or try to find out what is in them," he said, as he laid them down on the sofa. [176]

"No, indeed, we shouldn't think of such a thing," Mrs. Hanlon assured him. "There wouldn't be any surprise for us if we knew what we were going to have."

Sam made quite a little call, and told Billy about his visit to the big market and what he saw there; and then he told him about the three children he saw trying to look in at the window where Santa Claus was. He told him all about that wonderful Santa Claus, too, how exactly like a real live man he looked, about the four beautiful little reindeer harnessed to his sleigh, and how natural the snow and the trees looked.

Billy listened to all this with great interest, and seemed to enjoy it as much as if he had seen it as Sam had. When Sam told him about the three children, and said that the little one who wanted a doll so much was called "Maysie," Billy said,—

"Why, that was the name of one of the children who were so good to me that time they took my mother away." [177]

"Perhaps it was the same one," said Sam. Billy, however, could not tell how the little girl looked, so they could not be sure.

"If I see them again," said Sam, "I will ask them if they are the same ones."

When Sam thought it was time for him to go, he repeated his instructions in regard to the presents, and extracted a promise from both not to exercise any undue curiosity to find out what their presents were. When Mrs. Hanlon followed him to the door, he confided to her that his present to Billy was a little fire-engine that would throw a real stream of water, and he thought it would be of great use, as they could water the plants with it. "We can make believe there is a fire and can turn the hose on just as real engines do," he added.

"It must be beautiful," said Mrs. Hanlon, "but I wish the poor child could see it;" and she gave a deep sigh.

"But he *will*," replied Sam, brightly. "You haven't forgotten what I told you about my Christmas present, have you?" [178]

"No, indeed, I remember; I only hope you won't be disappointed!"

"Of course it will come. It is sure to," replied Sam, confidently. "Didn't my little pony come all right?" And with a happy good-bye Sam ran down the steps and jumped into the sleigh.

"Dear little soul!" said Mrs. Hanlon, looking after him as he waved his hand gayly at her. "How disappointed he will be!" and the tears stood in her kind eyes as she closed the door and joined the little blind boy.

CHAPTER TWELFTH

HEN Sam went to bed that night, he pulled his window-shades to the very top of the window, that he might awake as early as possible. This arrangement had the desired effect, for when Mary came in he had examined all the presents that were in his Christmas stocking and was [179]



nearly dressed besides.

"I will tell you why I am in such a hurry," he said in answer to Mary's look of surprise. "I want to go over to see Billy the very first thing."

"Oh, you must wait until after breakfast," said Mary. "It is a very cold morning, and Billy is probably abed and fast asleep yet."

"Oh, no, he isn't," said Sam. "He'll be sure to be up. So give me my coat and cap, Mary, please."

"Indeed, your grandmamma wouldn't like to have you go out so early," said Mary, "and such a beautiful breakfast as Cook has got!" [180]

"I don't care about that, Mary," replied Sam, decidedly. "I *must* see Billy the very first thing. I know the way very well."

In vain Mary tried to persuade the little boy to wait until after breakfast, but he was so persistent she knew he would go alone if she refused to go with him; so she very reluctantly agreed to go. She dared not disturb his grandparents at so early an hour, or she would have appealed to them to decide the matter. So the two started out on their expedition.

Sam had never been in the streets at so early an hour. The sun rises late at this season of the year, and its bright rays were just streaming over the tall house-tops as Sam and Mary sallied forth. Most of the families in the neighborhood were still in bed, but the houses were being put in order for the day. Front steps were being swept down, front doors dusted, parlor shades drawn up, and sidewalks cleaned. Colonies of sparrows perched among the trees and secreted in the branches of the vines that grew against the houses, had not yet finished their morning hymns, and their joyous twittering was heard on every side. [181]

The air was so cold that Mary made her little charge walk briskly, and by the time they reached Mrs. Hanlon's house his cheeks were glowing. They found Billy dressed and holding the engine in his lap. Sam gave a keen glance at the little blind boy, who sat passing his hands caressingly over the beautiful toy, but his eyes were not bent upon it,—they were fixed straight before him in the same old way.

"Billy," cried Sam earnestly, as he watched the blind boy's patient face, "can you see it with your eyes?"

"No," replied Billy, cheerfully, "but I know just how it looks because I can feel it, you know."

"Can't you really see the pretty red wheels and the shining brass and everything?" said Sam, very earnestly. "Try real hard, Billy, and perhaps you can." [182]

"No," said Billy, gently, "but you can tell me all about it, and we can play with it all the same."

A great change came over Sam. The bright color left his cheeks, and his lips began to quiver. Kindly Mrs. Hanlon knew what was going on in the little boy's mind, and she tried to take him in her motherly arms to comfort him; but he broke away from her and ran downstairs and out of the door. Mary followed him, but she found it hard to keep pace with him as he rushed at full speed along the streets. He paid no heed to her entreaties to stop, and arrived breathless at his grandpapa's house.

Mrs. Ledwell, who was about to go down to breakfast, was startled to see her little grandson appear in such a breathless and excited state.

"Grandmamma," he exclaimed, "I am never going to pray to God again as long as I live!"

"Why, Sam!" exclaimed his astonished grandmother, "what do you mean?" [183]

"Billy can't see," he answered, "and here I have been praying and praying for all this time; and Mary says there is a pony dog-cart for me in the stable, and I didn't want it! I just wanted to have Billy see!" and Sam threw himself upon the lounge and burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

Mrs. Ledwell hardly knew what to do, but she did the best thing she could possibly have done. She let the little boy expend the violence of his grief, and then she seated herself by him and gently stroked the hair back from his hot forehead. When the weeping grew less violent and she knew the little boy could listen, she said,—

"You must remember, Sam, that there are a great many little boys and girls all over the world asking God for different things, and he can't answer all at once. It takes a long time, you know, so you must be patient and wait a little longer."

"But I didn't ask for anything else," sobbed Sam, "and he has gone and sent me the dog-cart, after all; and I was *very particular* to say that I didn't want it." [184]

"By next summer, Sam, I am quite sure that Billy can see, and think what fine drives you and he can have together!"

"Summer is a long way off," replied Sam, "and I *did* so want Billy to see *now*!"

"We can't have things come about just as we want them, my dear little boy," said Grandmamma.

"I sha'n't pray any more, just the same," said Sam, decidedly.

"Billy is in a comfortable home and has found kind friends, and Grandpapa will soon find out where his mother is; and then by and by Billy will see, and then how happy he will be! There are a great many little boys worse off than Billy is, so if I were you I would try to be patient."

Sam was silent for a while, and his grandmother knew that he was thinking the matter over in his sensible mind.

"I suppose there must be an awful lot of boys and girls asking God for all sorts of things," he said. [185]

"Indeed, there are," said Grandmamma, "and just think how much happier Billy is than he was when you first saw him!"

"Well," said Sam in his old decided manner, "I guess I had better keep on praying a little while longer."

"I think so, too, dear," replied Grandmamma; "and now we'll go down to breakfast and be as cheerful as we can, because if we look unhappy we shall make everybody about us so, and we want all to have a very pleasant Christmas."

So Sam, like the sensible, conscientious little fellow he was, wiped his eyes very carefully with his pocket-handkerchief and assumed a cheerful smile,—very much the kind of expression, his grandmother thought, that people have when they are sitting for a photograph and the artist tells them to "look pleasant." It was rather a forced smile, to be sure, but before breakfast was half over, Grandpapa, under whose genial influence nobody could be long unhappy, had brought real smiles back to the little boy's face, and they were laughing and joking together as if there were no such things as unhappiness and suffering in all the world. [186]

"Now I will tell you my plan," said Grandmamma, "and you can see how you like it. I shall be busy this morning, for I must call on my old ladies at the Home and see if they are having a happy Christmas, but I propose that you two take a nice sleigh-ride and invite Billy to go with you. Then you can bring him home for lunch, and in the afternoon a few boys and girls are coming, and you can play games together. How does my plan strike you?"

"It strikes me very pleasantly," replied Grandpapa, "and will suit me exactly, for I have to see a man who lives out of town and shall be glad of the company of the youngsters. What do you say, Sam?"

"I think it will be very nice," replied Sam, "and I guess Billy will think so too."

"Suppose we stop at the 'Animal Rescue League' and see how our little dog is getting on," said Grandpapa. [187]

"Can't we take some cakes to him?" asked Sam. "I don't believe he knows it is Christmas."

"Yes, we will take cakes enough to go all around," said Grandpapa.

A little later, Sam and his grandpapa, with a box full of cookies and sweet biscuits, called for Billy. The little blind boy was delighted at the prospect of such a happy day, and he beamed with smiles as his faithful friend Sam led him carefully down the steps to the sleigh, while Mrs. Hanlon, looking just as happy, watched them from the door.

"What have you in that package that you take such care of?" asked Mr. Ledwell, who observed that the little boy carried a package in one hand.

"It is a Christmas present for Jack," replied Billy.

"Why, Grandpapa, we forgot all about him!" exclaimed Sam. "Isn't it too bad?"

"We have cakes enough to spare him a few," replied Grandpapa. [188]

"Of course, I couldn't forget about Jack," said Billy, "because he saved my life, you know."

"The dear little soul has been worrying about what to give Jack for a Christmas present," said Mrs. Hanlon. "He has saved up some of the money you gave him for presents, and I told him I thought Jack would appreciate some nice bones more than anything else. So what does he do but ask the butcher to sell him some of the very nicest bones he had, with plenty of meat on them."

"And what do you think, Sam? When I told him they were for Jack, he wouldn't take any money for them! He said he should like to give something towards a present for the Fire-Dog, because he is such a nice dog."

"You see," said Billy confidentially to Sam, as they drove to the engine-house, "I can make a present to Mrs. Hanlon now, because the butcher wouldn't let me pay for Jack's present. Do you suppose she would mind if it doesn't come just exactly at Christmas?" [189]

"I don't believe she would mind *very much*," replied Sam, who remembered that the Christmas present he so much wanted did not come on time.

"Will you go with me some day and buy something for her, Sam?"

"Yes," replied Sam, "and we will pick out something real nice!"

The Fire-Dog was at home and rejoiced to see them, especially the little blind boy whose life he had saved. He was much gratified too, at the present Billy brought him. One large bone was given him, which he at once took in his mouth and walked off with to eat by himself, a proud and happy dog. The rest of the package was left in Reordan's charge to be given according to his judgment, and a dessert from Sam's box of cakes was added.

There was not time to stop and watch Jack enjoy his repast, as the boys would have liked to do, so they had to leave before he was half through. Jack was very hungry, but he was such a polite dog that he never forgot his good manners, and whenever the boys spoke to him, wagged his tail and smiled, to let them know how much he appreciated the attention. [190]

"You ought to see how he enjoys that bone, Billy," said Sam, as they drove off; and Billy looked just as happy as if he had seen it.

Such a barking as greeted them when they entered the building of the Animal Rescue League! All the dogs who were around came running to see who it was and to find out if another stray dog had been brought in; and among them, barking his loudest, was little Toby, as happy and as much at home as any of them. He recognized his old friends at once, and tried by every means a dog knows, to express his gratitude.

"They act as if they know it is Christmas," said Sam.

"So they do," said the man who had charge of them, "and they are going to have a Christmas-tree just like folks. They do seem to know something is up, they and the cats too. The cats are going around with their tails straight up in the air, and they play with one another just as if they had lost their senses." [191]

"This little boy has brought some cakes for the dogs," said Mr. Ledwell; and Sam presented his box.

"They will come in very handy when they have the tree," replied the man.

Then the visitors were taken over the building and shown all the inmates, even to some big dogs out in the yard. All looked happy and contented, and showed the best of care. Some kittens especially took the children's fancy, and Sam explained to Billy how they looked when they were playing. One was lying on his back, kicking, clawing and biting a worsted ball he had to play with, and another was running sideways with his back arched and his tail fluffed out, as if he were dreadfully frightened at something; while another had pounced upon one of them and made believe he was going to eat him up. The mother of this lively family was pretending to take a nap, but her half-opened eyes and fond and happy purring showed that she was enjoying the romps of her darlings as much as they did themselves. [192]

It was hard for the children to leave this entertaining place, and especially hard to resist the affectionate entreaties of the dogs, who were delighted to see visitors. They had to go, however, for a long drive out of town was before them, and they departed after a while, all the dogs who could reach the windows barking a joyous farewell as they drove off.

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

 [193]

OMEHOW or other on Christmas morning everything takes on a festive, joyous tone. The very sleigh-bells seem to ring out more merrily than usual, and the children's voices in their play seem more joyous than on other days. Even the shy sparrows seem to grow bolder, and twitter more loudly than usual. The dogs, too, seem possessed of unusually gay spirits, and bound through the streets as if they were thinking of the good Christmas dinner that awaits them.

The two little boys in the sleigh felt this Christmas influence and partook of the prevailing joyous spirit. We will leave them for a time and return to some other acquaintances,—the three children who had cared for the lost Toby.

Great was the grief of the children when they saw the little dog turned out into the cold, dark streets, but they did not dare to express their feelings before their father. Directly after supper they went to bed, and the mother soon went in to their rooms to comfort them. The two girls were nearly heart-broken, but the mother reminded them that the little dog would be likely to seek the shed for shelter, and she promised to look after him and give him a good supper. [194]

"He wanted some of the sausages so much," sobbed Maysie, "and I ate up the piece I was saving for him, and I am so sorry!"

"He shall have some sausage, dear, so don't worry so about him. I will cover him up with something warm, and in the morning you can take him to the home for lost dogs. They will find a good place for him, I am sure, a much better one than we could give him."

This hopeful prospect comforted the little girls, and from them the mother sought Johnny in his dark bedroom. He was lying very still, and answered in a voice that he tried to make sound as usual, but the mother knew he was trying hard to make it cheerful. As with a loving hand she put [195]

back the hair from his forehead, she felt it hot, and as her hand brushed against his cheeks she found them moist, and she knew he had been crying, although he tried so hard to conceal the fact.

"Don't fret about the little dog, Johnny," said the kind mother. "He'll be sure to go to the shed where you kept him before, and I'll look after him."

"It was so mean to send him out, and this such a cold night, too!" exclaimed Johnny, indignantly.

"Hush, dear!" said the gentle mother. "You mustn't forget that Father is tired and things worry him. He didn't mean to be unkind."

"It was awfully mean," replied Johnny, "and him such a little fellow, too!"

Then the mother told of her plan to send the little dog to the refuge provided for all homeless animals, and, as she drew the pleasant picture of the home the little wanderer would be sure to find, Johnny allowed himself to be comforted as his sisters had been, and, feeling that Mother would look after the wandering dog, he forgot his anxieties and fell asleep. [196]

We have seen how the mother found the forsaken dog and fed and warmed him, and how he at last found shelter in the very home to which they intended to carry him.

The following morning when the children hastened to the shed they found it empty, and great was their grief. They searched for him for days, of course without avail. Oh, if they could have seen the little creature in the happy home he had found!

On Christmas morning they were almost wild with delight at the presents kind Mrs. Ledwell had sent them. As for Maysie, she could hardly believe that she was the owner of such a beautiful doll, and she handled it with great awe.

"I really believe that Santa Claus heard what I said!" exclaimed Maysie. "You know the lady said he had very sharp ears." [197]

The big turkey, too, gave the children almost as much pleasure, and they crowded around the mother while she cleaned it, and singed off the pin-feathers by holding it over a piece of burning newspaper. They had to see it safely stowed away in the oven, too; such a large, handsome turkey had never come their way before.

"Now you had better all go and take a walk in the streets where the nice houses are," said Mother. "The windows will be all trimmed up with wreaths and garlands, and perhaps you will get a sight of some Christmas-trees, for people often have them Christmas Eve."

The mother thought it as well to get the children out of the way for a while, for she did not have a Christmas dinner to cook every day, and she wanted to do full justice to all the good things sent them; and how could she do this with three curious children following her about and getting under foot at every step? [198]

So the three started, Hannah wearing her new chatelaine bag in a position in which she decided it would show to the greatest advantage, Johnny proudly drawing his new sled after him, and Maysie with her doll perched on her arm in a position to show off her beautiful clothes and at the same time take in the sights. The lost dog was not forgotten, and at every step they were on the lookout, hoping to catch a glimpse of him at any moment.

Their way led by the engine-house, in front of which lay the Fire-Dog, finishing one of the large bones that the blind boy had brought him for a Christmas present. They stopped to pat him and to look at a flock of pigeons feeding there. They watched the large blue pigeon, Dick the Scrapper, who walked in among them snapping up the best morsels and pecking any of the pigeons who came in his way. They noticed, too, the handsome white squab, so strong and yet so mild-looking; but the one that pleased them most of all was the lame black and white pigeon. He was so tame that he ate out of their hands and even allowed them to stroke his feathers. [199]

The lame pigeon soon began to act in a very strange manner. He would fly a few steps, and then look back at the children as if he expected them to follow him. This he did so many times the children were certain this was what he wanted. So they followed, and as soon as the little lame pigeon saw this he flew off again, waiting for them to overtake him. This was kept up until the children found themselves in a part of the city where they had never before been.

"We mustn't go any farther," said Hannah, "or we shall be late for dinner, and Mother will be anxious."

"I am very hungry," said Maysie, as visions of the beautiful turkey roasting in the oven rose before her mind, "and my feet are very tired too."

"It can't be much farther," said Johnny, "and I am certain that the little pigeon wants something. You just sit on my sled, Maysie, and I'll give you a ride." [200]

This plan was very agreeable to Maysie, and she seated herself on the sled with her doll in her lap, while her brother and sister drew her over the snow.

They had not much farther to go. To their surprise the lame pigeon turned in at a driveway and flew toward a large brick building enclosed by high walls.

"What can it mean?" said Hannah. Perhaps the little lame pigeon didn't mean anything, after all.

But the little lame pigeon did mean something. He had recognized the children as the ones who took little Billy home when his mother had fallen in the street, and he had taken this means to induce them to follow him and discover the sick woman at one of the windows of the hospital. With a noisy fluttering of his wings he flew up to one of the windows and alighted on the sill. A pale, sick-looking woman was seated in a chair close to the window, and the children saw a nurse come to the window and open it. In hopped the little lame pigeon and alighted on an arm of the sick woman's chair. [201]

"Why, Johnny!" exclaimed Hannah. "Do you mind the face of the sick woman up there? It is blind Billy's mother."

"How do you know it is?" asked Johnny. "You never saw her but the once."

"I know that, but I minded her hair, because it is just like Billy's, so soft and curly, and she looks just the way Billy's mother looked."

"Perhaps they brought her here because it is a place where they put sick people," said Johnny, who was convinced by his sister's positive manner.

"Now, if we only knew where Billy is, it would be all right," said Hannah.

"Perhaps she has found him," said Johnny.

"I don't believe she has, because she would look happy, and just see the sad look of her!"

The sick woman did indeed present a forlorn appearance, even the children's young eyes could detect that, as she sat with her head laid against the back of the chair, stroking the feathers of the little pigeon. [202]

They stood looking up at the window for some time, and gazing curiously at the large building before them.

"I suppose it is full of sick people," said Johnny.

"I wonder if there are any little children there!" said Hannah. "Do you suppose the sick people know it is Christmas Day?"

This reminded Maysie of the Christmas dinner cooking at home, and she exclaimed:

"I am just as hungry as I can be, and I know it is ever so long after dinner-time."

The other two children now became aware of the fact that they were hungry too, and, fearing to be late to dinner, they set off on a run toward home, with Maysie on the sled. Before they had gone far, they heard the jingle of sleigh-bells and the voices of children coming up behind them, and seeing a large sleigh and pair of horses in the road, they drew the sled to one side to allow it to pass. [203]

In the sleigh sat a gentleman and two little boys. The children at once recognized the pleasant face of the gentleman. He was the one who had bought the cakes for Maysie. It would have been strange if they had not recognized him, for where was there another such sweet-tempered, happy countenance, and who else possessed such a pleasant, genial voice? So intent were they in watching the gentleman that they did not look at the two boys who were with him until just as the sleigh, which went slowly, was opposite them, they caught a glimpse of the little blind boy.

"Billy! Oh, Billy! Is that you?" screamed the two elder children in one breath.

"Stop!" called Mr. Ledwell to the driver, and the sleigh stopped in front of the children.

The blind boy had heard their voices, and recognized them with the quick perception that the blind possess. He turned quite pale with excitement, and stood up in the sleigh. [204]

"Where are you?" he cried, feeling about him with outstretched hands.

"Here we are," said Hannah, coming close to the sleigh. "The three of us are here. Oh, Billy, we didn't know what had become of you and we were awfully sorry."

"And your mother is over in that big house yonder!" exclaimed Johnny, excitedly. "We saw her sitting up at the window, and she looks awful sick!"

"Oh, Mother! Mother!" screamed Billy, struggling to free himself from the fur robe in order to get out of the sleigh. "Please, Mr. Ledwell, let me go to my mother! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" and the poor child, feeling his utter helplessness, sank back upon his seat and burst into tears.

"Try to compose yourself, Billy," said Mr. Ledwell, kindly, "and we will find out all about it, and if your mother is really here you shall be taken to her at once." [205]

He then questioned the children, who told him about the lame pigeon who made them follow him, and who flew up to a window of the big house where they saw Billy's mother.

"I am sure it was Billy's mother," said Hannah, positively, "because I minded her hair and the

look of her face."

Mr. Ledwell turned back, and going in to the hospital made inquiries concerning the sick woman the children had seen at the window. They were not mistaken, and in a few minutes Billy was in his mother's arms.

After the excitement of the meeting had passed, Billy told his mother all that had happened since the dreadful day when she was taken away from him. He told of the kind children who had given him all they had to give, a shelter and what food they could spare, and how Jack the Fire-Dog saved his life. He told, too, about the kind-hearted firemen and his life at the engine-house, and about Sam and his grandpapa and the comfortable home he now had.

[206]

The poor woman could not find words to thank the kind gentleman who had done so much for her blind son, and when she tried to express her gratitude to him, he told her the best way to do it was to get well as fast as possible and come and live with her son.

"I am anxious to find work, so that I can take care of him," said the sick woman. "As soon as I am well I am sure I can find something to do."

"The first thing to be done is to get strong," said Mr. Ledwell, "and then we will think about working. I propose that as soon as you are well enough you go to Billy, where you can have the best of care. You will improve much faster there than you can here, surrounded by sickness and suffering."

The patient was pronounced not able to leave the hospital just then, but was promised that she should go so soon as it was deemed prudent.

So Billy took leave of his mother, happy at the promise of a visit the next day. They found Sam with the three children seated in the sleigh, and the new sled tied to one of the runners.

[207]

"I thought we had better take the children home, because they were afraid they would be late to their Christmas dinner," Sam explained. "Do you think they will crowd you very much, Grandpapa? We will squeeze as close together as we can, and Maysie is almost a baby, you know."

"I shouldn't mind a little crowding on Christmas Day," said Grandpapa. "Here, Baby, you can sit in my lap."

"I am as big as Johnny," replied Maysie, who was ambitious to be considered big.

Sam looked just as happy as Billy, thinking that the little blind boy had found his mother. He sat silent for some time, and his grandpapa, seeing his thoughtful, happy face, said,—

"Well, Sam, what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking how glad I am that Billy has found his mother," he replied, "and I guess God thought He'd send this Christmas present because He didn't find time to send the one I asked for."

[208]

So Sam's Christmas turned out to be a much happier one than he had thought it was going to be, and the three children who had helped bring about this happy state of affairs reached home just as the big turkey was taken out of the oven.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH

[209]



It is some time since we have heard from the engine-house, and a change has taken place since we last looked in. The off horse was quite old, and the headlong speed at which the horses were obliged to go whenever an alarm was sounded, began to tell heavily on him. He was an ambitious fellow, and strained every nerve to keep pace with his mates and do his share of the work, but he was a tired horse when the scene of the fire was reached, and soon an order came for the off horse to give up his place to a younger and stronger one.

This order filled the kind hearts of the company with sorrow, for old Jim was a great favorite. When the news reached them, there was silence for a while, then warm-hearted Reordan burst out impetuously,—

[210]

"If old Jim goes, I go too. There isn't one of us that has done his work faithfuller than old Jim has!"

"That's so, he's done his duty right slap up. What would the others be without old Jim, I'd like to know? They always take their cue from him," said another.

"I've always made it as easy as I could for old Jim," said the driver, "and have done my best to make the other two do their share of the work; but the knowing old fellow won't have it, and isn't satisfied unless his nose is just a grain ahead of the others, so he can feel he is doing his share and a little more."

"He's acted just like a Christian," said another, "and if we do our duty as well as old Jim has done his, we sha'n't have anything to answer for."

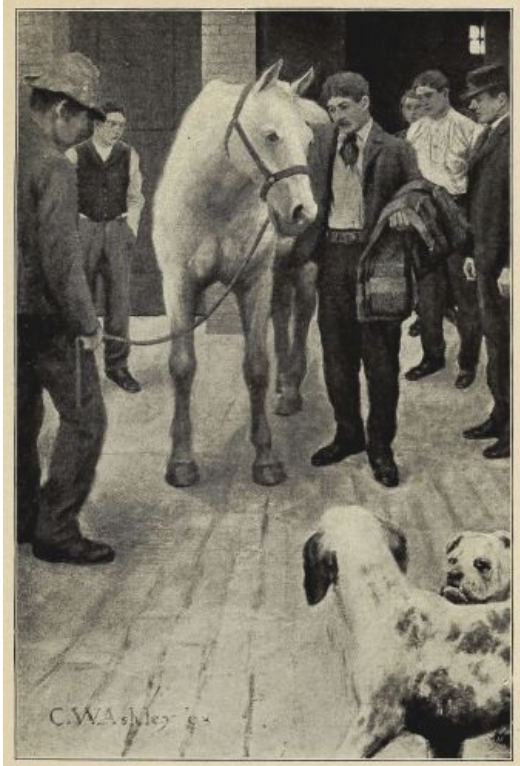
"Get rid of him!" exclaimed a young man. "A nice return to make for his faithful service! It makes me sick to think how horses are turned off when they begin to lose their usefulness! Just think of old Jim sold to some old junk pedler or such, and being starved and beaten after all the good work he has done! It wouldn't break the Fire Department to pension him, and they ought to do it!"

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"They *ought* to, but whether they *will* is another thing," said Reordan. "They will say that they can't afford to pension off all the old horses in the department."

"Well, if they can't afford it, *we* can," replied the young man. "What do you say to starting a fund for old Jim's support, and boarding him out for the rest of his life?"

What could they say, but one thing, for courage and generosity go hand in hand, and to men who daily risk their lives to save those of others, as do our brave firemen, a dollar doesn't look so big as it does to smaller natures.



After this decision the hearts of all were lightened, but parting with their old friend came hard.

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"Let's get him out of the way before the new horse comes," said Reordan. "It would hurt his feelings to see a new horse in the stall that has been his for so long."

The others felt as Reordan did, and just before the new horse arrived, old Jim came out of his stall for the last time. The intelligent creature turned his eyes on the men gathered to bid him farewell, and rubbed his nose affectionately against the shoulders of those who stood nearest him.

"He knows he's being sent off just as well as we do," said one, "and he's trying to say good-bye to us."

He certainly did know it, for his large, mild eyes had the sorrowful look that all dumb creatures have at leaving old friends.

"He looks kind of reproachful," said one, "just as if he thought we hadn't appreciated the good work he's done for us."

The men had bought a warm blanket for the old horse, knowing that he was going to a country stable which was not so warm as his stall in the engine-house. This was buckled on him, and he was led away. At the door he hesitated a moment, and looked back

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at his old home; then, with drooping head, he left for his new quarters.

"Be good to him," said the captain to the man who had come to take the old horse to his new home. "The best you've got isn't any too good for old Jim."

"We'll take good care of him," replied the man. "You don't need to worry about him."

They watched the old horse so long as he was in sight, and nothing was said for some time. Then Reordan spoke,—

"Well, it's a comfort to think we've done the best we could for the old horse. He'll have plenty to eat and a good place to sleep in, and he will have as comfortable an old age as we can give him."

Jack the Fire-Dog had, of course, known what was going on, and his heart was every bit as sad as the men's.

"I suppose I'm a fool to feel so bad about it," he confided to his friend Boxer, "but I can't help it. We've been to a good many fires together, first and last, old Jim and I. My turn will come next, I suppose. I'm not so young as I once was, and old dogs are in the way."

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Such remarks as these had a most depressing effect upon his friend Boxer, for there is no dog more attached to his friends and more sympathetic than a bull-dog, although he is so reserved that he does not find it easy to express his feelings.

Boxer pondered over the situation, and the more he thought about it the more convinced he became that something *must* be done. He was on hand when the old engine-horse was taken away from the home that had been his for so long, and, as he looked at his friend Jack's mournful face and heard him softly crying to himself, Boxer could bear it no longer.

"It is true that they will be sending him away next," he muttered to himself; and as his indignation increased he cast his eyes about for something upon which to vent his anger. The

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man leading old Jim away caught his attention, and without stopping to consider the justice of his act, in true bull-dog fashion he rushed after them and seized the man by the leg of his trousers.

A commotion at once arose. Old Jim, startled at the sudden attack, started back, twitching the halter-rope out of the man's hand, while the man struggled to free his leg from the bull-dog's grip.

A bull-dog's grip is a very peculiar thing. When he becomes excited, his jaws, which are very strong and formed differently from those of other dogs, become tightly locked. A spasm of the jaw seizes him, and it is impossible for him to unlock them himself until the spasm has passed. So Boxer held on, with his eyes set and his feet braced.

Now that old Jim was free, he stood still and looked on to see how the affair was coming out. He was not the only spectator, for quite a crowd collected at once. Varied was the advice given to make the bull-dog loose his grip, and poor Boxer would have been roughly handled had not Reordan seen the commotion and run to the spot. In a twinkling he had out a sulphur match, and, lighting it, held it as near the dog's nose as he could without burning it. [216]

The suffocating fumes of the sulphur match did their work, and Boxer gasped for breath. Thus his jaws were unlocked, and the man was freed. After such an excitement a dog always feels weak and shaky, and Boxer returned to his friend Jack with drooping tail and unsteady legs.

"Well, I never before saw a bull-dog made to quit his hold that way," said one of the on-lookers.

"It's the best way," replied Reordan. "It's a bull-dog's nature to hold on when once he gets started, and he doesn't know how to stop. There's no use pounding him to make him let go. He simply can't do it till the spasm in his jaw lets up, and I don't know any better way to bring it about than this."

"What did he tackle me for, anyway?" asked the man. "I didn't do anything to him, and the first thing I knew he grabbed me by the leg." [217]

"He probably thought you didn't have any business to take the horse off. He hangs round the engine-house a good deal;" and Reordan stroked old Jim's nose, for the old horse had come up behind him and put his head over his shoulder.

"Well, if my trousers stood that, I guess they'll stand all the work I'll give 'em for quite a spell," said the farmer good-naturedly, as he took Jim's halter and started for home. "Say," he added, as he saw Reordan's eyes resting sadly on old Jim, "don't you worry about the horse. I'll look after him all right."

This assurance lightened Reordan's heart, and he returned to the engine-house feeling that the best had been done for old Jim that could be done.

The new off-horse arrived that day,—a fine young gray, with all the restless life that only a young creature possesses. He was a superb fellow, and he knew it, judging from the proud way in which he carried himself. He was so full of life that he couldn't bring himself to walk sedately, but entered the engine-house with a springy step that showed his colt days were not far behind him. When he was brought to a stand-still, he pawed the floor in an impatient manner, as if he demanded instant attention. [218]

"Do they expect that colt to take the place of old Jim?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, he'll learn the whole business in a short time," replied the man who brought him. "He's very intelligent."

"Well, if the department don't mind laying out their money in repairs, I don't doubt he'll learn in time, but I don't like the look of his eye," said the driver.

"What's the matter with his eye?" demanded the man.

"It's a skittish eye," replied the driver,— "shows too much of the white to suit me."

"I'd be willing to pay for all the machines he smashes," replied the man; but the driver did not change his mind. [219]

The new off-horse took possession of old Jim's stall as if it were his by right, and made himself at home immediately. He was very intelligent, it is true, and he learned his duties very soon, but still his youth was against him. He started off with the engine as if the whole thing were great sport and gotten up especially for his entertainment; and if the other two horses had not kept him back, there would have been a runaway engine the very first time he was taken out. He enjoyed *going* to a fire of all things, because he could use his strong muscles and let off some of the young life he didn't know what to do with, but he didn't like coming back. The other two horses were quite ready to go home at a gentle trot, but not so the new horse; and as they lumbered along he felt that it devolved upon him to give a little style to the team. He certainly did it, and many turned to watch the fine knee action and spirited bearing of the new engine-horse.

One day his youthful spirits got the better of the new horse. The department was called out to a fire in the business section of the city, and Engine 33 left the engine-house in a mad rush at full speed, as usual. When about half-way down the slope of the hill, a man on a bicycle came suddenly around the corner from a side street. The new horse was taken by surprise and shied badly. All the movements of such a powerful young horse are vigorous, and the engine was [220]

thrown against a lamp-post and wrecked.

When the chief heard of the accident, he remembered the dog who always ran in front of the engine, and he at once said that the dog was the cause of the accident and that they must get rid of him. "It is enough to make any horse shy to have a dog getting under his feet," he said.

It was in vain for the firemen to explain that Jack had nothing whatever to do with the accident; the chief refused to be convinced.

The order concerning Jack, however, was not obeyed, for how could they part with their old friend Jack? [221]

The driver was right in his opinion of the new horse. He certainly *was* skittish, and before long a second accident came. This time the order to get rid of Jack must be obeyed, and the question arose what to do with him.

Mr. Ledwell being the kind of man to whom everybody in trouble appealed, Reordan at once sought him and told him the story. "We can't have old Jack killed," he said, "because he is one of us!"

"Of course you can't," replied Mr. Ledwell, "we must find a good home for him."

"You see, sir, Jack has been in the business so many years he wouldn't feel at home anywhere except in an engine-house, and if we gave him to any other company the chief would find it out, and 'twould be just as bad. I don't see what we can do. The poor fellow would grieve himself to death if he wasn't in the Fire Department."

"And so he shall be," replied Mr. Ledwell, heartily. "There is an engine in the town where I live in the summer, and I'll write and ask them to take Jack. They will be sure to do it." [222]

Reordan's face brightened. "It would be very kind of you, sir, and just like you. After Jack got used to it, he'd be sure to feel at home, and the men couldn't help liking him."

"Of course they will," replied Mr. Ledwell, "and we shall look after him too. Sam will make it his special business to see that he is well cared for."

So Jack's fate was settled, and, with a heart even sadder at parting than were those of the firemen, he was taken to his new home. Boxer was quite desperate in his grief, and wanted to make an assault on every one at once and settle the matter in that way; but gentle-hearted Jack accepted his fate with the same fortitude that had led him to follow through the thickest of the fire the fortunes of the firemen he so loved.

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

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JACK'S new home was in a sea-coast town about an hour's journey by rail. A baggage car does not afford much opportunity for seeing the country. Even if it did, Jack was not in a mood to enjoy it, for if ever there were a homesick dog, Jack was one. When the train stopped at Seaport and Jack was released, the wind was blowing fresh from the ocean, and the sun was shining brightly.

When Nature does her best to make things bright for us, we feel her cheery influence. So it was with Jack, and he began to look about him with some interest. The engine-house which was to be Jack's future home was situated in the centre of the town. It was a small wooden structure, very unlike the fine brick building where Jack had lived so long. The men received him kindly and with interest, for Mr. Ledwell had written a glowing account of Jack's sagacity and usefulness, but Jack did not feel happy. How could a dog of his years and experience be expected to feel at home in a new place and among new people? [224]

Jack showed his gratitude in his dog's way for all the kindness shown him, but his occupation was gone. He never ran with the engine again, for he couldn't go with his old company. In vain the men tried to induce him to follow. He resisted every invitation, and watched the engine start for a fire with perfect indifference.

"He is only homesick. He will be all right when he gets used to us," the men said; but they were mistaken. The faithful dog, who had stood by the company of Engine 33 so long and valiantly, lost all his interest in the Fire Department. When an alarm sounded, he would sometimes start to his feet from force of habit, but his interest went no further. He would sit and watch the engine leave without manifesting the slightest concern. [225]

When this account of Jack reached the ears of his old friends of Company 33, they could hardly believe it, for they had supposed that he would feel at home in an engine-house. If he had been a young dog, he probably would have adapted himself quickly to the change, but the saying "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" is true in most cases.

One day one of the engine men of the town of Seaport went to the city, and, in order to see what would come of it, took Jack with him. As they neared the engine-house which had been

Jack's home for so many years, a change came over him as he recognized familiar objects. His ears were pricked, his tail no longer drooped, and he hurried along at a rapid pace. When he reached the engine-house, he turned in at the entrance and ran upstairs as if he had never been away. The day with his old friends was a happy one, and Jack seemed as contented and as much at home as of old. The subject of his not caring to follow the engine was talked over, and one of the men, in order to try him, went below and sounded the alarm. In an instant Jack was on his way downstairs in the old way, and when they saw his disappointment at the trick played upon him, they were sorry for him, for it made them understand how much the Fire-Dog grieved for his old home.

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After this visit Jack seemed more reconciled to his new surroundings. He soon made the acquaintance of all the children in town, and endeared himself to them by his gentle and affectionate ways. They began to bring him the things dogs are known to relish, as the children who lived near his old home used to do. Surrounded by so much kindness, no dog could have been unhappy, and Jack gradually became accustomed to his new life. It is true the excitement of running with the engine was no longer his, but other pleasures came into his life. Before long he became known to all the townspeople, and they began to tell anecdotes of his sagacity.

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Mr. Ledwell, who felt a pity for the faithful dog who was banished from his old home, ordered the butcher in Seaport to furnish the Fire-Dog with bones, and every morning at the same hour Jack walked sedately to the butcher's shop and got his bone. So it became a standing joke that old Jack had an account at the butcher's.

After his visit to the city, when Jack was beginning to cultivate the social side of his nature by making and receiving calls, which he had little time to do in the busy life at the city engine-house, he made the acquaintance of a very affable young dog who greatly pleased him. So much did he enjoy the new friendship that he went to the greatest length a dog can go in the way of friendship,—he showed him the place where he buried his bones and treated him to a generous supply. The new acquaintance, however, proved to be unworthy of the trust reposed in him, and went secretly to the spot and helped himself.

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When the Fire-Dog discovered that the new friend had taken this mean advantage of his generosity, he at once cut his acquaintance. When they met, as they frequently did, the Fire-Dog always looked straight ahead as if he didn't see him at all. This course of behavior was very humiliating to the culprit, and he felt the disgrace much more than any other course Jack could have pursued, for nothing humiliates a human being or an animal so much as to be ignored.

Now that Jack was no longer a business dog, it was astonishing how much time he found in which to amuse himself. He had in the old days, as we have seen, found no time to indulge in the social pleasures in which dogs take so much delight, such as running the streets and calling on dog friends. The only pleasures he then had were the visits of the children who lived near the engine-house, an occasional call from Boxer, or a chance meeting with some dog passing through the city. As we have seen, he had not been popular with the dogs of his neighborhood, on account of the jealousy his important position excited in them. Now that he had retired to private life, this objection was removed, and the Fire-Dog's loving and amiable nature made him a host of friends among his kind.

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There were certain houses where Jack made daily calls. He went with great regularity to these houses, as if he felt the care of them and must see that everything was going on in a satisfactory manner. He always took up his position on the door-steps or piazza and waited patiently until some one invited him to enter. If nobody happened to notice that he was there, it seemed to make no difference to Jack. He would wait a reasonable time, and then take his leave, calling at the next house on his list.

Still another pleasure fell to Jack's lot. He all at once took up the habit of going to church, and every Sunday Jack was to be seen at one of the churches in Seaport. He slipped in quietly and took a modest position in the back part of the church, where he was in nobody's way. He sat very still through the service, usually taking short naps during the sermon, but he was always wide awake and attentive during the singing, which apparently afforded him great enjoyment. He went to one church after another, as if testing them to see which suited his taste the best, and finally settled upon the Methodist, attending services with great regularity. It was supposed to be the character of the music which made Jack choose this denomination, for the cheerful, hopeful vein that pervades the Methodist hymns seemed to be particularly acceptable to him.

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This church-going habit was, of course, no objection, as the intelligent dog made no disturbance during service, and went and came with the greatest propriety. Before long, however, the children in the congregation discovered that Jack was a regular attendant at church, and from that time there was a craning of necks to obtain a look at the Fire-Dog, and whispered questions and other signs which showed that the young members of the congregation were more intent upon watching Jack than they were upon the service. When this state of affairs became apparent, word was sent to the engine-house that Jack must be kept at home on Sunday. So the following Sunday Jack was locked up in the engine-house, and a miserable morning he passed, softly whining to himself when he heard the church-bells summoning the congregation.

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The next Sunday morning when the firemen looked for Jack to shut him up, the Fire-Dog was nowhere to be found. In vain they hunted and called; there was no response. But Jack attended services that morning at the Baptist Church. The following Saturday night Jack was secured, and he passed the next day locked up in the engine-house, a very unhappy dog; and the firemen

thought they had at last found a way to keep the Fire-Dog away from church, by securing him on Saturday night. They were mistaken, however, for the next Saturday night not a trace was to be found of knowing Jack. The next morning he slipped into the Universalist Church as the swinging door was opened by a tardy arrival, and he took up his old position in the corner. He was one of the first to pass out of the open doors when the service was ended, and very few knew of his presence.

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After this, the firemen decided it was not much use to attempt to keep Jack from attending church, so they let matters take their course; and as he went sometimes to one and sometimes to another of the churches, no further complaints were made. If he succeeded in slipping in when some one was entering, he took advantage of the chance and entered; but if no such opportunity offered, he seated himself outside where he could hear the singing. When the congregation came out, he joined them and walked sedately home.

After Jack's departure, his old friend Boxer grieved for him long, and seemed to take comfort in visiting the Fire-Dog's old home. He passed a great part of his time there, watching the men and the horses, and gradually came to be there most of the time. He seemed to feel it his duty to guard the property, and sat for hours in front of the house, watching the pigeons and sparrows when they came for the food that was regularly thrown out to them.

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Here Boxer's duty ended. He was observed to watch the engine start off to a fire with great interest, bustling about while the hurried preparations were going on, and barking himself hoarse with excitement as the horses dashed out of the engine-house and disappeared down the hill. He watched them with longing eyes, but could never be induced to follow them, much as he seemed to long to do it. The men concluded that he considered this had been his friend Jack's privilege, and that he was too loyal to his old friend to usurp his rights.

Boxer also took great pleasure in the visits of the children who still came to the engine-house, and they soon became very fond of him, although at first the youngest among them were rather afraid of his big mouth and rather savage expression. Among his visitors were Sam and Billy, and many choice morsels of food he received from their hands.

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So we see that although he did not take the Fire-Dog's place, he had a place of his own in the hearts of the firemen and the young visitors who came so often to the engine-house.

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH

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BILLY'S mother was soon well enough to be taken to Mrs. Hanlon's pleasant home, and, surrounded by the comforts that kind woman knew so well how to give, she improved rapidly in health and spirits. The happiness of being once more with her blind boy did more than anything else to restore her lost health, for, although but a short time had elapsed since she awoke to consciousness after her severe illness and learned that she was separated from her boy, the anxiety and grief of her loss had delayed her recovery.

Her eyes now followed his every movement and change of expression, and again and again Billy had to repeat the story of his experiences. Sam continued to come every day to visit his friend, and the gay spirits and energy he brought with him helped the sick woman on the road to health. He often brought news of the Fire-Dog, too, and of Boxer, who had established himself at the engine-house. He told them also about the pigeons, the sparrows, the lively chickadees, and the other winter inhabitants of the park, and Billy's mother was just as interested in them all as Billy himself was.

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She could tell beautiful stories, too, of the time when she was a little girl and lived on a big farm. Sam never wearied of hearing about the calves and sheep and the clumsy oxen, who are so intelligent, although their minds work so slowly. Billy's mother, too, knew how to draw pictures of all the animals she told them about; and although Billy couldn't see them, Sam could, and it made Billy very happy to know that his mother could do something to give pleasure to the little friend who had done so much for him.

"If I only could *see*, I think I could draw things," Billy said one day, "because I know just how they ought to go."

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"Do you think you could draw Jack?" asked Sam.

"I think I could," replied Billy, "because my hands know how he looks."

"Take a pencil and see how good a picture you can make," said his mother.

So Billy made a picture of the Fire-Dog, as he thought he looked, and, considering that he was blind and had never been taught to use a pencil, he did very well.

"It looks just like Jack, all but the spots," said Sam, "but of course you couldn't make them because you couldn't see them. I'll paint them in for you."

After this, Billy began to make pictures of the things he could pass his hands over, and it helped many an hour to pass pleasantly.

Soon came a time when the oculist whom Mr. Ledwell had consulted about Billy's eyes decided that the boy's health was now sufficiently established to make it safe to operate. So Billy was put to sleep and the operation performed, but for many days afterwards he had to be kept in a dark room. Without his mother to sit by him and take care of him, this would have been a trying time for Billy; but with her by his side he was perfectly contented to wait patiently for the time to come when he should be like the seeing children.

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All this time Sam was not allowed to see the blind boy, and the time seemed very long to him. He had many boy playmates, but not one of them was so dear to him as the little blind boy to whom he had so patiently loaned his eyes. He was persuaded at last to try his new dog-cart, for by this time the snow had disappeared, and his black pony with the star on his forehead had been brought in from the country. There was a new russet harness, too, that became the pony beautifully, and Sam was allowed to drive alone in the park behind the big carriage, for the pony was gentle and Sam a good driver.

At last came a day when Sam was told he could visit Billy, and he was in a state of great excitement. "Do you suppose Billy can see yet?" he asked his grandmamma.

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"You must find out and tell me about it when you come back," replied Grandmamma; and Sam thought she looked just as she always did when she had a pleasant surprise for him.

So off Sam started, and he hurried along at such a pace that Mary had to almost run to keep up with him. As they approached the house, there stood Billy at the parlor window, looking out from among the plants. As Sam approached, he noticed that the blind boy did not stand still with the patient look on his face and his eyes looking straight ahead in the old way. His eyes followed Sam's movements with an eager expression, as those look who are not quite sure they recognize a friend. As Sam ran up the steps, however, the blind boy's face grew brighter, as if he were now sure Sam was the one he thought he was.

"Billy can see! Billy can see!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I am sure he can, Mary! Didn't you see him look right at me and kind of smile?" and he burst into the house and into the parlor.

As Sam entered, Billy was standing in the middle of the room quite pale from excitement, but he didn't say a word. He only looked at Sam very earnestly, at his bright eyes and rosy cheeks and his sturdy figure. He always before seemed so glad to see Sam and greeted him so affectionately that Sam didn't know what to think of the change in Billy's manner, which was shy, as if a strange boy had come to see him.

"You can see now, can't you, Billy?" asked Sam.

"Yes," replied Billy.

"Aren't you glad you can see?" asked Sam; for he was disappointed to find that Billy did not express more joy at seeing him, when he himself was so glad for Billy. "Didn't you know me when you saw me?"

"I thought perhaps it was you, but I wasn't sure," replied Billy.

"I should think you'd be as glad as anything, now that you can see," said Sam.

Billy's mother, who had seen the meeting between the two children, thought it time to explain matters to Sam.

"You see, Sam," she said, "everything is so new to Billy that he must become accustomed to seeing."

"He always used to know me just as soon as I came," replied Sam, "and now he acts as if he didn't know me at all."

"He knew you by your step and your voice," replied Billy's mother, "but he didn't know how you really looked before. His mind made a picture of you, but it was so different from the real *you* that he must get used to the new one."

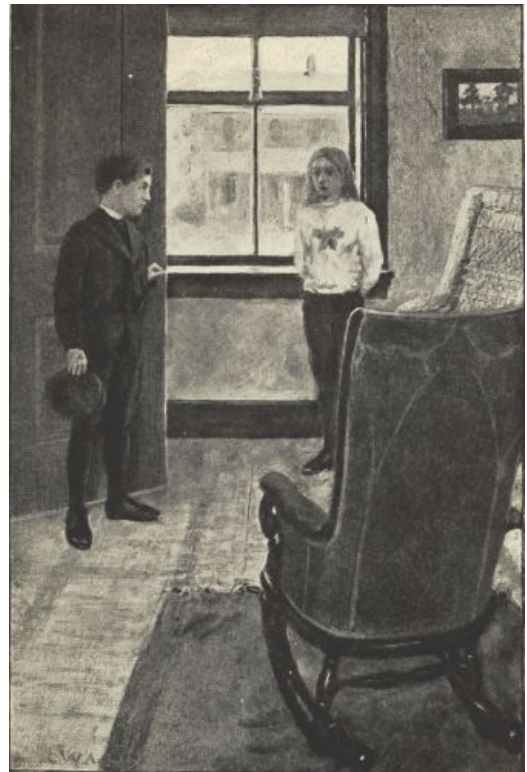
Sam understood now why Billy had looked at him as if he did not know him. "Of course he didn't know me, because he had never *seen* me before," he said. "I wonder what sort of a looking fellow he thought I was. What color did you think my eyes were, Billy?"

"I don't know what seeing people call it," replied Billy.

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"You see, he will have to learn the names of the colors and a great many other things, too," explained Billy's mother.

"I should think he would know them," said Sam. "Anne is only four years old, and she has



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known them ever so long.”

“Your little sister can see, you know,” said Billy’s mother.

“I suppose it makes a difference,” said Sam. “He’ll soon learn, though, won’t he?”

A new world was opened to Billy, and there were a great many things besides the names of colors for him to learn. Everything about him seemed so wonderful! The beauty about us, which those who are gifted with sight take as a matter of course, filled this newly awakened soul with wonder and admiration. The blue sky and the trees, whose buds were now bursting into their new life, the birds, and the blossoming plants in the parlor window, were a source of constant delight to him. His greatest pleasure was in drawing the objects that most pleased him. These were so well done that Mr. Ledwell gave him a box of paints, and the boy was so happy in this new work it was hard to get him to leave it long enough to take the exercise he so much needed. [243]

“I want to see Billy as sturdy as Sam,” Mr. Ledwell said to his mother. “He must go to school and play with other boys, or we shall have a girl-boy, which we don’t want. There is nothing that makes a boy so independent as roughing it with other boys.”

“I am afraid they will ridicule him for being different from them,” said Billy’s mother. “You know he has been kept from other children on account of his blindness.”

“I know it, and that is why he needs the companionship of other boys,” said Mr. Ledwell.

“But boys are so rough, and sometimes they are unkind to sensitive boys like Billy.”

“Boys are not unkind as a general thing; they are only thoughtless. Billy will become over-sensitive if you keep him tied to your apron-strings. He will have to meet all kinds of people, you know.” [244]

So one morning Billy was sent to school with Sam, who called for him. As Billy’s mother, standing at the open door, watched the two boys start off together, the contrast between them was very marked, and she felt that Mr. Ledwell’s advice was of the very best. Billy, with the blue glasses that he was obliged to wear when out of doors, his blond hair falling in curly rings about his delicate face, which was radiant with smiles because he was at last going to a “seeing school” like other boys, did indeed have the air of a boy who has not mingled with other boys.

Sam trudged along on the outside of the sidewalk, his strong, sturdy figure in striking contrast to Billy’s slender one. Billy’s mother watched them so long as they were in sight. Then she slowly entered the house, saying to herself,—

“Poor boy, what a hard time he will have before he gets to be like other boys!” [245]

Meanwhile, the two boys went on, Sam feeling very important to be entrusted with the care of Billy, and chatting all the way about his school-life. His grandmother had sent Mary with him, fearing the two boys would be careless in crossing the streets, but Sam’s dignity was hurt at this precaution.

“I am not a baby, Mary, to have a nurse tagging around after me,” he said, as soon as he was out of sight of his grandmother’s window, “so you can just go back again.”

This Mary did not dare do, as she had directions to keep with the boys; so after a serious conversation between her and her independent charge, they compromised matters in this way: Mary was to be allowed to follow at a respectful distance on the opposite sidewalk, provided she would not attempt to speak to Sam or make any sign to show that she had any connection with him. In this way Mary could keep an eye on her two charges and be on hand if her services were required. Sam threw occasional side glances in Mary’s direction to see if she were keeping the contract faithfully. [246]

The two boys proceeded on their way for some time, Sam using great caution in piloting his friend across the streets, for Billy was afraid of being run over by the teams and carriages which were so constantly coming. The city sights were so new to the poor child, it was hard for him to calculate how long it would take for the teams he saw coming their way to reach them. This gave him a timid, undecided air, and Sam would often say when Billy stopped, fearing to cross, “Come along, Billy, there’s plenty of time to get over.” At this Billy would gain courage and start, but he always reached the other side before Sam did.

“Whatever you do, Billy, don’t ever stop half-way across and run back again,” Sam said, when Billy had been particularly nervous. “If you do, you’ll be sure to be run over, because the drivers don’t know what you are going to do. It would be better to stand still and let them turn out for you. They won’t run over you if you stand still.” And Billy, who thought Sam knew all about such things, promised to take his advice. [247]

At the next corner they met a group of older boys on their way to school. They were in the mood to find amusement in anything that came their way, and as soon as they caught sight of the two little boys, one of their number called out, “Hullo, Blue Glasses!”

The color came into Billy’s cheeks, and Sam looked very defiant.

“Trying to be a girl? Look at his nice curls! Ain’t they sweet?” said another.

“What’s your name, Sissy?” called the largest of the group, a boy several years older than the

two little boys. At the same time he took hold of Billy and made him stop. "What's your name, I say!"

The slight and sensitive Billy, tightly held by the larger and stronger boy, was about to reply meekly, when Sam called out, "Don't you tell him your name! It's none of his business what your name is!" [248]

"Oh, it isn't, is it! He shall tell me his name and you shall tell me yours, too, and tell it first;" and letting Billy go, he seized Sam by the collar. "Come, out with it! Now what is it?"

"It's none of your business," replied Sam, stoutly, struggling to free himself from the strong grasp of the boy.

"Come, let the little fellow alone," said one of his companions.

"He's got to answer my question first. Come, youngster, what's your name?" and he gave him a shake as he spoke.

"You let me alone!" cried Sam, who was working himself into a very excited state, and trying his best to free himself. "You just wait until I get hold of you!"

Billy had been standing helplessly by, wanting to assist Sam, but not knowing how to do it. At last, when he saw his best friend struggling in the grasp of the big boy, he suddenly became desperate, and, throwing down his luncheon basket, flew at the big boy and began hammering at his back with his weak fists. [249]

All this had taken place in a much shorter time than it takes to relate it, and Mary, from the other side of the street, had seen what was going on, but she feared that Sam would resent her interference, so she watched to see that matters did not go too far. When Billy made his sudden attack, she quickly crossed over and released Sam from the big boy's grasp.

"It's a fine business for a big fellow like you to be after picking a quarrel with two little fellows! Why don't you take one of your own size?"

The boy did really seem to be ashamed of himself, particularly as his friends did not uphold him, and he joined them in rather a shamefaced manner. Sam, however, was not satisfied with the settlement of the quarrel, and made a rush after him, but Mary caught him in time and held him fast.

"I'll tell you what *your* name is," he shouted, while he struggled to free himself from Mary's tight grasp. "It's a mean old bully! And you just wait till the next time I get a chance, that's all!" [250]

"It's a shame for little boys to be fighting like the beasts that don't know any better," said Mary. "What would your grandmamma say if she came to hear of it? She would think it was just awful!"

"I don't know about that," said Sam, shrewdly.

Mary did not cross to the other side of the street again, but kept with her charges, and, until the schoolhouse was reached, improved the time in lecturing the two boys on the sin of fighting. Billy listened very meekly, and even Sam received the lecture in silence; but when Mary left them at the door, he said very seriously,—

"Mary, I sha'n't *begin* a fight, but if a fellow hits me he's got to look out!"

When Mary on her return related the story to Sam's grandmamma and grandpapa, and told how valiantly Billy had gone to the rescue of his friend, Sam's grandpapa only smiled with his eyes and said, "He'll do!" [251]

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH

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ILLY'S mother was now so well that she was eager to begin work. "You have done so much for us," she said to Mr. Ledwell, "that I cannot accept any more."

"Have you thought of anything special to do?" asked Mr. Ledwell.

"I have thought a great deal about it," she replied, "and I should be glad of any work that will support us. Since I have been so long idle I have realized, as I never did before, the fact that there are many children thrown upon the charity of the world as my boy was, but very few fall into such kind hands as he did. There are institutions to care for just such children, and if I could get a situation in one of them I should put my whole heart into the work, remembering the helpless position my boy was in. In caring for other forsaken children I would work off some of the deep sense of gratitude I feel." [253]

"It is a good scheme," replied Mr. Ledwell, "and we will try to find a place for you. Feeling as you do, you are just the one to look after the poor little waifs. It takes time, though, to obtain such a position, and meantime I can give you employment in my business."

So Billy's mother began work at once, and at the end of the first week was able to hand to Mrs. Hanlon a sum for her own and Billy's board.

Billy gained in strength and health every day, and soon was able to lay aside the blue spectacles.

"I should think you would have your hair cut just as short as it can be," Sam one day suggested to his friend. "You see, it curls so that the fellows think it makes you look like a girl."

So Billy gave his mother no peace until his hair was cut so short that there was no chance for it to form the curly rings to which the other boys so much objected, and Sam pronounced it a great improvement. [254]

With the short hair Billy also acquired an air of confidence which made him look more like other boys, and he was no longer singled out as a butt for their rough jokes. He learned very fast, and his love for drawing helped to make him popular; for on stormy days, when the boys could not go out at recess, it was a great pleasure to have Billy draw pictures for them. His greatest pleasure was to draw on the blackboard, and his sketches, done with a bold, free hand, often gave as much pleasure to the teacher as they did to the pupils.

Before long came the time for Sam to go with his grandparents to their country home. Such good friends had the two boys become, that a separation would have been very hard for both. They were so unlike that each had a good influence on the other. Sam, full of spirit and health, would much rather spend his time out of doors than in learning his lessons, while Billy liked nothing better than to sit indoors, working hard at his drawing, or conscientiously studying his lessons, that he might keep up with the other children who had not been deprived of the use of their eyes. [255]

Mr. Ledwell, who looked out so well for every one, proposed to Billy's mother that she should live in a little house on his grounds that had been built for his gardener's family. The present gardener, however, had no family, and lived with the other men employed on the place, and the house would make a cosy, comfortable home for Billy and his mother.

The latter by this time had obtained the situation she so much desired,—which was to look after homeless children. Her duty was to take these little waifs to homes that were willing to receive them, and to see that the little ones were happy and well cared for after being placed. This, of course, took her away from home all through the day, and she often returned tired from her day's work. Giving so much motherly care to the neglected ones, who needed it so sadly, prevented her from giving her own boy the care he ought to have, and a pleasant way out of the difficulty was found by having good Mrs. Hanlon come down to the little cottage and take care of it and of Billy. In this way Billy was not neglected, and his mother could earn money for their support. [256]

It was a happy day for the two boys when they alighted at the little station of Seaport. It was quite a distance to Sam's grandpapa's place, so they drove there in one of the station carriages. Billy noticed how glad all were to see Sam. Everybody seemed to know him, and to have a pleasant word for him, from the station master down to the colored porter. Sam was just as glad to see them, too, and asked after their families and how they had been through the long, cold winter.

It made Billy very happy to see how much everybody loved Sam, and for every kind word and look given to his friend he was more gratified than if he had received them himself. The grateful boy never forgot for a moment how kindly and generously his friend had received him when he was blind and forsaken. [257]

As they passed the different houses in the village, Sam was kept busy in hailing old acquaintances and hearing their cordial "Glad to see you back again."

They passed the engine-house, and there on the sidewalk in front of it lay Jack the Fire-Dog. Although he had never *seen* him before, Billy knew him even before Sam's keen eyes discovered him. At the boys' call the dog pricked up his ears and gazed searchingly at them; then, with all the power of his eloquent eyes and wagging tail, he tried to express his joy at meeting these old friends.

Of course the boys couldn't go by without stopping for a moment,—no human boys could do that. So out they piled in a hurry, and before the carriage had come to a stop they were hugging and caressing their faithful friend. "Does he look anything as you thought he did, Billy?" asked Sam. [258]

"Yes, just, only a great deal handsomer. Do you suppose he knows I am a seeing boy now, Sam?" asked Billy, anxiously.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did, because I saw him looking at your eyes awful sharp the first thing."

"I shouldn't wonder if he did, either," said one of the firemen who had witnessed the meeting between the old friends. "He's awfully knowing."

They could not stop so long as they would have liked, however, because the driver of the station carriage was in a hurry to get back; so they had to leave the Fire-Dog. "You shall come to

see us every day," Sam called out, as the carriage started again, for the dog's wistful eyes said how sorry he was to have them go; and the Fire-Dog did not wait for a second invitation, but presented himself about five minutes after the boys had reached home.

"First of all, I must take you about to show you everything on the place," Sam said to Billy. So off they started, the boys followed closely by Jack, who seemed much older than he had in the days when he used to run with Engine 33. [259]

First of all, there were the stables to be visited, where in a paddock was the black pony with the star on his forehead. He came trotting up to the fence to see the boys and rub his nose against them and beg for sugar. They had no sugar to give him, but a few handfuls of grass did just as well. After he found they had no more for him, he lay down and rolled over; then, after shaking himself, he came for more grass.

These stables were wonderful places, and had in them everything that boys, and most girls, love. There was a new colt only a few weeks old, but as tall as the black pony with the star in his forehead, although his legs were longer and not so prettily formed, and he had a short, bushy tail. Clumsy as he looked, however, he could run fast, for, after looking anxiously at the boys for an instant with his large, mild eyes, he darted off at full speed to join his mother at the other end of the field. [260]

There was a litter of pups belonging to one of the grooms, young bull-terrier pups, with little fat, round bodies and very blunt, pink noses; and the mother dog evidently thought amiable Jack a fierce ogre, who wanted to eat them up, for she flew at him with great fury when he only wanted to admire them. So she had to be shut up in the harness-room, where she tore at the door and growled and barked so long as the boys and Jack stayed near her pups.

There were two little kittens, too, and they also seemed to consider innocent Jack a dangerous sort of fellow, for they arched their backs and spit at him whenever he happened to look their way.

When the stables had been explored, the two boys and Jack ran down to the beach. The tide was out, and they could walk far out on the smooth sand. This was very beautiful, but Sam's favorite nook was the little cove where the fiddler-crabs lived. He was never tired of watching them at low tide, and trying to find out whether each had his own particular hole to hide in, or whether they darted into the first one they came to when surprised. [261]

The two boys each singled out a crab and tried to keep his eyes on him to watch his movements, but they all looked so much alike that it was very confusing, and after an hour spent in this way Sam was no wiser than he was before.

Then the shells that had been washed up in the hard storms of the winter before, how beautiful they were, and how exciting it was to pick them out of the line of seaweed in which they were entangled! Billy had never dreamed of such pleasures, and they were as good as new to Sam, now that he had a companion to enjoy them with him. Thus the two happy boys spent the forenoon, while Jack wandered about the beach, sniffing into holes and examining the skeletons of the horse-shoes and crabs that had been thrown up by the winter storms. They found many delicate skeletons of baby horse-shoes, some not much larger than a silver quarter of a dollar, and perfect in shape. [262]

"We must make a collection of curiosities," Billy said,—“shells and horse-shoes and all such things.”

"I can show you where there are beautiful stones," said Sam. "I have got a little bookcase where we can keep them, and we can label them just as they do in the Museum."

As Sam spoke, the clear notes of a horn were heard from the direction of the house. "That's for me," said Sam. "They always blow that horn when they want me, and I guess it's about time for lunch."

So the two boys went toward the house, carrying as many of their "curiosities" as they could take, and Jack followed.

The fresh sea air had sharpened the appetites of the boys, and of Jack, too, but they spent as little time at the table as possible, they were in such a hurry to go back to their play on the beach. [263]

In these pleasures the days passed so rapidly that Sam's birthday came around before he had thought it was anywhere near the time for it. Jack appeared every day with great regularity, and never let them out of his sight. Even while they were eating their meals, he lay under the dining-room windows, in order that he might be on hand if they required his services.

"What should you like to do to celebrate your birthday, Sam?" asked his grandpapa one morning at the breakfast table.

"I know what I should *like* to do," replied Sam, who usually knew just what he wanted, "but I don't suppose there is any chance of my doing it."

"What is it, Sam?"

"Well, you know those children who were so good to Billy? The ones you gave the cakes to, you

know. Billy and I have been thinking how much they would like to be here and run on the beach and see the colt and the puppies. Billy said if he had lots of money he would just send for them to come here and have a good time. It is awfully hot in that part of the city where they live, Billy says, and it smells awfully bad, too."

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"I know it does, Sam," replied Grandpapa, very seriously, "and I wish we could take all the children out of the hot city and let them run about in the fields and on the beach as you and Billy do."

"I *knew* it couldn't be done," said Sam with a sigh.

"We can't take care of *all* the children in the city, Sam," replied Grandpapa, "but I think we can manage to give these three a taste of the country."

"Oh, Grandpapa!" exclaimed Sam, and he was so overcome with joy at the prospect that he couldn't find words to say how happy he was. His grandmother was very particular about his table manners, so he said, "Please excuse me a minute, Grandmamma," and, jumping down from his chair, ran up to his grandfather and put his arms about him and hugged him until his face was quite red from the effort. "I think you are the very kindest man I ever saw, Grandpapa," he said.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

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R. LEDWELL was fully as kind as his little grandson thought him. That very day he went to several of the townspeople to ascertain if any of them were willing to take three city children as boarders for a few weeks. At last he found what he wanted. A young married woman with no children of her own was glad to oblige the man who was such a favorite with everybody, and at the same time earn a little money; for money is scarce in the country, where the means for earning it are so much less than in the city.

On a beautiful morning about a week later, the three children, beaming with happiness, alighted at Seaport station, to find Sam and Billy on the platform looking eagerly for them. Yet when they met, the natural shyness that children feel at meeting those whom they seldom see, overcame the three new-comers, and they found no words to express the pleasure and gratitude that was in their hearts, although their happy faces spoke for them. Sam, always business-like, was the first to speak and conduct them to the wagonette which was to take them to their boarding-place. When they were seated in the wagonette, facing one another, Maysie at last found voice,—

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"Hallo, Billy!" she said, her face wreathed in smiles.

They were all a little shy of Sam at first, but they soon felt at their ease, for he pointed out the objects of interest as they drove along, and told them about the colt, the puppies, the kittens, and the wonderful things they would find on the beach.

"Is it hot in the city?" asked Sam.

"Just!" replied Johnny, briefly.

"I saw a horse that was killed entirely by the hot sun," said Maysie.

"He wasn't dead, Maysie," said Johnny; "it is just overcome he was. They took him off in a big cart to the hospital."

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Soon the engine-house was passed, and there sat Jack, who knew them as soon as they came in sight. Sam insisted on taking him in, and Jack, who seldom had the pleasure of a drive, was very glad of the opportunity.

"He looks like the dog I saw to the fire that day I told you of," said Maysie.

"It can't be the same one," replied Hannah, "for that one runs with one of the city engines, and he wouldn't be so far from home."

"But it *is* the same," said Billy; and always glad to tell how faithful Jack saved his life on the night of the fire, he told the story to them, and how Jack happened to be so far away from his old home.

When they stopped at the pretty farm-house where the city children were to stay, a pleasant-faced woman came out to meet them and show them the rooms they were to occupy, and Sam and Billy left them there, promising to come for them in the afternoon, to show them all the things they had told them about.

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The sweet air, the green fields, and the singing birds were what these city children had never before enjoyed, and nothing was lost on them. There was only one drawback to their perfect happiness, and that was the fact that Mother was not there to enjoy it with them.

"If Mother could only be here, too," said Hannah, "how beautiful it would be!"

"But she said she should enjoy it just as much as we did, when we got home and told her about

it," said Maysie.

"I know she said so," replied Hannah, "but it ain't like smelling the beautiful air and seeing the fields and things."

"But she won't have so much work to do while we are away, and there won't be no noise nor nothing," said Maysie, who always took a hopeful view of things.

"The house will seem awful lonesome to her," said Johnny, whom Hannah's remark had made a little homesick. [270]

"She told us to have as good a time as we could," said Maysie, "and I've made up my mind to see everything and tell her all about it. Do you mind how pleased Mother is when we tell her things we've seen?"

"I know," said Hannah with a sigh, "but I wish Mother could be here all the same."

"But she *can't*, you know," said hopeful Maysie, "so what's the use of fretting about what can't be helped?"

"Maysie is right," said Hannah, after a moment's silence, for she began to see into what an unhappy mood they were drifting. "The best thing we can do is to get as strong and well as we can, and then we can help Mother more when we get home."

"That's so," replied Johnny, once more cheerful; "and it's the pocketful of shells and nice stones I'll take home to her,—those the boy told us of."

"And the day we go home we'll take her a big bunch of the flowers the fields is full of," said Hannah. [271]

"And the kitten the boy promised me!" said Maysie.

"I don't believe Father would let us keep a kitten," said Johnny. "You know about the little dog!"

"Kittens isn't dogs," replied Maysie, confidently. "I know he wouldn't send a kitten out on us."

"I guess he wouldn't mind a kitten," said Hannah, "because they keep the mice away. I heard him tell Mother one day that she ought to get a cat or the mice would eat us out of house and home."

So they agreed that it would be safe to introduce a kitten into their home, and in talking over the pleasant surprises they intended to give Mother they were soon their old cheerful selves.

Only those who have always lived in a city can understand fully the state of bliss these children lived in during their stay in the country. Hunting for eggs in the hen-house and barn, discovering stolen nests, going to the pasture for the cows, and watching the process of milking, riding to the hayfield in the empty hay-rigging, and, after treading down the load, making a deep nest in the hay and riding back to the barn,—particularly enjoying the jolt as the heavy wagon went over the high threshold,—then the pleasure of sliding down from the top of the high load into the farmer's arms!—that was the best of all. [272]

In these simple country pleasures, in the company of Sam and Billy, and the enjoyment of Mr. Ledwell's beautiful place, the days flew rapidly by, leaving as they went traces of the fresh air and sunlight on their blooming cheeks and sun-browned skins. Almost before they knew it, the time for which they had been invited had passed, and their faces grew long when they thought of leaving these blissful scenes. The calves, the hens, and the pigs—especially the new litter of pigs, with their pink skins and funny little wrinkled noses—how could they make up their minds to leave them?

Then, just when everything looked most hopeless, came a pleasant surprise. The farmer's wife, with whom they had been boarded, said she had become so attached to them, and had found them so helpful and such good company, that she wanted them to stay two whole weeks more; yes, she did! And she said they were the best-mannered children she had ever had in her house, besides! [273]

These compliments pleased Sam and Billy as much as they did the three children to whom they referred, and little Maysie resolved to repeat them to Mother the next time she was reproved for her manners.

As for Jack the Fire-dog, after the arrival of the three city children he spent more time than ever on Mr. Ledwell's premises. Since he could not be with his old engine and his beloved company, he could feel interest in no other engine; but there were the dear children, and Jack had always been accustomed to the company of children and could not live without them. So by degrees Jack established himself on the Ledwell estate, and from sleeping there on extremely hot nights came to sleep there every night. It was very pleasant sleeping under the large elms, with the sea-breezes wafted to him, or on cool nights, in the roomy stable, where he could smell the sweet hay overhead and hear the bull pups nestling in their sleep in their box from the room beyond; for the mother of the pups had become reconciled to Jack since he had no intention of hurting her babies, and even allowed him to play with them, now they had grown large and strong. [274]

It was a very fortunate thing for the pups and their mother and the horses and every one on the place, too, that Jack had seen fit to take up his abode on the premises—but we will tell what happened.

One night when the man whose duty it was to close the stable was about to lock up, he caught sight of Jack lying under the large elm-tree in front of the stable.

“‘Twill be cold, old boy, before morning,” he said to Jack as he held the door open, “and I advise you to come inside.”

Jack had been thinking the same thing himself, so he got up and went in to his bed in the harness-room. The heavy door was rolled to and locked, and the man went upstairs to his room on the floor above. [275]

A night-watchman is usually employed where valuable horses are kept, and usually there was one on Mr. Ledwell’s place, but for the past two nights he had been at his home ill from a cold, and the premises were left unguarded.

Jack curled up in his comfortable bed, listening for a while to the heavy steps of the men overhead, the occasional stamping from the horses’ stalls, or the rattling of their halter chains against their iron mangers; to the occasional nestling of the pups as they stirred in their sleep and crowded one another in their attempts to obtain more room; to the rising wind that shook the drooping boughs of the big elm outside. It was very pleasant to listen to these sounds from his comfortable bed in the harness-room, and, while listening to them, Jack fell asleep. He had acquired the habit of sleeping with one ear open during his old life in the engine-house, and the habit was so firmly rooted that it would never leave him. This night he awoke every few minutes, starting at every sound. Once he jumped to his feet, dreaming that he was in the old engine-house, and that the gong had just struck. [276]

It was no gong, however, but only the sharp noise made by one of the horses as he gave his halter chain a sudden jerk, and Jack was wide awake now and listening with all his might.

What makes the Fire-Dog so restless, and why does he keep his keen nose up in the air, sniffing so eagerly, then suddenly start to his feet and run about the floor of the large stable, peering in at every corner and cranny, and then with a whine dart up the staircase leading to the floor above? The wire door used in summer time swings inward, and as Jack bounds against it, it flies open and he stands inside. It is a good-sized room with two beds in it, the occupants fast asleep.

There is no doubt now as to what brought Jack here. A decided smell of smoke pervades the room, increasing every moment, oozing through the crevices of the partition which separates this room from the lofts beyond, where the hay is stored. The turned-down lamp that is always kept lighted at night, in case of a sudden call, shows dimly through the gathering haze, and the Fire-Dog knows that there is not a moment to lose. With one leap he stands by the side of the man who let him into the stable a few hours before. He is fast asleep, and Jack’s loud barks only cause him to stir and turn over in his sleep. But the Fire-Dog has not been brought up in an engine-house for nothing, and he knows the horrors of a fire at night. He now pounces upon the heavy sleeper, pawing him frantically with his strong paws, while his loud barking is shrill with the warning he tries so hard to express. [277]

He succeeds at last in rousing the heavy sleeper and at the same time the occupants of the other bed. They take in the situation at once, and in an instant are on their feet. They snatch up some articles of clothing and run for the stairs, putting them on as they go. The rolling door is thrown open, and their voices send out the startling cry of “Fire! Fire!” [278]

The loud cry is borne on the night air to the stable beyond, where the farm-horses and cows are kept, and where other men are sleeping, and there the alarm is taken up and sent on to the house, where the family are fast asleep.

There is nothing that arouses one more suddenly and fills one with more alarm than the cry of “Fire!” in the middle of the night. In a few minutes all the people living on the place are aroused. The alarm is sounded for the only engine in town, but what can one engine a mile distant accomplish when a stable filled with hay is on fire?

The first thought is for the horses; and they, terrified at the noise and excitement and fast-gaining fire, refuse to leave their stalls, running back when they are released so soon as they catch sight of the flames. So blankets and carriage robes are hastily caught up and thrown over their heads, that they may not see the flames, and in that way they are led through the burning stable in safety and turned loose in the field, where they stand watching the commotion about them and snorting with terror. [279]

Then the carriages are run out and harnesses caught down from the pegs where they hang, and carried to a place of safety. Meanwhile the fire steadily sweeps on its way, bursting through the roof and sending volumes of smoke and flame high up into the dark sky. The big elm that drooped its graceful branches over the burning building, shivers and moans like a live creature in pain, as the tongues of flame lick its fresh green leaves and shrivel them with their hot breath.

Every man and woman on the place is awake and on the spot, and the high wind is taking the smoke and flames of the burning building directly in the line of the stable where the farm-horses and cows are kept. These are taken out blindfolded, as the horses in the other stable have been, [280]

for the heat from the burning hay, the summer's heavy crop, is intense, and the strong wind hurls blazing embers against the shingled roof.

It is evident that this stable will go like the other before long, and men are on the roof, stamping out the fire as often as it catches on the dry shingles. Then they do what is often done in country towns where the fire department is of little use. Two lines of men and women stand between the farm-stable and the well, while pails are hurriedly filled with water and passed from hand to hand along one line until they finally are handed up to the men on the roof, to be dashed over the heated shingles. Then the empty pails are passed down the other line to the well. In this way, the roof is kept wet and the burning embers are made harmless. Before the pails have been passed along the lines many times, the engine comes tearing up the driveway, the horses at full speed, and draws up before the burning stable. It is too late to be of any service there, but the other buildings can be saved, and the hose is quickly unwound and attached to the well. The deep thuds of the working engine are soon heard, and the hose is turned upon the farm-stable. Every throb of the engine sends the water higher and higher, until a broad, full stream strikes the ridgepole and sends rivulets running over the surface of the slanting roof. In less than five minutes more service is done than the lines of hard-working men and women could accomplish in an hour.

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All this time the Fire-Dog, but for whose warning many lives would have been lost, is going in and out among the workers, with the same air of responsibility that he had always worn in the old days when he went to fires with Company 33. He threads his way among the crowd, which has collected, exactly as he used to, looking about to assure himself that everything is as it should be. When Sam and Billy appear on the scene, excited and awestruck, he stations himself by their side and never leaves them for an instant, as if he fears harm might come to them if he were not there to watch over them.

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The anxiety comes to an end at last. The stable where the fire started is a pile of black and smoking embers, but the farm-stable with its sheds and paddocks is saved, and not a life lost, even to the kittens and puppies; and of old Jack, whose sagacity has brought this about, what a hero they make when the story is made known! The children cannot love him any more, because they already love him as much as they can, but every man and woman on the place has a kind word and a caress for the faithful Fire-Dog. If he were not the most modest dog that ever lived, his head would certainly be turned, for the facts even reach the newspapers, and the whole story is told that everybody may read it. It does not make him one bit conceited, the dear old Fire-Dog, and he would do the same thing right over again, even if every hair on his body should be singed. When, however, a handsome collar with a broad brass plate, on which is engraved in large letters

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JACK THE FIRE-DOG

PRESENTED BY
HIS GRATEFUL FRIENDS,

is placed on his neck, then you may be sure his heart swells with pride and gratitude.

If only there were time enough, how we should like to tell a little more about Jack's friends,—how Sam grew up to be a man very like his grandfather and made a great many people happy; how Billy grew strong and manly and at last became an artist and was able to make a comfortable home for his mother; how the three city children went home well and happy and came back for many summers, until Johnny was old enough to take a position in Mr. Ledwell's business, where he made himself so useful that he rose a little higher in position each year; how helpful Hannah became to Mother, and what good care she took of the pretty house to which they moved in the beautiful town of Seaport; how Maysie turned out to be a very capable business woman; how Father enjoyed the new home in the country, and did not so often come home tired as he used to in the city.

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We can only hint briefly at these things, however, for it is time to say good-bye to the dear old Fire-Dog and his friends.



Transcriber's Note: Page 116, "of" changed to "off" (off the old block)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK, THE FIRE DOG ***

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