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LITTLE JOHNNIE;

OR,

GOD'S SILVER.

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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CONTENTS.

LAZY JOHNNIE.

ABEL'S SEARCH.

JOHNNIE'S REPENTANCE.

LITTLE JOHNNIE; OR, GOD'S SILVER.

CHAPTER I.

LAZY JOHNNIE.



"JOHNNIE," said old Mrs. Peters to her grandson, who was seated lazily by the fire-side, rubbing the rust and mud from an old horseshoe which he had just picked up outside the village forge, "Johnnie, lad, would

it not be as well to move yourself a bit, and set about something useful? there is a deal of work to

Little Johnnie.

be done in the house before nightfall, and very few hands to do it."

"What work is there to be done? I am sure I can't see nought as wants doing," replied Johnnie, gazing vacantly around him; "but it's always the same cry, 'work, work, work.' I'm sick o' work, so I am! I niver have a moment's rest the livelong day, from the time I rise o' a morning till I go to sleep at night."

"From the moment *you* rise in the morning till you go to bed at night, Johnnie, is no long day," replied Mrs. Peters, with a laugh. "If you rose in the morning with the lark, and went to bed at night when the stars were twinkling in the sky, as your father did when he was a lad like thee, then indeed you might talk o' rest; but to creep out of your bed at nine o' the clock, and to creep back to it again at sundown, is but a half-day's work—and a very sorry half-

Lazy Johnnie.

day's work it is at most times," murmured Mrs. Peters, gloomily, and she looked at the listless attitude still maintained by her grandson.

"I niver could see the use of getting out o' one's warm bed at cock-crow, niver; and I am sure I niver shall," said Johnnie, throwing the mud and rust he had been scraping off the horseshoe on the newly-washed cottage floor, and cleaning his hands on the knees of his corduroys. "It niver puts a penny more in one's pockets, but makes a fellow as ravenous as a hawk; and I'm sure there's little enough to eat nowadays as it is."

Mrs. Peters did not reply at once to this foolish and most ungenerous speech uttered by her lazy grandson; she had no time just now to enter into a wordy argument, for the tea-things had to be washed up, little Abel, Johnnie's younger brother, had to be put to bed early, as he

Little Johnnie.

was tired out after a long day's gleaning, and the whole cottage had to be set in order before nightfall. But Mrs. Peters was too anxious about Johnnie's future welfare to allow him to retire to rest without adding a few words more of kindly advice and encouragement, and as she swept the mud and rust from the tiles, and set the kitchen in order, she thought over in her mind and prayed silently to God that He would show her the best way of getting at her grandson's heart, and of stirring up within it the desire of earning an honest livelihood; for Johnnie, up to this period of his life, had contributed little or nothing to the daily expenses of the household. He spent, as a rule, his whole time loitering about the precincts of the village forge, either watching the sparks flying about the hot iron, or speculating idly on the machinery of the huge bellows which puffed and snored in its corner. His

Lazy Johnnie.

grandmother would have willingly apprenticed him to the blacksmith had she possessed the necessary funds, for it was the only occupation Johnnie seemed to have taken the slightest fancy to. But poor Mrs. Peters, old and infirm as she was, could barely keep the house going, much less could she pay the 'prentice fee; and were it not for poor little Abel's earnest efforts to assist her, she would sometimes have given up altogether in despair, and accepted the quiet home which had been offered her more than once in the comfortable almshouse built on the squire's grounds.

But Mrs. Peters had accepted the charge of her two little grandsons many years ago from the hands of their dying mother, and she was determined not to relinquish it now without a struggle, though many a time her heart almost fainted in the task. Abel was a good boy, and helped her as best he could;

Little Johnnie.

but he was very young, and not strong enough for much work. It was Johnnie, the elder and stronger of the two, that made her burden almost heavier than she could bear.

These thoughts kept turning and turning themselves over in the poor widow's heart as she swept, and tidied, and dusted, till at length, the cottage being finally set in order for the night, she took down from the book-shelf the old family Bible, which from its great age was considered quite a sacred relic.

"Johnnie, lad, come here," she cried in her kindest voice, as she placed the large book upon her knee and opened it at the fly-leaf; "come here and let us read together the words which your great-grandfather wrote upon the first page of this book—words, too, which he not only wrote, but made the motto of his life, and he was one of the best men that ever lived."

Lazy Johnnie.

Johnnie came over at this appeal, and standing behind his grandmother, read out, it must be confessed in a somewhat reluctant and sulky voice, the following words, which were written in a large round hand upon the fly-leaf of the Bible:

“Those who rise up at break of day,
And prayerfully pursue their way,
Will find, if they but search with care,
God’s silver scattered everywhere.”

A long pause ensued after the reading of this proverb, during which Johnnie seemed to be intently gazing at the words.

“Well, lad, what dost thou think of it all?” asked his grandmother, somewhat encouraged by Johnnie’s apparent interest.

“What do I think on it? why, I just think a sillier pack o’ words were ne’er threaded together afore. How do you think a fellow could believe such stuff and nonsense at this time o’ the world, eh?”

Little Johnnie.

"Your great-grandfather who wrote these words, not only believed in them, Johnnie, but proved them to be true, so did your grandfather and your own good father after them ; and if you would only have faith as they had, you would find the truth of the proverb for yourself."

"Do you mean to say, granny," burst in Johnnie, somewhat rudely, "that if I chose to get up early to-morrow morning, and took the trouble of looking about me, I should have nothing to do but just to grab up as much silver as ever I like? Pugh! you could not make me believe such humbug;" and Johnnie turned away with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders.

"I would have you *try*, at least," urged Mrs. Peters, with kindly forbearance. "I am not asking you to do a very great thing, Johnnie, and if it is any comfort to you, I can tell you that I have often—ay, hundreds of times—proved the truth

Lazy Johnnie.

of this proverb myself. Many a morning I went out empty-handed at sunrise, and returned home again to breakfast with my pocket lined with silver."

"You did?" asked Johnnie, suddenly aroused to interest by his grandmother's words, for she had never deceived him in her life; and this last speech of hers bore all the stamp and force of truth. "You went out yourself to look for God's silver, and you found it?"

"Ay, did I, lad; and I have no doubt you will find it too, and plenty of it, if you only set about looking for it in the right way."

"And what way is that, granny?"

"Why, just as the proverb tells you: by rising for it early, seeking for it prayerfully, and picking it up with diligence and care. Careless eyes and idle hands will never find God's precious silver."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Johnnie, "I know I shall never find it; I don't even

Little Johnnie.

know at what o'clock I ought to get up ; and if I did, how am I to awake at the right time ? ”

“ You must rise with the sun—at least, so the proverb says ; and if you do really wish to be up betimes, I will set the alarum to-night at the proper hour, and when you hear it go off in the morning you will know that it is time to be up and stirring.”

“ I must rise with the sun,” echoed Johnnie, with a lazy yawn. “ Well, if so, here goes for bed ; I must manage to get a good night’s rest somehow. Good night, granny ; ” and stretching his long muscleless arms above his head, Johnnie crawled up the few stairs which led to his garret bed-room.

“ Don’t forget to set the alarum, granny,” he shouted presently in a muffled voice, which showed his head was already buried beneath the blankets.

“ All right, Johnnie, I will set it at once ; ” and Mrs. Peters rose, put her

Lazy Johnnie.

knitting down on the table, and forthwith stretching up to the clock, she fixed the hand of the alarum to the hour of four.

Asshedid

so, however, she shook her head despondingly. She

knew

Johnnie's

lazy ha-

bits so

well, she

could not

but mis-

trust his newly-formed resolution—a resolution which it was evident he had not strengthened as yet by prayer.

“Well, the morning will tell whether he is in earnest or not; I may be judging him wrongly,” she murmured to herself,



Lazy Johnnie.

Little Johnnie.

as she resumed her seat—"the morning will tell;" and with a heavy sigh she took up her knitting again; and though her poor back ached after the long day's stooping in the corn-fields, and her eyes grew dim and dull, still she worked on patiently at Johnnie's socks till the clock struck ten, when, her task being accomplished, she also rose, turned down the kitchen lamp, and retired to rest for the night.

Well, the morning came at last, which was to put Johnnie's good intentions to the test; and what a lovely morning it was, with a red dawn and violet flush rising up behind the poplar-trees. Johnnie was not awake as yet to see how beautiful everything looked outside, but presently the alarum ran down with a furious whirr and screech, and the cuckoo hopped out of his box with trembling wings, and sobbed out, "One, two, three, four."

"Good gracious, what a fearful row!

Lazy Johnnie.

Did any one ever hear the like?" cried Johnnie, in no amiable voice or mood, as he started from a sound sleep and counted the calls of the cuckoo. "Four o'clock! Why, what humbug! Catch me getting up at four o'clock to go on such a wild, goose chase. If I get up in two hours' time, it will be early enough for all the silver I'm like to find."

And, closing over the small shutter which he had left open on purpose the night before, the lazy boy threw himself back upon his pillow, and was soon heavily asleep.

Though the alarum had been set purposely with a view to rousing Johnnie, its loud metallic screech was heard by other ears as well, and old Mrs. Peters, startled from the sleep which had only come within the last few hours to her relief, listened with an anxiously beating heart for the sound of Johnnie's steps.

At first all remained so quiet and still

Little Johnnie.

through the house, she could distinctly hear the crickets' chirp in the kitchen and the nibbling of the mice in the bread cupboard within. But by-and-bye there was a step to be heard overhead—a quiet, muffled tread, as of some one moving as noiselessly as they could, and poor Mrs. Peters lay back on her pillow with a grateful heart, for she felt sure that it was Johnnie who was up and astir, and who, out of love and consideration for her, was treading as lightly as he could.

But it was not Johnnie. It was little Abel Peters, Johnnie's junior by many years, who was awake and creeping about so softly overhead. Lying in his bed the evening before with tired limbs and an aching head, he had overheard the conversation carried on in the kitchen beneath between his brother and his grandmother, and the lesson which had been intended for Johnnie's encouragement and good sank deep into his own heart.

Lazy Fohnnie.

Abel had the most unbounded faith in his grandmother, and every word which fell from her lips was listened to by him with a respectful belief. So all the long night he had lain awake thinking over the wonderful mottoes which he had heard her read from the Bible, and to the truth of which she had testified so earnestly; and now, with the quaint words of the rhyme ringing in his ears, he had risen with the dawn, and was dressing in haste and some fear lest he might be already late; for through the one cracked pane which formed the garret window he could see the sunlight even now burnishing the edges of the hills beyond.

But though Abel was in such earnest about his project, and in such anxiety lest the prize had already slipped from his grasp, he did not consider it a needless form to kneel down and ask God's blessing on the long day which lay

Little Johnnie.

stretched out before him, nor, in particular, to crave with simple faith that He would be with him in his lonely



Abel praying.

morning,
and assist
him in the
search
which he
was about
to under-
take.

When
Abel rose
from his
knees, he
paused a

moment before going downstairs, for the thought had come suddenly into his mind that he ought to make one more effort to rouse his elder brother, who had, perhaps, not heard the alarum ring, or having heard, might unwittingly have fallen asleep again. So, creeping softly along

Lazy Johnnie.

the narrow passage, he tapped at the door of Johnnie's room, and called him by his name.

There was no answer, so Abel pushed open the door a space, and tried to peer through the darkness. The room was so still, and Johnnie's head was buried so deep between the blankets, no sound of breathing reached his brother's ears. Abel almost thought that Johnnie had got the start of him, and he would have closed the door again and gone down, had not a loud snore and a sudden startled movement in the bed shown him that his brother was still there.

"What do you want? who's pushing at my door?" cried a hoarse, sleepy voice, as Johnnie, startled from no pleasant dreams, sat upright in his bed, and saw some one standing in the doorway. "What do you want, I say, and who are you?"

"It is I, Abel; I thought you would

Little Johnnie.

like me to call you, for the alarum has rung this some time, and as I did not hear you stirring, I came to see if you were up."

"Thank you for nothing," replied Johnnie, gruffly; "I had much rather you had left me alone. And what o'clock, may I ask, is it, that I see you up and dressed, eh?"

"It is more than a quarter-past four; and if you do not get up and dress quickly, all the silver will be gone," pleaded Abel, innocently.

"Bah! is that what you are up to?" sneered Johnnie, with a yawn. "Why, what a little fool you are, to be sure! I'd just as soon get up out of my snug roost here to look for a mare's nest as to go out on such a fool's errand. Besides, if I was you, I'd be afraid, so I would, to go out wandering over the fields and lanes at such an hour by myself."

Lazy Johnnie.

“Afraid of what?” asked Abel, simply; “who would harm me?”

“How can I tell? But I’d like to know what way you would look if a couple of fellows took it into their heads to run after you and rob you, eh, my lad?”

“You are only trying to frighten me, I know that quite well,” replied Abel, with growing indignation, not wholly un-mixed with fear. “Why should people run after a poor little chap like me to rob me?”

“Why, I thought you were going out to fill your pockets with silver,” retorted Johnnie, with a hoarse laugh at his own wit, and his brother’s evident discomfiture. “However, you can do as you like, old boy, only don’t come rattling at this door again; and shut it after you, while you are about it, for once granny’s astir in the house, there is no standing the noise she makes.”

Abel shut the door as he was told, nor

Little Johnnie.

did he make any further efforts to induce his brother to accompany him, though, to tell the truth, Johnnie's cruel suggestions had filled his heart with an indescribable terror, and the remembrance of them kept him long and long hesitating in the dark narrow passage outside his brother's room.

At length, however, he summoned up his courage; his natural good sense came to his aid, and he reasoned with himself that his grandmother would never have urged upon Johnnie a course which was likely to end either in danger or disappointment. Resolutely turning away his thoughts from Johnnie's dark forebodings, he crept down the short, creaking staircase which led to the kitchen, and having taken his cap from the peg where it hung, and lifted the heavy chain from across the door, he opened it and stepped out into the cool morning air.

Abel's Search.

CHAPTER II.

ABEL'S SEARCH.



THE garden path leading from the cottage door to the quiet road beyond was quite slippery from an early hoar frost, and Abel had to walk cautiously down the sloping walk so as not to fall.

Once out upon the high-road, with the pretty church filling up the end of the village street, and amongst all the familiar objects recognizable on either side of the way, Abel's nervousness quite subsided, and the bright freshness of the early morning air gave fresh strength to the desire which had arisen so strongly in his heart the night before—to look for God's silver till he should find it.

But where was he to begin his search

Little Johnnie.

for this wonderful "silver"? Abel knew not in what direction to bend his steps,



Abel searching for "Silver."

and his eyes travelled high and low, far and wide.

The church steeple, sheeted with bright zinc, glistened silver enough in the morning sunshine

to realize his ideas of this precious metal; but Abel could not carry the steeple home on his shoulders, and even

Abel's Search.

if he could it would not be his own ; and though Abel's heart was an eager one, it was as honest a little heart as ever beat, and casting his eyes upon the ground, he began to search anxiously amongst the hedgerows, and by the edges of the bright little streamlet which kept hurrying past him on its way to the village fountain.

At first Abel snatched at the beautiful leaves bound with the white hoar frost, which shone brighter than silver itself ; but no ! scarcely had he held them in his grasp for a moment when all the brightness and beauty faded away, and nothing but the leaves, damped and bruised, remained in his hands.

Once or twice also the shining track of an early snail, or the bright beads hanging on the gossamer threads, made him turn aside with a start of hope ; but again and again he was doomed to disappointment, and exactly as the sun rose

Little Johnnie.

higher and higher in the sky, so little Abel's bright aspirations sank lower and lower in his bosom.

Slowly he passed down the silent village street. Very few shutters were open at this early hour. There was no sound of life, save where hard by at the fountain-side a few disconsolate ducks were performing their morning's ablutions. But as Abel went a little farther down the street and passed by the house of his friend Joe Stephens, he noticed that the window of his bed-room was thrown wide open, and that Joe's canary had already been lifted down from its peg and placed on the sill outside, where the little bird, with its throat full of sweet sounds and its head raised towards the sky, was pouring forth its morning song.

"Where can Joe be at this early hour?" thought Abel, as, having whistled a well-known "call" for some minutes outside, no welcoming face appeared at the win-

Abel's Search.

dōw. "Can he be also out searching for God's silver? if so, perhaps I shall meet him;" and peering down the long straight road which passed by the church, Abel almost fancied that he caught a glimpse of Joe's blue smock frock and buff corduroys.

This was a fresh encouragement to go on, for Joe was a bright, intelligent boy, who read a great deal, and was fond of learning; and even supposing he had never heard of the proverb, he might still be able to make a guess as to what the "silver" would be like, or where they ought to search for it. And Abel only delayed to consult the face of the old village clock before setting off in pursuit of his friend.

It wanted still twenty minutes to five. Abel counted the figures twice to make sure of the hour; but, short a time as it took him to ascertain this fact, when he looked down the road again it was quite

Little Johnnie.

empty, and as if by some magic the figure he had supposed to be that of his friend Joe had disappeared.

For a moment Abel felt daunted: he paused and leaned against the churchyard wall, while all Johnnie's dismal croakings came back upon his ear. Supposing he were to pursue his way down the long, lonely road, and the figure he had seen a moment before were to spring out of some ambush and seize upon him. Abel looked down the road again, and hesitated whether to turn back or proceed; his grandmother could not blame him, nor indeed feel any disappointment at his return, for she had not counselled him in the matter. But then how delightful it would be to see her kind old face light up with joy and pride were he to come home successful and triumphant, bearing "God's precious silver" in his hands! And keeping these thoughts steadily uppermost in his mind, Abel no

Abel's Search.

longer hesitated, but proceeded cheerfully on his way.

Perhaps after all Joe had only turned aside into some of the fields that bordered the lane. He might have gone out to milk, or to drive the cows from one pasture to another; and Abel peered through the hedgerows on either side of the road until the little gurgling rill which had followed him all the way from the village deepened into a stream, and he could no longer step across it.

Again Abel paused and gazed anxiously around him. In his eager pursuit of his friend Joe, he had almost forgotten the real object of his walk—namely, to search for “God’s silver;” and perhaps, for all he knew, it might be lurking somewhere in his very path, if he only could but tell where to look for it. What did the proverb say? it ought to help him somehow; and Abel repeated the words to himself—

Little Johnnie.

“Those who rise up at break of day,
And prayerfully pursue their way,”

—ay, that was just it ; ever since he had set out he had been fighting his fears and pursuing his search all in his own strength, and had forgotten to ask for help, which all can have if they but ask rightly ; and as Abel gazed at the reflection of the blue sky in the patch of water at his side, his lips parted, and a very short but earnest little prayer went up for future guidance.

He had come to the very deepest part of the stream now, where the water scarcely seemed to flow, and the mark of footsteps showed that it was used occasionally as a well. Here Abel also came to a sudden standstill, and stooping down close to the water's edge with a cry of delight, he began hastily to snatch something from its surface. Was it the silver which he had found at length, and whose bright reflection shone upon his face ? To

Abel's Search.

all appearance, no ; for the treasure which he held so exultingly clasped in his hand was nothing after all but a bunch of fresh green watercress, whose leaves still glistened brightly with the morning dew.

"Abel, old boy, what are you doing down there ?" cried a cheery voice, which seemed to the startled child to come almost out of the sky ; and Abel looked up suddenly, but his face soon broke into the happiest of smiles as he recognized the beaming countenance of his dear friend Joe, grinning at him over the blackthorn hedge. "What are you doing, old boy," cried Joe again, "hunting for birds' nests, eh ?"

"No," replied Abel, with an indignant toss of the head ; "you know well I ain't. I'm just a-gathering a handful of watercress for granny ; she's fonder of it than of the best white bread out o' the shop."

"Well, if you ain't a good little chap to get out of your bed at this hour of the

Little Johnnie.

morning to look for watercress," said Joe, half to himself and half to Abel, who still



Abel gathering Watercresses.

kept adding to his bunch.

"I didn't get up to search for watercress," answered Abel quickly, as the thought of the proverb brushed suddenly

back to

his mind ; " I came out to look for silver."

"For what?" asked Joe, craning his neck farther over the hedge.

Abel's Search.

"I came to look for silver. Granny told Johnnie last night that if he got up early i' the morn, he would find silver on the ground."

"Why, did she lose any?" asked Joe, eagerly. "If she dropped it here, she has not much chance of finding it again. But I'll get over the hedge and help you to look for it."

"No—no," interrupted Abel quickly: "she did not lose it. It is 'God's silver' I am looking for, not hers."

"God's silver!" cried Joe, with a scarcely repressed smile and a queer look into Abel's face, as if he thought the child were raving; "what on earth do you mean by 'God's silver,' Abel?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Joe," replied poor Abel, blushing up to the roots of his yellow hair; "it was something granny read out of the Bible to Johnnie last night. I was just a-lookin' for you to ask you what it meant, and now you're

Little Johnnie.

a-laughing at me too ;” and the tremble in Abel’s voice betrayed the strong effort to keep back his tears.

“ I ’m not laughin’ at you, not I,” replied Joe, good-naturedly ; “ it was only the funny way you said it made me smile a bit. But I say, old boy, run a yard or so farther down the road to where you ’ll find a piece o’ plank thrōwn across the stream, and then climb over the gate into this here field, and I ’ll soon show you how to pick silver off the ground, if I ain’t mistaken.”

“ You will—will you ? It’s no humbug ?” asked Abel, scrutinizing for an instant the honest rubicund face of his dear friend Joe ; but he saw at a glance that it was all right, and hurrying down the road to the spot indicated, he soon, with the help of his friend’s arm, cleared the five-barred gate, and was inside of the wide-spreading sheep-field.

“ Now, see,” cried Joe, heartily, as he

Abel's Search.

pointed to a dish filled up with freshly-gathered mushrooms; "see how I am picking silver off the ground. I expect to add not a little money to my store by this morning's work, and if you choose to set to work too, there'll be plenty for us both."

"Who'll buy them from us?" asked Abel, with kindling eyes, as he saw a splendid crop of mushrooms peep-



Mushrooms.

ing out of the grass just at his very feet.

"Why, Farmer Johnston, to be sure, who lives down by the mill, where I saw you and your mother gleaning all yesterday. He'll buy as many as ever we can fetch before breakfast, while they are fresh and small; but don't gather the great brown ones, for he don't care a straw for them."

Little Johnnie.

So Abel, laying his bunch of water-cresses in a cool spot under the hedge, and gathering two large dock-leaves to serve as a dish, set to work to hunt for the mushrooms, which were scattered here and there over the surface of the field. Sometimes he found ever so many growing quite close together, and again he would walk for yards and yards and not come across a single one; but Abel had a quick eye, and an earnest purpose at heart, and not many escaped his view.

And as he gathered and put them away in his dock-leaves, the meaning of his grandmother's proverb seemed to grow clearer and clearer to his mind, and he determined when once out upon the road to open up the subject of it again to his friend Joe, and to take his opinion on it.

So when they were walking down the pretty lane, starred with wild flowers, which led to Farmer Johnston's house,

Abel's Search.

Abel began once more to speak of "God's silver," and told Joe all his grandmother had said about it to Johnnie the night before.

"Of course, I see it all now," cried Joe, with a shrewd sounding whistle, and a friendly dig of his elbow in Abel's side, which sent a few of the mushrooms rolling on the ground. "'The early bird finds the first worm;' ain't that much about the same tune, eh? And a truer pair of proverbs never were. Why, if you could only get a peep into my early-bird money-box, you would see what a fellow could make by just turning out of his bed an hour or two before others are astir, and keeping his eyes open and his hands ready for work. Though it's true enough what your granny says, and indeed I think hers is the better motto of the two; for, you see, it gives the credit where credit is due, for it is God who puts the stuff in the lanes and fields,

Little Johnnie.

which, though it ain't exactly silver at the moment, turns to silver by-and-bye. Why, in the spring, I'd gather as many as a dozen bunches of sweet violets before breakfast, and get sometimes twopence a bunch in the town, and once or twice they even went as high as sixpence for the violets."

Thus talking together with eager voices and bright faces, the two boys reached Farmer Johnston's gate, and when they rang the door bell the farmer himself came to open it.

"Good morning, Joe," he cried, in a hearty tone; "always up with the sun, eh? All the more welcome at my door for coming early. And who is the small chap you have brought with you?"

Joe and the good Farmer Johnston were the best of friends, and the big boy took a pride in introducing his little chum, Abel; the result of the introduction being the purchase, not only of all Abel's mush-

Abel's Search.

rooms, but also the large bunch of water-cress which the little boy faithfully re-



Farmer Johnston's Gate.

tained for his grandmother. Nor, indeed, would Abel have parted with it now, but that Joe promised to wait patiently for

Little Johnnie.

him in the lane, on their return home, while he gathered another bundle.

The farmer knew Abel's grandmother, old Mrs. Peters, well, and had always admired her for her active, industrious habits, and her love of honesty and truth. He brought the two boys into his kitchen, and gave each of them a smoking cup of tea and a slice of good brown bread hot from the oven ; and, while they partook of this welcome repast, he drew from simple Abel the story of his grandmother's proverb, and of the silver he had gone out to search for.

Mr. Johnston seemed greatly pleased both with the quaint saying, and with little Abel for trying to carry it out, and when the boys rose to take their leave, he called after them, " Now, boys, mind you come here every morning at the same hour, and the more you have to sell the happier I shall be to buy ; and when the mushrooms and watercresses are all

Abel's Search.

gone, why, you'll be sure to find 'God's silver' elsewhere."

With these cheery words in their ears, and the good hot cake in their mouths, the two boys stepped out again into the lane, now flooded with the yellow morning sunshine. All the birds were singing, and everything looked so bright and cheerful; and brighter and more cheerful than any other ob-



Johnnie asleep.

ject in the lane, shone little Abel's face, as he gazed at the shining silver in his palm, and looked forward with unalloyed pleasure to the moment he should see his grandmother, and place it in her hand.

Could Abel have seen at this moment the face of his elder brother, still sleeping heavily and stupidly in the dark garret

Little Johnnie.

room of the little cottage beyond the church, what a shadow would have come over his face, and how his joy would have been clouded ! but, happily for him, he forgot all about Johnnie's good intentions of the night before and their grievous failure in the morning, and never thought of the share his brother must have in the home meeting, or of the shame and remorse the sight of "God's silver" must bring in its train.



Johnnie's Repentance.

CHAPTER III.
JOHNNIE'S REPENTANCE.



IT was
a little
after
eight
o'clock
when
the two
boys,
according to pro-
mise, halted by
the side of the
village stream to
gather the water-
cresses for Abel's
grand mother.
They were
scarcely so cool
and fresh as

Little Johnnie.

those he had plucked in the early morning, for the sun's rays were much hotter now, and all the bright cooling dew had faded from them ; but still, by gathering those in the shade, they succeeded in obtaining a very dainty bunch, and Abel, with the green leaves in one hand and the silver in the other, looked the very picture of happiness and pride.

Joe bid Abel good bye opposite the village fountain, and went into his house whistling, with a joyous heart, while Abel trudged on in innocent pride and earnest expectation ; nor was his pleasant reverie broken till he pushed open the cottage door, and beheld as he did so Johnnie's shoeless feet coming down the garret stairs.

Then it all came back upon him with a rush—the remembrance of Johnnie's sleepy taunts and idle threats, and it was almost with a feeling of remorse that he met his grandmother's gaze, as she

Johnnie's Repentance.

glanced suddenly away from Johnnie's shock head and untidy dress to his own unexpected figure filling up the doorway.

"Why, Abel, is that you?" and the poor old grandmother's cheeks flushed with a surprise which was not unmixed with pleasure. "Is that you, my little laddie? and I was thinkin' to mysel' you were in bed and asleep all this time, and I didn't like to wake you, as I thought you looked tired like and pale last night. And where have you been, my sonnie, with your bright eyes and your rosy cheeks smelling of the early morning?" and granny bestowed a hearty kiss on her grandson, as he threw his arms round her neck and wished his usual good morning.

"I've been looking for 'God's silver!'" cried Abel, restored to his former joy by this pleasant welcome; "I've been looking for 'God's silver!'" he cried, with such a cheery ring in his voice, and a

Little Johnnie.

look of such innocent pride in his face, that even Johnnie felt startled, and stopped his wasteful raking of the fire to listen further.

“ I ’ve been looking for ‘God’s silver!’ ” he repeated, still breathless from his rapid walk, while he laid his bunch of watercresses upon the table, and sought eagerly in the pocket of his little jerkin. “ Joe Walker and I have been out a-huntin’ for it since nigh four o’ the clock, and now, granny, look what I have found ; ” and as Johnnie drew nearer to the table, under cover of the kitchen horse, Abel, with an upward glance of pride into his grandmother’s face, laid two bright sixpences and a fourpenny-piece on the table. “ There, granny ! what do you say now ? ”

But granny was so surprised and so delighted, she could scarcely say a word. She looked at the silver, and then from the silver into Abel’s happy face, in

Johnnie's Repentance.

amazement, till suddenly the lecture she had given Johnnie the night before, and the proverb she had read to him from his father's Bible dawned upon her mind, and as it did so she caught Abel up in her arms and gave him a hearty hug, while tears of the purest joy and honest pride shone in her eyes.

Meantime a contemptuous smile was gathering on Johnnie's lips, and as he drew his chair to the breakfast-table, he said with a laugh which sounded neither natural nor pleasant, "If you have picked up money as don't belong to you, old boy, you'll have to return it, that's all; for it ain't yours, and you've no right to it."

Abel released himself from his grandmother's arms as these words spoken by his elder brother reached his ears, and for a moment a flush spread over his cheeks and crimsoned his ears; but this confusion did not last long, for Abel knew he had earned the money honestly,

Little Johnnie.

and that he could easily prove the fact ; and being questioned by his grandmother, he related the whole story, beginning by his accidental overhearing of the proverb the evening before, his early rise, and the meeting of Joe in the fields, etc.

Johnnie, though very slow at taking in an idea, and still slower in carrying it out, listened to what Abel had to say ; and when he had heard it all, he remained silent and brooding, while Abel laughed and chatted with his grandmother, and counted up wondrous sums which he hoped to realize in the future by his early rising.

When breakfast was over and the cottage set in order, poor old granny, as was her custom, took down her old cloak from the peg inside the bed-room door, and bound a yellow cotton handkerchief over her head and ears. Abel also put on his cap and shouldered the gleaner's rake,

Johnnie's Repentance.

while Johnnie sat on the long wooden bench by the fire, neither stirring hand or foot, but gazing on the red tiles of the cottage floor.

"Johnnie, my son, won't you come a-gleaning with us to-day? Do, that's a dearie; we might have doubled our store yesterday if we had had you to carry home the sheaves. I walked half the length of the field with a bundle of them across my own shoulders, but when I got so far I could go no farther, and had to put them down on the ground, and while my back was turned some one else came and snatched up the bundle and made off with it. So come, Johnnie, like a good soul, and give us a helpin' hand."

"I can't go to-day—I'll go to-morrow," replied Johnnie, shortly.

"Why not to-day? it's a fine day, dry and warm, and to-morrow may be wet."

"I can't go to-day, I tell you; I've summat else to do," and to prevent fur-

Little Johnnie.

ther argument Johnnie rose from the bench and went upstairs.

So Mrs. Peters and Abel started for the gleanings-field, and Johnnie remained



Mrs. Peters gleaning.

at home. It was a beautiful day for the gleaners, and Abel and his grandmother made a fine time of it; for Farmer Johnston was a liberal-hearted man, and his men received no orders to hunt the gleaners from the field, or to bind each sepa-

Johnnie's Repentance.

rate blade into the sheaves. They were to bind honestly, that was all that was required of them, and the gleaners might gather up what remained.

About midday the sun was so hot overhead that old Mrs. Peters had to retire under the shade of a tree to rest, for her head and back ached, and she was very weary. There she sat, thinking of her idle grandson, who had so rudely refused her the help she had begged of him in the morning. If it had not been for her tender love and care when Johnnie's father and mother died, he would not have been alive now, for he had been as a child sickly and weak ; but now that she had, by the sweat of her own brow, reared him up to be a big strong youth, he had refused in her weakness and old age to assist her, and she was just wiping away some bitter tears which had risen to her eyes at the thought of his ungratefulness, when she heard the sound of horse's feet

Little Johnnie.

on the sward, and looking up saw Farmer Johnston reining up his horse in front of her.

“Good afternoon, Mother Peters; don’t stir from where you are sitting,” he said kindly, as the old woman strove to rise quickly from the ground to curtsy to him. “You are right to sit in the shade, for the day is the hottest we have had this season. I know, my good woman, what you are fretting about,” he added in a kinder voice, as he dismounted from his horse and drew the rein through his arm that he might come closer; “I know what you are fretting about, and I think I’ve done you a good turn, eh?”

“How so, sir?” asked Mrs. Peters, much startled and confused by this sudden and unexpected sympathy.

“I’ll tell you how. About an hour ago I was just going into my yard to fetch my horse from the stables, when I noticed the figure of a lad skulking be-

Johnnie's Repentance.

hind the pillar of the gateway, and when I approached him, instead of coming forward to meet me, he slunk back quickly into the carpenter's shed. Well, I followed him in, and who should I find him to be but your grandson John, who had just come over to my place with a great bunch of dusty watercresses and a plate of large, broken, withered mushrooms, which he wanted me to buy. Now you must not be angry with me, my good woman, but as I had my bird in the net, I was not going to let him out so easily, so I just made him sit down on the bench and listen to what I had to say, and though he did not say much in return, and looked a bit sulky, yet I think it was more shame than ill-temper that I saw.

"Well, you must know," continued the farmer, kindly, "I have had my eyes on that chap for the last year, and have noticed his idle, careless ways, and it did

Little Johnnie.

my heart good this morning to find the little one—Abel you call him—was not following in his steps; so I made the most of my time, and just pointed out to him the folly and sin of his present life, and the misery that lay before him if he persevered in it. I made him blush for himself to let a poor old woman like you go out toiling in the sun, and bending your back in two, while he played at chucky-stones in the village street with a lot of idle chaps like himself; and then when I had brought him down as low as I could, I thought I'd give him a helping hand to lift him out of the mud, and I've promised him that if he's up in my yard every morning in the summer at six, and every morning in the winter at seven, for a whole year, I'll pay his 'prentice fee to any trade he likes to choose for himself, and I think I touched him on the right nail there, for he suddenly lifted up his head and got quite red

Johnnie's Repentance.

in the face, and said, 'Will you really, sir? will you really pay my 'prentice fee if I'm up betimes in the morning?' 'Ay, will I, lad,' said I, 'to any trade you like.' 'I'd rather be bound to a blacksmith, sir, than to a king,' he cried; 'I'd rather spend my days in the forge than in the grandest house I ever saw.' So thereupon we shook hands. I didn't buy the mushrooms, though, or the dusty watercress; no—no, I couldn't do that. I told him they had not the shine of 'God's silver,' and that I'd have nought to say to them. If he had brought me them before breakfast, when the stamp of the true coin was on them, I'd have taken them, no doubt; but for all that he went off as cheerful as a cricket, and if I don't mistake I see him coming in at the gate of the field this minute. Good morning, Mother Peters: tell Abel I'll be glad to see him again to-morrow;" and with a cordial shake of the hands he

Little Johnnie.

bid good bye to the poor widow, whose heart was too full for speech, and, mounting his nag, galloped across the field to the spot where the reapers were busy cutting the ripe corn with their sickles.

Mrs. Peters was still following his retreating figure, with her eyes full of grateful tears and her heart full of grateful prayers, when Johnnie stood beside her, and with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes repeated to her the good news she had already heard from Farmer Johnston; but there was something the farmer had left unsaid, and which Johnnie had now to say for himself—something which did not come rushing forth with the same unconstrained glee that had marked his first communication, but was impeded by nervousness and hindered by very shame.

“Granny, listen to me,” and Johnnie threw himself down under the tree. “I’ve wanted to say something to you this long time; no, not this *long* time.

Johnnie's Repentance.

I've wanted to tell you what Farmer Johnston was telling me this morning—how very good you have been to me ever since I have been a little bit of a thing, not higher than his horse's knee. I know it mysel'—how you never said a word to vex me; and never—never——” Poor Johnnie's confession as well as confusion grew more painful every moment, and Mrs. Peters tried to cut it short by kindly words of humility and love; but it was no use, the current, though broken and rambling, was not to be turned altogether aside, and presently the words flowed on, though hoarser than before. “But he didn't need to tell me so, he didn't, as how I was idle and good for nothing, and a shame to the town I was born in, and to the father and mother who was a-lyin' cold in their graves, for I knew all that afore, whenever I took the mind to think o' it; but it did cut me a bit to hear as how I was the most

Little Johnnie.

ungratefulest boy to you as ever was born, and would rather win a game of chucky-stones in the street than earn money to put bread in your mouth, even if you was a-starvin', and—and——”

“They were hard words, laddie, but they were meant well,” murmured Mrs. Peters, who loved Johnnie too well to seek to weaken the lesson he had just been learning; “but they were meant well, for Mr. Johnston has a kind heart.”

“They nearly broke mine,” sobbed Johnnie, hoarsely, “to say I didn’t love you.”

“Well—well, the words were a trifle sore, but you’ll see it will all turn out for the best, Johnnie, for the farmer has his one way of saying things and another of doing things, and though he’s rough in his words, he’s awful kind in deeds; and some day, perhaps, when you’re working in your own little forge, lad, and you bring down a heavy blow o’ a piece of

Johnnie's Repentance.

iron as you want to bend to your will, you'll think how Farmer Johnston only struck as it were a bit hard on you to bring you to your right shape."

This happy allusion to the forge brought the fire back to Johnnie's eyes, and dried the tears of wounded pride which had rushed forth so bitterly. Johnnie began to talk again of his prospects with hopeful energy, and only desisted when his grandmother rose to her feet to continue her work. But this Johnnie would not allow. He made her sit down again under the tree while he went on with the gleaning; and having made for the spot where little Abel was busily working, he soon poured the happy intelligence into his ears.

Both boys carried home a heavy load that night on their backs, but the lightest of hearts within. The evening meal was very different from the morning one; they were all of one mind to-night, and

Little Johnnie.

there were no envious feelings or bitter jealousies at work to spoil their pleasure as they talked together over their newly-formed projects.

Before going to bed that night old Mrs. Peters read to them again the proverb written on the fly-leaf of the Bible, and added many precious promises written within the sacred book itself: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

When Mrs. Peters had finished reading to them, both the boys bid her good night, kissed her, and then went up arm-in-arm to their garret bed-room.

Before going to sleep, Johnnie made Abel promise that he would call him early in the morning at sunrise; and Abel, full of peace and hope, no sooner laid his head on the pillow than he fell fast asleep, and

Johnnie's Repentance.

dreamed he was picking bright pieces of silver off the road-side, while Johnnie within his forge at his anvil was beating them into crowns of light.

THE END.

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