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Smithers.

BY ANNIE E. FITCH.

He lived alone on the outskirts of a small country town,—alone—that is, with the sole exception of a huge black dog, which was his constant companion both in the house and wherever he chanced to roam.

He had gained the name of "Ugly Smithers," though the boys who gave it to him, feared as well as hated him, and seldom dared to speak or call the name where they knew he would hear it. Once or twice, however, he chanced to hear it, and the knowledge that he was called "ugly," did not improve his temper in the least. He had not always been ugly, nor had he always lived alone. In his younger days he had been quite a favorite in the village, rather jovial than otherwise, and making friends on every hand.

When he had married pretty Susie Jenkins and brought her home, he thought no man happier or more fortunate than himself; and later, when the little ones began to grow up around them, his happiness increased until John Smithers would not have changed places with a king upon his throne.

But his happiness was not built upon the only sure foundation. His wife and children were his idols, and as for the Bible and church going, he worked all day in the fields to provide for his family, and when night came he was too tired, he thought, to read the Bible, the newspaper was about all he could manage. Church-going was very often pushed aside in the same way, and a quiet Sunday nap, which he tried to make himself think he sorely needed, took its place.

When, however, his sun of happiness seemed at its very height, darkness came. Scarlet fever broke out in the schools, and not long after entered the Smithers' home, smiting down three of the children as with one mighty blow. Before the fever left them, Smithers had seen one after another, three of his beautiful children lowered into the cold grave, and only one boy, the eldest, left in the home. The hardening of Smithers' heart had begun. He could not see justice in his awful affliction. He would not turn his heart to God for comfort, but hardened and closed it up against all love and sympathy, aside from his wife and one remaining boy.

Time passed on and the wife's health began to fail, and within a year a larger mound was raised beside the three little graves, and the mother had gone to be with her children.

Kind neighbors now tried to show him loving sympathy and good will, but his heart was closing up more and more against all love. He was shutting out not only the Father's love and comfort, but all human love was likewise rejected. After repeated failures and repulsions, the neighbors and would-be friends decided that, as their sympathy was not wanted they would not offer it, and if he wished to shut himself up with his grief he would have to do so, that was all. Thus, one by one the chords of love were severed.

But now came a time sadder than all that went before. His one son, Angus, did not receive from his father a father's love or a father's kindness. Smithers was moody and silent most of the time, and when he did speak to the boy it was to chide or blame him, and sometimes even to become enraged and abuse him.

Angus was really a good boy and loved his father. He tried to please him, but the father's heart had become so hardened to all affection, that the very sight of the boy seemed a constant annoyance to him. Angus bore this treatment patiently for some years, but when he reached the age of fifteen and his father's heart had not softened towards him, he secretly laid his plans, and quietly slipped away from home one night while his father slept, going no one knew where. No one blamed him for going, they wondered rather that he had stayed so long.

One night, not long after Angus left, his father dreamed that the boy came home one dark night, very much exhausted and frightened, having slipped over the embankment on a bad part of the road, and Smithers was awakened with these words, "Oh father! if there'd only been a light there." Smithers resolved that there should be a light there for him whenever he should come. He found a poor boy living near the spot, and giving him a lantern and oil, bargained with him for so much a week to hang the lantern each night on a tree overlooking the worst part of the road.

Smithers was often seen on specially dark nights, walking with his dog in the direction of the light—"Just to see," he said to himself, "that the light is kept bright, and that the little rascal does not cheat me." But who shall say that the father's heart was dead? Was not that dream cherished as a prophecy whose fulfillment he really longed to see? However that may be, sixteen long years had passed away since Angus had slipped out into the big world; and today, as Smithers dragged himself wearily in from the fields, his thoughts were with the boy. He feels no energy to prepare the mid-day meal, but instead, buries his face in his hands and gives

himself up to his thoughts, taking no account of time. At length the dog which sleeps at his side wakens quickly and goes to the door. This movement rouses Smithers and his eyes follow the dog, where stands—is it a vision?—the sweetest, daintiest little girl his eyes have seen for many a day.

"Oh! I guess youse boff waked up now. Has you any little girls for me to play wiff? I came over to see."

"No," said Smithers, looking at her intently, "I haven't any little girls."

"Oh! I'm so sorry. Hasn't you got any little boys either?"

"Yes, I suppose I have one boy somewhere, but he won't be very little now, I'm thinking, and he isn't home either."

"I'se sorry you hasn't any one for me to play wiff, cos you see my mamma hasn't any more little boys and girls, only me; but someways I'm glad, cos she says that makes her love me all the more. You must loved your little boy a lot didn't you, havin' just one—and what made him go away?"

"I suppose he went because I sent him," said Smithers, absently.

"Well now, that's like God, isn't it? You know he had only one son, and he loved him very much, but he sent him away just the same, cos he loved the world so much he let his son come and die to save it—that means you, and me, and everybody, cos mamma says so. Oh! I think it's a wonderful story!"

"How do you 'spose he could make up his mind to let his only Son come?"

"But mamma says we can't understand, cos we can't love as much as God does. But anyways, I love God so much when I think of it, that I don't see how he can love me any more."

As neither the man nor the dog seemed inclined to reply to this, the little maiden said she guessed she'd be going, but added—"I do hope your little boy will come home soon, and if he does I'll come over and play wiff him."

"Good-bye man, good-bye nice doggie," and the little fairy was gone.

But she had left her gospel message behind in the heart of Smithers. He drew up to the table and buried his face, weeping and groaning alternately, with now and then a few words which seemed wrung from the depths of his soul.

"Oh! my God! what a wretch I am. What love! what love! and yet for me, who have not loved anybody. Can it mean me? Yes, the little angel said so, and God sent her I am sure."

Growing more calm, he rose, and going to his trunk took out a Bible, saying, "I think it's in this book—'A little child shall lead them,' and I'd like to find it." He did not find the passage he was looking for, but he found many others more sweet and precious, bringing a flood of light and love into his life. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool." "He was bruised for our iniquities, and wounded for our transgressions," etc.

He sat drinking in the sweet words of life as only a thirsty soul can, until warned by the gathering shadows that the evening meal must be prepared for himself and faithful Carlo.

Smithers rose and went about his task with a happy heart and a song on his lips.

He found himself doubting if he were the same wretched man who came from the fields a few hours ago, and surely, he was a "new creature in Christ Jesus."

As he sat down to supper, for the first time in many years he lifted his heart in praise and thanksgiving, to the giver of all good.

After the chores were done he sat down to read, but this time the paper was thrown aside, and the "Word of Life" again eagerly devoured.

Among other things, he read the parable of the "Prodigal Son." It impressed him strangely. "Yes," he murmured, "I am truly God's prodigal son, but in relation to my boy I'm a prodigal father."

It was very dark and growing late, and yet the father felt a strong desire to go and meet his son. Not that he felt at all sure of meeting him if he did go, but more to show God that this was his attitude of heart. He was just saying, "Well, Carlo, will you take a walk with your master,"—when—what was that? A step on the path,—a lifting of the latch, and Smithers stood face to face with a strong, fine looking man, who grasped his hand, and looking into his eyes said, "Father!"

"Can it be you, Angus, my boy? Oh, how good the Lord is! You've just come in exactly the right time. I'm glad you didn't come an hour sooner, or an hour later, either."

Then he told his afternoon's experience, and he said, "I have been a slave to my own grief these many long years, but God sent his angel, and now the chain is snap-

ped and I am free to live in the sunshine, and free to love you, my son, as I have never loved you before."

Then followed the story of the intervening years.

The father's was a dark picture, and told in a few words; but Angus had much to relate. He had sought his fortune in the West, and by honesty and industry had accumulated quite a little property. "Yes, father, to use a Western phrase, I've 'struck it rich,' and I suppose I might have settled down in any one of our Eastern cities and led a very pleasant life, but I couldn't rest until I came to see you, to find out if you wanted me now. If you do, father, we will settle here. I left Mary and the little girl with friends in the next town, and she is ready to do just what you think best. I rather think a little of our western gold will make the old place look up a bit, and we can all be very comfortable and happy here I am sure."

Smithers shed many tears of joy that night, and found himself agreeing perfectly with all his son's plans for the future.

Within a few days Mary and the little girl arrived, and the old place was "home" again from that hour.

"The little angel," as Smithers called the child who talked to him that memorable day in the doorway, soon found that a little girl had come, and the wee girls were very happy together in the long summer days.

But little Susie loved best to sit with grandpa, as he read to her under the apple trees, or go walking with him in the quiet lanes and streets, or out into the broad fields.

As the boys who had once delighted to call him "Ugly Smithers" saw the changed expression of the old man's face, and saw him walking often with the sweet little girl, they changed the name to "Grandpa Smithers," by which he is now known all over the village.

One day, as "Grandpa" and little Susie were under the apple tree, Mary and Angus joined them, and Grandpa, looking around on their faces, happy with love, said, "Well, children, I used to think when I was so wretched that I would like to die, but I did not dream there was so much happiness ahead for me, even in this life. 'In wrath he had remembered mercy,' and has sent me all these blessings before it is too late."

"Yes," said Mary, that makes me think of the passage I read from Whittier this morning,—

Ah! human kindness, human love!
To few who seek, denied;
Too soon we learn to prize above
The whole round world beside.

Angus and I are so glad that it did not come too late to you, father."

And as he sat there in the bosom of his family, with a heart of love to all, he fervently and reverently said, "Amen."

How Flossie Fed the Castaway.

BY MARY ALLAIRE.

Flossie was delighted. Any little girl would be, for the lamb was beautiful, and the pleading look in its eyes would make any loving little girl want to supply its mother's place at once.

It was a puzzle how it ever came there. Flossie's father found it on the road when he was taking the oxen to the blacksmith's to be shod. There, near a clump of bushes, from which the leaves were gone, was the tiny white lamb bleating and shivering.

Flossie's father got down from the ox cart and took the lamb in his arms. When he saw how cold it was, he put it inside his coat. At the blacksmith's the lamb was put down close to the forge. That it was hungry Flossie's father knew, but how to feed it was the problem. When the oxen were shod, Flossie's father took the lamb in his arms and kept it warm under his coat again.

Flossie was swinging on the gate. She knew when she saw her father that he had some surprise for her. She danced up and down. "What is it, papa, what is it?"

As the oxen stopped at the gate, her papa opened his coat, and she saw the little white-and-pink nose of the lamb. In a minute she was climbing over the wheel and sitting beside her father holding the lamb tenderly in her arms, as the oxen turned slowly toward the barn.

"The little thing is very hungry, Flossie; you must feed him," said her father.

Flossie put the lamb down tenderly in the hay, but it stood on its wobbly legs, bleating pitifully. Flossie hurried to the house, so interested in feeding the lamb that she forgot to ask where her father got it.

In a moment she was back with a pan of milk, but the little lamb only smelled at it and bleated the more pitifully. Poor Flossie! Here was a situation. A hungry lamb, and plenty of milk, but no way to feed the lamb.

Flossie suddenly turned and ran over the fields toward a white house, whose chimneys showed when the leaves were gone from the trees. She entered the kitchen of this house like a small tornado.

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