

NEMO

OR

The Wonderful Door.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIE'S OLD ORGAN."

CHAPTER IV.

AMONGST THE BASKETS.

So little Nemo never saw the inside of the workhouse door, but he became instead the joint property of the old man and of Abel Grey. Never did mother or grandmother watch more anxiously the child whom they loved, than the old man and little Abel watched their baby.

Directed by Amos, Abel went round to the different second-hand shops in the town, and bought a little stock of clothes for the child, and then he was taught by the old man how to wash and to dress it.

It was a curious sight to see the two in the freelight, bending over little Nemo, listening to his every breath, and watching every movement of his tiny hands or feet.

Whilst Abel was removing to his new house, whilst he was cleaning the dirty rooms and putting everything in order, and at all other times when he was busy, or when the weather was wet, the baby was left with Amos, and the old man lived his life over again, and felt once more proud and happy as he watched by and tended the child.

But in fine weather Abel took the child with him when he went on his rounds in the cart; it was good for babies to have fresh air, so Amos said, and it was certainly good for Abel to have a companion in the long slow drives which used to be so tedious and uninteresting to him.

The cart was covered with baskets of all sorts and shapes, and colours and sizes. There were large baskets and small baskets; there were baskets red, and white, and blue, and green, there were baskets round and baskets square, baskets made for use and baskets made for ornament; there were clothes baskets and plate baskets, and hand baskets and waste-paper baskets; basket tables and basket chairs, basket flower-stands and basket cradles, basket sofas, and basket stools.

Some of these baskets were slung outside the covered cart, so that it looked like a huge mass of moving baskets as it went along, others were stowed away one upon another inside it. But how-and white, and blue, and green; there ever full the cart was, and it was very full at all times, there was always a corner inside kept for little Nemo.

There he quietly slept in a basket cradle, as his foster-father drove along, waking up now and again to have his bottle, or to lie back in Abel's arms as he sat on the edge of the cart, only to fall asleep again, soothed and quieted by the sweet country air.

And little Nemo did credit to the constant care bestowed on him by the two men. He grew a strong, healthy child, rosy and fresh with living in the open air, and happy and merry as the day is long. Never did baby laugh more than that baby, never did tiny child crow or caper or kick his fat little legs with joy, more than Nemo; never were teeth cut more easily than the two pearly rows of which Amos and Abel were so proud.

"He's all smiles, Abel, my lad," said the old man, as he looked at him one day,—"all smiles and sunshine. Not one of my sixteen was like him. Why, bless him, he hardly seems to know how to cry!"

As Nemo grew older and began to talk, it was a fresh source of amusement to the two who cared for him. Everything he said during the day was repeated to old Amos at night, and they both agreed that he was the most wonderful boy that had ever been born. He no longer lay in the basket cradle, but sat by Abel's side, holding the reins and calling "Gee up" to the old donkey, and asking questions about everything they passed on the road.

Abel's customers began to look for the pretty little fair-haired boy, who was always to be seen perched on the front of the basket-cart, and many were the presents brought to little Nemo as he went through the villages where Abel's chief business was done.

Sometimes a kind-hearted woman would give him an apple or a plum; sometimes a child would thrust a picture-book into his hand, or would run after the cart with a bunch of wild-flowers for little Nemo.

Abel taught him to touch his cap and to say "Sank'ou," whenever anything was brought to him, and he said it so prettily, with such a twinkle in his eye, and with such a fascinating dimple in his

cheek, that he won the hearts of Abel's customers, as he had won Abel's own heart two years before at the workhouse door.

The little basket-seller had never before done so much business as he was doing now that Nemo was with him. The number of people who found they wanted new baskets was astonishing. Instead of being worse off now that he had a child to keep as well as himself, Abel had never been so rich in his life.

When he told old Amos this, he said, "It's the Lord, my lad—he's paying thee back for looking after the bairn for him."

But Abel only laughed when the old man said this, for Abel did not know the Lord; he was yet a stranger to the power of his love. When Amos tried to speak of the Master who was so dear to him, Abel only smiled to himself, and thought it was a childish fancy of the old man's, with which he amused himself in his old age, but which Abel thought had nothing to do with himself, and in which he had no need to believe.

For poor little Abel Grey lived without God in the world. He had heard there was a God, or at least that some people believed that there was, but he knew nothing about God, and did not care to know anything.

He listened to all that Amos said to him about the child, but when he spoke to him of the Lord he loved, and who was very near and dear to the old man's heart, Abel, whilst he seemed to be listening, was thinking of other things, and never really attended to the words that were spoken by the old man.

So, whilst Abel loved little Nemo, and

which they usually stopped, and he would pull up the donkey at exactly the right moment; he even learnt the prices of the various articles in the cart, and would hold up a stool or table, if he saw any one pass that he thought would be likely to buy, and would call out, "Nice basket-stool, only a shilling, my lady!" "Round garden table, only three shillings and sixpence, sir!" as well as Abel could have done it himself.

But he was always asking one question—"Why don't we go somewhere new, Abel—somewhere where we've never been before?" and Abel would answer him—"I don't know, my lad; maybe we will some day!"

But the day Nemo so much longed for did not come until he was nearly six years old. Abel had gone on so long in the old groove, that he found it very difficult to get into a fresh one. But at length, after much deep consideration, he planned that as soon as the warm summer weather came, he and Nemo and the donkey should take a long round together, and visit villages to which he had never been before, not returning home every evening, as had hitherto been his custom, but sleeping either in the cart itself, or in any other place in which they might be able to find shelter.

It seemed to little Abel Grey a mighty undertaking, and even after it was settled he was full of misgiving, and was almost inclined to give it up, but the boy was so full of delight at the thought of seeing places which he had never seen before, that he could not bear to disappoint him by saying that he did not care to go.

and spelling over to himself again and again, p-l-g, d-o-g, dog, c-a-t, cat. Before the spelling was finished, they had left the town behind and were getting out into the open country road. There were green hedges on either side, broken here and there by a gate, through which Nemo could see the sheep and lambs lying under the trees, or the green waving corn moving in the morning breeze. But still the child did not care to use his eyes much.

"It's all old yet, Abel," he said. "I've seen it all before."

It was not until late in the afternoon that they came to a place where four roads met, and in which there was a curious old-fashioned milestone on which was carved, Fairburn—15 miles.

"Now," said Abel, "we turn up here;" and Nemo gave a shout of joy.

"New land, new land!" he cried. "Hurray, Abel! we've never been here before!"

From that moment Nemo was full of excitement and expectation; every field they passed he gazed at with interest, because it was a fresh field; every horse and cow and sheep seemed worth looking at, because it was in the new country, as he called it.

The sun was just beginning to set when they came in sight of some houses, still in the far distance.

"There will be a village out there. I should say," said Abel.

A long steep hill took them up into the village street. On either side was a row of cottages built of grey stone, some of them with thatched roofs, and others, more newly built, covered with slates. Though it was almost dark, the village green was covered with children playing at different games, and enjoying the cool evening air after the heat of the day.

"It's over-late to do business to-night," said Abel; "folks can't see the baskets. We must stop here for the night, I think."

"Where shall we sleep, Abel?" "Here, in the cart, my boy; we've got a cover overhead, and plenty of wraps, and it's a warm, pleasant night."

"Oh, what fun!" said little Nemo. "Lift me out, and let me go and look at the new country, Abel."

So Abel took him out of the cart, and he wandered about the green, watching the games of the children, throwing pieces of the biscuit Abel had given him to the geese and the ducks, and looking at the lights appearing one after another in the cottage windows.

When he came back to the cart, he found that Abel had been to a farm and had bought some milk, and made all ready for their supper. Then, after they had had a good meal, he took Nemo in his arms, and they lay covered with blankets and sound asleep till daybreak.

Then, as soon as smoke began to be seen in the cottage chimneys, Abel was up and busy.

"We must call at every house in the village," he said; "for we've never been here before."

They had a very successful day; the cart grew lighter, and Abel's pocket grew heavier at almost every house they came to; and one farmer's wife gave Nemo a cake she had just baked, and another threw a handful of gooseberries into the cart, and a third, when she paid Abel for her market-basket, gave Nemo a penny for himself. So that, altogether, both Abel and the child had a very merry time.

Passing through the village late in the afternoon, they came to an open moorland stretching away for miles as far as they could see. They inquired at a little public-house, which stood on the edge of the moor, how far it was to the next village, and they were told it was several miles away.

"We must try to get there to-night, Nemo," said Abel, "and begin work there to-morrow."

But the moorland road was rough and uneven—up hill and down hill the whole way; sometimes they had to cross a stream, and then the donkey turned stupid and refused to move, till Abel took off his shoes and stockings and waded across, dragging the donkey after him; sometimes the road was so steep that Abel and Nemo had to walk for a mile at a time, and had often to stop to rest both themselves and the donkey. So their progress was very slow, and the darkness came much sooner than they expected it.

On and on they went, but no village came in sight. Somehow or other they had taken a wrong turning, and missed the direct road. For some hours Abel urged the donkey forward; but at length the poor animal grew very tired, and he knew it, and was too kind to press it further.

"It's no use, Nemo," he said; "you and me will have to stop here till daylight comes, and we can see which way to go."

(To be continued.)



ABEL AND NEMO SELLING BASKETS.

would have laid down his life for the child, he never taught him anything about God. It was old Amos who made the child say a little prayer night and morning, and who would often lift him up to the skylight in the attic, and, pointing to the blue sky, would tell him that God lived there, and that God loved Nemo, and that Nemo must love him.

When he was quite a little child, not two years old, Nemo learnt this first simple lesson, and he never forgot it. He learnt to speak very early, and was never tired of repeating anything he had heard. He would drag Abel to the window of their small house again and again, and, pointing up to the sky, he would say, "God 'ives up dere. God 'oves Nemo, Nemo 'oves God."

And then he would look at Abel, and go over the same lesson again, in just the same words, except that this time he put Abel's name into it instead of his own—"God 'ives up dere. God 'oves Abel; Abel 'oves God."

And the words would ring in the little man's ears long after the child had uttered them—"God loves Abel; Abel loves God."

Was the first of those statements true? Did God really love Abel? He did not know. But he was quite sure of this, that Abel did not love God. The child was quite wrong there, but he did not choose to tell him so. Nemo would be troubled if he shook his head and said that he did not love God, and little Abel Grey would not trouble Nemo for the world.

As Nemo grew older, he became more and more of a companion to his little foster-father. He knew the houses at

Accordingly all was made ready for their departure. Blankets and warm wraps were put into the cart, in case they should have to sleep in the open air. Abel bought meat in tins, and a good supply of bread and biscuits, that they might not fall short of food; and then, when all was done, they took as tender a farewell of old Amos as if they were going to America or Australia.

"I'll tell you all about it when I come home, Father Amos," said the boy, "and you'll like that, won't you?"

The next morning, at daybreak, Abel rose, waked little Nemo, and helped him to dress, for the child was so sleepy he could not even put his stockings on; and then he went out to harness the donkey and to bring the cart to the door.

Nemo was wide awake as soon as he came out into the fresh morning air, and was wild with joy that they were really starting on the journey for which he had longed so much. He perched himself beside Abel in a little basket-chair, which looked as if it had been made on purpose for him, and after eating a large slice of bread and butter, and drinking a mugful of milk, he took out of his pocket his little blue reading-book, and began to learn the spelling which old Amos had set him, and which must be said perfectly on his return.

"I know what all these streets are like," he explained to Abel, "so I shall get it all done before we come to the new country, where we've never been before."

So they were very quiet during the first part of their journey. Abel sat busily thinking of the places he meant to visit, and Nemo was intent on his book, tracing each word with his finger,