

THE TERRIBLE RED DWARF AND THE CAVE HE LIVED IN.

CHAPTER II.



T would take me a great deal too long a time to tell of half the harm that came out of that dreadful cave. If I lived to be as old as Methuselah, and did nothing but write all my days, I should not have told you all about this dwarf and his evil doings. There certainly was not a cottager in the little village hard-by, but had some story of the troubles he wrought. Some could tell of the friends he had parted ; some of the enemies he had made. Many talked of the angry quarrels that he was constantly leading people into. Some had been robbed by him of all that they had, and been turned adrift on the cold world. Others, even in that little village, wept for homes he had ruined ; and some, who did not talk much, knew even of hearts that he had broken. In fact, there was no end to his mischief.

There was Farmer Hasty, who lived in the long, low, white house, with the thatched roof, and the old-fashioned garden in front of it ; the dwarf almost plagued the life out of him. If you met him you saw a miserable face, and heard nothing but a miserable grumble about him being the worst-used man in the kingdom. The weather was always against him, and his crops were always going to be ruined—but there, as if to show that nothing agreed with him, a long row of wheat stacks came every year. He was always going to be starved, he was quite sure of that,—and there all the time were his broad shoulders and his rounded waistcoat quite making fun of their master, and his double chin actually contradicting him to his very face. It was all this little Red Dwarf that plagued him wherever he went. There were his servants ; he never saw such a set, never. He couldn't keep one of them ; ploughman, milkmaid, cook, shepherd—they all went almost as soon as they came. This, too, was the fault of that wicken Red Dwarf. Why the very dog came sneaking along, crouching on his hind legs, with his tail tucked tightly between between them—the Red Dwarf had actually spoiled him too.

Then there was young Jack again, the widow's son. What chances that boy had had to be sure ! When he was only a little curly-headed boy the Squire had taken a great fancy to him, and sent him to school. Everybody said then that the lad's fortune was made. So it would have been but for

the Red Dwarf. One day he upset it all, Jack and his prospects too, in about a couple of minutes. Then Jack had gone away to a great town and was doing well, folks said. "Jack would get on ; trust him for that," said the people in the village when somebody came back from the great city and reported that Jack was coming out quite like a gentleman. Steadily he was working his way up from one position to another, and there was nothing to hinder his being Lord Mayor of London some day, if it hadn't been for this terrible Dwarf. One day there he was home again, loafing about with nothing to do, until at last he had to emigrate and leave his poor old lonely mother almost broken-hearted. If I could stay to tell you all the story you would see that it was brought about by that dreadful Red Dwarf.

Then there was poor Harry, the carpenter who had married pretty pert Bess, the schoolmaster's daughter. There in his pleasant little cottage, with the roses clustering about it, and the jessamine and honey-suckle covering the porch, he had set up for the happiest man in the parish. And so he was, if loving hearts, and steady work, and good wages can make people happy. Little wonder that Harry went whistling to his work and came whistling home again ; and little wonder that whenever you stepped into the carpenter's shop you heard Harry's merry voice singing as he sent the curly shavings flying from the plane.

Ah ! he might have whistled always if it had not been for that dreadful Red Dwarf. Foolish Bess forgot about *him*. She thoughtlessly left the cottage-door open, so that the dwarf sent in a swarm of his mischief-makers, and his stinging messengers ; and, waiting until a chance came, they would burst out upon Harry, and worry him so that often he was driven away to the public-house. Bess might have seen with half an eye what the dwarf was doing ; but she didn't—not even with her two eyes, though they were as bright a pair as ever flashed. Again and again the fierce little army burst out upon Harry with dart and arrow and sharp sword, until his corner, of an evening, was generally at the *Blue Boar* instead of being at home. Then he ceased to whistle as he came and went. The shavings dropped sullen and silent from the plane. Drink and idleness stole the roses from Bessie's cheeks, and from the cottage too ; and stripped the place of one comfort after another till you would not have known it. Such a power had that terrible Red Dwarf.

(To be Continued.)