

FRIENDLESS BOB.

(From Children's Friend.)

CHAPTER I.

On a certain sunny afternoon in June, a gentleman was walking across a common, enjoying the blue sky flecked with fleecy white clouds, the thick short grass on which he trod, and a distant line of sparkling silver which sent toward him invigorating sea-breezes. He lifted his hat to receive them on a pale, somewhat weary brow, and inhaled deep draughts of the pure air. He looked unused to such delight, as indeed he was; and this was his last walk. He was a city missionary, who, after a brief visit to this quiet watering-place, was now on his way to the station, to return to his work, and exchange the sound of breaking waves and screaming sea-birds, the sight of azure sea and sky, golden sands and green grass, and the breathing of the fresh country air, for the stifling noisy courts of East London, with their sights of misery and sin on every side. It was his duty, and he loved it; but nevertheless he left with keen regret the little spot in which he had rested, regaining health and spirits.

Nor had he been idle here. Many were the messages from his Master he had been able to give during his stay, for he never lost an opportunity of sowing the good seed, and every man, woman, or child with whom he had come in contact had received some word of pity, encouragement, warning, or reproof.

But there was one more good deed for him to perform, before the train whirled him back to the smoky city; one more life to influence.

Lying flat on the common, with his feet in the air and his face buried in the fragrant grass, displaying a ragged coat, a pair of bare heels, and the back of a curly head, lay a boy, and near him browsed an equally ragged-looking, little, underfed donkey. Now Mr. Allen was very fond of boys, and also of donkeys, and he thought he knew all the donkey-boys in the place; so, after glancing at his watch, and finding that he had ten minutes to spare, he stopped and said, "Halloo!" But the scowling little face, begrimed with dirt, that looked up was that of a stranger: the dirt was nothing new, but the scowl was, for boys usually took to him; the donkey, too, to whom he extended a friendly hand, put back his ears, showing a suspicion of human beings which told its own tale.

"What are you doing here, my lad?" asked the gentleman.

"Nothin," replied the boy, staring with a pair of open blue eyes.

"So it seems. What is your name?"

"Bob."

"Bob who?"

"Don't know."

"Who are your friends?"

"I ain't got any friends," said Bob, sitting up and looking more confidential.

"But whom do you live with?"

"I lives with an old woman named Brown, who says she's my granny; but I don't believe a bit of it. Anyhow, she ain't no friend."

"And where does she live? I don't know. And where were you when I had all the donkey-boys to tea?"

"Yes, Jerry's a bad un to go."

"Poor little fellow! he doesn't look as if he had much to eat, and he's very small; and what a pretty head and patient eyes! I wouldn't beat you if you were mine, Jerry."

"Oh yes, you would, sir; why, every one beats their donkeys."

"No, indeed, Bob; only cruel people, who don't deserve to have them. Now look here my little man, I've only two minutes more left before I catch the train, and I want to say something to you first, so listen. My advice to you is to make a friend of Jerry; don't beat him but treat him kindly and love him, and God, who made him and

which he lived, kindness to animals had not been heard so much of as happily it has been in many places. Moreover, this was some few years ago. Poor Bob was a very neglected boy: his parents had died when he was a baby, and the old woman who called herself his grandmother certainly did not treat him as a grandson, for she beat him till he grew strong enough to get away from her, and then she half-starved him, and sometimes kept him out of doors all night.

She was a miserable old woman herself, and whenever she could get a little money by washing or mending, she spent it in drink, so the boy's home was not much of a home for him. He had grown to the age of ten without any education except that he had learned to read a little from a boy who lived near; this was Jack, a crippled lad, whose death had been an additional misfortune to poor Bob. Mrs. Brown made him work as soon as he was old enough, and this the boy was willing to do, for it took him away from the wretched hovel where he was allowed to eat and sleep when the old woman was not tipsy and in tolerably good-humor. A small donkey and cart had been procured, and now Bob's earnings were expected not only to pay for the keep of the former, but if he did not bring home something for his own lodging too, he met with but scant welcome. Jerry had a dilapidated little outhouse, in which he patiently dwelt when not hard at work drawing coals, or wood, or stones, or anything else his master could get to fill his cart, and make a few pence by conveying. Bob had by this time got used to a life of much work, little pleasure, plenty of hard words and blows, and often empty stomach, and a general feeling that nobody cared for him and he cared for nobody.

Whether Jerry had also got used to his hard life and absence of kind words or looks, it is impossible to say. He kept his feelings to himself, and Bob never once thought of them. Indeed, I fear that when sent out breakfastless in the morning, with the words, "Be off, you and your brute," the poor brute would suffer for the soreness of Bob's heart, and a little ill-temper with it: not that he was naturally an ill-tempered boy. Of all his errands he preferred being sent to the seaside, across the common that divided the two villages, for when his cart was emptied of its load, he would take Jerry out and let him feed, while he himself found entertainment in watching the ships and little fishing boats, resolving that some



POOR BOB SPENDS THE NIGHT IN THE STABLE WITH HIS DONKEY.

"We don't live 'ere, but three miles off t'other side of the common; but I come over to bring coal or wood, or to get seaweed."

"And you have no friends, poor Bob?"

"No, none, I 'ad Jack once, but 'e's dead," and the blue eyes filled with tears.

"Your brother?"

"No; a chap that lived next door."

"Is the donkey yours, Bob?"

"Yes."

"You don't beat him with this great stick, I hope," said Mr. Allen, taking it up.

you, will be your friend too, and so will humane people, and you will no longer be a lonely, friendless boy. Here is sixpence, and two-pence of it is for Jerry, remember. Buy him some little treat, and spend the rest for yourself, and don't forget my words. Good-bye, Bob." And off he ran to make up for lost time, while Bob sat staring alternately at the retreating figure, the sixpence lying on his little dirty palm, and the donkey.

It took Bob some time to get a new idea into his head, and these were very new ideas to him. In the out-of-the-way village in