

Bobby.

BY ALICE M. DOUTHITT.

There is so little that I can tell about Bobby, and he did so much. Bobby was a waif on the sea of life. We did not know where he had lived, we did not know even his name.

One evening just at dusk, he had come wandering into our little village, when Mrs. Walton bent over him and asked the lonely little stranger his name, he raised two great black eyes to her face and said:

"I'm Bobby."

"But your other name, your father's name?" Mrs. Walton persisted.

"I'm just Bobby," the child said, shaking his little dark head.

"And where is your home?"

"Bobby has no home," the little one answered, "Bobby came from where the sun shines, far away over the sea. Mamma says Bobby is a stray lamb."

"Where are you going?" Mrs. Walton asked, her voice husky.

The child was looking about and did not seem to hear the question; but after a while he said, wearily: "I'm so tired, I do not like this place. I think I will walk on, please. I think I will go right on to heaven. Do you think they will open the gates for Bobby if he gets there at night? Mamma's there, you know."

But Bobby did not go on to heaven that night. Mrs. Walton took him home with her. And there he stayed.

Bobby had only one leg. The other was off above the knee. So he had always to walk with a crutch. When asked about it, the child said:

"I awoke and it was gone, and there were rows of beds, and mamma had gone to heaven."

And this was all we knew of Bobby's little past. Although we advertised and tried in every possible way to learn something of those to whom the boy had belonged, we could find no trace of them. That the child had been accustomed to the most refined surroundings was evident. He was never very strong, and during the first years of his life among us he spent most of his time lying on a couch in a certain beautiful room of Mrs. Walton's. He did not talk much, perhaps because the little body was never quite free from pain. But when he did talk he had a quaint way of speaking of himself as in the third person. He soon began to show a passionate fondness for music. And for a child, how he sang! He became, at last, quite the wonder of our quiet village. During that last year he used to lie for hours crouching softly to himself and looking out into the tree tops that shaded his window, and through the tree tops to the blue hills beyond. Perhaps our Bobby was not only a musician; he may have been a poet as well.

And now I am going to tell you some of the things that Bobby did.

There was but one church in the village. Many of the people went to church but they were not very warm-hearted Christians, I suspect. They did not try to help the minister in his work, and they gave very little to missions. In short, they did not care a great deal for anybody but themselves.

Mr. Parton, the minister, was a very sad man. His only little boy had died about the time that Bobby came to the village. The children said that he—Mr. Parton—went out often when it was cold and dark, and cried by the little, silent grave.

On Sunday morning—Bobby was strong enough that last year to go out and play a little almost every day—some playmates were telling him of this little boy of Mr. Parton's. "Ah!" said Bobby. "I am so sorry for Mr. Parton. I will go and sing to him. Mrs. Walton likes me to sing when she is lonely."

That morning when the minister was giving out a hymn, Bobby stepped away from Mrs. Walton's side. Patter, went the little crutch, and the little foot, up the long aisle, and without pausing, on up into the pulpit, not stopping until the tiny, dark-haired child stood close beside the amazed preacher.

The boy did not speak, and the congregation began to smile. But they did not smile for long. Suddenly they grew very still. Tears gathered in many eyes.

Bobby, a rare smile lighting up his little, thin, dark face, had begun to sing. It was only some simple, childish hymn, but it was Bobby's voice, that rare, strange, wonderful voice, that sang it. Except for the singing, you almost could have heard a pin drop in that church, it was so still.

The minister put his hand over his eyes, and Bobby, thinking that perhaps he might be grieving for the lost little boy, drew close to him and leaned against him as he sang. Bobby did not linger

n instant after his little song was ended, but pattered off down to Mrs. Walton.

Mr. Parton was not troubled by inattention that day; a great hush seemed to have fallen over the people. The following Sunday when the minister read the first hymn, the little crutch again went pattering up into the pulpit. Mr. Parton stopped reading and smiled down at Bobby, but the child did not seem to see him. There was a longing, far-away look in the great eyes. It seemed almost as if he were singing to some invisible presence.

And so Bobby kept singing every Sunday and great crowds soon began to come to that church. Mr. Parton forgot his sorrow in the good that was being done. The child sang always of his own free will. No one could get him to talk of the singing. He would say, simply:

"I like to sing in church. I guess that up in heaven mamma listens."

Mrs. Walton talked to Bobby a great deal of this unknown mother, and he would often allude to her as awaiting him in Heaven. Although he seemed to have quite forgotten the strange way in which he had come to the village, as well as everything pertaining to that other unknown life of his, he seemed to entertain, as he had done from the first, the idea that in some way he was going very soon to Heaven to meet his mamma.

There came a day when Bobby did not hurry off down the aisle as usual after singing. Instead, he climbed into a great easy chair in the pulpit and sat there, his head resting on his little dark hand.

It so happened that the sermon that day was about missionaries and their work, and at the close Mr. Parton asked for a collection for foreign missions.

When Mr. Parton had finished speaking, Bobby stepped forward. Aside from his singing, the boy had never spoke in the pulpit before. What prompted him to do it now no one ever knew. But he said, the clear, childish voice falling out over almost perfect stillness, as leaning far forward he reached out his little arms.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me."

He had learned the verse that morning. Then he broke out into a low, sad, plaintive air that wrung the hearts of those who heard it. The pastor was not dissatisfied with the collection that day. I dare say there had never before been so large a sum sent from that church.

The following Sunday when Bobby had finished his singing he again crept up into the great chair and rested his head on his hand. There was something new and different about Bobby. His brightness seemed to have gone. There was a pinched, weary look in the little face, and great circles under the big, wistful eyes. Mother's hearts ached when they looked at him.

The ladies of the church were making up a box to send to the poor children of a neighboring city, and the minister spoke something of the fact before commencing the sermon. Bobby at once slipped down from his chair and, leaning heavily on his crutch, said:

"Send it full, packed full to the very top. You don't know how sad and hungry and cold they are. I did not know, but one day I went with Mrs. Walton and I saw them all ragged and pale, and I cannot care for all the beautiful things since. Tell them Bobby has no money to send and he cannot come to them now, but Bobby sends his love. Put a little letter in and tell them this, and tell them also, that when Bobby gets on to Heaven he and mamma will look down and watch over them, and will ask Jesus to never let anything hurt them anymore. Do this," a strangely winning smile lighting up his wan little face, "and I shall sing for you next time my prettiest song, I call it Bobby's Christmas song."

Then he sank down at the pastor's feet. There was no sermon that day. Mr. Parton stooped, gathered our Bobby up into his arms and carried him home.

Such a box or rather boxes, as went that week to those poor children. One box did not begin to hold the things. It seemed that the people would never get through sending, and they never have. Many times each year great boxes of things are sent out from that church. And everything that is sent has marked upon it, "Bobby's love."

And what of Bobby? Bobby, our strange, quaint, dark-eyed little wanderer never sang in the world any more. It was not many days until the people were stealing with silent footsteps into a darkened room where a little boy lay with dark eyes closed, and sweet voice hushed and little still hands very softly folded.

The little stray lamb had been gathered to its Shepherd's bosom. Up among the angels Bobby sang his Christmas song—*Presbyterian Messenger*.