

JACK.

A LENTEN STORY FOR BOYS.

(From the Churchman.)

"O all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord; praise Him, and magnify Him forever," sang St. Mary's choir; but something was wrong with the leader, that was certain. The high silver-toned soprano—that had rung above the other voices and taking all the principal solos for so long—broke, scrambled up after the highest note in the bar, and reaching it, brought it out with such an effort, so different from its old bird-like ring, that the organist, turning round, shook his head and muttered "Twice" to himself as his fingers ran over the keys.

When morning service was over he shook his head again, this time over the curly-haired, bright-eyed boy, the leading soprano of St. Mary's, who was struggling out of his surplice in the vestry-room.

"It's no use, Simpson, we can't shut our eyes to the fact any longer, your voice is breaking and what we're going to do I cannot imagine. Hadden isn't up to the mark, or Brown either, and where to look for another voice like yours I don't know; but we must be careful of our choir's reputation. That you feel, I'm sure."

"Yes sir," the boy answered soberly. "I know I've got to give up my place, and it's real hard, after leading so long. But, Mr. Reynolds, did you ever hear Jack Osborn sing? He's got a voice just like a lark, and he loves music better than anything, I truly believe. But there's one bad thing," looking up into the brightening face of the organist, "he's lame."

"Eight weeks only to Easter," the organist said to himself, as he turned to put away his music, when Harry had promised to bring up his friend after afternoon service, that he might hear him sing. "Only eight weeks to Easter, and a new boy to train, for I must have one; and this lark of Simpson's is probably only a robin at best."

Meanwhile the choir boys were straggling out of the vestry door in twos and threes, talking loudly about the very same thing.

"Did you hear Simpson this morning?" inquired one. "Mr. Reynolds never'll stand that. I wonder who'll have his place. I wouldn't like to have to stand up there, with everybody looking at me, and sing the solos; but then there isn't any danger," and the boy, a fat comfortable alto, who never made very much noise any way, sighed a sigh of relief.

"Brown's pretty sure of it," another boy chimed in. "He's dreadfully careless, and sings wrong often, I've heard Mr. Reynolds say so; but there's no one else that *could* do all the Easter music."

Brown was thinking the same thing himself as he raced home. "It's an awful bore," he thought, as he hurried along. "I shall have to stay in and practise after the other boys are gone, just as Simpson does now, and miss football nearly every afternoon; but his seat is the most comfortable one in the whole row, and it must be real nice to sing all alone with every one in church listening to you." And so sure did he feel that he would soon be leading soprano that he quavered and trilled away half the afternoon in his own room, and then, in service, missed a whole bar while trying to imagine himself in Simpson's place.

"Brown, you grow more and more careless, every day, it seems to me," Mr. Reynolds said, a little sharply, after service. "You must turn over a new leaf, and quickly too." And that was such cold water poured over Brown's pleasant day-dream that he never noticed at all, as he hurried out, the pale thin boy who, with his

crutches beside him, was sitting out of the way of the boys, behind the door leading into the church.

"This is the fellow I told you about, Mr. Reynolds." And the organist nodded kindly to the lame boy as he followed Simpson up to the organ.

"Can you sing?" he said, looking keenly at the flushed face, and the thin hands working nervously on the crutches.

"A little, sir," Jack answered modestly.

"And read music?"

"Not very much, sir. Mother has taught me a little."

"Can you read that?" putting some music into his hand; "If you can, sing it."

At first—he was so frightened—Jack's voice trembled, and he sang false in a way that made Mr. Reynolds draw his eyebrows together, and Simpson fairly danced up and down, he was so afraid that his friend would fail; but soon, quite forgetting where he was, Jack only thought of the beautiful holy words he was singing, and his lovely voice rose clear, sweet, and high above the organ notes.

"Very well indeed, very well," smiled Mr. Reynolds. "Your voice needs a good deal of training—a great deal in fact—but I've heard worse singing," smilingly. "Suppose you come to the practising Wednesday and Friday afternoon this week, and to service next Sunday morning, not to sing but to listen and learn a little. You can slip in this little door here by the side of the organ with me, and sit down quite out of sight of the people. Why! What? Oh, never mind, never mind; I understand." And the kind old man patted the little boy's shoulder, pretending not to see the tears that filled his eyes or hear the quiver in the voice that was trying to thank him.

Home as fast as his crutches would carry him Jack hurried, and for the first time, perhaps, since he had been obliged to use them, he forgot how much he disliked to hear the sound of their tap, tap on the pavement. Elsie his little sister, was waiting for him at their street corner; but "Oh, Elsie!" was all he could say when she looked up in his beaming face.

"Something nice, mamma," she called out, running ahead to open the door; "something very nice, I know; just look at Jack's face."

"Oh, motherdie, the jolliest thing!" Jack called up to the sweet face hurrying down stairs. "I'm to go to the practisings, and Sunday service, and Mr. Reynolds says that I may sing, perhaps, some day. Wasn't it good that you taught the music and that we sing every evening?"

Jack was so happy, he loved music so dearly, that for three whole days he quite forgot how hard it was to be lame, to suffer pain, or that he never could again play ball, or run races and jump fences like other boys, all the harder for him to think of because only a year ago he had been as well and strong as any of them before his dreadful fall.

Wednesday and Friday's practice came; none of the boys noticed particularly the quiet boy in the corner, almost out of sight behind the organ, but what every one did notice was Mr. Reynold's saying.

"Brown, you may try this solo, and see what you can make of it."

Something very bad he made of it, to judge from the look on Mr. Reynold's face; but no one saw that, and the boys went home more sure than ever that he would at least sing the Easter music.

But he was never asked to sing alone again. Harry Simpson kept his old place till the Second Sunday in Lent, when the boys, marching into the choir, found "that chum" of Simpson's, as they had begun to call Jack, sitting in the place of honour.

Of course there was only time to look surprised, and to twist about a little in search of Harry, who was to be seen sitting quietly in his father's

pew before service began; for St. Mary's choir-boys are very well behaved. But every boy listened, in spite of the noise they were making themselves, to the wonderful voice that was leading them. When it came to the introit, Jack had almost forgotten to be nervous, and the beautiful solo, "As pants the hart for cooling springs," was sung as it had never been since the bygone days the grown-up people could only just remember, when St. Mary's was crowded, and people stood about the windows to listen to a boy with just such another voice.

"I'm glad he's got my place," Harry said to himself, trying to fight down the feeling that *would* come into his mind, of its being hard to see some one else in his old seat.

But Poor Tom Brown. He got very red in the face and looked very much surprised when he saw Jack. After the service was over and the boys back in the vestry-room, Mr. Reynolds made a little speech about being very sorry that their old friend had been obliged to leave them, but being very glad that he had brought them such a nice new voice in his place. "And I hope," he went on, "that you will get along as nicely as we always have done. Mind I want to hear no complaints, and I hope no one will forget that this is the Lord's house, that you sing to praise Him, and for His glory."

Then Tom boiled over. As soon as Mr. Reynold's back was turned he threw down his music, pulled off his surplice and threw it on its nail in the wardrobe, and going close to Jack, near enough to push one of his crutches, muttered something about "Snacks coming where they were not wanted," and then dashed out of the door and hurried home muttering, "I'll make him leave the choir yet, see if I don't."

"Brown's all put out," one of the boys said, by way of apology, as he picked up Jack's crutch for him. "He thought he was going to lead the choir, and it is pretty rough on him, so you mustn't mind."

And Jack tried hard not to; but as Lent went on and the daily services brought the boys together, he found St. Mary's choir a very uncomfortable place. His books were missing nearly every morning, and could not be found until after a great deal of trouble and worry, or could not be found at all; or a piece of white paper, with "Snack, or, Who comes where he isn't wanted? Jack Osborn," written on it, would tumble out of his Prayer Book when it was opened. Twice Tom had brought the rector's eyes upon their seats by making a noise when Jack was singing alone. A sharp "That noise must never happen again," after service, had put an end to it; but the persecution went on, and whatever a boy could do in the way of pinches, sly kicks, disagreeable things whispered in an undertone or written on paper to hurt another boy's flesh and feelings, poor Jack had to suffer through those long weeks.

"I won't complain," Jack would say to himself, as he hobbled home after some particularly unpleasant service. "It's lovely to sing, and mother would be so disappointed if I gave up. She and Elsie like to hear me tune up alone. The other boys would be nice if it wasn't for Brown, and some of them are now. I wouldn't mind it a bit if I wasn't lame; but it is mean to make fun of that." And Jack (he was only thirteen, you know) would have to go down in the chicken-yard among the hens and have a comfortable cry all by himself, with only the chicks for sympathy, before he could go in the house and be cheerful.

(To be continued.)

Speak truly, and thy thought shall a world's famine feed,

Speak truly, and each word of thine shall be a fruitful seed;

Live truly, and thy life shall be a great and noble creed.