

For Girls and Boys.

A YOUNG HERO AND HIS REWARD.

A small, rough house, far from any other human habitation, hid itself, the balmy summer through, amid the surrounding foliage; but the cruel wintry blasts, tearing away its leafy coverings, left it in desolate nakedness, in full view of the railway trains, which, several times daily, sped noisily by on their way east and west. The quick eye of many a traveller noted the column of smoke curling upward from the chimney.

Here a widowed mother and her son found a humble shelter. But three short years before they were living comfortably in the nearest village. The sudden death of the husband and father, combined with a series of lesser misfortunes caused them to exchange their pretty home for this, which they obtained at a trifling cost from its first proprietor.

And here they had lived ever since—how, their old friends and neighbors scarcely knew. True, James, the son, went to and from the village, laden with numerous packages. His herbs nicely picked and carefully assorted, were always acceptable at the country stores; and the bundles of bright wools he carried home, when returned, woven into many attractive forms by the nimble fingers of the invalid mother, invariably found ready and eager purchasers.

Many a time, as James turned his back on the cheery village, the intense longing of childhood for companionship and amusements stole over him, and an inexpressible feeling of loneliness caused his throat to swell with emotions which only the remembrance of the watching, waiting mother could quell.

"One sharp wintry afternoon, when the quicksilver with downward tendency denoted that it was to be colder still, "Our Hero"—for such he will prove to be—jumped into his little, rough wagon, and turned pony Shag's head toward home, leaving behind him the cheery glow of household fires. Never had his heart been happier or lighter than now. For 'twas his own at last, the book he had wanted so long, and for which one hard-earned penny after another had been so carefully hoarded. Now that he had the coveted treasure in his possession, it seemed doubly precious. As Shag of his own accord turned to the right, he raised it to his lips and kissed it rapturously, immediately glancing around to see if any one was looking at him.

The short wintry day was near its close, and the bleak hillsides, unvisited by the sun, crowned here and there with leafless trees, made dreary indeed the almost trackless country road. The iron track of the railroad, running parallel with the wagon track, gave no token of the locomotive's approach. The pony and his master were the only living creatures visible. The boy smiled joyfully, and, loosening his grasp of the lines, opened the book, and in the twilight began eagerly to read the pages. Undeniably it was the nipping cold that gave to the end of his nose a rosy hue, but it was not that alone which sent the vivid color flying all over his face. What if Shag, left to himself, did take the wheels over every stone, and bump him around considerable. He, as he read, seemed to be in the land of the Saracens, in the midst of the Crusaders, side by side with Richard "Cœur de Lion." All about him was the din and and turmoil of battle; glittering armor flashed in the sunlight; horses and men were falling together; but everywhere, stately, proud and victorious, went the black horse and his rider. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" escaped involuntarily from the boyish lips. "Whinny! Whinny! Whinny!" responded Shag, approaching the curve rounding which they would obtain a first glimpse of home, yet half a mile distant.

Reluctantly James closed his book and caught up the lines, for now a deep ravine bordered the way, and mother had begged him always to be careful. The curve of the road, rounding with the track, was safely passed, when James' eye, rested on something that sent the blood surging through his heart.

A huge tree had fallen from the bank above directly across the track. The strength of many men would be required to lift it from its lodging place, and with a sickening tremor it flashed across his mind that the eastern express, passing through the village he had just left, was even now due, and any moment might round the curve proudly. And then James saw, as once he had in a dream, the locomotive and cars whistling over and over, and, away down at the bottom of the ravine, the faces of wounded and dying. Even with this vision before him he was carefully turning Shag about.

Yet what could he do? If he only had a lantern he might swing it round his head, and thus warn the engineer. But he hadn't one, nor anything to make a light with. Yes he had, a solitary match, picked carefully up from the floor of the store, his book,—his precious book,—and the pine wagon-box.

In an instant his plans were laid. Shag was urged back at his best speed a few rods. Every second was precious. Out sprang James, jerked the tail-board from the wagon, and, in less time than I can write it, had with the aid of a jackknife made it into kindling wood. This with quick fingers he piled, cob-house fashion, on the middle of the track, filling up the interstices with leaves, ruthlessly torn by the handful from the new history, until nothing of it was left in his possession but its strong leather cover. Then with eager haste he crossed carefully over the top the long side-pieces of the wagon-box, and, kneeling down, drew the solitary match quickly across his rough boot. A pale blue light flickered an instant, then a gust of wind, and it was out. But no matter, the paper had taken fire, and up through the quaint little pine tower sped the flames. The boards, dry as pine could be, now ignited, but not a moment too soon; for the earth trembled, the rails were jarred by a low rumbling, and near and nearer comes the train.

Hard down upon the brakes, and the cars, laden with human beings, were at a sudden standstill. Open flew windows, out popped heads. Several men jumped down into the snow.

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" they cried, inquiringly, of the little figure erect by the bonfire.

The boy could not speak, but pointed dumbly to the curve, and as they disappeared in the direction, fell, overcome by conflicting emotions, face down upon the snow. Strong and gentle arms bore him into a palace car; some one unbuttoned his worn overcoat, and out dropped the cover of his history, all that was left of what cost him so much thought and self-denial. This sight was just what he needed. It brought the tears to his eyes, and the sob to his voice.

"I had to burn it," he faltered, as kind, sympathetic faces crowded about him.

"Don't cry, boy, you're good, and 'Izzie loves you," lisped a curly-haired little one, as she climbed into James' lap and pressed her arms caressingly about his neck.

"But for you," said a fine-looking gentleman, "my darling might never again have seen the mother waiting for her return so anxiously.

A lovely lady pressed forward, and stooping gently kissed the boy on either cheek. "I shall never forget you. Remember me by this." As she spoke, she slipped a ring sparkling with brilliants upon the boy's forefinger.

"I cannot be outdone by you, lady," exclaimed a grateful young man, as he took from his person an elegant watch and chain, and laid them in the lap of the astonished boy.

"Add this to the gifts," rang out the hearty voice of a man, who, unobserved, had entered from another car. "Here, lad," he continued, holding toward the young hero a hat almost full of notes and currency, "take this with the thanks of two hundred passengers."

"Not so fast," ejaculated 'Izzie's papa; "there are others here would like to do their share." And round went the hat, more bills, some of them very large ones, falling into it.

The cars were under motion again.

"I—I must get off," cried the alarmed boy, "Shag's out there."

"No, he ain't," answered the conductor. "I know about you, and I sent a man on ahead with the pony. We'll drop you at your place."

"Oh, how good you all are!" exclaimed the happy James.

"Reckon we ought to be; you saved all our lives," answered the conductor.

The little rough house is closed. The widow lives again in her old village home. James goes to school, and both are happy in the consciousness that their good fortune was not ill deserved.—*Alden's Juvenile Story-Book.*

Tales and Sketches.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

Passing one evening along the Westminster Bridge-road, I stopped a moment attracted by the glare of a great gin-palace. The room over the bar was lighted up, the long lace curtains drawn back, and one of the windows opened at the top. Someone inside was playing a piano, and through