

BOYS AND GIRLS

Toby's Mice.

It was a good many years ago that I was the youthful telegraph operator in the night yardmaster's office at the terminus of one of the great railways.

Mr. Toby was the night yardmaster's name, and he had worked for the railway company since he was a little boy; and once when he was coupling some cars, his arm was caught between the bumpers and crushed so badly that the doctors had to cut it off. Then the railway company made him night yardmaster—a very responsible but not very laborious position.

Mr. Toby had been on duty every night for a great many years when I came to do his telegraphing for him, and never was a man more faithful or more highly esteemed by his associates than the old one-armed yardmaster.

Mr. Toby was a very kind and tender-hearted man. I remember one night when some of the men opened a freight car they found a poor, starved kitten, which had been locked in at Baltimore, and had come all the way through without anything to eat or drink for ten days and nights. Poor Tabby! She was terribly poor and thin, and so weak that she could hardly stand alone; and who was it but Mr. Toby that walked away home, about a mile distant, and brought a bottle of milk to feed and warm kitty, after he had fixed up a nice bed of cotton 'waste' for her back of the stove, and then nursed her back to health day by day, or rather night by night, and adopted her?

But it was about Mr. Toby's mice I was going to tell you. The yardmaster's office was a not very gorgeous place; and about all there was in it, besides a chair, a clock, a stove, and bulletin board, was an old table in one corner where Mr. Toby sat and wrote, or sat and ate his midnight lunch, or just sat and did nothing. Away back in the corner was a little hole on a level with the table, and there lived three little mice; and sometimes, after Mr. Toby had eaten his lunch, they would creep out cautiously on the top of the table and gather up the crumbs, and by and by, after they must have seen what a kind, gentle man the old yardmaster was, they would venture out a little way while he was eating, pick up little morsels which he would put close to the hole for them, and then scamper back, until finally the little creatures became so brave that they would come out every night and help the old man eat his lunch, and allow him to handle them without exhibiting the least sign of fear.

It was funny to see the three, bright-eyed little fellows sitting on the table in a row, waiting patiently for the old man to throw them their share of the lunch in small instalments.

He taught them a number of little tricks, and named them Shem, Ham and Japhet, although I never thought they answered to their names very readily. It was only when Mr. Toby was alone that his little pets seemed very tame; and it was only by our sitting in a farther corner and keeping very quiet that he was able to entice them out to perform for our benefit.

One night I carried up an order from the train-despatcher to the yardmaster, which read as follows:

Despatcher's Office, 11.22 p.m.—Toby Sd.
Hold No. 60 for orders. 12 H.G.B.

No. 60 was a through freight which left at midnight or shortly after, and the despatcher

wished to run a special as far as he could, and to inform No. 60 at the last moment at what station to wait until it passed. Mr. Toby signed the order, and I went back into my own little office.

The engine had not yet come from the round house, the train was not quite made up, and the conductor's car was still in the passenger yard, half a mile away, so the old yardmaster sat down by the table to wait.

It had been a hard day for him. His little daughter had been sick, and all day, when night-workers rest, he had not closed his eyes in sleep, and the old man was almost worn out. It was warm and quiet in the little office. Only the solemn ticking of the big regulator on the wall broke the stillness. The old man laid his head upon his arm on the table to rest it a little, it ached so. He felt so very drowsy. He shook himself and looked at the regulator.

No. 60 would not be ready in thirty minutes. There was no hurry.

He laid his head on the table again, and almost in a second he had dropped asleep.

The solemn regulator ticked off a minute, ten minutes, twenty minutes, and still the old yardmaster slumbered on. The engine from the round-house clanged noisily by. He must waken now; but he only stirs uneasily, and does not rouse.

No. 60 has the right of way; and the conductor, ready to go promptly on schedule time, comes up to the platform, sees through the window the old man's bowed head, smiles good-naturedly, tucks his train report under the door, and goes away to his caboose without disturbing him.

It is 11.58. In two short minutes the heavy train, if not warned, will rush away; and a terrible disaster must certainly ensue. But the old yardmaster does not move.

Suddenly there is an impatient little squeak in the corner, and tiny Shem pokes his nervous little nose out of the hole in the wall. It is supper time, and their landlord seems to be a little negligent. Shem and Ham creep stealthily out upon the table to reconnoitre. There is not a single crumb anywhere. It is really shameful. Japhet joins his brothers. Still Mr. Toby makes no move. The three hungry little creatures put their noses together for consultation.

Would it not be advisable to give their kind master a little hint?

They creep noiselessly up to the bowed gray head, Shem and Ham on the right side, and Japhet on the left. By rising on his haunches, Japhet can just reach the tip of the old man's ear. Shem and Ham take stations close by his nose and chin, and at a signal from Japhet they each gave a quick nip with their sharp little teeth.

The old man moves. Three little tails fairly snap as they disappear in the hole at the corner of the table. The yardmaster raises his head and yawns. His mind is a little hazy. What are those freight cars moving slowly by the window?

He yawns again. There is a piece of paper under his hand. He picks it up mechanically—
Hold No. 60—

With a wild shout the old yardmaster seizes his lantern, throws open the door, and bounds out upon the platform. The caboose is just drawing slowly by. He shouts and waves his lantern frantically. The conductor sees him. Other lanterns are waved. There is a shriek from the engine, and the long train comes to a standstill.

'The despatcher has some orders for you,' was all that Mr. Toby said; and after I had received and delivered the warning messages,

and the train had gone, I found the old man in his office alone, crying like a child.

And then he told the story I have told you; but no one besides Mr. Toby and myself, excepting, perhaps, Shem, Ham and Japhet, ever knew how near the old yardmaster came to fatally neglecting his duty—'Drake's Magazine.'

Charlie Rutherford's Pluck.

There had been a few nights of keen frost, and Cherry-tree Dam had been frozen over for the last three days. It was the only skating-place within miles of Minstead, and all the boys were talking of skating, and hoping the frost would continue a little longer, so that the ice on the dam would be safe.

Charlie Rutherford was as eager as any of them, and made ready his skates. But he was greatly disappointed when his father forbade him to go upon the ice at Cherry-tree Dam for another day or two. Charlie told him that all the boys said it would be quite safe, but his father said it was a dangerous place, and he was not to venture until the ice was thicker.

So Charlie left his skates at home when he went out. But he could not keep away from Cherry-tree Dam; he wanted to see if anyone was skating upon it. When he got there he saw quite a number of boys upon it, and they were enjoying themselves very much.

One or two of his friends shouted to him to come on, and when he did not do so they came to ask him why it was. He told them at first that he had not brought his skates. They said that it was quite safe, and that there had been some grown-up men upon it.

They wanted him to come on the ice and slide, and they begged so much that he was forced to tell them at last that his father had forbidden him to do so.

This only made them laugh, and one of them, Peter Morris, said Charlie was afraid, and that it was sneaking of him to tell them he was coming and then break his word like that because he thought it was dangerous.

Charlie went away a short distance into the fields and found a little sheet of ice where he amused himself with sliding all alone. He could hear the rattling of the skates upon the dam and the shouts and laughter of his companions, and he thought it was very hard that his father should have forbidden him to join them in their sport. A thaw might set in at any time, and then the chance would be gone.

Suddenly he heard shouts of alarm and cries for help coming from the direction of the dam. He ran towards it as quickly as he possibly could. A hole had been broken in the middle of the ice near the dam, and he saw one of his companions, Ferguson, in the water, holding on to the edge of the broken ice. The other boys were on the banks, frightened almost out of their wits and wondering what to do.

'Run for help, some of you!' said Charlie.

He had read stories of people being rescued from the water in cases like this by means of ropes and ladders. He looked round to see if there was either a rope or a ladder at hand, but there was not. He saw, however, that the wooden rails which protected the mill-race were rotting and breaking away from the posts, so he broke one off, and told his companions to break off some more.

Taking the rail in his hands, he ran down to the ice and walked upon it towards Alan Ferguson. By-and-by he heard the ice creaking under his feet, and then he dropped upon his hands and knees.

Pushing the rail before him, and keeping his hands upon it, he worked his way slowly to the hole, and pushed the rail across it, quite