

JACK THE CONQUEROR ; Or, Difficulties Overcome.

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CHAPTER II.

The sun was getting low in the heavens, the daisies were beginning to shut up their little round white frills for the night, and the quarrymen were preparing to go away from work: some of them were already descending the steep paths that led to the village below. These signs, and Jack's own hungry stomach, told him it was time to go home to tea.

As he was crossing a stile he met a girl about his own age, who was carrying a basket in one hand, and leading her little sister with the other. Now, if Jack could be said to have a friend in the world, it was Mary Naylor. Not that he saw much of her, but she was always kind to him. She lived with her widowed mother, who was a very different sort of woman to Susan Law, Jack's aunt. She was in all respects as tidy and comfortable a body as Susan was the reverse, and invariably had a civil or kindly word for her neighbors. Her cottage and two children were always clean. A greater contrast could scarcely be imagined than Jack with his torn clothes, tumbled hair, and not even clean face, to the neat little maiden, in her lilac print dress and brown straw hat, under which the shining golden hair was so tidily arranged. Jack always felt pleased to meet Mary or her mother. With all their clean, nice appearance, they never seemed to look down on him, or to think him not worth speaking to. Mrs. Naylor had more than once given him a good slice of bread and butter when she had seen him passing her door, which he relished all the more because butter was a luxury seldom granted him, and because a nicely-cut slice of bread fresh from the loaf rarely fell to his lot either. His aunt was in the habit of giving him odd stale pieces that were left from her own or the lodgers' meals. These soaked in weak tea or skimmed milk were his usual breakfast and tea. No wonder that he thought Mrs. Naylor's bread and butter a treat.

Mary had her lesson-book in her hand, out of which she was teaching her little sister some easy words of spelling as they walked along together towards home.

"How do you do, Jack?" said

Mary; "please will you lift this basket over the stile for me?"

"Yes, that I will," said he, delighted to be of any service to her, however small; then holding out his arms to the child, he offered to lift her over also.

But the little one clung to her sister's frock, and shrank from him, exclaiming--

"No, no; Jack is a dirty boy, and shan't touch Nellie."

"Oh, fie! fie! Nellie," said Mary, coloring up, and much afraid lest her spoilt, petted little sister's plain speech had hurt Jack. "She did not mean to be rude," she said, in an apologetic

Jack; but he took it in good part, and sauntered on thinking.

The sight of Mary teaching her sister had put a new idea into his head on the spot, and it was this. Suppose he could get Mary Naylor to teach him to read! She was able, for she had learnt for several years, and was often to be seen with her book; but then how could he ask her such a favor? how would her mother like it? Kind as she was to him, she had scarcely ever invited him into her house. Why, even little Nellie would not suffer him to touch her because his face was so dirty; and the strange gentle-

And in truth, when after tea he went into the back-kitchen, and began to use the small piece lying on the sink, she knocked it out of his fingers, and desired him to leave it alone.

"But I want to make myself look clean," said poor Jack.

"Go along then, and wash yourself in the river," was the reply. "You'll find water enough there, and you must do without soap."

The hint was not lost on Jack, however ungraciously given. He would go to the river, to a snug little shallow creek he knew of amongst some willow trees. Why should he not use it as a bath every day? But a bit of soap would be such a treasure, and it might be kept in some safe place where no one would see it if by any chance they went there. A bright idea struck him, and with a hop, skip, and jump, sent him running down the hill-side into the village. He halted at the little shop, where articles of every description were sold.

"Please, I want a piece of soap."

"How much?" asked the woman, pointing to some squares ready cut for customers requiring small quantities of the article in question.

Jack chose one of the least of the pieces, and held out the sixpence which had been given him that afternoon. He trembled lest it should not be enough; for it had never been his aunt's way to send him to make any purchase for her, and he supposed soap must be dear, as he was not allowed to use it. Greatly was he delighted, therefore, when he had threepence handed back to him.

"Anything else?" asked the woman; "doesn't your aunt want an ounce or two of tea to-day? I've some fresh just come in."

Jack shook his head, but his eye rested on some rough-looking pocket-combs hanging up in the window, and he asked the price.

"Threepence each." Fortunately Jack! The next minute he was in the street, his

bit of soap in his hand, and his comb thrust into his jacket pocket. "Now to the river-side," thought he, and thither he sped. The day had been sultry, and the cool water looked very inviting. The shallow place under the willow-tree proved quite as eligible for a bath as Jack expected. Never had his face had such a cleansing; and as for his hands, he scarcely knew them again. He had often bathed in the river before; but he had never known the luxury of soap, and its value was enhanced by the fact that it was his very own possession.

A towel would have been



JACK AT THE STILE.

tone, "only she is so young. Please help me over," she added, hoping with true native delicacy of feeling to make up for what the child had said.

Jack held out his hand, and as it took hold of Mary's fingers, he thought for the first time in his life how much nicer it was to have clean hands than dirty ones.

Mary walked on with her sister; probably she reproved her for her rude speech to Jack, for he heard the little one exclaim in reply to something she had said--

"But, Mary, Jack's face was so dirty."

Another wholesome lesson for

man had advised him to begin to care more about his appearance. Jack was not wanting in shrewdness; no boy in Her Majesty's Dominions possessed a larger share of that commodity; and it enabled him to see that learning to read was not the first difficulty he had overcome in finding out the way to "get on" in the world. He must begin by making himself look clean and respectable, and then perhaps he need not so much mind asking Mary to teach him to read.

"If only I could have a bit of soap," thought he, "a bit all to myself; for aunt won't let me touch hers."