

Children's Department.

"Boy."

CHAPTER X.

SIR RICHARD SELBY was the last to arrive at the Town Hall, for he had been busy with his steward, giving orders about some new buildings: and great was his surprise, as he entered the ante-room, to see his little son standing by Mr. Birch's chair, and chatting confidentially to several gentlemen in the room.

Sir Richard was speechless with astonishment, but the child was apparently quite at his ease.

"You're late, father," he said, pointing to a big clock over the fireplace.

"Our special pleader," laughed Mr. Birch, pointing to the child.

"Boy, what are you doing here?" asked Sir Richard.

"It takes hours to 'xplain," said Boy looking up and nodding at his new friend.

"It appears that your little son knows the lad Mike, who stole the apples—"

"Who didn't steal the apples, you mean," interrupted Boy.

"Yes, who didn't steal my apples; and so he has come to prove it himself; and, if his word cannot be taken, we must send for your gardener, Sir Richard, for he saw your boy with this lad last Tuesday, at the time he is said to have been in my orchard. Boy, we must come to business now," he added, leading the way into the Court-room.

Boy was given a place on a stool between Mr. Birch and his father, where he was out of sight of the witness-box.

He was trembling with excitement, and only a stern "Sit still!" from Sir Richard made him remain where he was when Mike was brought in between two policemen.

The prisoner pleaded "Not guilty," and was asked if he could give any account of himself.

He answered that "he could if he chose, but he didn't choose to."

"Poor Mike!" whispered Boy.

Several witnesses were then brought forward to say that the lad who had been seen in the orchard was about Mike's size, and certainly like him.

But the strongest evidence against him was, that for days and days Mike had disappeared from the farm between five and six, and, instead of meeting the other farm lads for tea, he went no one new where, re-appearing again in about an hour's time.



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Sir Richard felt a tug at his coat and a little voice whispered: "he comes to me 'cos he loves me."

One more witness now gave evidence. A lad about Mike's size, swore positively that he saw Mike enter the orchard at the hour named, and leave it about six carrying a sack.

"I shouldn't be particularly surprised if that wasn't stealer himself," whispered Boy again, longing to rush out and speak to Mike. But he stopped suddenly, for he heard the prisoner again cross-questioned.

"If you were not in the orchard, where were you between five and six on Tuesday last?"

"Somewhere," was the answer. "Of course; but the question is, in what exact spot?"

"A good way from th' orchard."

"And away from the farm?"

"Yes," in a surly tone.

("Oh! do speak up, Mike, dear," whispered Boy in an agony.)

"I will change the question. Where do you go every day between five and six?"

Mike looked nervous and turned red. He felt he was in a dilemma.

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It would never do to drag his beloved young master into question. Whatever happened, Mike knew he would never doubt him; but he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the tide was turning dead against him.

"I won't tell," he said at length.

"Then you will be convicted of theft."

"I canna help that," still bravely, but feeling his heart sink within him.

"Are there any more witnesses?" asked one of the magistrates.

"Yes, one sir."

"Then call him."

"Richard Eustace Selby," and Mike never moved, for this name conveyed nothing to him.

"Here I am," chirped a childish voice, and Sir Richard led his little son round to the witness-box.

Mike turned deadly pale, but Boy kissed his hand to him and nodded, and held up the text-book. There was some demur about such a young child taking the oath, and as he would have been completely lost if he had stood in the box, his father perched him on the wooden rail.

"Do you know what an oath is, Boy?" asked Sir Richard.

"Course I do, father dear," answered Boy.

"What is it?" inquired the chairman.

"Horrid bad words, which is very naughty to say," Boy's ready answer.

Every one smiled, even Mike.

"But you know what speaking the exact truth is, Boy?"

"Oh! father!" said the child in a surprised tone. His father felt as if a bird had flown in his face.

"Then say the words after me, darling," putting the Bible into Boy's hand.

And you could have heard a pin drop in the Hall, as the little child took the

oath, looking so earnest and engrossed, and giving an upward look, which must have pierced the very sky at the words, "So help me, God."

"Kiss the book," added Sir Richard.

"Yes, father dear," as he kissed the book; "and you too," holding up his little face.

"Now prove, darling, if you can—"

"Course I can," interrupted Boy.

"Where this lad Mike was last Tuesday between five and six."

"With me in the old willow tree—and that's a rhyme, father dear."

"Yes; but we can't have rhymes now," said his father, trying not to laugh.

"Well, he was; wasn't you, Mike?" nodding across to the prisoner; "and this will make it quite clear," he went on, producing the old text-book.

"Tuesday . . . Here it is, and I hav'n't seen Mike since. And I taught him this text—"

"Wait a minute," said the chairman.

"Do you mean that you taught Mike a text last Tuesday, and he hasn't been to the old willow tree since?"

"Course I do. Didn't I say so?" said Boy impatiently.

"Then," went on Mr. Birch turning to Mike, "if the prisoner can tell us what the text was he is cleared."

Boy shook. Mike is nervous. Here was the test. Would he fail? "Oh, God! help him to 'member," prayed Boy to himself, for he knew his pupil sometimes mixed up the days, and out loud, "Tuesdays, Mike—'member Tuesday."

"Hush, Boy," said his father, feeling the clasp of the little hand in his own getting tighter and tighter.

"My head feels very swimmy, father dear," whispered Boy, as every one turned and looked at Mike.

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