

## The Christmas Stocking.

By Elizabeth Wetherell, (author of 'The Wide, Wide World'.)

(Continued)

"The boy was quiet enough now. While Mr. Swift had been speaking he raised himself from the floor, half up, and had stopped sobbing, and was looking at Long Ears and gently touching his curly head; who, on his part, was lapping the milk with an eagerness as if he had wanted it for some time. Norman's tears fell yet, but they fell quietly. By the time the little dog had finished the

opened the door. A man was there, sitting over the fire; a wretched tallow light on the table hardly showed what he looked like. Mrs. Meadow spoke with her usual pleasantness. "Good evening, Mr. Finch. Can I see little Norman?"

"Yes—I suppose so," the man said, in a gruff voice, and pointing to another door; "they're in yonder."

It was so dark, hardly anything could be seen. A woman rose up from some corner—it proved to be Mrs. Finch—and went for the light.

The room was ill-lighted when the candle was in it, but there could be seen two beds;

Norman stroked and stroked his little dog's silky head.

"Poor Long-Ears!" said he faintly; "poor Long Ears!—I can't take care of you now. Poor Long Ears! you're hungry. He hasn't had anything to eat since—since—mother?"

"He don't know how time goes," said Mrs. Finch, who had not before spoken. "The dog hasn't had a sup of anything since the day before yesterday. He has a right to be hungry. I don't know what he lives on. My husband don't care whether anything lives or not."

"Silky had not said a word, and she didn't now, but she brought out that same little tin



milk they did not fall at all. Till then nobody said anything.

"Come for it every morning again, my child," said Mrs. Meadow softly; "I'll give it to you. What a dear little fellow he is! I don't wonder you love him. He shall have milk enough."

Norman looked up gratefully and with a little bit of a smile.

"You don't look very strong, my boy," said Mrs. Meadow. "You don't feel well, do you?"

He shook his head, as if it was a matter beyond his understanding.

"Are you tired?"

"His eyes gave token of understanding that."

"Yes, I'm tired."

Norman came after that every morning for the dog's milk; and many a Sunday he and Long Ears passed part of the time with Mrs. Meadow; and many a reading he listened to there as he had listened to the first one. He didn't talk much. He was always near his little dog, and he seemed quietly to enjoy everything at those times.

As the summer changed into autumn, and autumn gave way to winter, Norman's little face seemed to grow better-looking, all the while it was growing more pale, and his little body more slim. It grew to be a contented, very quiet and patient face, and his eye took a clearness and openness it did not use to have, though he was never a bad-looking child. "He won't live long," Mrs. Meadow said, after every Sunday.

The little white dog all this while grew more white and curly and bright-eyed every day; or they all thought so.

It was not till some time in January that at last Norman stopped coming for milk, and did not go by to the factory any more. It was in a severe bit of weather, when Mrs. Meadow was shut up with a bad cold; and some days were gone before she or Silky could get any news of him. Then, one cold evening, his mother came for milk, and to say that Norman was very ill and would like to see Silky and Mrs. Meadow.

They got ready directly. Silky put her purse in her pocket, as she generally did when she was going to see poor people, and, wrapping up warm with cloaks and shawls and hoods, she and her mother set out. It was just sunset of a winter's day, clear enough, but uncommonly cold.

Silky was trembling all over by the time they stopped at one of the brick dwelling-houses and went in. The front door stood open; nobody minded that; it was nobody's business to shut it. They went in, through a dirty entry, and up stairs that nobody ever thought of cleaning, to the third story. There Mrs. Meadow first knocked, and then gently

one raised on some sort of a bedstead, the other on the floor in a corner. No fire was in this room, and the bed was covered with all sorts of coverings; a torn quilt, an old great-coat, a small ragged worsted shawl, and Norman's own poor little jacket and trousers. But on these, close within reach of the boy's hand, lay curled the little dog; his glossy white hair and soft outlines making a strange contrast with the rags and poverty and ugliness of the place.

Norman did not look much changed, except that his face was so very pale it seemed as if he had no more blood to leave it. Mrs. Meadow and Silky came near, and neither of them at first went forward to speak. Mrs. Finch stood holding the light. Then Mrs. Meadow stooped down by the bed's head.

"Little Norman," she said—and you could tell her heart was full of tears—"do you know me?"

"I know you," he said, in a weak voice, and with a little bit of a smile.

pail from under her cloak, and set it down on the floor. Norman's eyes brightened. But the dog could not be coaxed to quit the bed; he would set only his two fore-feet on the floor, and so drank the milk out of the pail. Norman watched him, almost with a smile. And when the dog, having left the milk, curled himself down again in his old place, and looked into his master's face, Norman quite smiled.

"Poor Long Ears!" he said, patting him again with a feeble hand. "I'm going to leave you—what will you do?"

"I'll take care of him, Norman," said Mrs. Meadow. "As long as he lives, if you wish."

Norman signed for her to put her ear down to him, and said earnestly:

"I give him to you—you keep him. Will you?"

"Then you'll have milk enough, dear little Long Ears," said Norman. "But," he said eagerly to Mrs. Meadow, "you must take him home with you to-night—I'm afraid fa-



"How do you do?"

"Very well," he said, in the same manner.

"I am going now."

"Where, dear?"

"You know—to that good place. Jesus will take me, won't He?"

"What makes you think you're going, dear?" said Mrs. Meadow.

"I can't stay," said Norman, shutting his eyes. He opened them again immediately. "I'm going," he said. "I'm so tired. I sha'n't be tired there, shall I?"

"No, dear," said Mrs. Meadow, whose power of speech was like to fail her. She kept wiping her face with her pocket handkerchief.

ther will do something with him, if you don't."

"You will want him," said Mrs. Meadow.

"No, I won't. Father will do something with him."

"Then I'll take him, and keep him, dear, as if he was yourself," said Mrs. Meadow.

"I won't want him," said Norman, shutting his eyes again; "I'm going."

And he never opened them again. It seemed that having his mind easy about his pet, and having seen his friends, he wanted nothing more on this earth.

(To be continued.)