

JANE HOPKINS.

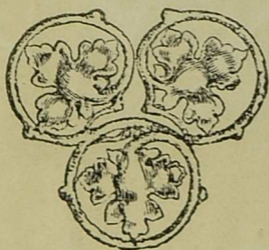
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JOHN AND CHARLES MOZLEY,
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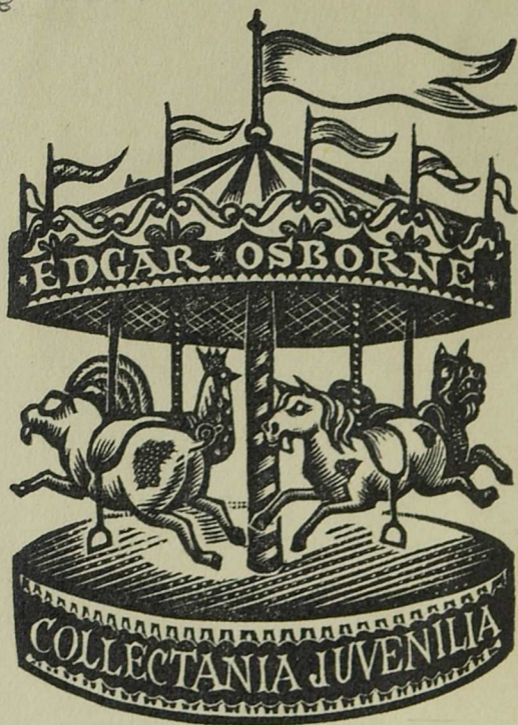
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Jane Hopkins.



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Jane Hopkins.

“SUPPOSE, mother, that you and father were to die, as Uncle John did; who would take care of me, I want to know?”

“God Almighty would take care of my dear child,” was the good mother’s reply; and from this she took occasion to teach her child somewhat respect-

ing the goodness and care of her heavenly Father. Jane Hopkins, the little girl who had put this question to her mother, was only about six years of age, but she was thoughtful beyond her years; and though of a cheerful, was yet of a very serious turn of mind. To many persons it may seem strange to speak of her being both cheerful and serious; but I know not why these two feelings should be contrary to each other; indeed, the same apostle, St. Paul, who bids us to "rejoice evermore," tells us, almost in the same breath, as it were, to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. v. 16, 17.)

Jane had been playing merrily on the little green by the road-side, in front of her father's cottage, and thinking (happy girl!) to herself, what a good father and mother she had, when, all at once, she heard the church-bell beginning to toll. The solemn sound was, she well knew, a warning that somebody in the parish was dead; and it called back again to her mind the recent death of her good uncle, who had lived not far from them, and had always been very kind to his dear little niece. In the midst of her play Jane stopped to listen

to the distant bell, and then, wiping away her tears with her pinafore, she ran to her mother to ask her the question, "Who would take care of me, if father and mother were to die?"

That the Lord would take care of her, that "He is a father of the fatherless, and the God of the widow, even God in His holy habitation" (Psalm lxxviii. 5), was a truth which the little girl's mind was in a fit state to receive; and the lesson which her mother taught her at that moment was never forgotten during the whole of her life.

Some months passed on, and Jane Hopkins was sent to the parish school, where she was a quick scholar and a good girl, though sometimes rather careless and a little inclined to be obstinate. Winter came, and in her hours of play, Jane, though not a strong child, enjoyed with her school-fellows a game at snow-balls, or running about in the snow, almost as much as she had enjoyed her summer sports; but yet, while full of happy, harmless gaiety, she did not lose her thoughtful turn of mind, nor forget her mother's teaching; often would she repeat to herself a text which her mother had shewn her and

made her learn by heart: "When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up." (Psalm xxvii. 12.)

One day when Jane came home from school, she seemed very much out of sorts. It was one of those cold-blowing days in March, against which a strong man scarcely knows how to stand, much less a delicate child. But it was not only with labouring and beating against the wind that our little scholar was vexed and tired; she was vexed with herself, she was angry at her own conduct, for having been a careless and naughty girl; she was angry also (though without just cause) at her mistress, who had been obliged to put her down to the very bottom of her class. Quite out of breath with the wind, and half choking with mingled feelings of anger and of shame, she ran into the cottage, and, sitting down upon a chair, began to cry violently. Her mother was upstairs when she came in, but hearing a noise, she hastened down to see what was the matter; and, after a little while, Jane, who wanted a good deal of quiet talking in order to bring her to herself, confessed to her mother that she had been behaving very ill, and promised to try,

with God's help, to be a better child in future.

“Indeed you must try,” said her mother, “for your poor father and I have only you, and it will be sad indeed for us if you do not turn out to be a good child. Besides, you know, Jane, what a sad cold your father has had ever since just after Christmas; well, he has been obliged to leave his work to-day, and to come home and go to bed. And Dr. Davis has just been here, and ordered a blister and some leeches, which I must go down and fetch directly; so don't you add to our troubles by behaving yourself ill; pray don't, there's a dear little girl.”

So saying, the kind mother kissed her daughter, and, leaving her to wait upon her father, went out to fetch the blister to the village, which was about a mile distant. The evening was very boisterous, and before she could get back again, Jane's mother was nearly wet through. Altogether, that night was one of the most unhappy nights that Jane Hopkins had ever spent; and one great reason why it was so arose from the remembrance that her troubles had been partly caused by her own faults.

But this evening proved only the beginning of her troubles; for her father, whom the blister and bleeding had eased at the time, continued still to grow weaker rather than stronger; her mother, too, had caught a very bad cold on the night when she had been forced to go to the doctor's through the rain; and so Jane had but a sick house to come home to, and was obliged to ask leave of her mistress to stay away from school for a few days, while her mother's cold was at the worst. That, however, after a time became better, and her mother was pretty well again by the end of April, only very weak. But Jane's father was evidently getting worse and worse, until at length the doctor said that he did not think it possible that his life could be saved. Poor little Jane! what a shock was this to her affectionate heart! To think how often she had sat upon his knee and talked to him by the hour together; how often, when she was little, he had carried her to church or to the Sunday-school; to think how much he loved his only child, and how dearly he was beloved by her; to think of losing him; to think of what was to become of them when he was taken from

them ;—oh, it was almost too much for her to bear to think about at all. And yet she must think of these things—she could not help thinking of them. One only comfort, but that was a sufficient one, was still left for the mother and her weeping child. They knew that they had a Father, a Saviour, a Friend in heaven. They were sure, they were quite sure, that, whatever might happen to them, God Almighty would take care of them. And in the strength of this assurance they watched the gradual decline of a husband and a father ; supported by faith in God, they stood upon the edge of that grave wherein they saw the remains of one they so dearly loved committed to the ground,—“earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;” but they looked upon the mournful sight with the eyes of Christian faith ; they beheld it “in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It was little more than a twelvemonth since Jane’s thoughts had been led by the sound of the funeral-bell towards the possibility of her losing her kind and good parents, that she found this

had actually taken place with regard to one of them. The sun shone as brightly, the birds sang as merrily, the fields looked as richly, as they had done on the day when she was sporting so gaily upon the fresh green turf: but now, alas, her father was no more; "the dust had returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit had returned to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes xii. 7). Jane's neat black frock, her altered looks and heavy heart, bore witness to the greatness of the loss that had befallen her. Every thing, indeed, served to put her in mind of the change that had taken place. The house in which she had been born, the little room in which she had so often rested, the green on which she used to play so gaily, the school where she had learned so much that was good, the church where her parents had always taken her to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;" all these beloved and well-known objects, which seemed to her to be, as it were, parts of herself, were to be left; and her mother, unable any longer to pay the rent of their cottage, was preparing to move into another parish, which,

although only six miles off, appeared to Jane like the very ends of the inhabited world.

The little Christian's father was no more, and all these trials were coming upon her; but now, when a portion of what she had once feared as being possible had really come to pass, did her mother's words of comfort, we may ask, at all prove true? Now that her earthly father was dead and gone, did her heavenly Father, whose child she had been made at baptism, more especially shew His care for her? Forlorn indeed seemed the state of the helpless child, when first I saw her, which was on the day of the removal of her and her mother to the house of one of Jane's aunts, whom she had scarcely ever seen, but who had kindly offered to her sister and niece the use of a room in her cottage. This was, as I have said, in a parish about six miles off; and bitterly indeed did Jane Hopkins cry,—in vain were all endeavours to quiet the poor child,—when she saw her mother set off in a cart that was loaded with their goods and furniture, while she was left behind for a day or two, with a neighbour, to wait till things should be got

into a little order at her new home. Jane thought she never should see her mother again, and when she left her old home, she knew she should never see that again as her home; so, between the two struggling feelings of her heart, she scarcely knew what to wish for. But love of persons is sure soon to get the better of mere love of places; and it was not without some feeling like joy that the child at length set out to her aunt's, in the full hope of seeing her mother again, and of again enjoying her company and her smiles. "Good bye, dear old cottage;" "good bye, pretty green;" "good bye, school;" "good bye, church," whispered Jane, as the cart carried her swiftly away from the spot where she was born. "God bless the place I am leaving," thought she to herself; "and God bless me too, wherever I may be taken."

Nor was the infant's prayer unheard by her heavenly Father. In a few weeks' time she might be seen in her new dwelling-place, at church, or at play in her aunt's garden, the same happy, cheerful, good girl, as she had formerly been. Her aunt, and her aunt's husband, were very kind peo-

ple, and were very good to little Jane and her mother ; and, in one thing, she was even happier than before, for she now had a nice playfellow, and school-fellow too, in her cousin, Sarah Brown, who was only a year older, and not any taller than herself. Now and then, very often, indeed, thoughts of her dear father would come into Jane's mind ; but, upon the whole, though somewhat more serious than she used to be, she seemed as happy and as cheerful as any of her companions. And, like a good child, never did she forget, in her morning and evening prayers, to thank her Almighty Father for the blessings which He had given her. Every day she grew fonder of her mother, her aunt, and her cousin, and sometimes she would say to her mother, while yet oftener she would think to herself, ' Well, if it has pleased God to take away my father, He has not forgotten to take care of poor little Jane.'

Winter came round again, bringing with it its usual companions—cold, and frost, and mist—to which all ranks are liable, and many pinching wants and necessities to which at that season the cottagers are more especially exposed.

Never, since the evening when she caught cold in going to fetch the blister, had Jane's mother been quite so well as before; her cold, her sitting up with her husband at night, and, possibly, her having been so much with one who had died of decline,—all these things, added to a naturally weak constitution, combined to render it very likely that in one short year Jane Hopkins would be deprived of both parents, would be left without father or mother, alone, as it were, in the wide world. Fears of this kind had long been felt by all their friends, nor had the fond daughter been quite free from them; but whenever they came into her mind, she tried, as far as she could, to repress them, for they were almost too painful to be borne. What, then, must the reality have been, if the possibility was so painful! What were Jane's feelings when, within a twelvemonth of the time when she had followed her father to the grave, she stood over the place into which her mother's corpse had been just lowered down! It is not for me to describe the forsaken feeling of the little orphan, for never, thank God, have my feelings been put to such a

trial; but this must be said concerning them, that, deeply as she felt her double loss, Jane never forgot the lesson taught her by her departed mother. Though tears might choke her utterance, yet could she say within herself, "When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up." And the truth of this saying was brought to pass in the case of this orphan child, as, indeed, it has been, and will continue to be, proved in thousands of like cases of distress. Though no one certainly can quite supply to us the place of a father and mother, yet Jane's kind aunt and uncle did all that could be done. It was agreed that the parish should allow them something for the child's support, and they brought her up with her cousin Sarah, just as if she had been their own daughter. Among the many things for which we may thank our heavenly Father, it is by no means the least blessing that He has so ordered it, that troubles should bring their own cure. At all ages, in childhood especially, time will speedily heal sorrows, which nothing else can heal. And so it happened in Jane's case. She never, indeed, could forget that she had lost the

two best friends that she could ever hope to have, but yet her cheerful soul, the kindness of those friends that were left, and, above all, the grace of God, soon enabled her to enjoy the good things which she had, even while she felt how great were those which had been taken away. But more changes were in store for Jane. She was not to continue to live in that cottage and parish, which once had been feared as a strange place, but had now become her own, her happy home. One of the chief inhabitants of the parish, who had friends living in London, was kind enough to think of getting Jane Hopkins into the Female Orphan Asylum, a sort of large school, where poor girls without father or mother are fed, and clothed, and taught every thing useful, and, when they are old enough, are put out into service. It takes a great deal of trouble, and a great many people are to be asked for their votes, before a child can be got into this Asylum; but Jane's kind friend undertook all this, and, after a second trial at the elections (which happen half-yearly), Jane Hopkins was chosen to be admitted into the Female Orphan Asy-

um. Here, again, arose another trial. No doubt it was for her good, and it was her duty and her aunt's to accept thankfully the benefit thus offered, a benefit which thousands of poor children would rejoice to have placed within their reach. Nay, it would be well for thousands and thousands of *rich* children, if they could have such a religious education, if they could be trained up kindly and gently, yet strictly and firmly, as the children at the Orphan Asylum are, instead of being too often humoured and spoiled. Still, what a trial it would be for Jane to leave her home, to part from her aunt, and uncle, and cousin, to go entirely among strangers whom she had never before seen! And then, how sad to bid farewell to green fields, and pleasant walks, and fresh air, to go to London, of which, indeed, she knew only by hearsay, but report told her it was a dirty, smoky, disagreeable place, far from her home, far from all that she cared for, or that at all cared for her!

However, though Jane cried bitterly at first, she saw it was her duty to submit, and not to throw away the blessings which Providence had placed in

her reach, merely because they were attended with present trouble. The day of her departure came. The coach, which passed by their cottage, stopped at the garden-gate; Jane kissed her cousin, and she and her aunt were soon mounted on the top, and hastening towards London. She felt as if her very heart would break, but in a few days she again became cheerful and happy. She soon began to be beloved by the mistress and by her school-fellows, and when she saw how many little orphans besides herself were entirely supported, and brought up in the fear of God, by the bounty of strangers, she felt once more the truth of her mother's saying, she saw plainly that there was One above who pities and protects "the fatherless, and those that have none to help them" (Job xxix. 12).

Many had been the troubles and trials of Jane Hopkins, although she was yet barely nine years of age; but God's purpose was soon to be made known in her. The child of sickly parents, she had always wanted that bodily strength which others have; and now, instead of gaining strength, she grew weaker as she grew older, and before

she had been quite a year in the Orphan Asylum, Jane Hopkins breathed her last. She lived (so far as man may judge, and according to her years) as “a member of Christ, and a child of God;” and we may humbly believe that, through her Saviour’s merits, she will hereafter “inherit the kingdom of heaven,” together with the rest of God’s elect.

We have seen in this short and simple history of a very short and simple life, how mercifully her God took care of this little child, and provided for her. May we not learn from the life of Jane Hopkins, not to count them happy who suffer no affliction, but rather to reckon those happy who, like their Saviour, are “made perfect through sufferings?” (Heb. ii. 10). And let us not close this account of the course of a Christian child, without recalling the beautiful warning of our heavenly Master—He, who was Lord of all, yet Himself condescended, for our sakes, to become “a child;” (See Isaiah ix. 6; Acts iv. 27),—and thus does He set before us the state of childhood as our pattern: “Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the king-

dom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." And elsewhere he says, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me; and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me" (comp. Mark x. 15, and ix. 37).

