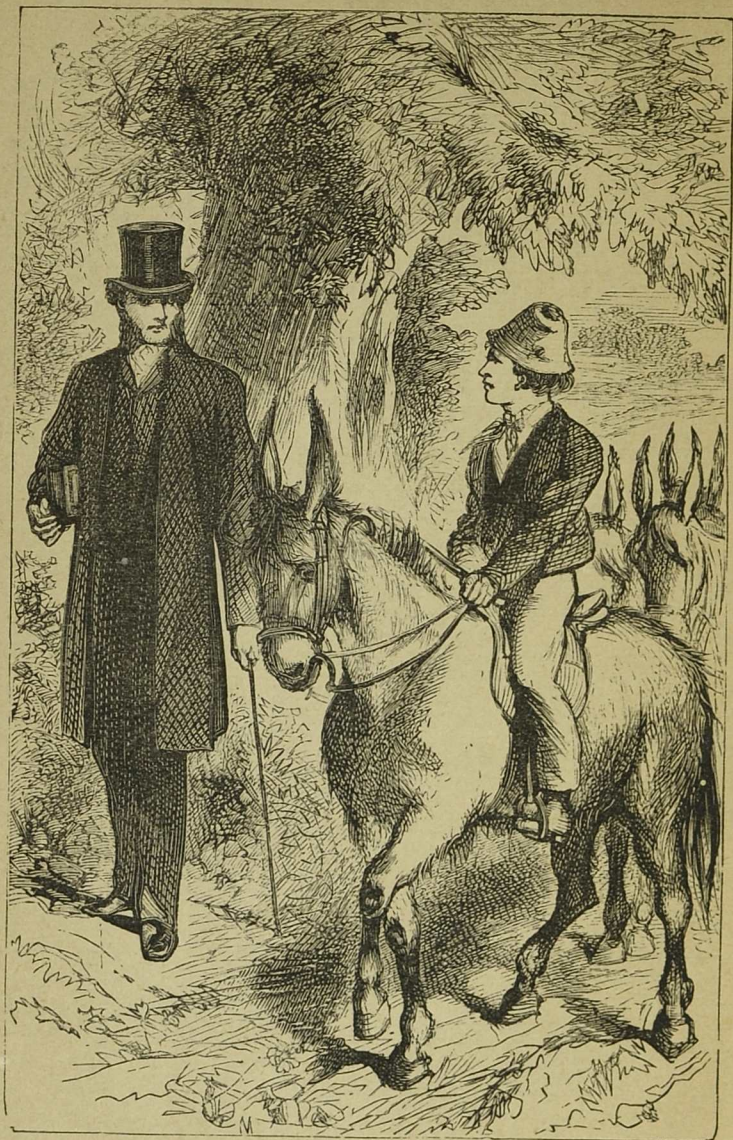


Mary C. F. Stuart



“Jem jumped on a donkey as usual, but to-day he made it walk gently down the hill, as the clergyman was following.”—
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J E M

THE DONKEY-BOY

OF

BLACKHEATH

BY FRANC MARI

AUTHOR OF "THE FIRST PARABLE," ETC.

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PREFACE.

To my two youngest Brothers, and any other boys who have enjoyed a ride or ramble on Blackheath.

MY DEAR BOYS,—

It is with feelings of both thankfulness and regret that I dedicate this little story to you.

The old familiar name of *Blackheath* brings to my memory past happy days when I, like you, was young ; when I, like you, loved the Saturday half-holiday at school, and, better still, the fun it brought in a scramble on Shooter's Hill, or a donkey-ride to Eltham, or a scamper in Greenwich Park. All this is past for me : hence my regrets, for surely child

hood is the time of joy and freedom, and the "bitterest tears of childhood are the happiest tears we shed."

My cause of thankfulness is that I am still spared to look back upon these things, to look forward to better things. You will soon be in the position I now am in—when your schooldays will be past, when you will have begun to realise that "Life is real, life is earnest," that even "The grave is not its goal." You need no words from my pen to proclaim that time is speeding by. The changes of every day tell you that; even the old heath itself tells you so. And a queer tale of change and decay, destruction and restructure, peace and war, it has to tell.

Let us listen to it.

The story begins—ah! where does it begin?—in ages which have rolled by, leaving no remembrance or record behind them. We can first take up the thread in 1381, when Wat Tyler and his followers,

to the number of 100,000, met on the heath to defy their noble king Richard II., who, in his own person, quelled the riot by peaceable words instead of deadly blows.

Seventy years later the far-famed Jack Cade and his bold 20,000 Kentish men encamped on the heath after their victory over Sir Humphrey Stafford, and their triumphal march through London. And in the cavern on the ascent of Blackheath hill, under that part of the heath known as the *Point*, Cade found a hiding-place until the desertion of his followers obliged him to flee, which led to his being captured and slain.

This cavern was a retreat for banditti in the time of Cromwell, after which it remained in oblivion until the year 1780, when it was re-discovered. For many years after this it was exhibited as a natural and historical curiosity, but for the last six or seven years it has again been

closed, on account, it is said, of the danger of its falling in, and seems likely again to be forgotten.

The so-called Battle of Blackheath was fought in 1497 by the men of Cornwall, with Lord Audley at their head, against King Henry the Seventh's soldiers, who won a complete victory at Deptford.

And now the old heath speaks of better times, or the outward signs of better times, at any rate. Noble houses now form its bulwarks, and a church spire points upwards on, perhaps, the very ground which was formerly stained by the blood of rebels. Thus all these earthly things have changed, and will change, until the last great change come, for which may we all be prepared!

Yours affectionately and sincerely,

FRANC MARI.

October, 1867.

JEM, THE DONKEY-BOY OF BLACKHEATH.

CHAPTER I.

JEM lived with his grandfather, old Mike, in a small house in the Pits—a part of Blackheath Hill, which is probably so called because gravel pits used to exist there.

In the days when Jem and his grandfather lived in the Pits—about ten years ago—it was an unhealthy, disagreeable neighbourhood. The houses were tumble-down, and badly drained; and the people who lived in them seemed to care little for comfort or cleanliness.

Many of the inhabitants (old Mike

included in the number) kept donkeys, which they took on the heath every day to let out to Londoners and others to ride. Others kept pigs to fatten and sell at the cattle fair, held every year on the heath.

Unfortunately, these occupations tended to make the people who lived in the Pits, and their abodes, still more untidy. In many instances the stables, sheds, or pigsties were so near the house of their owner, and were, moreover, so like it, that any one wishing to call on a friend living in that part of Blackheath might easily have mistaken the door of the animals' dwelling for that of his friend's cottage. King Street, as the principal street of the Pits is called, is tidy and orderly now. Many of the old houses have been pulled down, and neat cottages built in their stead.

The house in which old Mike and his little grandson lived, and which proved an exception to the general disorder of the

Pits, stood in a small garden, and was also inhabited by a man named Brown, and his wife, who kept Mike's rooms in order and cooked his meals for him. She was a steady, hard-working woman, and was not wanting in acts of kindness towards the little orphan, Jem. Yet her kindness and industry did not make people as happy as they might have done, because Mrs. Brown lacked gentleness.

My story begins one Saturday evening towards the end of October. The weather was raw and damp—cold enough for it to have been December.

Old Mike and Jem were returning with their donkeys from the heath.

“Jem,” said Mike, as they reached their little cottage, “I feel as though my rheumatism was coming on, through being out in the rain to-day; so you put up the donkeys to-night and I will go in. Only be careful to bolt the door of the outer shed where the two foals

are, or they will get loose and do mischief."

Jem led the donkeys into the shed as his grandfather had desired him. Then he took some straw in his arms and laid it on the ground to make a fresh bed for them to lie on; and he put some hay on the top of an old barrel (there was no crib in that poor shed) that they might reach it; and filled a worn-out watering-pot with fresh water for them to drink. After this he went into the other shed, where the two foals were kept, and gave them a fresh bed, and hay and water.

Jem was an obedient little lad, and generally tried to please his grandfather; yet sometimes he was apt to be thoughtless. To-night he was cold and hungry, and was thinking more of the warm fire and large loaf indoors than of his work in the shed.

Thus it happened that he forgot to bolt

the door as his grandfather had told him to do.

After he had washed his hands and face at the pump, he went into the house and sat down by the fire to warm himself. If his grandfather had asked him about the shed door, Jem might have recollected that he had left it open ; but, as nothing was said about it, Jem did not discover his mistake till the next day, when it had caused great mischief.

The next morning being Sunday, Jem dressed himself in his best clothes to go to the Sunday school.

Old Mike did not get up till late on Sunday, as he only went to church in the evening. He said that a poor man, who had to work hard all the week, must rest on Sunday. Poor old Mike ! He did not know what it was to go to Jesus and “ find rest.”

When Jem had eaten a large slice of bread and butter he went out of the cot-

tage, on his way to school. As he trotted down the garden path he looked in the direction of the sheds. To his horror and amazement he saw the door of one open. Then it flashed across his mind that he had forgotten to bolt it the night before. He ran towards the shed, hoping the donkeys had not made their escape.

But it was too late. One little donkey was there, lying comfortably on the straw; but the other was nowhere to be seen.

Jem went into the garden. The foal was not there. That both the donkeys had been there was clear enough. The narrow paths were cut up and disfigured with marks of hoofs; the cabbages were eaten or destroyed; a branch was knocked off the apple tree, and many apples strewn on the ground; and, what was worst of all, the palings surrounding the garden were broken in several places. Yet there was no donkey to be seen.

Jem looked at the destruction his carelessness had caused till he began to cry with fear—fear for what his grandfather might say. The thought came into his head that he would go to school as though nothing had happened, and pretend that some one else—some mischievous boy, for fun—had opened the door. But Jem's conscience told him that this would be wrong, and I am glad to say he listened to his conscience instead of attending to the wicked thoughts Satan was putting into his heart. He shut and bolted the door of the shed where the one donkey was, and then walked boldly into the house to tell his grandfather what had happened. He found him just coming down-stairs.

“Oh, grandfather,” began Jem, “I'm very sorry, but I left the shed door unfastened last night, and Jenny has got out.”

It required a good deal of courage for

Jem to say this, for he knew his grandfather would be very angry.

“Jenny got out! And where’s she gone, pray?” asked old Mike.

“I don’t know,” replied Jem, faintly.

“Then you’d better know as quick as you can,” said old Mike, angrily. “Go and find her, and bring her home directly. What are you standing there star-gazing for?”

Jem looked out of window to see the stars he fancied his grandfather alluded to.

“I suppose,” continued the old man, “she has done fine damage to my tidy garden. Eh?”

“Yes, grandfather, I’m afraid she has,” was the answer; “I’m very sorry.”

“No use being sorry now,” said Mike. “If you’d been sorry before it happened, you would have been more careful to lock the door. But don’t stand there wasting time; go and find the donkey.”

Jem could not help wondering how he

could have been sorry for a thing before it happened, as he left the cottage in search of the missing donkey.

On passing by the Sunday school he heard the children singing, and felt very sorry not to be singing with them. He scarcely knew in which direction to seek the lost animal; but after walking about the Pits, he turned his steps towards the heath.

When he got there, however, he did not find the lost treasure. He wandered about for several hours, and asked the boys he met whether they had seen it, but still he did not find it.

At last he went home. His grandfather was very vexed to see him without Jenny, and said he must go out again to look for her. Old Mike let Jem have some dinner, though, before he started off again.

This time Jem went to Lewisham. Still he did not find Jenny. When he

returned it was quite dark, and he felt very tired.

“Well,” said Mike, as they sat down to tea, “all I can say is, that you will have to go without your winter coat, and I shall have to go without a new hat, if we do not find Jenny. I meant to have sold her before Christmas, and she’d have brought us two pounds, at least.”

Jem felt really sorry for the trouble he had brought on his grandfather, for he knew that, as old Mike said, the loss of the donkey would deprive them of several comforts during the coming winter. He sat looking into the fire till the bells began to ring for evening service.

Then old Mike got up and put on his great-coat. He did not take any notice of Jem. He felt vexed with him, and thought that, as he had been out all day, he had better not go to church.

“Grandfather,” said Jem, “mayn’t I go to church with you to-night?”

“I should think you’d been walking about enough to-day to please you,” returned old Mike.

“I’m not tired—at least, I should like to go to church with you, if I may.”

“You may go, if you want to,” said old Mike, gruffly.

So little Jem went to church with his grandfather. I do not know which church they went to—there are about eighteen different churches to which they could have walked from where they lived—but I do know that when they got there they found that a very good man was going to preach. He was not the minister of that church, but a stranger.

The text he chose for his sermon was the 31st verse of the 16th chapter of the Acts: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” I shall not tell you to whom those words were said, as you will find that and the whole of the beautiful story connected

with them, in the Bible, and can read it for yourself.

Now little Jem was feeling very unhappy about having lost the donkey, and was therefore quieter and more attentive than usual. When the good man began his sermon, Jem began to listen, and soon grew very much interested in what he heard.

One part of the sermon seemed to suit him exactly, and the clergyman spoke in such simple, earnest words, that Jem once thought he was speaking to him alone, and must see into his heart and know all his trouble. The clergyman said that if we could really believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we should never feel grieved or vexed at any trouble, because we should feel that He who had sent it would help us to bear it.

“Let us take the names separately,” the minister continued, “and think of what they each mean.

“ ‘*Lord*’ means somebody strong and rich, who can do what he pleases for us. We know that Jesus Christ is our Lord, and that He is a kind Lord, and loves us too well to do us aught but good.

“ ‘*Jesus*’ means ‘He shall save his people from their sins.’ Jesus has done this in dying for sinners. This great proof of his love for us ought to make us trust Him for everything else. ‘He laid down His life for His friends.’ Since He calls us His friends, He is our friend, and we know that He is a *faithful* friend.

“ ‘*Christ*’ means anointed, or set apart. By this we see that Jesus is devoted to what He has undertaken—the sad, ungrateful task of redeeming us poor sinners. He thinks of nothing else, He cares for nothing else, He is still unwearied in watching us to save us from harm. The Bible says, ‘Even Christ pleased not Himself.’”

When Jem heard this, he thought how

much he wanted a kind friend; his grandfather was not exactly a *friend*. Nor was Mrs. Brown—she was so often cross. Nor were the boys who lived near—they so often quarrelled with him. Then he thought how pleasant it would be to have a kind friend always near to share his troubles and to save him from harm; and when he knelt down at the end of the sermon, he prayed that he might believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Old Mike had listened to the sermon as well as Jem, and he thought of it as he went home, and he thought of it as he lay in bed that night; and he thought it was odd, being a Christian as he was, that he had never before thought of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ in the way the clergyman had told him that evening.

There was another little boy who had listened to the sermon. His name was Charlie Willan.

CHAPTER II.

CHARLIE WILLAN was ten years old, the same age as Jem. He was very different from poor orphan Jem, though. Both his parents were alive, and he lived with them in a large house on the heath. As he was not very strong, his papa and mamma indulged him in a great many ways that they would not have done had he been as bonny and well as other little boys. He did not go to school, but was taught by his elder sister, Mary.

The day after Jem had lost Jenny, Charlie asked his mamma to let him have a donkey-ride when he had finished his lessons. As his mamma very seldom said No when she thought it would give

her little boy pleasure if she said Yes, she gave him sixpence, and told him to ask Mary to take him to the stand and help him choose a donkey.

At twelve o'clock, lessons being ended, Mary and Charlie set out towards old Mike's donkey stand.

"Good morning," said Mary, when they reached it; "have you a donkey at home for this young gentleman to ride?"

"Yes, Miss," replied Mike, touching his hat; "here is a capital fresh one that hasn't been out all day, and will carry the young gentleman at a famous pace."

"Then you had better mount, Charlie," said Mary. "I suppose you have some one who can go with the donkey?" she continued, turning to old Mike.

"Well, Miss, to tell you the truth, here's no one but myself, for yesterday one of my foals got loose, and my grandson has gone over to Charlton, as we

heard a stray donkey had been seen out there. But if you fear for the young gentleman to go alone, I'll go with him, and ask Mr. Payne, who keeps those donkeys" — Mike pointed to another stand,—“to keep an eye on my beasts.”

Charlie was soon on the donkey's back, trotting away, old Mike following. They went straight across the heath, towards Charlton. Charlie was a good-tempered, kind-hearted boy, but he was apt to be impatient and thoughtless at times, and often liked to have his own way more than to give way to the better judgment of others. He had often been on old Mike's donkey before, but he had never hitherto been without Jem to run after the donkey and make it trot, which Jem doubtless made it do faster than old Mike; for Jem was young, and did not mind a run. But with poor old Mike it was quite a different thing. He did not enjoy a run by any means, for he was rather

stiff; partly from old age, partly from rheumatism.

Charlie never thought that perhaps the poor old man could not keep up with the donkey so well as his grandson, but expected him to make it go as fast as usual. At first old Mike tried to do as Charlie wished him; but, finding that he could not run so fast as the donkey could trot, gave up the attempt; and when Charlie cried out, "Beat the donkey; make him go," old Mike gave the poor beast a gentle tap with his stick, which he knew could have but little effect.

"Give me the stick," said Charlie at last; "give it to me. I *will* make the donkey go."

Old Mike gave Charlie the stick, thinking that perhaps he might now be allowed to walk at a convenient pace, for he fancied Charlie would not be able to hit the donkey hard enough to make any impression.

He was mistaken, however. Charlie gave one or two gentle taps, then, finding they did no good, took the stick in both hands, that the blow might have more force. He did not mean to be unkind to the donkey, nor to old Mike. He wished to gain his own end, and set about doing so in a thoughtless manner. It so happened that the stick came down on the poor donkey's ears, at which their owner, not being used to such treatment, gave a start, and threw his hind legs into the air. Charlie he sent flying over his head, and poor old Mike he kicked down to the ground.

Charlie was not hurt at all. He got up, and went to help old Mike do the same.

But Mike lay quite still. He did not speak, and Charlie began to fear he was very much hurt.

In a few moments a man came by, who stopped to look at Mike, and told

Charlie to go and find a policeman or some one else, that they might carry him home. Charlie ran towards Greenwich Park (one side of which faces the heath) as fast as he could. At the gate he met one of the keepers.

“Oh!” said Charlie to him, “can you come and help a poor old man who has been kicked by a donkey? Quick! quick! or he’ll die.”

Now the keeper was not inclined to be quite so quick as Charlie wished. In the first place, he wanted to know who it was that required help, and then why he required it. When he understood the story he blew a whistle that hung round his neck. In another moment a gardener came towards him.

“John,” said the keeper, “just go with this little lad and see what is the matter.”

Charlie took hold of John’s hand in his impatience to get back to old Mike, and

made him run with him across the heath to where he lay. They found him still unable to rise, though he could now speak.

“Oh, Mike!” said Charlie, “are you much hurt?”

“Not much,” returned old Mike, trying to smile. “But we old folks aren’t like you young things. Our bones are brittle. The kick the donkey gave my leg seems to have taken all the life out of me.”

“I am so sorry,” continued Charlie, “so very sorry. I will never be so impatient again. It was all my fault.”

“Oh no, Master Charlie, it was not your fault at all. Don’t fret about it, don’t fret.”

John stooped down and looked at the leg. Then he shook his head, and said he must go and borrow a shutter to carry Mike home on. Charlie was very frightened when he heard this, and began to cry.

When John came back with the shutter they placed Mike gently on it, and John and another man carried him home, whilst Charlie led the donkey. When Mary, who had been walking gently up and down, saw them coming, she was terribly alarmed, for at first she thought it was Charlie who was hurt. When Charlie told her how the accident had happened she looked very grave. Charlie wanted to see Mike safely carried home, but this Mary would not allow. She took five shillings out of her purse and gave them to the man, telling Mike that she would ask Dr. Willan (her father, who was a medical man) to call and see him in the afternoon, adding that another doctor had better be sent for meanwhile.

Then she took Charlie home. I need not tell you how sorry and grieved he was for the trouble and suffering he had caused.

CHAPTER III.

JEM had set out early in the morning on his expedition to Charlton. He inquired of every one he met on his way if they had seen Jenny: and two or three persons told him they had seen a donkey wandering down the Woolwich Road. So Jem trudged on to Woolwich.

But he saw nothing of Jenny. He concluded that as several persons had seen a stray donkey, it was most likely Jenny, so he determined to seek till he found her.

On leaving Woolwich he went down first one lane, then another, and walked on for many hours.

At last, on turning a sharp corner,

he saw a little donkey grazing by the road-side. He ran forward, hoping it was Jenny, but when he came close to it he found he was mistaken. It was very like Jenny, and he doubted not but that it was the donkey of which the persons of whom he had inquired had spoken.

It was a great disappointment to poor Jem. He did not lose heart, however, but sat down by the hedge and ate the bread and cheese he had taken with him for his dinner; and then began his walk home, like a brave little boy. He had intended to get up early that morning, and make their garden tidy after the mischief Jenny had caused, instead of going to Charlton; so now he walked fast, hoping he might still have time to do so before it grew dark, as old Mike sometimes went home early in the winter.

When he reached his grandfather's stand he inquired of Mr. Payne why he was not there. Mr. Payne told him that

some hours before he had been out with Master Willan, and had been kicked by the donkey.

“I dare say it’s nothing much, though,” continued kind-hearted Mr. Payne, “only they thought he’d better be taken home at once. So two men undertook to see him there safe. Don’t take on about it—it’s nothing, he’ll soon be well. Take the donkeys home now, and if your grandfather isn’t better by to-morrow, why, you can just put your donkeys along with mine, and then when you’re out with one I can take care of the rest.”

Jem thanked Mr. Payne, and, jumping on the back of one donkey, called to the others to follow, which they did without hesitation, as they knew that their work for that day was done, and were, like most sensible beings, not sorry for it.

They trotted down steep Blackheath Hill, and turned into the narrow street leading to the Pits. Jem put them safely

in their shed, and you may be sure that to-night he did not forget to bolt the door.

When Jem went into the house he was met at the door by Mrs. Brown.

“Just come in here,” she said, opening her kitchen door. “I suppose you know what’s happened?” she continued, turning towards the fire to attend to some bacon that she was cooking for her husband’s tea. “Your grandfather’s leg is broken, and the doctors have just set it. You’ll have to mind what you are after now, and not go leaving shed doors open, and spoiling people’s tidy gardens, and losing people’s winter savings. It would never have happened if you had not gone to look for Jenny.”

She was interrupted by hearing a cry. She turned round to see what was the matter. Poor little Jem had sunk on a chair, sobbing as though his heart would break.

“Oh, Mrs. Brown,” he cried, “is

grandfather very bad? Will he die? Oh, I did not mean to do it—I did not indeed.”

“Oh, don’t take on about it. I did not mean to say it was your fault,” said Mrs. Brown, in a more gentle tone of voice. “Look here, you shall have a piece of this bacon for your supper, and you’d better come and have it in here with Brown and me, as your grandfather is ill in bed.”

Jem thanked her, and went up-stairs to see old Mike. He found him suffering greatly, but more cheerful than he expected.

“What will you have for supper, grandfather?” asked Jem.

“A cup of tea,—nothing else,” returned old Mike. “I’ve no appetite for bread and cheese.”

A bright thought came into Jem’s head. He crept down-stairs into Mrs. Brown’s room.

“Mrs. Brown,” he began, hesitatingly, “you said you would give me a piece of bacon with my tea; would you mind if I took it up to grandfather instead? I’ll eat bread and cheese.”

“No; you may give it him if you like,” returned Mrs. Brown. “It will be done in a minute.”

While the bacon was being cooked Jem toasted a piece of bread and poured out some tea. When all was ready he carried it up-stairs.

“Mrs. Brown has sent you a piece of bacon,” he said, when he reached his grandfather’s room. “Try to eat it, grandfather.”

Old Mike did try to eat it, and succeeded in doing so, enjoying it very much.

“Thank you, Jem,” he said, as he finished it. “Now go down-stairs to your tea, and thank Mrs. Brown for the bacon.”

When Jem got down-stairs he found Mr. and Mrs. Brown eating their bacon, of which there was a slice on Jem's plate.

"Come and sit down," said Mrs. Brown, good-naturedly, "and eat your bacon while it's hot."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brown, but I'd rather not eat any."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown, "eat it directly."

"No, thank you; I'd rather not," repeated Jem.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Brown. "Do you think it's poison?"

"Oh no!" said Jem, the tears coming into his eyes. "It is not that. When I asked you just now to let me give the piece of bacon you promised me to grandfather, I did not mean to ask you to give me another piece; so I'd rather not eat this, thank you."

"Let the boy have his way," said Mr. Brown. "A gift is no gift unless

it costs the giver something, so let Jem have the honour of having given his grandfather his supper. Put Jem's slice by for old Mike's breakfast to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Brown did as her husband had suggested. She put the bacon by, and old Mike ate it for breakfast next morning. Thus Jem's self-denial brought his grandfather two nice meals.

"Grandfather," said Jem, when he went up-stairs after tea, "would you like me to read to you?"

"Yes," replied Mike, "I should."

"What shall I read?" asked Jem.

"Go to that cupboard," answered Mike, "and get down the large Bible,—it's on the top shelf,—and read the 16th chapter of Acts."

Jem was very much astonished. He had never known his grandfather care to hear the Bible before. He remembered, too, that this was the chapter the minister

had preached from on Sunday evening, and he wondered if his grandfather had thought of that sermon as much as he had. He got down the Bible, and began to look for the 16th chapter of Acts, which it took him a long time to find; for all poor little Jem knew of the Bible was what he had learnt at school on Sunday morning, and at church on Sunday evening.

When he had found the chapter he read it, and then waited for his grandfather to speak.

“Thank you, Jem,” said old Mike; “go to bed now. God bless you, my boy.”

Old Mike had never said this to Jem before; but it made Jem feel very happy, for it was said in a gentler tone than Jem had ever heard his grandfather use.

CHAPTER IV.

JEM got up as soon as it was light next morning to make the garden tidy.

First he raked the paths, then he stamped on them to make them smooth—there was no roller,—then he dug up and raked the beds. The palings he could not mend, but as old Mike had carried the broken wood and the apple-bough into a shed for firewood, Jem thought he might as well chop it into sticks. This he did, and when he went in to breakfast at half-past seven, he felt he had done a good morning's work.

When Mr. Brown went out to his work he was so surprised and pleased at the appearance of the garden that he

turned back to tell old Mike what Jem had done.

After breakfast Jem took the donkeys to the heath as usual. As Mr. Payne had given him leave, he took them to his stand.

Jem was very fortunate in the way of business. His donkeys were out nearly all day. First a lady brought two little girls to have a ride; then five young gentlemen from a school came, and each took a donkey for an hour and a half. Lastly, two cousins of Charlie Willan, Fred and Anna Cox, came for a ride.

Just as Jem was about to jump on a donkey's back to go home, Mary and Charlie Willan walked up to him to inquire after old Mike. Mary said she was very sorry that Dr. Willan had not been able to call and see him the day before, but that he had gone that afternoon instead.

Charlie had brought some little books

for Jem, which pleased Jem very much, as he thought they would do to read to his sick grandfather.

Jem felt very tired when he sat down to tea, on his return home, for he had had a hard day's work. He would have liked to go to bed directly, but he knew that his grandfather would want him to read to him; so Jem sat down by his grandfather's bed, and read aloud one of the little books Charlie had given him.

"Shall I read any more, grandfather?" Jem asked, when he had finished the book.

"Are you very tired?" asked old Mike, in return.

"Not very," said Jem.

"Then I should like to hear that chapter again that you read last night," said Mike.

Jem took the Bible, and to-night he knew better where to find the place. Mrs. Brown came into the room, and she also listened to Jem while he read.

“Now, then, Jem,” she said, when he had ended, “get to bed. You are as tired as you can be. Here, let me help you to undress.”

“I will say my prayers first,” said Jem.

“You’d better say them in bed to-night,” remarked Mrs. Brown kindly, “you are so tired.”

“I’d rather not,” said Jem; “they never seem to go higher than the bed-tester when I do.”*

Jem knelt down, in spite of Mrs. Brown’s advice to the contrary, and to-night his prayer was different from what it had been on Sunday. It was a prayer of thankfulness for the lovingkindness he had received from God during the day.

Now we must turn to other characters in our history. Charlie Willan was sitting on a footstool before a blazing fire in his

* A real answer.

large and comfortable home, talking to his mother, while Jem was reading to old Mike

“ I am very glad I am not Jem, the donkey-boy,” he said.

“ Why so ?” asked his mamma.

“ Because Jem has to work so hard, and to be out in the cold and rain. And then he has no kind mamma as I have, and no friend, and—”

Charlie paused ; Jem seemed to want so many things to make him happy.

“ I think what you say is true,” remarked Mrs. Willan. “ Jem has to work hard, and he, most likely, has not so many kind friends as you have : yet that is no reason why poor Jem should not be quite as happy. God puts each one of us in our own place, and can and does make us happy accordingly.”

“ Mamma,” said Charlie, after a short silence, “ you remember the sermon we heard on Sunday evening ?”

“ Yes, dear.”

“ Well, I thought when the clergyman said what a kind friend Jesus is, that poor people must be very glad to hear that—little Jem and old Mike, for instance. You see, mamma, rich people have so many friends.”

“ Charlie,” said his mother, very seriously, “ you forget that it is God who gives rich people their friends. It is God who has given you a dear papa and mamma, and you know He could take them away in a moment if He liked. Jem had a mother once, yet she is now dead. Besides that, all rich people have *not* friends. Every one is not as happy as you, Charlie.”

Charlie was silent some time, thinking over what his mother had said. At last he said—

“ I wonder whether Jem would like to have more friends—rich friends, I mean, like I have ?”

"Probably he would," said Mrs. Willan.

"Mamma," exclaimed Charlie, looking up into his mother's face, "do you think Jem would like to have me for a friend?"

"Yes, darling, I think he would."

"May *I* be his friend, mamma?"

"Yes, Charlie, if you think you can be consistent towards him, and not over-generous one day and neglectful the next," said Mrs. Willan.

"Oh! mamma, I would take care not to be so. But how can I be his friend? What shall I do for him?"

"What did the clergyman say the other evening that Jesus did for his friends, Charlie?"

"He said that Jesus 'laid down his life for his friends,'" replied Charlie.

"Then I think you should try and give up something for Jem," said Mrs. Willan.

"Suppose I were to give up part of

my weekly allowance?" said Charlie. "The great difference between Jem and me is, that he is poor and I am very well off. If I gave him half my pocket-money he would have twopence a week. I think he would like that, mamma. May I do it?"

"Yes, my child. And may you find that it is 'more blessed to give than to receive.'"

CHAPTER V.

THE days passed on, and Saturday came again. Jem had had a week of hard work, and he had gone through it bravely.

As usual on Saturdays, he prepared to take the donkeys home early, that both they and he might have a half-holiday. Jem was uncommonly happy that afternoon. You should have seen him trotting down the hill on one donkey's back, and all the others following as hard as they could.

Ah! I don't wonder little Jem felt happy, or that he was hurrying home. He possessed twopence of his own, and he was going to spend it when he had

put up the donkeys. Jem had hardly ever possessed so much money—to spend as he pleased—before.

It is true he sometimes received pence for following the donkeys; but then his grandfather always made him save those to buy something useful—such as a new cap, or a warm great-coat. So it is no wonder that little Jem felt joyful at having twopence.

Perhaps you have guessed how he came by the twopence; and I think you have guessed rightly. Charlie Willan had brought it to him that morning: it was half his allowance for that week. When Jem had put the donkeys safe in their sheds and bolted the doors he went into the cottage, and put his head into Mrs. Brown's kitchen. She was busy as usual.

He said, “I am just going down the hill to a shop, Mrs. Brown. I shall be back by the time tea is ready.”

“What are you going to a shop for?” asked Mrs. Brown.

“To buy something,” replied Jem.

“And whose money are you going to fling away?” inquired Mrs. Brown, sharply.

“My own,” said Jem, stoutly.

Then he ran away, not caring to hear more of Mrs. Brown’s opinion on the subject. Jem had a strong idea it might be more inclined towards saving than spending the twopence.

Jem went to Deptford. It did not take him many minutes to get there, for he was so used to run to keep up with the donkeys, that he ran now, as a matter of course, though no donkeys were before him.

When Jem reached the Broadway at Deptford he paused, for he had not quite made up his mind how to spend his twopence. He had determined to buy something for his grand-

father, but the question was, what should it be?

There were a great many stalls in the Broadway, and a great many people buying at the stalls. At length Jem wedged his way through the crowd up to a woman who sold fish. He thought old Mike would like a bit of fish for tea.

"Please, ma'am," said Jem, addressing the woman, "I want some fish. What would be the price of one?"

"Depends upon what sort you want," returned the woman.

Jem said he was not particular as to what it was, and told her it was for his sick grandfather.

The woman was kind-hearted; when she heard that she offered Jem three fish for twopence. They were worth rather more than that to the woman, and greatly more to Jem. He ran home with them as fast as he had run to Deptford.

“Here, Mrs. Brown,” exclaimed Jem, panting, “here are some fish for grandfather’s tea. Will you cook them for him?”

“Why, where did you get them from, Jem? You’ve never been spending your grandfather’s money, eh?”

“No, Mrs. Brown, indeed I have not. Master Willan gave it to me.”

“Who is Master Willan, pray?”

“The young gentleman grandfather was out with when he broke his leg,” said Jem.

Mrs. Brown cooked the fish without asking any more questions. Then Jem carried it up-stairs to his grandfather.

Old Mike enjoyed the fish as much as he had the bacon. Such treats as these were few and far between; for Jem could hardly earn enough by the donkeys to pay for rent and plain food. Had it not been for Dr. Willan’s kindness in sending them things and attending on

old Mike for nothing, they could hardly have "made ends meet."

Illness always brings trouble, and often poverty.

Charlie little thought how much pleasure his twopence had brought his friend.

It was now a regular thing for Jem to read the Bible to old Mike; but he did not always read the sixteenth of the Acts. Many other chapters were read by Jem, and listened to by his grandfather, and sometimes by Mrs. Brown.

"Jem," said Mike, when Jem had finished reading for that night, "do you remember the sermon we heard the Sunday before I met with the accident?"

"Yes, grandfather," said Jem.

It was the first time old Mike had alluded to that sermon, though Jem knew well enough that he had thought of it as he had.

"Do you know the name of the clergyman who preached?" asked old Mike

“No, grandfather. They said he was a stranger.”

“I should like to see him again, Jem,” old Mike said. “I never heard any one speak so plain and comforting. I should like to see him and hear him speak once more. Jem, you know we must all die, and it would be an awful thing to die without believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Oh, grandfather, do not talk of dying. It is such a sad thing,” said little Jem.

“Not too sad to speak of,” said Mike. “Not at all sad if one is sure of being happier afterwards.”

The boy looked at his grandfather, but did not speak.

“Jem, my boy, I am an old man. God may take me at any time. But when He does, remember the words of that good clergyman’s sermon, and you will never feel that you are left alone in the world.”

Little Jem hid his face in his hands and cried bitterly.

Poor little orphan Jem! Who would take care of him when he lost his grandfather?

CHAPTER VI.

“JEM,” said Dr. Willan, one morning when he was calling to see old Mike, “I hear you have a donkey to sell—brother to the one you lost. Just bring him round for me to look at. I am thinking of buying one for my little boy, and perhaps yours will suit me.”

Jem ran to the shed, and soon appeared with Dobbin.

“How much does your grandfather ask for him?”

“Grandfather expects to get two pounds for him at Christmas,” said Jem.

“Then if he expects to get two pounds at Christmas, I see no reason why he

should not get as much now, or more too, if he can. Here are two pounds ten shillings, and if your grandfather approves of the bargain you can bring the donkey to my house this evening."

Jem flew upstairs to tell his grandfather the good news.

But old Mike was not so pleased as Jem had expected. He seemed weary.

"Put the money by, Jem," he said. "It will be useful to you some day."

He lay for a few minutes without speaking: then he said, "Jem, do you think you could find out the name of that good clergyman?"

"I'm afraid not," said Jem, musingly.

"Ah! I'm afraid not either," rejoined old Mike; "never mind, it is only a strange whim that came into my head, Jem."

People say that ills never come alone. Now, I am inclined to think that good things very often do not come alone

neither; and Jem thought so too, to-day.

Well, it was curious, certainly!

He went on the heath, as usual; not many little boys or girls came for a ride that afternoon, for the weather was cold. So Jem stood for the greater part of the time doing nothing except looking at the passers-by.

As he was gazing idly across the heath, he suddenly espied a little donkey grazing quietly at some distance. From the little creature's appearance, Jem thought it looked like Jenny; so off he set to examine it more closely.

As he approached it, it grew more and more like Jenny, and at last Jem felt quite sure it was Jenny.

Then he ran so fast and looked so hard at the donkey, that he forgot to look where he was going, and consequently did not see a tall, grave gentleman, who was walking across his very path. Jem

did not even see his arm when he put it out to prevent his knocking him down; but ran straight against it.

This unlooked-for impediment brought Jem to a standstill so suddenly that he fell down.

“Get up, my little man,” said the kindly voice of the tall, grave gentleman. “Where were you going in such a hurry?”

“I was going to bring Jenny back to the stand,” said Jem. “There she is. We have lost her for more than a fortnight. I beg your pardon, sir, for having knocked up against you,” added Jem, touching his cap and looking up at the gentleman.

When Jem looked at that kind grave face, he thought he had seen it before—he could not recollect when or where—and he thought he recognised the voice too.

“Who is Jenny?” asked the gentleman.

“Oh! sir,” said Jem, never heeding the question, “you are the good clergyman who preached to grandfather and me the Sunday before last. You preached the beautiful sermon about believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh! sir, will you come and see poor grandfather? He is very ill in bed, and longs to see you, sir.”

“Where does your grandfather live? I will come and see him now if you like,” replied the clergyman, for it was he.

“He lives at the Pits,” said Jem.

“If you are ready to go home now, I will go with you, and you can show me the way,” observed the clergyman.

Jem said he was ready to go home, but that he must not leave the heath without the donkeys. Then he went up to Jenny, who seemed to recognise him directly, for she came to him of her own accord. Jem was very, very much pleased to have found her, but he was so much more

pleased to have found the good clergyman, that he scarcely thought of her.

The clergyman followed Jem and Jenny, and then waited till Jem had unloosed the bridles of the other donkeys from the posts and railings.

Jem jumped on a donkey, as usual, but to-day he made it, as well as the others, walk gently down the hill, for the clergyman was following on the pavement, and Jem would not have lost sight of him on any account.

When they reached Mike's cottage, Jem showed the clergyman into their kitchen, whilst he attended to the donkeys, and went upstairs to prepare his grandfather for his visitor.

"Grandfather," said Jem, "you said last evening you would like to see that good clergyman again."

"Yes, yes, my boy, but it was only a fancy. One may fancy one would like a great many things one can't get. I shall

never see that good clergyman again. He will not come here to see me, and I shall never be able to go to church again to see him."

"But, grandfather, I met him this afternoon, and he said he would come and see you. He is here now—waiting to come up. Shall I fetch him?"

"What—what did you say, Jem?" asked old Mike, faintly. He hardly understood the good news.

"Shall I bring the clergyman upstairs, grandfather?"

"Yes, if you like."

Old Mike did not understand it yet.

In a few minutes the clergyman was standing beside old Mike's bed, speaking words of comfort—telling him of that Saviour, our Lord, Friend, Preserver.

Some hours afterwards Jem went to say good night to his grandfather.

"Jem," said Mike, "as Jenny is found, that money must be returned to

Dr. Willan, and we must have the donkey back again. He only bought it because Jenny was lost. Tell him so when he comes to-morrow."

Jem did tell Dr. Willan; but Dr. Willan refused to go from his bargain.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE weeks had passed away since that Saturday when Charlie first gave half his allowance to Jem.

He had hitherto carried it each Saturday afternoon to Jem at his donkey-stand.

Saturday morning had come round again.

Charlie had placed his lesson-books ready for Mary when she should come into the schoolroom. His slate was cleaned, and his pencil ground to a fine point. Charlie did sums on Saturdays—a part of his education he did not at all relish.

When Mary came she first heard him

say the lessons he had prepared the day before, and then set him a sum.

Charlie had not done more than three figures before the schoolroom door was thrown open, and in rushed his two cousins, Fred and Anna. They were breathless with excitement and haste.

“Charlie!” shouted Fred.

“Mary!” screamed Anna.

“Stop, stop,” interrupted Mary.

“One at a time, please.”

In spite of Mary’s request both children began to speak together again, till at last Anna gave up to Fred, and let him tell the story.

“A man with a Punch and Judy show—such a grand one—has just come to our door,” he said, “and mamma says we may have him into the garden to perform if we like to pay for ourselves. She says she has given us so many treats this week that she can stand no more. The man asks a shilling, so we thought

we could easily collect that by proposing to you to join us, Charlie. Mary will spare you, I am sure. Won't you, Mary?"

Mary smiled; but did not reply. Nor did they wait for her to speak.

"You see, Charlie, we shall each have to give fourpence," said Anna

"Just what you get," resumed Fred, "for your week's pocket-money. Oh! do join in the fun."

A look of joy came over Charlie's face. He clapped his hands, and begged Mary to let him go to his aunt's house.

"Yes, dear," said Mary, "you may go if you can pay your subscription; but I think it will hardly do to go if you cannot, for if aunt has said she does not wish to pay for Fred and Anna, I think it would not be fair to ask mamma to pay for you."

"Oh! but, Mary, you know I shall have fourpence to-day."

For the moment Charlie had quite lost sight of Jem and his good resolutions.

“Charlie,” replied Mary, gravely, “have you forgotten?”

Then Charlie remembered his little friend.

“Fred,” he said, firmly, though in a much sadder tone, “I cannot join you in seeing Punch and Judy. I have not fourpence to spend.”

“Not fourpence to spend!” exclaimed Fred. “Why, have you already spent this week’s allowance?”

“I’ve as good as spent half,” returned Charlie, “and I have no more money by me. So, you see, I cannot subscribe fourpence.”

Fred and Anna went home, wondering how Charlie could have spent the twopence.

When they were gone, Mary took Charlie on her knee, and kissed his cheek.

And that kiss told Charlie that she knew he had denied himself a pleasure for the sake of giving pleasure to another, and it made up for a great deal of that which Charlie had missed.

“We will not do any more sums this morning,” said Mary. “Go and put on your hat, and we will go for a walk on the heath.”

How Charlie enjoyed that walk!

They returned home just in time for luncheon, and found Dr. Willan at home. When Charlie took his seat at table his papa asked him whether he would like a drive in the carriage with him. Dr. Willan knew what the answer would be. It was one of the greatest treats Charlie could have, to go in the carriage with his papa.

“You must not mind waiting outside one or two houses, Charlie,” said Dr. Willan; “for I have not seen all my patients to-day. Amongst

others, I am going to call on poor old Mike."

"Then," thought Charlie, "I can take the twopence to Jem"

When Dr Willan came home he did not intend taking Charlie with him. It was Mary who had begged him to do so.

That afternoon was unusually bright. The sun shone through the silvery clouds, and threw his beams on the grassy heath, and made the earth warm and cheery. Charlie looked out of the carriage windows as they drove through Blackheath village, and thought there was nothing pleasanter in life than driving with a dear, good papa.

Charlie little knew how dull and wretched that bright afternoon was to his friend Jem;—it was well he did not, for the knowledge must have spoiled his enjoyment.

When they had returned from the village, and driven down Blackheath Hill

to old Mike's, Dr. Willan got out of the carriage, and told Charlie he would send Jem down to speak to him whilst he saw his grandfather.

And now we must revert to our friend the donkey-boy. Jem had not gone on the heath that day.

As he was going out of the garden gate, on his way thither, Mrs. Brown called him back, and said she thought old Mike might like him to read to him, and that he had better stay at home. Jem returned, and went up-stairs to sit with his grandfather.

Old Mike was very, very weak. It was with difficulty he could even speak. He had asked Jem to read the 16th of Acts, and Jem had done so. Then old Mike lay quite still for some hours.

When he spoke again it was late in the afternoon.

“Jem, my boy,” he said, taking Jem's hand in his, “do not forget, when I am

gone, that you have a Friend—the best of friends. You know whom I mean.”

Old Mike was interrupted by a knock at the bedroom door. It was caused by the good clergyman, who often came to see Mike now.

“Sir,” said Mike, when he had entered the room, “I thought I should not have seen you again here on earth. I am glad you are come. I wanted to thank you for all you have taught me. I should like to have thanked Dr. Willan too; but never mind. God will bless him, and all those who do His service.”

Just then a carriage drove up to the cottage. It was Dr. Willan’s.

“Well, Mrs. Brown,” said the doctor, coming in, “how is your invalid?”

Mrs. Brown led Dr. Willan into her cheerful kitchen.

“Sir,” she replied, “I’m afraid he’s dying.”

“Oh no!” returned Dr. Willan, “you are nervous. I will go up-stairs and soon assure you that he is better.”

Dr. Willan went up. He really expected to find old Mike better. But he was mistaken.

“Doctor Willan,” said Mike, a flush overspreading his pale face, “I wanted to thank you before I die. God bless you. You’ve done all you could for me; but God has called me.”

Old Mike fell back on the pillow, almost exhausted.

Charlie, who was left in the carriage, wondered why Jem did not come down for his twopence.

After wondering for some time, he thought he would get out of the carriage, and go up to the cottage door to see why he did not come; so he called to the coachman to let him out.

When Charlie opened the cottage door he found no one in Mrs. Brown’s kitchen.

The house was quite still, except for some sobs, which Charlie heard proceeding from old Mike's room. Charlie did not like to break the silence by calling Jem's name. So he crept up-stairs.

Then he heard that it was Jem sobbing. He pushed open old Mike's room door, and entered, very gently. His father and the good clergyman, and Mrs. Brown and Jem were standing round the bed. Old Mike was speaking in a low voice.

"Sir," he said, addressing the clergyman, "if you had not told me to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, I should never have known how to love Him—how to trust Him. Oh! Jem, oh! Mrs. Brown, never rest till *you* know how to trust Him. You may be friendless when I'm gone, Jem, but you will still have Jesus."

As Mike finished speaking, Charlie sprang forward.

“Oh! Mike, do not think that Jem will be friendless. Papa will be his friend—I *am* his friend.”

And Charlie took the little orphan's hard, rough hand in his.

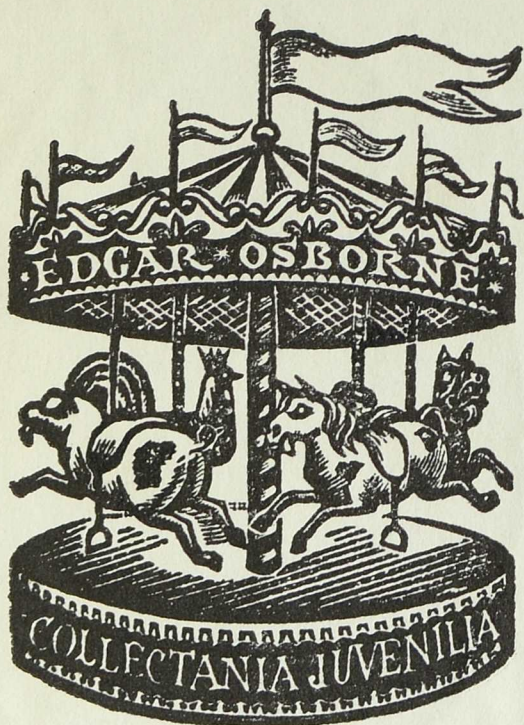
Old Mike heard the words. A bright look came over his face, but he could not speak.

He never spoke again; and in a few minutes little Jem had lost his grandfather for ever in this world.

THE END.

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