



TOM BRYANT;

OR, THE



STOLEN MINCE-PIE.



BIRMINGHAM:

C. CASWELL, 135, BROAD-STREET.

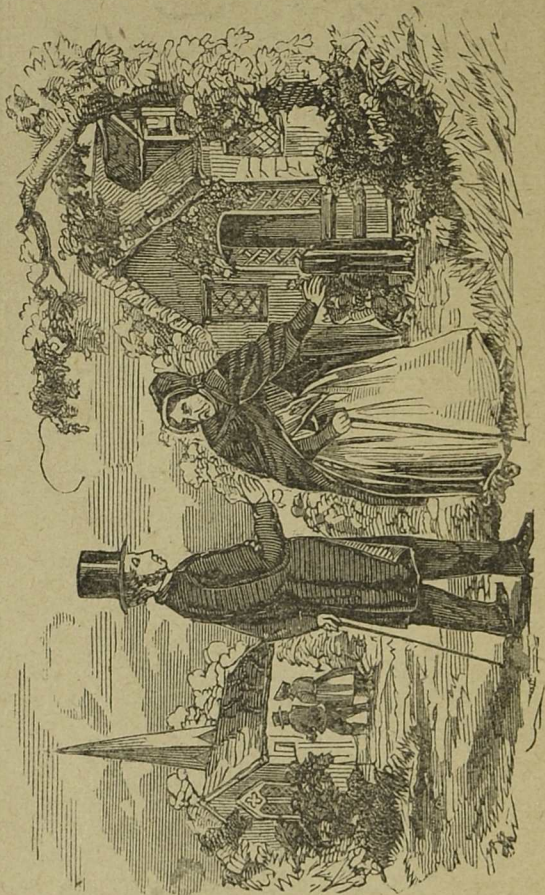
1866.



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*Sally E. Norton
from dear Aunt Grace*

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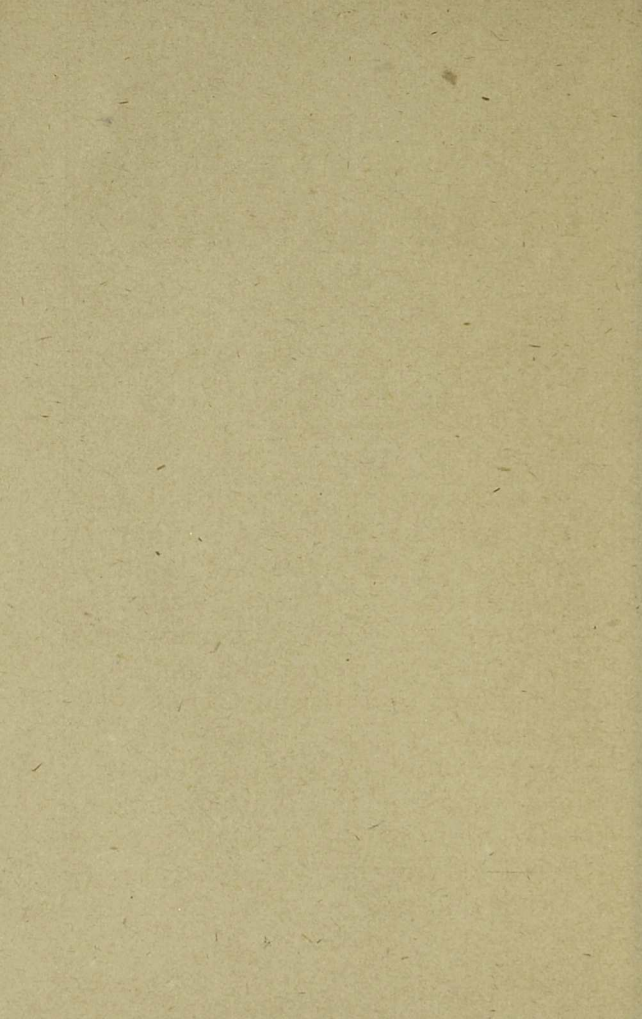
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TOM BRYANT was a poor boy who lived with his widowed mother in one of the back streets of London. He had one little blind sister, to whom he was much attached. She was only seven years old, and had been blind and helpless ever since her birth. It was a dreary life for the poor child to lead in that little dark room in the narrow street. Some children would have bemoaned their hard lot, but she was always patient and gentle. The little fur-

niture the room boasted was old and ricketty, though scrupulously clean ; the poor widow believed in the proverb, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Sometimes a stray sunbeam would make its way to the place where the blind child sat, and playing around her head would light up her face as with glory, but the bright beam never penetrated the darkened eye-balls of the blind girl. Tom would occasionally lead her by the hand along the crowded streets, and strive to amuse her by describing the different objects they passed. Oh, how the widowed mother longed as she gazed on her two poor faded children, threading the gloomy street, that they could run in the green fields and meadows, that she remembered so well when she was young. And then as she sat at work, stitching for their daily bread, her thoughts would carry her back to the happy days of her

childhood. Oh, how happy she was in that little country village, where she lived with her kind parents. How merrily the days passed in the bright spring time, when everything seemed to rejoice in its unfolding life and beauty. How often they went blackberrying and nutting in the lovely autumn days, when the overshadowing trees had more shades than the rainbow. And as she sat in her dull room she could hear again the joyous laugh of her young companions, as they chased each other on their homeward way. And then she passed on to the time when she had grown from childhood into a woman. How well she remembered the day when Tom Bryant had first asked her to be his wife, and how her future life seemed to be strewn with roses. Little did she think how soon they would sink into poverty and want, from her husband's extravagant and bad

habits. Her only comfort now was to think he died a penitent man. She almost wished she had died in her youth, but she checked this thought, knowing it was her Heavenly Father's will that she should still work and labour on in this world, and that He must have some wise purpose to fulfil in her. Although she was poor and friendless, she possessed that "peace which passeth all understanding," and she strove to bring up her children in a virtuous and honest way. Often would little Tom and Annie sit at their mother's knee, and listen to Bible stories and other good words that dropped from her lips. And they formed a pleasing picture even in their poverty. The poor widow with her thin and wan face, working hard for their bread, yet ever and anon casting a loving glance on the upturned faces of her children, little Annie's always in rapt attention.

How often she would tell them of Moses and the bulrushes, Joseph and his cruel brothers, and all the beautiful stories children so love to hear—but most of all they loved to hear her tell of the child Jesus, who, although he had as many temptations as other little children, always overcame them and was ever loving, obedient, and mild. Tom was a high spirited boy, but he always seemed subdued at these times, and in after life never lost the good impressions he then received.

The poor widow often knew what it was to go without a meal, and she was thinking now as she sat at work, whether she should have completed the shirt she was making in time to buy a loaf for their frugal dinner. As this thought was passing through her mind, Tom made his appearance with little Annie; they had been out for exercise to try and get warm, for it was a bit-

terly cold day, and there were but few sparks in the grate. They came home full of what they had passed on their walk. It was Christmas time, and all the shops were loaded with good things. The poor little girl had forgotten her cold and hunger while listening to the description of the beautiful things displayed in the windows. "Oh, Mother," said Tom, "shall we be able to have a Christmas-pudding this year?" "No, my boy, we must be thankful if we have bread enough to eat, and not be longing for things we cannot have. I have a very pretty story to tell you on Christmas-day, and we must try and be happy without the good things people better off than ourselves can afford." "I think it is very hard we can't have some nice things as well as other people," said Tom. "When I grow to be a man you shall have both meat and Christmas pudding

too. Won't that be nice, Annie? I do wish I was a man!" Tom was a good boy and had often wished to help his poor Mother; although such a little boy, he felt now that he would work very hard if he could but get some few comforts for those he loved so dearly; only that no one would take him. When he applied for any sort of situation, they were sure to say, "Oh, we couldn't think of taking a little boy with such shabby clothes and no shoes and stockings, and besides, who would give you a character?" So poor Tom was obliged to turn sadly away and acknowledge that he had no one to say a good word for him but his poor Mother.

"Tom," said the widow, "I wish you to take this shirt home, and bring a loaf with the money you receive for it. Make haste, my boy, as it is long since we have had anything to eat." Tom ran cheerfully

away to do his Mother's bidding, and having received the money went straight to a baker's shop. The shop was full when he entered it, for the people were busy buying in their things for Christmas-day. Tom stood patiently waiting for his turn to be served. He gazed around, and oh, how tempting everything looked. There were piles upon piles of cakes. Tom thought how happy those people must be who could afford to buy them. There were buns and biscuits, and what was more tempting still than all, rows of mince pies on a tray just within reach of Tom's hand. Oh, how many there are thought Tom, how I should like to be able to buy one for Annie—and then he heard a voice whisper in his ear, “there are so many that one could not possibly be missed, and besides no one is looking this way, and you can safely take one and run home as fast as you can.” Tom hesitated for a moment, and

then he heard a still small voice say, "Tom have been very poor, Tom, but have never been a thief, resist this temptation and run away as fast at you can, for if you stand longer looking at them, you will in the end take one." Again the evil voice sounded in Tom's ear, "make haste, already some of the people have left the shop, they will be looking this way soon, think how much little Annie would like a nice mince-pie, your poor little sister, who so seldom has anything that is good." Tom moved a little nearer, and suddenly seizing the nearest mince-pie, quickly left the shop and rushed down the street. He ran faster and faster, for he fancied he almost felt a hand on his shoulder, and a voice calling out 'Stop thief.' When he was obliged to slacken his pace in order to take breath, how guilty he felt, and how gladly he would have replaced what he had stolen. It felt like a leaden

weight in his pocket, and he fancied every one was looking at him, and suspecting him of being a thief. He dared not go home, and he dared not return to the baker's and confess—he began to think of all his Mother had taught him, and oh, how grieved she would be to think that her little son was a thief,—the little son she had always been so proud of—and then he thought of the verse,—“Thou God seest me,” and felt afraid even to pray to God to help him, for he felt that the pure and holy God was looking down upon him with displeasure. The thought was too dreadful to dwell on—what should he do, where should he turn! he knew not—at last he determined to buy the loaf of another baker, and go home as fast as possible, for his Mother would wonder what had become of him; and oh, how he shrank from telling her what had happened.

“What has delayed you so long, Tom,” asked his Mother as he made his appearance? Tom hung his head and looked very guilty, but did not say a word, for he was not yet so hardened as to be able to tell a lie. The widow saw that something had happened, but thought it best not to say anything about it just then. She trusted that Tom would confide in her and did not wish to press him into a confession. She saw that Tom had done something wrong, for he seldom hung his head except for a fault.

That night, Tom could not rest. It was not the hard straw mattress that prevented him sleeping, for he was used to that, but it was his sin that caused him to toss from side to side—oh how wretched he felt, he dared not look on the calm sky with the little twinkling stars shining down upon him so brightly, as he was so fond of doing from his little hard

bed, for this reminded him of his Heavenly Father whom he had sinned against—and he scarcely dared to look at his little sister sleeping so peacefully beside him, for she reminded him of what he had been a few short days ago—a happy, because a good child—and then he began to think what he should do. He determined at last to strive in every way in his power to earn two-pence, the price of the mince-pie, and to go to the baker and confess what he had done. Having made this resolve he fell into a quiet sleep, but not before he had risen from his little bed, and kneeling down had asked God to forgive him his sin, and to help him to keep to his good determination, and help him to be good and honest in the future.

The next morning he woke with a feeling that something was wrong, and as he became wide awake, he

remembered all that had happened. He determined to act at once on his resolve, so made haste and dressed, and left the house in search of something to do. He wandered about, but it was too early yet to hope to get any work. He still had the mince-pie in his pocket and was at a loss to know what to do with it. He no longer wished to give it to his little sister, and still less to eat it himself, for he knew how it had been obtained. He determined to throw it away somewhere and went wandering on to find a convenient place. As he was walking on with his head down, looking somewhat desponding and sad, a cheery voice hailed him with "Hollo, my boy, do you want a job? if so, hold my horse for a few minutes." Tom sprang forward lifting such a changed and brightened face to the gentleman that he was quite astonished. "You seem glad of something to

do, my little man.” “Indeed I do, Sir,” said Tom, “it is very seldom I can get a job, for no one will take me without shoes and stockings.” “Well, if you come to my office I think I shall be able to find you an old pair,” said the kind gentleman, “for you look an honest lad.” Oh, how Tom’s conscience smote him, and how he resolved that he would never be dishonest again—“Come to my office by half-past eleven and I will be ready for you,” and passing into the house he left Tom a happier boy than he found him. He began revolving in his mind what he should do when he received his boots. He considered that his fortune was almost made, for so many had refused him any kind of work because of his bare feet, that now that he had boots he thought he should be able to get something to do immediately. While he was still thinking of these things, the gen-

tleman again made his appearance, and throwing him a handful of copper and telling him to be sure to come to his office in time, he rode away.

How thankful Tom felt as he counted his pence—there was four-pence half-penny, quite a large sum for him. He lifted up his heart in thankfulness to God for all his goodness, and prayed earnestly that he never might fall again into temptation. He no longer felt afraid to think of the text, “Thou God seest me;” for he loved the idea that God was always near him, guarding him from all danger, and guiding him into the right way. What a delightful feeling it is, after having done wrong to feel you have full forgiveness. This, poor little Tom felt, and it made him bright and happy as he hurried along to the baker’s shop. When he arrived, he hesitated and scarcely liked going

in—the feeling of guiltiness came over him again; but making an effort he went in, and walked straight up to the counter. There was no one in the shop, and he began to tremble as he again stood on the spot where he had before yielded to temptation. He heard again the evil voice saying to him, “Well, you are a silly boy to put yourself into such an uncomfortable position for a little paltry mince-pie. I should go away and not say a word about it.” But Tom had prayed earnestly to be kept in the right path, and he could hear distinctly the good voice of his conscience saying to him, “You are doing quite right, Tom.” At this moment the baker made his appearance:

“Well, my little man, and what can I do for you to-day?” said he, rubbing his hands.

“If you please, sir,” stammered Tom, “I stole a mince-pie from

your shop yesterday; I am very sorry, and have now come to pay for it."

"I never missed it, my lad; but I am very glad you have come and honestly told me about it. What's your name, and where do you live?"

Tom told him, and also related how poor they were, and how difficult he found it to get work, how he longed to help his poor mother, last of all, he told him how the kind gentleman had promised to give him a pair of boots. The baker considered for a minute, and then said, "After you have got your boots, if you will come back to me, I think I can do something for you."

Tom thanked the kind baker, and laying the two pennies on the counter left the shop, and proceeded on his way to the gentleman's office. On the way he dropped the mince-pie on a door-step, in hopes that some poor hungry creature might

eat it. He was very hungry himself, for he had tasted no food that morning, but he could not eat the fruit of his sin, and neither would he take it home to his mother or sister.

When he arrived at the office, the gentleman was waiting for him with a smile on his face. "Well, my boy, you see I have the boots all ready for you; I am afraid they are a little too large; but you had better try them on and see." Tom scarcely knew how to thank the kind gentleman; he quickly slipped them on to his poor little bare feet. They were much too large; but Tom thought he had never seen boots fit so beautifully. - He was obliged to walk once or twice up and down the office to see how they felt. The gentleman looked on greatly amused, and told Tom that if those boots were the means of getting him a comfortable place, and he was a

good boy and kept it, and did his duty, he would make him a present of a new pair when those old ones were quite worn out. Tom could not sufficiently thank the gentleman: the tears came into his eyes, for he was so little used to kindness, except from his Mother and little sister. After a few more kind words the gentleman dismissed him with a pat on his shoulder, and told him to lose no time in seeking for a situation.

He then returned to the baker's, and found that he had determined to take Tom for his errand boy. Oh, how overjoyed Tom felt. The baker told him that he should only take him for a little time on trial, but that if he continued honest, obedient and diligent, he would keep him always. He would give him eighteen pence a week and his meals, and he might go home to his Mother in the evening. He was to begin his new

work the next day, and was to be sure and go very early. The baker said he had long been looking out for a boy, but had not been able to meet with one exactly to his taste. He liked Tom's face, for it was open and honest; and although his clothes were threadbare, they were patched and clean. He told Tom he hoped he would never be again tempted to do a dishonest action. Tom assured him he would do his best to please him, and after again thanking the good baker, ran off home as fast as he could. He could scarcely feel the ground under his feet, he was so happy. The boots were so large that they prevented him running very quickly; but Tom laboured on, thinking they were the most comfortable boots ever made. He rushed into the room where his Mother was sitting, and began dancing round her with delight. "Oh, Mother, see what I have got, and a

situation at such a kind baker's into the bargain. I am to go to-morrow morning very early." The poor widow felt very thankful, and making Tom sit down, she asked him to tell her about all his good fortune. Tom became very grave as his sin rose before his mind, but he determined to tell his Mother all about it. The tears flowed down the poor widow's face as Tom related what had happened. She could scarcely speak, but she kneeled down with Tom and thanked her Heavenly Father that, although her little son had sinned, He had given him grace to repent of it, and had given him a bright opening for a good and happy life. That was a happy evening spent in the widow's little dark room in the narrow street. Many living in ease and affluence might have envied them, for their joy was so pure and unalloyed. Although they were friendless in

this world they knew they possessed the love of Him who sticketh closer than a brother. After reading a chapter in the Bible, the widow desired Tom to repeat her one of her favourite hymns before retiring to rest. Tom repeated in a clear voice the following hymn:—

“ Jesus, still lead on,
 Till our rest is won;
 And although the way be cheerless,
 We will follow calm and fearless;
 Guide us by Thy hand
 To our fatherland.

If the way be drear,
 If the foe be near,
 Let not faithless fears o’ertake us,
 Let not faith and hope forsake us,
 For, through many a foe,
 To our home we go!

When we seek relief
 From a long felt grief,—

When oppressed by new temptations,
 Lord, increase and perfect patience :
 Show us that bright shore,
 Where we weep no more.

Jesus, still lead on
 Till our rest is won !
 Heavenly Leader, still direct us,
 Still support, console, protect us,
 Till we safely stand
 In our fatherland."

"Thank you, my boy, we must now go to bed so as to be up early in order that you may be in time at your new place." Who can wonder that Tom had sweet dreams that night. He started so early in the morning that the shop was not open, and no one was astir. He walked up and down, keeping himself as warm as he could until he saw some signs of life ; and as he walked up and down, how many plans he formed for the future. He

imagined his mother established in a sweet little cottage in the country, with plenty to eat, and able to attend the little village church, and all by his exertions. Oh, how hard he would try to please and get on; and he did not forget to ask God's help, for he felt how feeble were his endeavours without the blessing of God. Presently he saw a blind drawn up, and going forward he knocked gently at the door. The baker soon appeared and let him in. "Well, my lad, this is a very good beginning; I hope you will always be as punctual. Tom can go and take down the shutters of the shop." Tom quickly turned to obey, and although the shutters were very heavy for him to lift, he managed to get them all down safely without breaking any of the windows. And all day long he was so active and obliging, that the baker told his wife in the evening he had seldom

seen a boy he liked better, and that he thought he had a treasure in his new errand boy. His wife said she was glad to hear it, but that he must not be too sanguine. "New brooms generally swept clean."

However, as time went on, Tom still continued honest and industrious; and the baker never had cause to complain of having taken him. In a few months he raised Tom's wages, and many little comforts found their way into the widow's home. At last she was able to move into a better and more cheerful street.

Years rolled on, and Tom became a young man, and was so useful to the baker that he took him into partnership; for although Tom had no money to put into the business, he had energy and perseverance, and these quite made up for it; for the baker was growing an old man, and could now trust all the business

to Tom, being sure that Tom would do his duty, for he was an upright young man in all his dealings. In a few years Tom was enabled to buy the little cottage for his Mother that he had so often dreamed about many years before, and had the happiness of seeing his Mother and sister comfortably settled in it, with every necessary for their comfort. Tom married one of the baker's daughters, who was as pious and praiseworthy as himself. He lived a long and happy life, respected by all around him. But you must not think that because Tom was now rich and happy that he ever forgot to relate to all his little children the story of the **STOLEN MINCE-PIE**.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

To do to others as I would
That they should do to me,
Will make me honest, kind and good,
As every child should be.

I never should behave amiss,
Nor feel uncertain long,
As I can always tell by this,
If things be right or wrong.

I know I should not steal or use
The smallest thing I see,
Which I should never like to lose,
If it belonged to me.

And this plain rule forbids me quite
To strike an angry blow,
Because I should not think it right,
If others served me so.

Whether I am at home, at school,
Or walking out abroad,
I never should forget this rule
Of Jesus Christ the Lord.

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