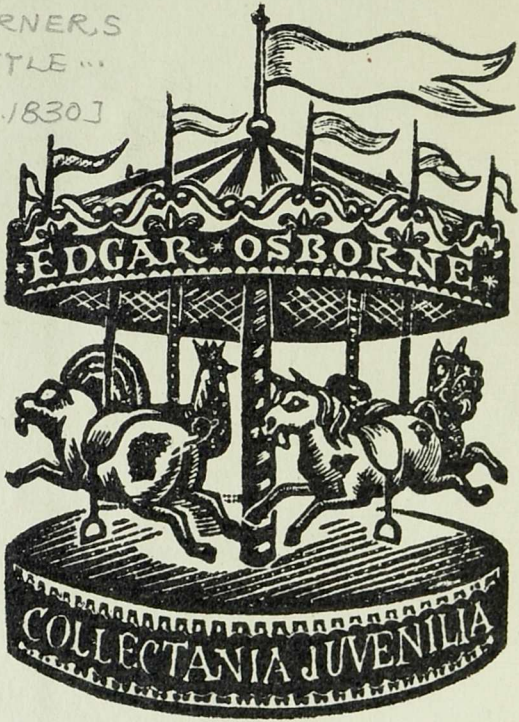
LITTLE BLACK HEN



William Dowsley
Prescott
Christmas
1870

THE LITTLE BLACK HEN.

Front.

THE

LITTLE BLACK HEN.

BY THE

AUTHORS OF "THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD,"

ETC. ETC.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."—MATT. v. 7.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS,
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL.

BY THE AUTHORS OF THE "WIDE, WIDE WORLD," &c.

Price Sixpence each, with Coloured Frontispiece.

THE TWO SCHOOL GIRLS.
THE LITTLE BLACK HEN.
THE PRINCE IN DISGUISE.
GERTRUDE AND HER BIBLE.
THE CARPENTER'S DAUGHTER.
MARTHA AND RACHEL.
THE WIDOW AND HER DAUGHTER.
THE ROSE IN THE DESERT.

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Little Ruffle	5
II.	The Two Fellow-Servants . .	19
III.	A Dark Night	29
IV.	Sunshine in the Morning . .	41
V.	Tim	52
VI.	Ruffle's Head	61
VII.	Good Boy	73
VIII.	The Two Ribbons . . .	86

THE

LITTLE BLACK HEN.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE RUFFLE.

The little black hen came out of a large white egg, and the egg lay deep down in a nest of clover. Little did the butterflies think of the nest as they flitted over and then stopped to suck honey out of the clover blossoms; little notice did the busy bees take of the old hen who covered the eggs night and day with her brown wings; and if any one had told them that she was just as busy as they were, doubtless the

bees would have taken it for a personal insult. But it was true for all that. For whereas the bees never stopped work for five minutes through the whole long day, except just to eat their honey meals, so the hen never left her nest except at dinner time, and made that meal so short that she nearly starved herself to death lest her eggs should get cold.

They say that patience and perseverance will accomplish all things; and so it came about, that when the brown hen had kept her eggs warm for three whole weeks, one day she heard something that sounded much like the breaking of an egg-shell. And then she felt something stirring under her wings; and then she heard the peep! peep! of a little chicken. In fact, it was the little black hen herself, who in this early stage of her existence presently thrust her head out from among the old hen's feathers and looked at the world

with her bright black eyes. And though all the other chicks also came forth into the world and the sunshine, we will, if you please, let them go their own way, and confine our attention to the little black hen.

At first she was a dingy, downy chicken, fat and round, very fond of going to sleep in the sunshine. And as the sun shone a great deal at that time of year, chicky took a great many warm naps. But by degrees she found out that eating was better than sleeping, unless at night, and from that time it was nothing but run, run the whole while. In vain the old brown hen in the coop called and called (for she lived in a coop now, and not at all in clover), telling the chickens that she was all alone; they never seemed to hear her, unless she cried out that there was a hawk in sight, when they all hid away in the grass or under a currant-bush. Or if she said she had some

meal or an ant for them, then they came running up fast enough. Scamper, scamper! it was a wonder the chicks never got tired, what with hunting grasshoppers, and running down crickets, and fighting for earth-worms; but they only grew fat and strong, and the little black one among the rest. And by degrees she grew feathery instead of downy, first on her wings and then on her tail, till by the time summer was over the dingy, downy chicken had become a very handsome little black hen, with a ruff of yellow feathers round her throat. She was so handsome that she was given to little Roger Van Dyke for a birthday present.

Roger's father owned all the hens and chickens; and while he lived in a pretty white cottage with glass windows and green blinds, they lived in a brown chicken-house, with two glass windows in front and a green door; but they had no green

blinds, because hens and chickens like the sunlight. There all the old cocks and hens were shut up ; and though the young chickens were let out to run about the garden for a while, yet so soon as they began to scratch up the radish seeds and eat the tomatoes they were shut up with the rest. Foolish chickens! if they had only not been mischievous they might have stayed out all the time. So now they could do nothing but look out between the rails of the poultry-yard fence and wish themselves outside. And here the little black hen walked about, and cackled, and turned her head and showed her yellow ruff to great advantage, much as if she admired it, which perhaps she did,

Roger was very proud of his hen, and very fond of her too; more than all, because she was a present to him for good behaviour, and everybody that came to the house was sure to be taken a walk out

to the poultry-yard to see "Little Ruffle." And so matters went on till November came, and the little black hen made herself a nest, and laid a little brown egg every day, and Roger was more proud of her than ever. As to her eggs, there never was anything *quite* so good as they were when boiled for breakfast.

The nights were frosty now, and by-and-by there was a pretty fall of snow, and then the winter set in. The winter nights were long and dark, and all well-disposed people went to bed and to sleep, covering themselves up as warm as they could. You may be sure Roger was one of these—I don't quite know whether he liked sleep or blankets best; and he even pulled them both over his head and eyes and ears till he looked as if he were made up of blankets and sleep. There is no telling what would have happened, one night, if he had left his head free, like a sensible boy;

nobody will ever know. But this is what did happen.

Very early in the morning, when Tom the gardener got up and walked out into the clear, cool light to see what was going on in the world, he found that things had been going on rather more than was necessary; and however soundly the people in the house had slept, it was quite plain that some other people had been awake. In front of the chicken-house the snow was glittering with pieces of glass, and one of the window-frames was broken and cut in two. Tom opened the door, and went in. There were a good many chickens on the roost yet, but as Tom looked about and began to count them he found that there were not so many by a dozen or two as he had shut in last night; and there were feathers scattered about, and on one of the boards the feathers were bloody, as if some of the hens might have had their heads cut

off. And as Tom peered about a little more (for it was not very light yet) he found two of the heads themselves. Then Tom thought he had found enough for once, so he picked up the two heads, locked the door again, and went off to milk the cow.

After a while the sun got up, and so did Roger, but neither of them at all early. Indeed, when Roger made his appearance down stairs breakfast was already on the table.

"Mayn't I just run out and feed the chickens first, mamma?" said he, pausing at the breakfast-room door.

"Certainly not. If you want to feed the chickens before breakfast you must get up earlier," said his mother.

"It's so cold to get up early," said Roger, coming to the table. "Dear me, how hot breakfast looks! Mamma, I think I love my little black hen better than anything else in the world."

"Better than anything that you love less, I suppose you mean," said his mother.

"I suppose I do mean that," said Roger, laughing. "But what do you think I like better than my hen, mamma?"

"How is it about Tray?"

"Tray? I like him very much, that I do. I suppose I couldn't do without either of 'em." And Roger began his breakfast in a very contented state of mind. "Tray was shut up in the cellar last night, mamma, by mistake."

"A great mistake, I should think."

"Was it, mamma? I thought it was only a little mistake. I dare say Tray liked it well enough."

"Tray had no business to like it."

"Why not, mamma? The cellar is warm."

"Warm! yes; but a faithful little dog wants to be at his post, doing his duty, not shut up in a warm cellar."

"Good little Tray," said Roger; "how faithful he is, mamma. But where's papa this morning?"

"He went out to speak to Tom."

"Roger," said his father, coming in at that moment, "some one broke into the chicken-house last night."

"Oh!" cried Roger. "What did they do, papa?"

"Why, they stole some chickens."

"Not my little hen?"

"I don't know, my dear; run out and see if you can find her."

Away ran Roger, his heart beating as quick time in his breast as did his little feet over the frozen ground. All the hens came down now as he called them and scattered corn, but no little black hen appeared. In vain he watched for the pretty yellow ruff; it was not to be seen; and, bursting into tears, Roger cut their breakfast very short indeed, and ran back to the house.

"Papa, papa! she's gone! they've stolen her!"

"Why, my dear boy," said his father, "you have not half looked for her. You were not gone more than a minute and a half, Roger."

"O yes, papa, but she'd come—she always came—right to me, and ate her breakfast all about my feet." And Roger threw himself down on the hearth-rug and watered it with his tears.

"Come," said his mother, leaving the table, "I'll go and help you to look. Don't you know I can generally find things when you cannot."

Roger got up and took hold of her hand and kissed it, but in a very dismal fashion.

"Dear mamma, how good you are! But it's no use!" he said, drawing a heavy sigh.

"We'll look first outside," said his

mother gently, and holding the little hand fast in hers; and round and round the chicken-house they walked, looking at everything, but saw no signs of the little black hen. There were a few feathers scattered about in two or three places, but some were brown and the others were white; and in another spot, where the snow was a little bloody, there was a tuft of gray feathers.

"Ah! here is something!" cried his mother at last, with so much pain in her voice that Roger ran up, expecting to find Little Ruffle in some unheard-of state of torture. But all he could see was the white snow.

"What, mamma? What is it?" he cried, trembling all over.

"O Roger," she said, "look here; look at these steps in the snow! One of the thieves must have been a child no bigger than you are!"

Roger's tears dried up as if they had suddenly passed over hot iron.

"The little wretch!" he cried. "O if I had him here, wouldn't I give him such a thrashing! Well, papa'll have him put in prison any way. I wonder how he'll like that. Wicked little thief!"

His mother made no answer. She looked steadily at Roger while he was speaking, and then her eyes went down to that little step in the snow. It had been made by a bare foot, for every little toe had left its mark. And Roger's mother drew one long sigh, almost as deep as Roger himself had done. But Roger did not hear it; he was stamping about the walk in a fever of anger and excitement.

"Here's two of the heads, ma'am," said Tom, the gardener, whose boots were now crunching through the snow as he drew near to where they stood. "Here's two

as they cut off," and Tom chucked the heads up and down in his hand.

"Let me see! let me see!" cried Roger. "Oh! oh! oh! it is hers!" For while one of the heads was a large white top-knot, the other was all black, and showed a pretty yellow ruff round the neck. This one Roger took away from Tom, and hugging it up to his breast, darted off out of sight. His mother walked thoughtfully down toward the house.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO FELLOW-SERVANTS.

I DON'T know how long it was before Roger made his appearance again, and could not tell; but it was certainly a long time. However, few fountains play all the while, and so, as the morning wore on, even the fountain of Roger's tears dried up, and he began to feel very cold and tired, and to wonder what his mother was doing. Roger always read aloud to her after breakfast, but this morning he had never once thought of it. Now he crept out of the haymow where he had hidden himself, and brushed off the hay-seeds, and opened the great barn door and came out. There was nobody to be seen, only the sun was high up in the sky, and

the snow lay cold and glittering all around. Roger crept slowly round the barn, past the stable, and there he heard two of the men talking.

"I tell you," said Tom, "that's what *I* call being a Christian."

"More like it than anything else," said the other man.

"Yes," answered Tom. "It's easy sheddin' brooks of tears, but when it comes to heapin' on coals of fire like that!"

"Then you're beat," said the other.

"Confess I am," said Tom. "And master, he felt pretty much as I did."

Roger went on into the house and into his mother's sitting-room, and put himself down on the rug in front of the fire, for there was no one there. And so it was, that when Mrs. Van Dyke came in she found him stretched on the rug fast asleep.

I wonder why she sighed over him as she spread her shawl over his shoulders,

so that he might not take cold, or why she stood looking at him so wistfully. Was she thinking of those little footprints in the snow, and whether her Roger would ever follow the hard way of transgressors, or be always found in the paths of righteousness? But she let him sleep on, and sat at her work, only sometimes dropping it and letting her head rest on her hands, and asked him no questions even when he woke up, but said,

"Roger, we have had no reading to-day."

"No, mamma. Shall I read now?"

"Yes," said his mother. "Come and sit here by me and eat these biscuits first, and then you may read."

Roger was very glad of the biscuits, and then he leaned his head against his mother's knee and began to read. And this was the place:

"Then came Peter to him and said,

Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, say-

ing, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Matt. xviii. 21—35.

"How should you like to be the servant of such a king, Roger?" said his mother when he had finished.

"I'd like it ever so much," said Roger. "I think he was real good. Only I shouldn't like to have such fellow-servants."

"As which one? the debtor or the creditor?"

"Which is the creditor?"

"The debtor is the one that owes money, and the creditor is the one to whom he owes it."

"Well, I shouldn't like that creditor for my fellow-servant," said Roger, "would you?"

"Why not?" said his mother.

"He was wicked and cruel," said Roger. "Why, the king had forgiven him all that, and then he didn't feel glad enough to forgive the man that owed him."

"Didn't feel glad enough," his mother repeated. "Ah, there is a great deal in that."

"But should you like it, mamma to have such fellow-servants?" said Roger.

"Why, Roger," she said, "the question is whether I *do* like it. Some of my fellow-servants are just like that."

"Some of your fellow-servants!" cried Roger. "Well, mamma, you *are* funny!"

"Why, yes," said his mother; "I serve the very King who is spoken of there. But now let me tell you how this King did at another time to some of his own enemies," and she took the Bible and read:

"There they crucified him and the malefactors; one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

"Yes, that was the Saviour; I know

about that," said Roger. "But this other king; does that mean God too?"

"Yes, it means the King of kings. And I owed him ten thousand talents, and had nothing to pay, and he freely forgave me all that debt."

"Mamma," and Roger turned round and looked up in her face wonderingly, "I don't understand one bit."

"Roger," she said, "you know what it means to owe me love, and duty, and obedience?"

"Yes indeed!" said Roger, nestling his cheek against her hand. "And sometimes I pay it too."

"Very often," said his mother, smiling. "Well, far more than you owe me I owed my King—love and duty and obedience and service from the time I was old enough to know anything. And I never paid, and the debt mounted up with compound interest."

"What's that?" said Roger.

"If I lend you a hundred pounds and you pay me five pounds a year for the use of it, that five pounds is simple interest. But if you do not pay the interest, then I should charge you other interest upon that. So in my debt of service to the Lord Jesus. If always, every day, I had been serving him, sowing good seed, then the seed would have sprung up and borne fruit."

"Mamma," said Roger, "how long ago did he forgive you that debt?"

"More than twenty years ago."

"Well, you must have done a great deal since then," said Roger.

"Ah, child," answered his mother, "every one to whom the Lord has lent life and health and talents must be very faithful indeed to begin to pay even the interest on the debt. If the Lord Jesus did not pay it all for me I should have no hope."

"But did you ever see a fellow-servant like that one?" said Roger.

"Yes, not long ago."

"He was so mean!" said Roger.

"Do you think so?" said his mother. "Well, we will go to dinner now, and talk more about it another time."

CHAPTER III.

A DARK NIGHT.

THE long talk with his mother had raised Roger's spirits a good deal; but after dinner she was busy again for a while away from him, and as the sun began to go down and it came near his usual time for feeding the chickens, Roger's heart grew very heavy. He sat in the corner of the fireplace, rubbing his eyes and making believe very hard that there were no tears in them, and then he put his head down and had a good cry.

"My poor little Roger!" his mother said when she came in. "Suppose you come and sit in my lap, and we will have another talk."

Roger came gladly; only it felt so good

to cry there, in her arms, that for a while he did not talk much.

"Roger," said his mother, "do you know I believe that every little thing is done with God's knowledge and permission?"

"You don't mean——" said Roger; but there he stopped short, for something rose up in his throat and choked him.

"Yes, I mean that," said his mother, gently. "I think God is teaching you lessons because he can do it so much better than I. That is the way he does with his children and servants. He has taught me a great many."

"Am I one of your fellow-servants?" said Roger.

"What do you think, my child? Are you? You ought to know."

"I *don't* know," said Roger. "But I'd like to be. What is God teaching me now, mamma?"

"I think, for one thing, he is teaching

you how wonderfully good he is to forgive people that have sinned against him. Do you remember, when Joe Allen plunged into that snow-drift to get your ball, you said you thought he was the best boy you ever heard of?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Why did you think so?"

"Don't you know?" said Roger, smiling and looking up in her face. "I said he was the best boy because I thought I was a pretty good boy, and yet I wouldn't have done that for anybody. Don't you remember, mamma? and you made me study for a lesson what a pretty good boy was."

"Well, then, think how wonderfully good God must be to forgive people. Like the king in that parable.'

"Why, mamma?" said Roger, looking round at her again; "don't you think I like to forgive people? You don't think

I'm like that wicked servant, do you, mamma?"

"I'd rather have you settle the question for yourself," said his mother. "But now I want to tell you something else. Whom do you think we've got up-stairs?"

"Oh, I can't guess!" said Roger. "Cousin Will?"

"No, not Cousin Will. Do you remember, Roger, when you and I went to the chicken-house this morning I showed you a little, little footstep in the snow?" Roger nodded his head, but he did not speak, and the tears started again.

"Well," said his mother, "the little boy who made that mark in the snow was brought here by his father to help to steal our chickens, because he was small enough to creep through the window. And I suppose in climbing about in the dark up to the roost, he fell and broke his leg very badly. And something probably made his

father think that some one was coming, for he ran off with the bag of chickens and left the poor little boy to get out as best he could. But his foot hurt him so much that he could not get up to the window, and when it was broad light Tom went in and found him there, hid behind one of the barrels."

Roger was sobbing out by this time.

"The wicked, wicked little boy!" he cried; "then he killed my beauty! Just good for him to break his leg! and now papa will send him to prison. What did Tom do to him, mamma? did he beat him?"

"If he had, Tom should have had a sharper reproof than I ever gave him before," said his mother, gravely. "No, Tom brought him in and he is up-stairs. Beat a poor little ignorant boy who was in more pain than you ever dreamed of, who had never had anybody to teach him about

Jesus, and yet who was one of the children for whom Jesus died? Oh, Roger!"

Shame and anger struggled in Roger's heart for a minute, but anger carried the day.

"I can't help it," he said; "if he hadn't come there he wouldn't have been in pain. My dear little hen! my poor little hen!" and Roger sobbed and cried and clenched his fist all at once. His mother was very silent for a while till he was quiet again, and then she repeated in a low, sad voice, so that Roger looked up to see if she had been crying too, these words:

"Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?"

Roger was very silent too after that, and his mother sat looking at him. Once in a

while he sighed, and then his face would flush up again till it was as red as the old turkey-cock's cheeks, so she knew anger was there yet. At last he slipped down from her lap,

"I think I'll go to bed," he said.

"Do you mean to say your prayers to-night, Roger?" asked his mother.

"Why, yes!" said Roger, opening his eyes. "I always do."

"Then read a little to me before you go," said his mother, "just a few verses," and she found the place for him. Roger read:

"And when ye stand praying forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Roger shut up the book and, kissing his mother in a great hurry, ran out of the room. But then he began to go up-stairs

very slowly, step by step. What should he do? He could not go to bed without saying his prayers, and he could not forgive the little boy; and, worst of all, if he was one of his mother's fellow-servants it was only the wicked one! Roger's mind was in a great tumult. However, one gets up-stairs at last even step by step, and so in the course of time Roger reached the last landing-place, and there he sat down to tie his shoe. One would think it was hardly worth while to tie it then, when he was just going to take his shoes off and go to bed, but it was Roger's thoughts that so much wanted putting in order; so there he stayed on the landing-place, pulling his shoe-strings and playing with his foot. The next flight of stairs was very short, and at the head of it were two doors; one led into his own little room, but the other was seldom opened, for nobody slept within. But now under that very door shone a

light. Roger watched it, wondering who could be there, and then the door opened and the housemaid came out.

"Oh, Kitty," said Roger, "is that you? What are you doing in that room to-night?"

"Mistress told me to stay there till eight o'clock and then she'd come," said Kitty; "and now it's eight o'clock, and I'm going down."

"But what's in that room?" asked Roger.

"Why, don't you know?" said Kitty. "It's the boy that broke his leg, and cut your hen's head off."

Roger shivered, but he did not shed any tears then.

"And were you staying there to watch him, so he couldn't run away, Kitty?"

"Bless your heart!" said Kitty, "why, where have you been all day? Oh, I forgot; Tom said you was in the mow down by the barn. Run away! he won't do that

soon, I'm certain. Why he's broke his leg dreadful; and mistress had him took up here, and the doctor he come and set it; and mistress washed him up, and put clean things on him, and sat with him ever so long till I'd done my work, bathing his head, and giving him drink, and coaxing him out of his fright, for he was sadly scared. I tell you she's a good one!" added Kitty as she went down stairs.

"She's a good one," Roger thought to himself; "so Tom said, *that's* being a Christian." But then the parlour door opened, and Roger hurried into his own little room and shut the door.

He heard his mother come up stairs and go into the poor little boy's room, and then everything was very still. Now and then he could hear her stepping softly about, just as she used to do in Roger's own room once when he was sick; and Roger almost wished that he was sick now,

so that she might come in and see him. Sometimes he could just hear her voice speaking or singing to the poor little boy whom he had called "a little wretch," and Roger felt about as bad as he could. Had not his mother only a few days ago explained to him about that beautiful verse: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me?" Yes, he was just one of her wicked fellow-servants, there was no doubt of it, and the thought made Roger so miserable that he nearly cried out with sorrow. Yet he knew in his heart that he did not really forgive the little boy. When he thought of his mother the anger seemed gone, but it roused up again when he remembered the pretty yellow ruff of his poor little hen. What should he do about saying his prayers? He did not dare go to bed without saying them, and yet God would not forgive him if he felt so.

Meantime it was very cold, and Roger's teeth began to chatter and his hands to tremble. So he thought he would undress himself and get into bed and think about it, and then when he felt better he would get right up and say his prayers. And, as you may suppose, the next thing was that Roger fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNSHINE IN THE MORNING.

THE sun was up, and shining in every dark place he could find, and in the same way Roger's mother had been at work since very early; but now she sat in the breakfast-room, waiting for Roger and the coffee-pot. But when they came the coffee-pot looked much the most comfortable of the two, with its warm cloud of steam, for Roger's face was blue and sorrowful. He had had one good cry over the little black hen already that morning, and felt as if he had two or three more to give to other things.

"There is a cold little boy that I must warm up," said the sun, pouring a stream of bright rays upon him.

"And there is a sorrowful little heart that I must comfort," thought Roger's mother to herself. But just then she only kissed him, and rubbed his cold hands in hers. Whereupon, first the tears came into Roger's eyes, and then he dropped right down by his mother and hid his face in her apron.

"Well, what now?" she said, cheerfully.

"I feel so very, very bad," sobbed out Roger.

"Poor boy!" said his mother, laying her hand on his head, while her heart sent up one quick prayer to the Lord Jesus, to whom she took all her own sorrows and Roger's too. "But come to breakfast, my dear—every hungry little boy feels bad I believe—and we'll see about setting the world straight afterwards."

I suppose Roger was hungry, or else his mother's kind words had a wonderful effect, for as breakfast went on his face

brightened up till he hardly looked like the same boy. But when breakfast was over and his father gone out, his mother went away too; and Roger heard her go up stairs, and knew in a minute that she had gone to see the poor little boy. He sat down on the rug and looked at the bright fire, sometimes shedding a few tears over the thought of his little black hen, sometimes wondering what his mother would say when he told her that he had not said his prayers last night—nor this morning either, for that matter. However, when she came back, and took her work and sat down by her little table, this was his first question:

"Mamma, what do you mean by setting the world straight?"

"Why," she said, "suppose you went into the parlour and saw the table-cover hanging all on one side, and the rug rolled up, and one fire-iron on the hearth while

the others were in the fireplace, and the table twisted round, and one chair lying on its back in the middle of the floor, would you know what I meant by setting the parlour straight?"

"O yes," said Roger, smiling; "you would pick up the chair, and pull round the table, and unroll the rug, and put the tongs inside the fireplace."

"Yes," said his mother, "I should put everything in its proper place and to its proper use. Well, some things in the world stand about just so: some of the people are not at work, and some of the money and time and opportunity are rolled up, or hanging about in the wrong places. And in that little world which we call our hearts, Roger, there is often a great deal to do. I have gone into my heart in the morning and found everything at sixes and sevens."

"*You*, mamma?" said Roger.

"I, my dear. Do you suppose my heart is any different from other people's?"

"I thought it was a great deal better than anybody's," said Roger.

"Ah, that was a mistake. The Bible says, that 'As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.' When the Spirit of God comes and dwells in a heart, then there is indeed a light shining in a dark place; but if He takes away the beauty and brightness of his presence, everything is dark and in disorder."

"Mamma," said Roger, in a low voice, "did you ever *not* say your prayers one night?"

"Yes, Roger."

Roger drew a long breath, as if that was a comfort to him.

"Why did you, mamma?"

"Suppose you were to tell me first why you did," said his mother.

Roger coloured and looked down.

"Mamma," he said, "I didn't mean to; but you know what I read before I went up stairs, and I knew I didn't do *that*, and I was afraid to pray till I did, and it was so cold I got into bed to think about it, and then I went to sleep."

"And how was it this morning?" said his mother.

"I couldn't then either," said Roger, "because I didn't forgive the little boy. I felt angry yet."

"Did you ask the Lord Jesus to help you to forgive?" said his mother.

"No, mamma."

"O foolish boy!" she said, "to try to do such great things without the Lord's help!"

"Are they great things?" said Roger; "I thought they were little things."

"So great, that not the best nor the wisest man on earth can do them in his own strength. See what the Bible says:

'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.' And forgiveness is a clean thing—pure and like God; while the little heart out of which it should come is all unclean until the Lord has washed it and made it new."

"What do you mean by my own strength, mamma?" said Roger.

"Last summer," said his mother, "when you wanted that little tree planted in your garden, why didn't you bring it to the place yourself?"

"I couldn't," said Roger; "it was too heavy. And then papa came and helped me."

"Was it too heavy for him to carry all alone?"

"No, indeed," said Roger.

"Then why did he bid you take hold too?"

"Why that's papa's way," said Roger; "he always makes me *try* to help about

anything I want done. He says, 'Try just as hard as if you were doing it all by yourself.'"

"Well," said his mother, "when you wanted the tree in your garden, and found you could not carry it there in your own strength, then you asked papa, and he took hold with his strong hands, but bade you try as hard as you could still. And so, Roger, God deals with us. If we try, depending on him, the work will be done; and the tree of grace not only be planted in our hearts, but will grow and flourish there."

Roger sat still, looking at the fire.

"Mamma," he said at last, speaking slowly and softly, "you didn't love my poor little hen as I did; you can't tell; you don't know how hard it is to forgive."

"Yes, dear Roger, I think I know. But harder things than that have been done."

"What?" said Roger.

His mother gave him the Bible, open at the twenty-third chapter of Luke, and told him he might read over to her what she read to him yesterday, from the first verse to the thirty-fourth. Roger read them all, and then looked at the fire again.

"But, mamma," he said, "*He* was the Lord."

"And we want to be like him, do we not?" said his mother. "But now read the last four verses of the seventh chapter of Acts. Stephen was only a man."

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a

loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this he fell asleep."

As soon as Roger had finished reading these words his mother folded up her work, and went away.

"Mamma!" Roger called out, "may I go up some time to that room yonder?"

"Whenever you like, Roger, if you will go there feeling like Stephen did."

"How should I feel if I was Stephen?" said Roger, pulling himself round on the rug, so as to see his mother.

"You would remember first that this poor little boy has sinned against God; and you would be so anxious that he should be forgiven this great sin that you would never think of wishing that he should be punished for the little sin against you. And you would pray the Lord Jesus to let the light of his grace shine in that little dark heart, and to make that poor

ignorant child one of his own little servants, washed in his blood, and full of love and truth."

Roger burst into tears.

"Yes, mamma, that's just how I should feel!" he said, "and then I should not be a wicked fellow-servant any longer! O mamma, pray!"

"Pray, Roger," she answered softly, and shut the door.

CHAPTER V.

TIM.

Did you ever see a dark, gloomy morning, when the sky was covered with gray clouds, and everything looked stormy and threatening? And then have you seen by and by the clouds send down a little shower, and after that the sun break through and through till it was all blue sky, and not a cloud left? The leaves might be all wet still, but every drop was sparkling with sunlight.

Something like this was the course of Roger's day; for when, long after his mother had left him in the breakfast-room, he too went out and began to mount the stairs, his eyelashes were wet and his lips trembled, but there was not a cloud

on his face. He went straight up to the little boy's room and softly opened the door.

The poor little boy was asleep, so Roger stood and looked at him to his heart's content. He was very pale and thin; and though his hair had been smoothed more than once that day, it was rough still, for it had not been brushed nobody knows when before.

"I can't do anything for *him* just now," said Roger to himself, "only keep quiet;" so he looked round the room to see if anything could be done for that. But no, it was all in order, with a nice little fire burning, and a little table, covered with a white cloth, to hold the pitcher and cup and spoon; and there stood his mother's work-basket, which Roger felt as if he could hug right off.

"It's easy to see she made up the fire," he said to himself again, "it's so nice; and

that's one of her napkins on the table; don't I know the look of 'em! She's just been up here putting things straight. Now I wonder what I can do?" So Roger seated himself down in the chimney-corner and began to study the matter, keeping a sharp look-out for the little boy all the while.

"I can't draw the curtains," he began again; "no, they're all right. Mamma always says to me, 'Think what the Lord Jesus would do;' but what would that be? Maybe he'd cure him; then he don't cure everybody. I think he'd put his hands on him and bless him, as he did to all the other children; but I can't do that. I can ask him to do it, though." So Roger got up and went softly to the foot of the bed, and knelt down there out of sight. When he rose up again the little boy's eyes were wide open. His face was wrinkled up, too, as if he were almost

crying; but Roger's sudden appearance clearly frightened him.

"Go away!" he said, "I don't want you.

"Why, I wont hurt you!" said Roger, advancing. "I'm only Roger. What were you crying for?"

"I wasn't crying," said the boy. "Go away!"

"Mamma said I might come," said Roger, going a step or two nearer, "and she wouldn't like to have you say you wasn't crying when you were. You mustn't speak anything that is not true."

"*You'd* cry fast enough, I know," said the boy, his face wrinkling up again, "if your leg was broken up into twenty pieces."

"Twenty pieces!" cried Roger, for that was an extent of damage that had never entered his head. "Oh, I'm as sorry as can be! But what made you break it?"

"*Me* break it!" said the boy, "it was one o' your plaguey old barrels."

"But the barrels wouldn't have broken it if you hadn't got on them," said Roger. "What made you do that? And kill my dear little hen too! Oh, how could you?" The boy looked at Roger curiously.

"Was one of 'em your'n?" he asked. "Well, what can a feller do when a man comes behind and gives him a push?"

"But why did your father make you do it?" said Roger.

"Didn't say he did.'

"You needn't be cross," said Roger; "I'm sorry you broke your leg, now; but how *could* you kill my little black hen?" Again the boy looked at Roger, and then rolled his head up in the blankets.

"Somebody made me," he said. "And you see, we was all so hungry."

Roger looked in dismay. The idea of

anybody being hungry enough to steal his little black hen! and then, worse still, to think of her being picked and roasted! There he stood, with anger and sorrow and pity all fighting for the possession of his heart, trying to crowd back the tears that rushed up into his eyes, and not feeling very sure whether he was on his head or his feet. But again his mother's sweet counsel, "What would the Lord Jesus do?" came into his mind, and, with a heavy sigh, Roger made another dash at the tears and conquered them. Then he saw that a little bright eye was peeping out at him from under a corner of the blanket.

"Boy," said Roger, "what's your name?"

"Tim."

"Well, what are you watching me for?"

"I ain't."

"Tim," said Roger, gravely, "that's not

true, for I saw you. Now what did you do it for?"

"If you was agoing to pitch into me I'd just like to know it aforehand," said the boy.

"Pitch into you!" said Roger, "oh, I'm not going to do that! That would be wicked."

"That's the word *she* said," replied the boy. "And she tell'd me what it meaned too." And as he spoke the door opened and Roger's mother came in. Little Tim unrolled his head at once and watched her with very different eyes; but she did not stay.

"Roger," she said, "I came to tell you that you must not make Tim talk. You may read to him, but he must be kept quiet."

Roger followed her to the door and spoke low, "Mamma, is his leg broken in twenty pieces?"

"No, only in two." Roger cast a glance of much disgust toward his new acquaintance.

"Mamma, doesn't he ever say *anything* true?"

"He don't know; he has never been taught anything," she whispered. And Roger held up his face for a kiss, and went back somewhat comforted.

"Poor Tim!" he said; "shall I read to you?"

"I don't care. What was you sayin' to her?"

"You can ask her when she comes," said Roger. "But don't you like books?"

"I dunno," said Tim. "What's in 'em?"

"All sorts of things," said Roger, "about ships, and people, and trees, and wild animals. Don't you like wild animals? I can read you a famous story about lions."

"I don't care if you do," said Tim. "You can if you've a mind to."

Upon the strength of which ungracious permission Roger got his little Bible out of the next room and read the story of Daniel. And little Tim listened with all his eyes and ears; but I suppose the pain in his leg tired him, for when Roger stopped reading he went right off to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

RUFFLE'S HEAD.

As soon as Tim's eyes were fairly shut, Roger went quietly out of the room and ran down stairs.

"Mamma," said he, opening the parlour door, "that boy's asleep,—do you want me to stay there?"

"No, dear," she said, and Roger ran off again—this time out of the house. For ever since he got over his first morning trouble, something else had been on his heart; and that was: what if the rats should find out where he had hid the pretty black head of his little hen, and should eat it up? for he remembered that they had now and then eaten a live chicken for him. To be

sure, he had laid Ruffle's head deep in the hay-mow, and piled the hay on top of it, but still the rats were very queer about finding out things; and Roger sped away to the barn with anything but a quiet heart. The smooth crust of the snow crackled and crisped under his feet, but did not give way, and the flocks of little birds fluttered and chirped, and took to their wings; and Tray followed close at his master's heels, but got hardly a word. Then the great barn-door swung slowly back, and Roger went in and began to pull away the hay, with Tray helping him. No, the rats had not been there—or, if they had, they had done no mischief; for there lay Ruffle's head just where Roger had left it. And even Tray must have seen there was something sad the matter, for he whined and snuffed about and stood on his hind legs to ask questions. But Roger did not answer them. He sat down in the hay and

thought what he should do; softly stroking the pretty yellow ruff all the while.

"They'll be sure to get it, some time, if I leave it here," he said; "and besides, the men will be pulling the hay down. And I can't keep it in the house. I shall have to bury it. So he went out of the barn again, and went for his little spade.

"In the garden won't do, for that'll be all dug up in the spring," thought Roger,— "and down in the meadow they'll plough; so I'll bury it here by the wood-pile, because I come by this way so often."

So choosing a place under a great apple-tree, Roger fell to work with his spade. First there was the snow to clear away, but that was easy enough; for though the snow was deep yet it was light, and nobody had trodden it down just there. Tray, on his part, thought it was simply the best fun that could be, and dug away with all his might; but as his little paws worked first

in one place and then in half a dozen others, it cannot be said that he accomplished much. Roger worked on without stopping, till the snow was quite cleared away in one place, and the brown earth appeared below; but when he struck his spade down upon that—it might just as well have been so much rock; for it was frozen perfectly hard. Roger stopped to take breath, leaning on his spade and studying the looks of the ground. Then he threw the spade down, and darted off to the lower barn, where the men were at work, with Tray at his heels.

"Tom," he said, "what do you do when the ground's frozen?"

"Do?" said Tom, stopping his work and looking up,—"why, I just lets it freeze."

"No, but I mean if you wanted to dig it?" said Roger.

"When you can't do what you want to, you must do what you can," said Tom; "and *that's* to wait till the ground thaws, I reckon."

"Suppose you can't wait?" said Roger.

"Oh, if I'm bound to get into the ground whether or no," said Tom, "I takes a pick." But before Tom could ask why Roger wanted to get into the ground, Roger was off to the tool-house, and there indeed stood the pickaxe, but it was about as much as he could lift.

"How in the world does Tom throw it over his shoulder, I wonder!" thought Roger, as he took hold of the heavy tool, and could just raise it a few inches from the ground. "I've got to hurry—for it'll be slow work digging with this." But hurry as he would, it took a long time even to get back to the tree. Every few steps he had to drop the pickaxe down in the snow and take a rest; and by the time he

got back to his cleared place of brown earth, the sun was almost dipping behind the hill.

"Sunset! as sure as I'm a boy!" said Roger, and then he drew a long sigh, thinking how he used to feed Ruffle at just that very time of day. But with that thought, he began to peck at the frozen earth again with his pickaxe. Yes, it was just like pecking; and the pickaxe might have laughed to itself, for certainly it had never been so used before; and soon Roger's arms got very tired, even of that; then he got down on his knees and tried to work with one end of the pick. And the last rays of the sun kissed the top of his head and went away.

"My dear boy," said his father's voice, "what are you about?"

Roger rose to his feet, very flushed and warm in spite of the cold. "I'm trying to dig, papa."

"So I see,—but for what possible purpose?"

"Papa," answered Roger, suppressing a sob, "it's for poor Ruffle's head."

"My dear child," said his father, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "is there no easier place you can think of?"

"There are rats in the hay, papa—and I don't think mamma would like to have me keep it in the house."

"Where is it now?"

"Here, sir,"—and Roger took out of his pocket a little pasteboard box, which he put in his father's hand. Mr. Van Dyke opened it and looked in.

"Roger," he said presently, "suppose you let me take care of it for a few days?—then if we cannot find a better place, I'll let Tom use the pick for you."

"*You*, papa?"—said Roger, so much astonished that he forgot to ask where his father would keep it. "*Would* you, really?

I thought," said poor Roger, faltering again, "I thought nobody would touch it but me!"

"I will, if you'll let me," said his father, "and take the best care of it I know how."

It is impossible to tell how much this comforted Roger's heart. To have poor Ruffle's head taken care of by his father, when Roger had feared that if any one found it, it would be thrown to the pigs, was giving the little black hen a dignity which was wonderfully soothing. With great relief he saw the little box slide into his father's pocket, and then ran in to tea, and to tell his mother "how good papa was."

"Mamma," he said, after tea, when he was resting on the rug at her feet, with his head against her knee, "I don't think that Tim's a nice boy at all!"

"No," she said, "not at all. But if you and I, Roger, who are so sinful ourselves, if we feel so about him,—think how our

hearts must look to the Lord Jesus—who is perfectly holy. Think what it must have been to him to come down and live in this world, among sinners, and to die for them."

"Yes, it was wonderful!" said Roger, sighing. "Mamma, do you dislike to be up in that boy's room?"

"No, Roger, I like to be there."

"Don't he tell stories, and say bad things?"

"Yes, sometimes, and they do give me pain; but they make me want to be there all the more."

Roger twisted his head round toward her, with a flushing look of tears.

"Ah, mamma! you are like Jesus! I do think that was the way he could bear to be in this world. Mamma, may I try and help to take care of that boy?"

She said "Yes;" then stooped down and kissed his forehead.

"Roger," she went on to say, "when I

saw that little footstep in the snow yesterday, my first thought was, what should I do if I ever found your little feet treading in the ways of open sin against God,—and I felt that it would break my heart!"

"Mamma," cried Roger, twisting himself round again, "you never shall! don't ever think of it again. Indeed you never shall!"

"The Lord helping you," said his mother, gravely.

"Mamma, did you think so, because I was in such a passion?"

"I suppose that helped me to think of it," said his mother.

"Ah, mamma!"

His mother did not say more in answer to his question, and Roger nestled his head up against her knee again, and looked into the fire with eyes so wide open that the coals did not know what to make of it, but kept winking and glimmering like fireflies.

"What's 'open sin,' mamma?"

"Roger," she said, "you know you disobey me sometimes."

"Yes, mamma," he replied, very sorrowfully.

"Yet it is not the choice and pleasure of your heart, in general, to do so—is it?"

Roger looked round, exclaiming, "Oh, no! mamma."

"Well, my child, if those who have chosen the Lord for their portion,—who choose obedience to him as their sweetest possible life,—if they ever fail, it is a bitter grief and shame to them. But in the case of those who disobey his commands, and disregard his will, because they choose not to be his servants—loving darkness rather than light, breaking his law in the sight of all men,—we say they live in open sin."

"Does anybody really love darkness better than light, mamma?"

"The Bible says, 'This is the condem-

nation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.' "

Roger moved so as to lay the other cheek on her lap, and look up in her face.

"Mamma," he said, "I choose to serve the Lord,—so your heart need not ache any more! "

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD BOY.

BREAKFAST was over, next morning, and Roger was wiping the tea-cups for his mother—a service which he liked very much,—when Kitty came in; and in her hands was a tray with a little bowl of gruel and a piece of toast.

"Mamma!" cried Roger, "may I take it up? I've only got one more saucer to wipe."

"If you can without spilling it," said his mother. So when that saucer was wiped and put away in the pantry, Roger took the toast and the gruel and carried them up to Tim's room. And then he pillowed up Tim's head, and gave him his breakfast just as nicely as he knew how.

If he sighed once or twice, it was because the breakfast he used to give poor Ruffle came into his mind. Tim was not talkative this morning: he ate his gruel and eyed Roger, but without even saying thank you, and never gave him once the good bright look that used to shine in Ruffle's black eyes.

"How do you feel to-day, Tim?" asked Roger, as he set down the empty bowl.

"You can ask the doctor," said Tim.

"But he don't know how you *feel*," said Roger.

"Well, *I* don't," said Tim,—"so we're even."

"Did you like the gruel?" said Roger.

"Don't know," said Tim.

"Tim," said Roger, "what's the use of saying what is not true? God hears every word you say, and He don't like it."

"Can't help that," answered Tim.

"Yes, but you've got to help it," said

Roger, "if you want to go to heaven. And I tell you it's no use to tell Him stories—He knows better. He knows everything you do and everything you think."

"He can't," said Tim. "I don't believe that."

"But I tell you He does," said Roger. "The Bible says so."

"Do you suppose, now," said Tim, "that He saw me in yonder in the dark t'other night? why, I couldn't see myself. If I had I shouldn't ha' fell."

"Ah, but God saw you," said Roger,—"it makes no difference to Him whether it's night or day. And I dare say He let you fall on purpose, because He was angry." A view of the case which seemed to startle Tim considerably.

"What makes you think that?" he said.

"He's often done such things to people who sinned against Him," said Roger. "Why, Tim, He could blow you out of that

window just as easy as could be—or up the chimney,—so you'd better take care how you tell any more stories."

"Don't believe that neither," said Tim.

"Indeed He could," said Roger. "Once when some people made him angry, God told the earth to open and swallow them all up, and it did: and another time a man and his wife fell right down dead in a minute, just because they'd said what wasn't true."

Tim's face wrinkled up at this, and he looked very much dismayed.

"I couldn't help it!" he said,—"where's she?—I don't like the way you talk. It scares me."

"But it needn't scare you if you'll only be good, Tim," said Roger.

"Nobody never teached me!" said Tim, squeezing his knuckles into his eyes.

"Didn't you ever read the Bible?" said Roger.

"No," said Tim. "Never heerd o' sich a thing."

"Well, don't you remember the story I read to you yesterday?" said Roger. "That was in the Bible."

"Yes, but the lions didn't eat *him*," said Tim.

"Because he was a good man, and served God," said Roger.

"Well," said Tim, "I'll be good too. What's to do?"

To Roger's great joy, his mother just then came in.

"Oh, mamma," he said, "won't you come and tell poor Tim how to be good?"

"He says," sobbed Tim, "that the earth'll swallow me all up."

Roger's mother could not help smiling. But she came and sat down by the bed, and laid her soft hands on poor little Tim's head, and he stopped sobbing at once.

"Tim," she said, gently, "if I held you

in my arms, would you be afraid I should ever let you fall?"

"No, that I wouldn't!" said Tim, with a grateful look at her.

"And if I promised to take care of you always—would you believe I could ever forget?"

Tim shook his head with great emphasis.

"And if I said to you, 'Tim, you have done me harm—you have broken into my chicken-house, and killed my chickens, and troubled my little boy ever so much; yet if you'll love me, and do everything I tell you every day, I'll forgive it all,' what would you do?"

"Why, I'd try!" cried Tim,—"just as hard as ever I could!"

"But suppose I told you, 'Tim, besides all this, you must mend the chicken-house, and bring back all the chickens, and pay all the damage, and then you shall be my little boy,—what then?"

The wrinkles showed themselves in Tim's face again.

"Then it wouldn't do," he said,—"I couldn't do that, I ain't got a farthing."

She stroked his head softly while she answered:

"Tim, you've done wicked things against God a great many times; and it displeases Him and does a great deal of harm in the world. Now, how can you pay Him for all that mischief? He is the great Lord of heaven and earth, and you have never tried to serve Him. How can He forgive you?"

"What if He don't?" asked Tim.

"What if I did not forgive you? I should say, 'Tim, go right out of my house to prison! I'll not help you, nor take care of you, nor ever speak to you again.' So if God does not forgive you, He'll never let you live in His presence, and you can be only miserable in

this world and the next." Tim watched her earnestly.

"You won't?" he said.

"Why shouldn't I?" But Tim did not speak. She went on:

"When Mr. Van Dyke heard what you had done, Tim, he was very angry; and then some one said to him, 'I'll mend the chicken-house, and pay for all the mischief, and we won't send Tim to prison—we'll try and make him a better boy,'—and then Mr. Van Dyke said yes."

"That was you!" said Tim. "I knowed it! I knowed it!"

"I know it too," said Roger, while little Tim put his hands over his face and burst into tears.

"Hush, Tim!" she said gently; "you mustn't cry—it isn't good for you. See, I want to tell you something else. When God knew how you and I and all other people had sinned against Him, He was

angry. And then the Lord Jesus, the son of God, said, I will pay all their debt and bear their punishment, that they may be forgiven. And he came down to this world from his great throne in heaven, and here he suffered and died for us; and now if we do what he says he will always love us and take care of us and take us to heaven. Now listen, Tim, for I am going to speak to him for you."

Then Mrs. Van Dyke knelt down by the bedside and prayed the Lord Jesus to teach Tim how to be good, and to take care of him, and never to let him sin any more.

"Did he hear you?" said Tim, when she had taken her seat again.

"Yes, I am sure he heard me."

"Then I suppose he'll do it!" said Tim. And pulling her hand to his little pillow, Tim laid his cheek on it, and went fast asleep.

Roger and his mother sat and watched him.

"Mamma," said Roger, softly.

"What?"

"How hard it is to teach people!" But his mother gave him her old answer:

"Did you ask God to help you?"

"No, I didn't indeed," said Roger.

"Always trying to do great things without the Lord's help!" said his mother, smiling.

"Is that another great thing?" said Roger. "Mamma, I didn't know little boys could do so many great things!"

"They cannot, alone," said his mother.

"No, I've found that out," said Roger. "But I meant any way."

"Why, my dear," said his mother, "so long as it is God's power, of course He can let it do its work by any means He chooses. He sent the ravens to feed Elijah, and He told Balaam's ass to reprove her master

—certainly He can teach a little boy to speak His truth in the right way."

"Mamma, how long do you think it will take Tim to learn to be a good boy?"

"How long has it taken little Roger Van Dyke?"

"Ah, mamma!" Roger sat very silent and thoughtful. "Mamma, do you thiuk the Lord Jesus is out of patience with me?"

"No, my dear caild!"

"Couldn't I get on faster?" said Roger, sorrowfully.

"Yes, Roger. But you must ask Him to lead you on, so that your feet may not stumble. Keep near to Him—that is the only way."

"How long it takes!" said Roger, looking toward Tim and thinking of himself.

"Roger," said his mother, "the first time you ever sowed seeds in your little garden, you came to me every day, and said, 'Mamma, will they ever come up?'

And then when they were up, you said, 'Mamma, will they ever have flowers?"

"I remember," said Roger. "Well, mamma?"

"How did they come up? what made them?"

"Why, the sun and the rain," said Roger.

"Yes, the sun and the rain from heaven. And what made them grow up and have flowers?"

"The same things, I suppose," said Roger. "And then I hoed round them, and kept the weeds out."

"What harm would the weeds do?"

"Why, they'd choke the flowers," said Roger. "I know in one corner that I didn't weed out in time the flowers were ever so much smaller and later."

"That's just the way with the good seed which God sows in our hearts. He sends ne sun and the rain, but we must pull

out the weeds—the naughty thoughts and words and actions we must try to keep down with all our might. And we must pray always for His help, that so the flowers and fruit may be neither small nor late."

"I remember once," said Roger, "I prayed for the sun and the rain for my garden, because the plants didn't grow fast enough."

"Yes," said his mother; "and when the good seed in your heart does not grow fast enough—when you want to follow Jesus nearer, and love him better—then 'it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you.'"

"Mamma," said Roger, "I do believe there's a verse in the Bible for everything!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO RIBBONS.

The chicken-house was repaired. One day the carpenter came with his box of tools, and put in a new window-frame, and mended up the glass, and made it all as strong as ever. And then the painter with his little brush went over every bit of the new wood, and made it white like the rest.

But nobody brought back little Ruffle, as Roger thought to himself sorrowfully, every time he went that way. And Tom said *he* would take good care that Tray was never shut up in the cellar all night again by mistake.

"Don't you think I might get Tom to

feed the chickens all the time now, mamma?" said Roger one morning. Tom had been doing it ever since the death of poor Ruffle.

"You might, Roger. Will you tell me why?" said his mother.

"It would make me feel bad to do it," said Roger.

"That is partly a good reason."

"What's the other part, mamma?"

"That depends upon why you fed the chickens before."

"Why," said Roger, "it was because I liked to, perhaps, for one thing, and then papa liked to have me—he said it was quite a help to Tom. Tom is so busy early in the morning, you know, mamma."

"Then it was partly your pleasure to feed them, and partly your duty?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Well," said his mother, "you need not

do it for pleasure, if it makes you feel bad, but how about the duty?"

"But, mamma, would its being a duty make me feel any better?"

"To perform a duty is always a good, healing sort of thing," said his mother, "but that is not the question. Have you any right to give up a duty because it is no longer a pleasure?"

"No; I don't suppose I have," said Roger, staring into the fire and thinking as hard as he could. "But, mamma, don't people?"

"Yes, people do. What then?"

"Nothing much," said Roger, drawing a sigh—"only I wish I could, that is all. How many duties boys have! Mamma, you know I haven't once been in there——"

"Roger," said his mother, kissing him, "duty is a great deal sweeter than pleasure, —indeed, it is pleasure—God's pleasure, if

not our own. And we ought to love His best."

"Yes, mamma,—I'll try. What did you mean by 'healing?'—you said duty was 'healing.'"

"Duty *performed* is healing, for God adds to it His blessing; and His blessing comes down upon our hearts when they are aching or troubled, just as the touch of Jesus did upon the poor sick folk when he was on earth."

"I'll go at once!" said Roger. And not waiting to let his courage cool, Roger got the key and the corn basket and ran off to the chicken-house. But he did not look about much. He threw down the corn in a great hurry, got a pail of water and filled the trough, locked the door, and ran back to the house just as fast as he could; for the truth was Roger's heart was in a strange commotion, and he was so very much afraid of

crying before he got through his work, that he did not dare stop a minute. And then, just as he got to the house door, and stood there to take breath, his father came out.

"Thank you, Roger!" he said. "That is being a good wise boy;" and how glad Roger felt after that you may guess. Yes, duty performed was at least sweeter than duty unperformed.

Several days passed by, and Roger was more and more glad that he had followed his mother's advice. For about this time Mr. Van Dyke sent home some very handsome fowls of a new kind, and Roger began to enjoy his work again. Meantime nothing was heard of the little pasteboard box and Ruffle's head; and Roger never asked, because he did not like to talk about the subject at all. He thought maybe his father had forgotten it—but that was by no means the case.

One afternoon, when Roger had been giving the chickens their supper as usual, and had been watching the new bantams and Poland hens, his father came into the chicken-house and stood by him.

"Roger," he said, "did you think I had forgotten my trust?"

Roger looked up inquiringly.

"I mean what you trusted to my care."

"I didn't quite know, papa,—I thought, —perhaps,—you are so busy,"—said Roger, stooping down to pick up some of the grains of corn.

"I did not forget," said his father, "and I have done all I can do. But now you must take charge for the future. So I have left the little box on my library table." And his father walked away.

Roger ran in, quick at first, and then walked slowly, wondering what his father meant exactly,—it must be Ruffle's head, of course, but might he keep it in the house?

And putting away the key, Roger quickened his steps again and went into the library.

The days were a little longer now, so that it was not yet sundown, and several long bright rays streamed in through the library windows, and gilded the table and the floor and the wall with their yellow light. The little pasteboard box stood on the table; Roger saw that at the first glance, for one of the long sunbeams lay right across it; but what was that alongside, on which also the sunlight rested? *What* was it?

There was a little stand or pillar of dark wood, about a foot high, and on the top of it—beautifully stuffed and prepared—was the head of little Ruffle; the black feathers smoothed and dressed, and the yellow ruff just covering the top of the little pillar. Two little black glass eyes looked very bright in the sunshine, and the yellow beak

which had so often taken corn from Roger's hand, held now, instead, two long floating ribbons on which were printed certain words. But Roger did not see what they were, nor indeed much of anything after the first glance, for sorrow and joy and surprise quite overwhelmed him, and he went down on the floor and hid his face in a foot-cushion. Of course tears were the first thing; and then without raising his head Roger thought it all over — how beautiful it was!—and how kind of his father,—and how glad he was,—and how sorry, — whereupon the tears rushed out again. But after a while Roger wanted another sight of his treasure. So he lifted up his head, and began to stroke and kiss the head of little Ruffle, only driving back the tears when they were likely to fall on her pretty feathers. "It was so beautiful!" and there was no more to be said about it. And accordingly, when by-and-by his father

and mother came in, and Roger was still gazing at little Ruffle by firelight, he never tried to say anything, except,

"Oh papa!—Oh mamma!" But I think they were quite satisfied with that.

Roger had tired himself out pretty well by this time, and he came and sat down on the rug, and laid his head against his mother, but still with his face toward the library table.

"Mamma," he asked, suddenly, "did you put those ribbons there?"

"I put one, and your father put the other."

"There's something on them—isn't there?"

"Yes, some printing," said his father. "Haven't you read it yet?"

"No, papa. You know I couldn't see everything at once. And it grew dark so soon. Which is yours, mamma? the blue?"

"No, the pink."

"It looks just like you," said Roger. "What's on it, mamma?"

"Some sweet words, with my love."

His father got up and lit a candle, and setting it on the library table told Roger he might look and see.

"On the blue ribbon, my boy," he said, "are some true words, with my approbation."

Roger went and knelt down by the table again, and softly passing his fingers over little Ruffle's head, he lifted the end of the blue ribbon with the other hand. On it was printed in letters of gold:

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Proverbs, xvi. 32.

Roger brushed away the tears out of his eyes, and took up the pink ribbon and read its golden letters:

"Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil." Luke, vi. 32.

THE END.

Woodfall and Kinder, Printers, Milford Lane, Strand.