

Cheap Repository.

BETTY BROWN,

THE

St. Giles's Orange Girl:

WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF

MRS. SPONGE, THE MONEY LENDER.



SOLD BY HOWARD AND EVANS,


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BETTY BROWN, &c.



BETTY BROWN, the Orange Girl, was born nobody knows where, and bred nobody knows how. No girl in all the streets of London could drive a barrow more nimbly, avoid pushing against passengers more dexterously, or cry her "Fine China Oranges" in a shriller voice. But then she could neither sow, nor spin, nor knit, nor wash, nor iron, nor read, nor spell. Betty had not been always in so good a situation as that in which we now describe her. She came into the world before so many good gentlemen and ladies began to concern themselves so kindly, that the poor might have a little learning. There was no charitable society then as there is now, to pick up poor friendless children in the streets, and put them into a good house, and give them meat, and drink, and lodging, and learning, and teach them to get their bread in an honest way into the bargain. Whereas, this now is often the case in London, blessed be God for all his mercies.

The longest thing that Betty can remember is, that she used to crawl up out of a night cellar, stroll about the streets, and pick cinders from the scavenger's carts: among the ashes she sometimes found some ragged gauze and dirty ribbons, with

these she used to dizen herself out, and join the merry bands on the first of May. This was not however quite fair, as she did not lawfully belong either to the female dancers who foot it gaily round the garland, or to the sooty tribe, who, on this happy holiday, forget their whole year's toil. she often, however, got a few scraps, by appearing to belong to both parties.

Betty was not an idle girl; she always put herself in the way of doing something. She would run of errands for the footmen, or sweep the door for the maid of any house where she was known; she would run and fetch some porter, and never was once known either to sip a drop, or steal the pot. Her quickness and fidelity in doing little jobs, got her into favor with a lazy cook-maid, who was too apt to give away her master's cold meat and beer, not to those who were most in want, but to those who waited upon her, and done the little things which she ought to have done herself.

The cook, who found Betty a dexterous girl, soon employed her to sell ends of candles, pieces of meat and cheese, and lumps of butter, or anything else she could crib from the house. These were all carried to her friend Mrs. Sponge, who kept a little shop, and a kind of eating-house for poor working people, not far from the Seven Dials. She also bought as well as sold many kinds of second hand things, and was not scrupulous to know whether what she bought was honestly come by, provided she could get it for a sixth part of what it was worth. But if the owner presumed to ask for its real value, she had sudden qualms of conscience, suspected the things were stolen, and got herself airs of honesty, which often took in P

silly people, and gave her a sort of half reputation among the needy and the ignorant, whose friend she pretended to be.

To this artful woman Betty carried the cook's pilferings, and as Mrs. Sponge would give no great price for these in money, the cook was willing to receive payment for her eatables in Mrs. Sponge's drinkables, for she dealt in all kinds of spirits. I shall only just remark here, that one receiver, like Mrs. Sponge, makes many pilferers, who are tempted to these petty thieveries, by knowing how easy it is to dispose of them at such iniquitous houses.

Betty was faithful to both her employers, which is extraordinary, considering the greatness of the temptation, and her utter ignorance of good and evil. One day she ventured to ask Mrs. Sponge if she could not assist her to get into a more settled way of life. She told her, that when she rose in the morning, she never knew where she should lie at night, nor was she ever sure of a meal beforehand. Mrs. Sponge asked her what she thought herself fit for. Betty, with fear and trembling, said, there was one trade for which she thought herself qualified, but she had not the ambition to look so high. It was far above her humble views: this was, to have a barrow and sell fruit, as several other of Mrs. Sponge's customers did, whom she had often looked at with envy.

Mrs. Sponge was an artful woman. Bad as she was, she always was aiming at something of a character, this was a great help to her trade. While she watched keenly to make every thing turn to her own profit, she had a false fawning way of seeming to do all she did out of pity and kindness to the distressed, and she seldom committed an

extortion, but she tried to make the person she cheated believe themselves highly obliged to her kindness. By thus pretending to be their friend she gained their confidence, and she grew rich herself while they thought she was only shewing favor to them. Various were the arts she had of getting rich; the money she got by grinding the poor, she spent in the most luxurious living, and while she would haggle with her hungry customers for a farthing, she would spend pounds on the most costly delicacies for herself.

Mrs. Sponge laying aside that haughty look and voice, well known to such as had the misfortune to be in her debt, put on the hypocritical smile and soft tone, which she always assumed when she meant to take in her dependents. "Betty, (said she) I am resolved to stand your friend; these are sad times to be sure. Money is money now. Yet I am resolved to put you into a handsome way of living. You shall have a barrow, and well furnished too." Betty could not have felt more joy or gratitude, if she had been told that she should have a coach." O Madam, (said Betty) it is impossible. I have not a penny in the world towards helping me to set up." "I will take care of that, (said Mrs. Sponge) only you must do as I bid you. You must pay me interest for my money. You will of course be glad also to pay so much every night for a nice hot supper which I get ready quite out of kindness for a number of poor working people: this will be a great comfort for such a friendless girl as you, for my victuals and drink are the best, and my company the merriest of any house in all St. Giles's." Betty thought all this only so many more favors, and courtesying to the ground, said

"to be' sure, Ma'am and thank you a thousand times into the bargain."

Mrs. Sponge knew what she was about. Betty was a lively girl, who had a knack of learning any thing, and so well looking through all her dirt and rags, that there was little doubt she would have custom. A barrow was soon provided, and five shillings put into Betty's hands. Mrs. Sponge kindly condescended to go to shew her how to buy the fruit, for it was a rule with this prudent gentlewoman, and one from which she never departed, that no one should cheat but herself.

Betty had never possessed such a sum before.— She grudged to lay it out all at once, and was ready to fancy she could live upon the capital. The crown, however, was laid out to the best advantage. Betty was carefully taught in what manner to cry her oranges, and received many useful lessons how to get off the bad with the good, and the stale with the fresh. Mrs. Sponge also lent her a few bad pences, for which she ordered her to bring home good ones at night.—Betty stared. Mrs. Sponge said, "Betty, those who would get money, must not be too nice about trifles; keep one of these pences in your hand, and if an ignorant young customer gives you a good sixpence, do you immediately slip it into your other hand, and give him the bad one, declaring, that it is the very one you have just received, and that you have not another pence in the world. You must also learn how to treat different sorts of customers, to some you may put off with safety, goods which would be quite unsaleable to others. Never offer bad fruit, Betty, to those who know better; never waste the

good on those who may be put off with worse; put good oranges at top and the mouldy ones under.

Poor Betty had not a nice conscience, for she had never learnt that grand but simple rule of all moral obligation, 'Never do that to another which you would not have another do to you.' She set off with her barrow, as proud and as happy as if she had been set up in the finest shop in Covent-garden. Betty had a sort of natural good nature, which made her unwilling to impose, but she had no principle which told her it was a sin. She had such good success, that, when night came, she had not an orange left. With a light heart she drove her empty barrow to Mrs. Sponge's door. She went in with a merry face, and threw down on the counter every farthing she had taken. 'Betty,' said Mrs. Sponge, 'I have a right to it all, as it was got by my money. But I am too generous to take it.—I will therefore only take sixpence for this day's use of my five shillings. This is a most reasonable interest, and I will lend you the same sum to trade with to morrow, and so on; you only paying me sixpence for the use of it every night, which will be a great bargain to you. You must also pay me my price every night for your supper, and you shall have an excellent lodging above stairs; so you see every thing will be provided for you in a genteel manner through my generosity.'

Poor Betty's gratitude blinded her so completely that she forgot to calculate the vast proportion which this generous benefactress was to receive out of her little gains. She thought herself a happy creature, and went into supper with a number of others of her own class. For this supper, and for more porter and gin than she ought to have drank

Betty was forced to pay so high, that it eat up all the profits of the day, which, added to the daily interest, made Mrs. Sponge a rich return for her five shillings.

Betty was reminded again of the gentility of her new situation, as she crept up to bed in one of Mrs. Sponge's garrets five stories high. This loft to be sure, was small, and had no window, but what it wanted in light, was made up in company, as it had three beds, and thrice as many lodgers. Those gentry had one night, in a drunken frolic, broke down the door, which happily had never been replaced; for, since that time, the lodgers had died much seldomer of infectious distempers. For this lodging Betty paid twice as much to her good friend as she would have done to a stranger. Thus she continued, with great industry and a thriving trade, as poor as on the first day, and not a bit nearer to saving money enough to buy her even a pair of shoes, though her feet was nearly on the ground.

One day as Betty was driving her barrow through a street near Holborn, a lady from a window called out to her that she wanted some oranges. While the servant went to fetch a plate, the lady entered into some talk with Betty, having been struck with her honest countenance and civil manner. She questioned her as to her way of life, and the profits of her trade—and Betty, who had never been so kindly treated before by so genteel a person, was very communicative. She told her little history as far as she knew it, and dwelt much on the generosity of Mrs. Sponge, in keeping her in her house, and trusting her with so large a capital as five shillings. At first it sounded like a very good natured thing; but the lady, whose husband was one of the

Justices of the new Police, happened to know more of Mrs. Sponge than was good, which led her to inquire still further. Betty owned, that to be sure it was not all clear profit, for besides, that the high price of the supper, and bed ran away with all she got, she paid sixpence a day for the use of the five shillings. 'And how long have you done this?' said the lady.—'About a year, Madam.'

The lady's eyes were at once opened. 'My poor girl,' (said she,) 'do you know that you have already paid for that single five shillings the enormous sum of 7l. 0s? I believe it is the most profitable five shillings Mrs. Sponge ever laid out.'—'O, no Madam,' said the girl,) 'that good gentleman does the same kindness to ten or twelve other poor friendless creatures like me.'—'Does she so?' said the lady, 'then I never heard of a better trade than this woman carries on, under the mask of charity, at the expence of her poor fellow-creatures.'

'But Madam,' said Betty, who did not comprehend this lady's arithmetic, 'what can I do? I now contrive to pick up a morsel of bread without begging or stealing. Mrs. Sponge has been very good to me, and I don't see how I can help myself.'

'I will tell you,' said the lady. 'If you will follow my advice, you may not only maintain yourself honestly, but independently. Only oblige yourself to live hard for a little time till you have saved five shillings out of your own earnings, give up that expensive supper at night, drink only one pint of porter and no gin at all: as soon as you have scraped together the five shillings, carry it back to your false friend, and if you are industrious, you will at

the end of the year have saved seven pounds, ten shillings. If you can make a shift to live now when you have this heavy interest to pay, judge how things will mend when your capital becomes your own. You will put some cloaths on your back, and by leaving the use of spirits, and the company in which you drink them, your health, your morals, and your condition will mend.'

The lady did not talk thus to save her money.— She would gladly have given the girl the five shillings; but she thought it was beginning at the wrong end. She wanted to try her. Besides, she knew there was much more pleasure as well as honor in possessing five shillings of one's own saving, than of another's giving. Betty promised to obey. She owned she got no good by the company or the liquor at Mrs. Sponge's. She promised that every night to begin saving the expences of the supper, and that she would not taste a drop of gin till she had the five shillings beforehand. The lady, who knew the power of good habits, was contented with this, thinking, that if the girl could abstain for a certain time, it would become easy to her; she therefore at present said little about the sin of drinking.

In a very few weeks Betty had saved up the five shillings. She went to carry back this money with great gratitude to Mrs. Sponge. This kind friend began to abuse her most unmercifully. She called her many hard names not fit to repeat, for having forsaken the supper, by which she swore she got nothing at all; but as she had the charity to dress for such beggarly wretches, she insisted that they should pay for it, whether they eat it or not. She also brought in a heavy score for lodging

though Betty had paid for it every night, and given notice of her intending to quit her. By all these false pretences, she got from her not only her own five shillings, but all the little capital with which Betty was going to set up for herself. As all was not sufficient to answer her demands, she declared she would send her to prison, but while she went to call a constable, Betty contrived to make off.

With a light pocket and heavy heart, she went to the lady, and with many tears told her sad story. The lady's husband, the Justice, condescended to listen to Betty's tale. He said Mrs. Sponge had long been on his books as a receiver of stolen goods. Betty's evidence strengthened his bad opinion of her. 'This petty system of usury,' said the gentleman, 'may be thought trifling, but it will no longer appear so, if you reflect, that if one of these female sharpers possessed a capital of seventy shillings, or 3*l.* 10*s.* with fourteen steady regular customers, she can realize a fixed income of 100 guineas a year. Add to this the influence such a loan gives her over these friendless creatures, by compelling them to eat at her house, or lodge, or buy liquors, or by taking their pawns, and you will see the extent of the evil. I pity these poor victims: you, Betty, shall point out some of them to me. I will endeavour to open their eyes on their own bad management. It is one of the greatest acts of kindness to the poor to mend their economy, and to give them right views of laying out their little money to advantage. These poor blinded creatures look no farther, than to be able to pay this heavy interest every night, and to obtain the same loan on the same hard terms the next day. Thus they are kept in poverty and bondage

all their lives ; but I hope as many as hear of this will get on a better plan, and I shall be ready to help any who are willing to help themselves."— This worthy magistrate went directly to Mrs. Sponge's with proper officers, and he got to the bottom of many enquiries. He not only made her refund poor Betty's money, but committed her to prison for receiving stolen goods, and various other offences, which may perhaps make the subject of another history.

Betty was now set up in trade to her hearts content. She had found the benefit of leaving off spirits, and she resolved to drink them no more. The first fruits of this resolution was that in a fortnight she bought herself a new pair of shoes, and as there was now no deduction for interest or for gin, her earnings became considerable. The lady made her a present of a gown and a hat, on the easy condition, that she should go to church. She accepted the terms, at first rather as an act of obedience to the lady, than from a sense of higher duty. But she soon began to go from a better motive. This constant attendance at church, joined to the instructions of the lady, opened a new world to Betty. She now heard for the first time that she was a sinner ; that God had given a law which was holy, just, and good, that she had broken this law, had been a swearer, sabbath-breaker, and had lived without God in the world. This was sad news to Betty ; she knew, indeed, that there were sinners, but she thought they were only to be found in the prisons, or at Botany-bay, or in some mournful carts which she had sometimes followed with her barrow, with the unthinking croud to Tyburn. She was most struck

with the great truths revealed in the scriptures which were quite new to her. She was desirous of improvement, and said, she would give up all the profits of the barrow, and go into the hardest service, rather than live in sin and ignorance.

‘ Betty,’ said the lady, ‘ I am glad to see you so well disposed, and will do what I can for you. Your present way of life to be sure exposes you to much danger, but the trade is not unlawful in itself, and we may please God, in any calling, provided it be not a dishonest one. In this great town there must be barrow-women to sell fruit. Do you then, instead of forsaking your business, set a good example to those in it, and shew them, that though a dangerous trade, it need not be a bad one. The Providence points out some safer way of getting your bread, let your companions see, that it is possible to be good even in this. Your trade being carried on in the open street, and your fruit bought in an open shop, you are not so much obliged to keep sinful company as may be thought. Take a garret in an honest house, to which you may go home in safety at night. I will give you a bed and a few necessaries to furnish your room; and I will also give you a constant Sunday’s dinner. A barrow woman, blessed be God and our good laws, is as much her own mistress on Sundays as a duchess: and the church and the bible are as much open to her. You may soon learn all that such as you are expected to know. A barrow-woman may pray as heartily morning and night, and serve God as acceptably all day, while she is carrying on her little trade, as if she had her whole time to spare.

To do this well, you must mind the following
RULES FOR RETAIL DEALERS.

Resist every temptation to cheat.

Never impose bad good on false pretences.

Never put off bad money for good.

Never use prophane or uncivil language.

Never swear your goods cost so much, when you know it is false. By so doing, you are guilty of two sins in one breath, a lie and an oath.

To break these rules will be your chiefest temptation. God will mark how you behave under them, and will reward or punish you accordingly. These temptations will be as great to you as higher trials are to higher people; but you have the same God to look for strength to resist them as they have. You must pray to him to give you this strength. You shall attend a Sunday School, where you will be taught these good things, and I will promote you as you shall be found to deserve.'

Poor Betty here burst into tears of joy and gratitude, crying out, 'What! shall such a poor friendless creature as I be treated so kindly and learn to read the word of God too? O, Madam, what a lucky chance brought me to your door.'—'Betty,' said the lady, 'what you have just said, shews the need you have of being better taught; there is no such thing as chance, and we offend God when we call that luck or chance which is brought about by his will and pleasure. None of the events of your life have happened by chance—but all have been under the direction of a good and kind Providence. He has permitted you to experience want and distress, that you might acknowledge his hand in

your present comfort and prosperity. Above all, you must bless his goodness in sending you to me, not only because I have been of use to you in your worldly affairs, but because he has enabled me to shew you the danger of your state from sin and ignorance, and to put you in a way to know his will and to keep his commandments.'

How Betty, by industry and piety, rose in the world, till at length she came to keep a handsome sausage-shop near the Seven-dials, and was married to an honest hackney coachman, may be told at some future period in a Second Part.

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THE END.