



BLIND WILLIE.

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BLIND WILLIE.

“WHY, what is the matter?” said Thomas Carter, as he returned from his day’s work, and found his cottage in a commotion.

“Oh, Carter,” said his wife, bursting into a violent fit of tears at the sight of

him, "our poor Willie! — our poor Willie!"

"What of him?" said the father hastily: "is the boy ill or hurt?" and without waiting for a reply, he opened the door of the little room where the child always slept.

"Do not disturb him," she whispered, as she followed him into the darkened room; "his pains are abated now, and he has fallen asleep."

"What is the matter?—what has happened?" he repeated.

"The child is sadly — very sadly burnt!" said his wife. "Come back quietly, and I will tell you how it all happened."

"Do let me know the worst, and quickly, too," said Thomas. But Mrs.

Carter tried his patience not a little by the way in which she told her story. "It's just a wonder," she began, "that I've kept my senses.

"I went out to engage to be sick-nurse to Mrs. Gilford at the Great House, and a good job it was like to have been, and a great help, now we are pinched from the hard, long winter that's just gone by; and I never thought but Jane, a girl turned twelve, could mind Willie for an hour or so; but if she's older, she's far more giddy than little Bessy, for all she's but eight; but I had taken her to carry the work home we've just finished. Well, I was coming back, all in spirits, for they paid for the work directly, and promised more, and all seemed prosperous, and

in the middle of thinking how glad you'd be at the news, I heard Willie screaming half across the green, and saw fire coming out at the chimney. Well, then I ran till I lost my breath, and found that Jane had been amusing herself with helping to dress the Maypole for tomorrow, or some nonsense about it, just content to peep in at the window now and then, and bid Willie keep off the fire; but she came back when she heard poor Willie crying, and then we found he'd thrown everything in the fire he could lay his hands on, and the drop of turpentine, above all, that I had been taking stains out with; and when he'd made up a blaze that caught the soot in the chimney, he tried to lift on the pot

of potatoes I had left ready for Jane to put on to boil, and upset it. But the worst is to come; he set himself on fire, and he's burnt so badly, that the doctor says, if he lives at all, he don't think he'll ever get his sight again. The doctor wrapped him up in cotton, and after a little while he gave him something composing, to make him sleep; and when he got easier, he did go to sleep, and Bessy is sitting watching him. Didn't you see her in the dark corner, close to the bed? And how Jane is crying bitterly because of the mischief she has done!

Poor Thomas was deeply grieved for his little boy's dreadful accident; but he always tried to make the best of everything, not from mere constitutional good

temper, but from a firm practical trust in the wisdom and goodness and watchful Providence which he felt overruled all things. This simple reliance is rarely found so strongly implanted elsewhere as in the breasts of the poor, who depend day by day for bread and shelter on means often varying, and but too often failing; and therefore they are led, from the position in which they are placed, to a more entire dependence on the only help which can never fail those who seek it.

Thomas sat thoughtfully for a few minutes, but not long, and when he looked up it was with an unruffled brow.

“Well, wife,” he said, “God knows best; I had come back rejoicing in having

got a mason's job likely to keep me in good work for some time; but if more trouble's right for us, why we must not repine; He's brought us through many a hard hour before, and He'll not leave us now.

“ This is indeed a sore trial, and it is God that has permitted it to happen; and if He hadn't seen it good and right, He would not have let those suffer who had no hand in it. I always find it comfort me best to look straight to Him for help, let the trouble come how it will; and then I may be sorry, but it don't make me angry.”

Jane looked at her father with heartfelt gratitude, and his forbearance did more to fortify her resolution to overcome her

giddiness than if he had punished her for her carelessness.

“It’s a mercy that I have work, in any case,” continued Thomas, “and that needlework can be got, if you can’t go out to nurse; and I hope my poor boy will get better. I’d work night and day to save the child and keep his sight, that I would, and never grudge it either.”

“Well, Thomas,” said his wife, “I will say for you, nobody in the village can match you for a good temper; and for a kind father, I believe there isn’t another such anywhere. I do feel ashamed at the way I get angry sometimes, when I look at you; but what’s to be done about the nursing? it’s such a pity to send and say I can’t take it.”

“But that’s what I fear you must do,” replied he; “for the boy’s more to me than the money; I’d want myself before I’d see him lost for lack of care.”

“Can I help in any way, Mrs. Carter?” said a kind-hearted neighbour, who just came in. “I am sorry to hear of your trouble, and most of all for the dear baby, to think he should be so burnt. Could I watch him while you are doing other things? You know my husband’s at sea. And for my children—more’s my sorrow—they are all in the churchyard, dear lambs! You know I haven’t been able to do hard work for a long time, since I met my accident; but I could bring my bit of needlework here whenever you want me.”

“Why, I had got a good job of nursing, at the Great House, and I was just thinking I must give it up.”

“Now don't think of it,” answered her neighbour. “Let me watch Willie; I'll never leave him; and it'll be like having one of my own again. You could see him most days, the Great House is so near, and they are too kind to say, No, to it, and one of the girls can help me to tend him.”

“Now, that's a true neighbourlike offer,” said Mrs. Carter; “husband, what do you say to it?”

“Why, that I'm too thankful for it; we must work when we can to get bread for these little ones; and you see God always helps us when the need comes pressing.”

So Mrs. Carter went to the Great House, and Mrs. Green was as good as her word; and most kindly she nursed the suffering child. Jane felt it a disgrace that Bessy was the one selected to help in attending him—that Bessy was the one trusted; but she knew she deserved it, and that, though she had obtained forgiveness, she could not wonder that she was mistrusted, for that was the natural consequence of her carelessness; she felt it was just, and she did not complain; but she tried to restore the confidence she had lost by attention to her father, and increased diligence in getting through as much needlework as she could. She dearly loved her little brother, and she had not even looked at the Maypole on May-day, for she could

not bear to think of the mischief her fancy for it had caused.

Little Willie gradually recovered all the sad burns, but his sight was gone. It was Bessy's delight to watch the poor blind baby boy, to sing to him in her little sweet voice, to bring him fresh honeysuckle to smell from their little garden, and twist daisies into wreaths, that he might amuse himself by pulling them to pieces. She would carefully hold his hand, and save him from every danger; and by degrees he learnt to find his own way with wonderful ease about the house, and even round the garden, and would laugh, with childish triumph, if he had managed any little feat before Bessy could follow him; he began to join in Bessy's songs with a

cheerfulness peculiar to the blind; he learnt to make baskets, and the flowers were now arranged in pretty nosegays.

All Bessy learnt she immediately communicated to Willie as well as she could; and as his memory was retentive, he never forgot what he once heard. The village in which they lived was remotely situated in the north of England, and they had never heard of the plan of printing the Bible in raised type, so that the blind may read by touching the letters: but as Willie grew older, Bessy tried to learn faster for his sake. She read to him all the interesting histories in the Bible, and he particularly delighted in the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was happy to possess a small Bible of his own

though he could not read it. He went gladly to church, as soon as he was able; and as his years increased, his fine voice gained power, and it was remarked that few sang the praises of God with so much appearance of thankfulness as "Blind Willie."

The organist, particularly, took an interest in him, and Willie would sit by him, as he played, with his whole soul absorbed in the tones, which raised his thoughts to Heaven. His sweet smile indicated a holy and cheerful communion with his heavenly Father; he seemed blessed by a double portion of that Spirit which is from above; he ever seemed rejoicing in the love of his heavenly Master; and though the light of day was shut out

from his sightless eyes, his joyous spirit marked that inward peace which this world can neither give nor take away. Thus was his heart cheered with a light that could not fail, and which was more than a compensation for all the earthly pleasures of which he was deprived.

Many were the lessons in the religion of Christ which those around him learnt from "Blind Willie;" he seemed, indeed, taught of God. And so far from his misfortune causing any expense to his parents, the interest he created was the means of almost providing for his family. So constantly does God bring good out of evil.

His father got permanent employment; his mother was constantly engaged as a

sick-nurse. Jane went into service as under-housemaid, but was soon advanced to a higher place, so much did she improve in steadiness under the superintendence of a good servant, who took more than common pains with her, because she belonged to the same village. The family at the Great House, in particular, were the means of adding many comforts in Carter's cottage; and Bessy conquered her natural aversion to needlework, that she might be the one to remain at home, for Willie's sake. Often the dread of leaving him quickened her fingers, and would induce her to give up any amusement that the work might be finished and the needful amount of money earned. The brother and sister seemed to have

but one heart between them, so dearly did they love each other.

Willie was now fourteen ; and the kind-hearted organist had not only taught him to join the village choir, but had instructed him in playing on the organ, as he saw, by his rapid advancement, that his musical talent was sufficient to secure his future maintenance.

It seemed that Willie was now sufficiently independent of Bessy to admit of her going to service, and that she might gain more in this way than by staying at home. It was much against her inclination to go where she would no longer see her brother ; but as her father and mother wished it, she felt it was her duty to submit. She obtained a place as nursery-

maid, which seemed particularly desirable, because the conduct of the household, in a religious and moral point of view, was attended to with yet more care than the work, though no neglect was allowed there either. The great disadvantage it had in Bessy's mind was its distance from her home; but the family at the Great House had recommended her to friends of their own, and there was no reasonable objection she could make. But when the morning came for her to leave her dear cottage home, and she felt she must say "good-bye" to all she cared for, but especially Willie, she thought her heart would break.

"We must not choose our own path, Bessy dear," said her father; "it's right

for you to go; it's best for us all, just now; so cheer up. You never leave God behind, and you never can,—or at least you ought not to be quite cast down when He is with you; and you are following the way He points out for you. A father and mother's blessing go with you!"

"And a brother's, too," said Willie. "Bessy, my own kind sister, you need not fear Willie will ever forget all you have been to him, and he'll think of you when you're not near him; and when Sunday comes, we'll pray to God together, and we'll sing His praises; for you know, Bessy, what good He does us; and we must still praise Him, though He sees right to send grief now and then. You know, Bessy, if He liked, He could

give me sight, as He did to the blind when He came on earth to save us. But He has some reason why He does not wish that I should see, and as he does not wish it, I do not desire it either. He'll take care of me, Bessy, and I am not afraid. I do not see the sun shine, but I feel it warm, which makes me know that it is there; and so, though I can't see my Saviour yet, I know He is near me, because He lights up my heart with comfort; and I feel so happy sometimes, I wonder what those round me mean by saying 'Poor Willie!' We'll meet again, and Willie's love will follow Bessy wherever she goes."

It was more than Bessy could do to stop her tears; her whole soul was devoted

to her brother; and when she got to her new place she was quite unfit for her work, so bitterly did she weep.

There seemed something so unusual in her grief, that her kind mistress called her to her room to speak to her alone.

“Bessy,” she said, “you will not be able to keep this place, if you give up all your time to crying. Your duties must be all neglected. Tell me what ails you?”

Bessy told, as well as her tears would let her, the simple truth. Mrs. Freeman was interested. “Now, Bessy,” she said, “let me advise you; dry your tears, and occupy your mind with your duty now, as you did when you watched your brother. You will find far more comfort in actively doing what God has appointed

for you, than in fretting at it; and if you seek help from Him heartily, He will not only enable you to do His will, but to do it cheerfully in that situation in which He has placed you. I expect to be in London shortly, and I will state your brother's case to a very clever oculist there, for I think something may be done for him."

Bessy gratefully thanked her mistress, and showed she valued her kindness by following her advice; and she felt the benefit of thus acting, for she gave satisfaction; and she was the more delighted to send home a large portion of her wages because she felt she had worked for it diligently.

Mrs. Freeman went to London, as she had said, and not only brought a cheering

opinion from the oculist, but a set of books in raised type for the blind, which she presented to Bessy to send to her brother; thus opening to him the invaluable blessing of reading the Bible for himself. "And now, Bessy," said Mrs. Freeman, "I shall be in London, I expect, again before Christmas. You have done your work so well, and exerted yourself so much, I will raise your wages from this time, and if you save all you can, it will pay your brother's expenses to London, and he can be received for the needful time into the Eye-Hospital, of which my friend is surgeon. I will then arrange to take you with me, and you will, once more, see your brother, and hear all about his prospect of recovery

after the oculist has examined his case."

Bessy's heart was too full to express half she felt, but she showed her gratitude by increased diligence and attention.

The time seemed very long in passing, but it did pass, and her journey to London was accomplished; her brother soon joined her there, having travelled with a person they knew, who was obliged to come up from the North at the very time that suited. The oculist declared his opinion that, by the treatment he proposed, he had hope the sight might be restored.

Anxiously did Bessy once more watch her brother at the times permitted her to

see him; and when at last the cure was effected, and the affectionate brother turned his now beaming eyes with grateful fondness on the face he had often longed to see of that sister who had watched him in suffering, worked for him, and so tenderly loved him, she felt how well she was repaid; and she acknowledged with thankfulness that in the very trial in which her heart had so much failed her, God was making "all things to work together for her good."

About this time her mother's health began to fail; she had been ailing for some time, and wanted help. It was decided, therefore, that she must return home at once. So, with sincere gratitude to the family who had been so kind to

her, and carrying with her their good wishes, she left service, and returned with her brother, now her protector.

Jane was allowed some days' absence from her place, that she, too, might rejoice in having the load that had pressed on her heart removed by the happy meeting with her brother in possession of his sight. On Christmas-day the cottage was decorated with bright evergreens, and after joining in the thanksgivings of the Church on that joyous festival, the grateful family assembled round their blazing fire, and recalled the many mercies God had given; and before they separated, their united voices joined in simple, but heartfelt praise to the glory of Him who had made the light shine out of darkness;

and they retired to rest with the blessed assurance, that "He who had not spared His own Son, but given Him up for us all, would, with Him, give us all things" needful for us in time and in eternity.

