



THE DISCONTENTED BOY.

HERE are some people in the world who are never satisfied. Put them where you will, they are sure to find some cause for complaint. They imagine that everything goes wrong, when the truth is that the *wrong* is in their own hearts. Where one is determined not to be pleased, it is hard to make him feel satisfied. If there is nothing around him that ought to make him unhappy, he thinks there is, and that amounts to the same thing with him. Did you ever put on a pair of green spectacles? Don't you remember how green everything seemed? Father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends, all looked green. The sky was green, and the birds were green, and the room you stood in was green, and everything about you was of the same colour. Now, what was the matter? Had they all really turned green? Oh, no! You were looking through green glasses—that was all; and when you took the spectacles off, there was nothing that seemed green but trees and grass. I think that the great trouble with most of these folks who are never satisfied is, that *they wear green spectacles*. What I mean by that is, that there is such an evil disposition in their hearts they cannot see things as they ought to be seen. They think that all they see is different from what it really is. Hence, they are constantly complaining, and grumbling, and changing their places and their plans.

I do not know of any living creature that is like them excepting themselves. The little birds that hop about the trees, or pick up worms on the ground, are all the time moving and changing; but then they are very happy. Who ever heard of a bird grumbling and complaining? The precious little creatures hop because they are happy, and sing for joy—their throats swelling and throbbing as the music gushes out. I hear them now, while I am writing about them. I wish I could write their music. Do you suppose the birds are unhappy because they are not something else—a horse or an ox, for example? Or do you think a small bird is jealous of a large one? Does the wren wish himself a raven, or the robin sigh because he is not a goose? I don't believe a word of it. They are all as happy as they can be, each in his own place.

But children are sometimes discontented, wishing themselves to be better off than they are, when, in reality, they are better off than many others.

Harry Baker was one of this sort. He lived in a large city, and though his parents were not rich, neither were they poor. They dwelt in a comfortable house, and Harry had plenty to eat and to wear, good books to study and to read, and a clean bed to sleep on. He ought to have been a very happy boy, but he was not. He was constantly complaining about his food, or his clothes, or something else. He knew many other boys that were better off than himself, and he thought it was hard

that he could not live in as fine a house as they did, or eat as rich food, or wear as fine clothes.

Poor boy! He had yet to learn that happiness is to be found in something else than houses, or food, or clothes. He knew nothing about suffering. He was never hungry in his life without having enough to eat to satisfy his hunger. Nor was he ever cold for want of clothes, or fire, or house. He did not know what it was to want.

Had he known how some other people lived, or tried to live, I think he would have been more contented. There were hundreds—yes, and thousands, too, in the city where he dwelt, that would gladly have taken one-half of the comforts he enjoyed if they could have obtained them. But Harry never thought of that.

His father had often tried to cure him of this foolish habit of complaining, but found it a very hard task. Harry always had something to say about such and such a one, who lived in such a house, and had so many nice things that he could not have.

Now, don't you think he was a very foolish boy, and very wicked, too? He never thanked God, the great Giver of all good, for the many blessings He had given him, but rather complained because there were others He had not given him.

His father one day thought it might do the boy good to see how some of the poor people in the world live. Only that very day Harry had been complaining as usual. This time it was about his skates. It was not that while other boys had skates he had none; but Joseph Simpson had a pair of skates that cost twelve shillings, while his only cost five; and Joseph's were really no better than his. True, they were a new style, and had silver mountings, and looked very fine—as indeed they ought for that money—but they would not glide over the ice any faster than Harry's, and would not last any longer.

But Harry did not see why he could not have as good a pair of skates as Joseph; he wished *his* father was as rich as Mr. Simpson; it was too bad that he could not have things like other folks; and thus he talked and complained more like a great baby than a noble, manly-hearted boy.

Mr. Baker was tired of it, so he said: "Harry, would you like to take a walk this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Harry. "Where are you going?"

"No matter about that," replied his father. "I want you to go with me. I have something to show you."

Harry knew it was useless to ask further about it. He therefore got ready as soon as he could, and they started on their walk.

It was a very cold day. The sky was clear, and the wind fresh, and the pavements slippery with ice. But Harry was warmly dressed, and did not feel the cold. He had on a comfortable overcoat, good enough for any boy to wear. Harry would have thought it good enough for him if he had never seen a more costly one. But Willy Waters, one of his schoolmates, had one that was trimmed with fur, while Harry's was not. That made him

dissatisfied with his plain coat, as he and his father passed Willie not long after they left home.

However, he did not freeze, though he had no fur trimmings to his coat. On they went, crossing street after street, turning down broad avenues and going through narrow alleys, until Harry wondered where his father would lead him. He noticed, too, that the houses were all mean-looking—even the new ones looked dirty, while the old ones looked as if they were about to tumble down into the street.

Presently they met a plain-dressed, kind-looking man, to whom Mr. Baker instantly spoke.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Sloan. I thought I should meet you somewhere around this part of the town. You are about your usual work, I see.”

“Oh, yes!” said Mr. Sloan, “and I find enough of it to do. It’s enough to make one’s heart ache, Mr. Baker, to see the misery there is in this place. I often think if some of those people who are constantly complaining could only see one half the wretchedness I see, they would be for ever after contented with their lot.”

Harry’s quick ear heard all this, and he wondered what it meant. Who was Mr Sloan? And did he know that Harry was always complaining?

I can answer those questions, though Harry could not. Mr. Sloan was a gentleman who had retired from business in good circumstances, and whose whole time was taken up in trying to relieve the poor and the afflicted.

Mr. Baker readily consented to go with him to a few of the families he had to visit that afternoon, for it was for this very purpose he had brought Harry.

The first house they entered was a large four-storey building, and very dirty-looking. There were four separate doors and as many staircases. On each side of each hall was a door opening into a little room, with a still smaller room behind it.

These two little rooms were meant for one family; and as Harry saw there were four entrances to the house, with two of these doors to each hall, he soon reckoned that there were eight families to each storey of the house. Then, as he noticed the four stories of the building, he saw that there must be thirty-two families in that one house.

And so it was. How they all lived there I cannot tell; and only God knows how much of misery, and wretchedness, and suffering was endured by the poor inmates of this house.

The people here all knew Mr. Sloan, and seemed glad to see him, especially the children, who crowded around him as he went from room to room.

In almost every room they visited they found some one in trouble. One family was crying over a dead child, that looked as though it might have been starved to death. The poor mother was a widow, and had not money enough to buy a coffin for her dead babe. This she told to Mr. Sloan, who promised that her wants should be attended to.

When they got into the hall, while Mr. Sloan was going up-stairs to the floor above, Mr. Baker took Harry aside and said to him:—“Harry, would you like to change your skates? You have not

used them yet, and Mr. Harden, I have no doubt, will take them back if you want a better pair.”

Poor Harry’s heart was so full, at the sight of the misery he saw, that he had quite forgotten skates and everything else.

“Here,” said his father, taking out his purse, “is half a sovereign. You can change your skates and have a pair of silver-mounted ones like Joseph Simpson’s.”

Harry said nothing, but he hung his head as the tears came to his eyes. He thought of that dead baby and no coffin for it. His father saw it all, and it was just what he wanted to see. He said to him:—“Perhaps you would like to do something else with the money. If so, you may have it, provided it is for a good purpose.”

“Father,” said Harry, “how does Mr. Sloan get the money for these poor people?”

“It is given to him,” said his father, “by kind people who want to do good.”

“May I give him this money, to buy a coffin for that child?”

“You may, if you wish,” his father replied.

So they hastened up-stairs to the fourth storey, where they found Mr. Sloan surrounded by a group of frowzy-headed folks.

There was no carpet on the floor, unless a thick covering of dirt could be called a carpet. There were no chairs, no table, no bed. On the hearth were a few smoking chips, and around this feeble fire the father, mother, and six children sat on the bare floor, only half-clad, and shivering with cold.

Mr. Sloan took Mr. Baker and his son to other places, and showed them other families. Wherever they went, they found poverty, hunger, and suffering. To tell all they saw would fill a small book.

Harry was not a hard-hearted boy, and now he had something to make him more thoughtful. His heart was very sad indeed at the sight of so much sorrow, and it needed not any one to tell him how foolish and wicked he had been in showing such a grumbling and dissatisfied spirit.

When, at last, the sun went down, they bade good-bye to Mr. Sloan, and started for home. But, before leaving, Harry said to him:—“Will you, please, sir, take that, to help to buy a coffin for the child of that poor woman?”

As he said this he gave him the half-sovereign.

Mr. Sloan took it and thanked Harry. They then separated. All the way home Harry talked to his father about what he had seen. When they neared the street in which they lived, Joseph Simpson passed them on his way to the ice-pond, to try his new skates. They were slung over his shoulders, and really looked very pretty. But Harry no longer envied him their possession. He thought of the dead child, and his heart felt light when he remembered that he had given something towards its burial.

From that day Harry was cured of his discontented spirit. He found that he was so much better off than many others, that he ought to be very grateful indeed, instead of envying those around him and complaining of his own lot.