

from the drooping elm boughs on to the roof of the corn-barn, dodge in at one of the little doors, much to the disturbance of the doves, and come out with a nut in each mouth. So laden they could not get back the way they came, but ran down the low roof, along the wall, and leaping off at a corner they vanished a minute and re-appeared without their plunder. Rob ran to the place, and in a hollow under the leaves found a heap of the stolen property hidden away to be carried off to the holes by and by.

"Oh, you little villains! I'll cheat *you* now, and not leave one," said Rob. So he cleared the corner and the corn-barn, and put the contested nuts in the garret, making sure that no broken window-pane could anywhere let in the unprincipled squirrels. They seemed to feel that the contest was over, and retired to their hole, but now and then could not resist throwing down nut-shells on Rob's head, and scolding violently as if they could not forgive him nor forget that he had the best of the battle.

Father and Mother Bhaer's crop was of a different sort, and not so easily described; but they were satisfied with it, felt that their summer work had prospered well, and by and by had a harvest that made them very happy.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOHN BROOKE.

"WAKE up, Demi, dear! I want you."
 "Why, I've just gone to bed; it can't be morning yet;" and Demi blinked like a little owl as he waked from his first sound sleep.

"It's only ten, but your father is ill, and we must go to him. O my little John! my poor little John!" and Aunt Jo laid her head down on the pillow with a sob that scared sleep from Demi's eyes and filled his heart with fear and wonder; for he dimly felt why Aunt Jo called him "John," and wept over him as if some loss had come that left him poor. He clung to her without a word, and in a minute she was quite steady again, and said, with a tender kiss as she saw his troubled face,—

"We are going to say good-by to him, my darling, and there is no time to lose; so dress quickly and come to me in my room. I must go to Daisy."

"Yes, I will;" and when Aunt Jo was gone, little Demi got up quietly, dressed as if in a dream, and leaving Tommy fast asleep went away through the silent house, feeling that something new and sorrowful was going to happen — something that set him apart from the other boys for a time, and made the world seem as

dark and still and strange as those familiar rooms did in the night. A carriage sent by Mr. Laurie stood before the door. Daisy was soon ready, and the brother and sister held each other by the hand all the way into town, as they drove swiftly and silently with aunt and uncle through the shadowy roads to say good-by to father.

None of the boys but Franz and Emil knew what had happened, and when they came down next morning, great was their wonderment and discomfort, for the house seemed forlorn without its master and mistress. Breakfast was a dismal meal with no cheery Mrs. Jo behind the teapots; and when school-time came, Father Bhaer's place was empty. They wandered about in a disconsolate kind of way for an hour, waiting for news and hoping it would be all right with Demi's father, for good John Brooke was much beloved by the boys. Ten o'clock came, and no one arrived to relieve their anxiety. They did not feel like playing, yet the time dragged heavily, and they sat about listless and sober. All at once, Franz got up, and said, in his persuasive way, —

"Look here, boys! let's go into school and do our lessons just as if Uncle was here. It will make the day go faster, and will please him, I know."

"But who will hear us say them?" asked Jack.

"I will; I don't know much more than you do, but I'm the oldest here, and I'll try to fill Uncle's place till he comes, if you don't mind."

Something in the modest, serious way Franz said this impressed the boys, for, though the poor lad's eyes were red with quiet crying for Uncle John in that long sad

night, there was a new manliness about him, as if he had already begun to feel the cares and troubles of life, and tried to take them bravely.

"I will, for one," and Emil went to his seat, remembering that obedience to his superior officer is a seaman's first duty.

The others followed; Franz took his uncle's seat, and for an hour order reigned. Lessons were learned and said, and Franz made a patient, pleasant teacher, wisely omitting such lessons as he was not equal to, and keeping order more by the unconscious dignity that sorrow gave him than by any words of his own. The little boys were reading when a step was heard in the hall, and every one looked up to read the news in Mr. Bhaer's face as he came in. The kind face told them instantly that Demi had no father now, for it was worn and pale, and full of tender grief, which left him no words with which to answer Rob, as he ran to him saying, reproachfully, —

"What made you go and leave me in the night, papa?"

The memory of the other father who had left his children in the night, never to return, made Mr. Bhaer hold his own boy close, and, for a minute, hide his face in Robby's curly hair. Emil laid his head down on his arms, Franz went to put his hand on his uncle's shoulder, his boyish face pale with sympathy and sorrow, and the others sat so still that the soft rustle of the falling leaves outside was distinctly heard.

Rob did not clearly understand what had happened, but he hated to see papa unhappy, so he lifted up the bent head, and said, in his chirpy little voice, —

"Don't cry, mein Vater! we are all so good, we did our lessons without you, and Franz was the master."

Mr. Bhaer looked up then, tried to smile, and said in a grateful tone that made the lads feel like saints, "I thank you very much, my boys. It was a beautiful way to help and comfort me. I shall not forget it, I assure you."

"Franz proposed it, and was a first-rate master, too," said Nat; and the others gave a murmur of assent most gratifying to the young dominie.

Mr. Bhaer put Rob down, and, standing up, put his arm round his tall nephew's shoulder, as he said, with a look of genuine pleasure, —

"This makes my hard day easier, and gives me confidence in you all. I am needed there in town, and must leave you for some hours. I thought to give you a holiday, or send some of you home, but if you like to stay and go on as you have begun, I shall be glad and proud of my good boys."

"We'll stay;" "We'd rather;" "Franz can see to us;" cried several, delighted with the confidence shown in them.

"Isn't Marmar coming home?" asked Rob, wistfully; for home without "Marmar" was the world without the sun to him.

"We shall both come to-night; but dear Aunt Meg needs Mother more than you do now, and I know you like to lend her for a little while."

"Well, I will; but Teddy's been crying for her, and he slapped Nursey, and was dreadful naughty," answered Rob, as if the news might bring mother home.

"Where is my little man?" asked Mr. Bhaer.

"Dan took him out, to keep him quiet. He's all right now," said Franz, pointing to the window, through which they could see Dan drawing baby in his little wagon, with the dogs frolicking about him.

"I won't see him, it would only upset him again; but tell Dan I leave Teddy in his care. You older boys I trust to manage yourselves for a day. Franz will direct you, and Silas is here to oversee matters. So good-by till to-night."

"Just tell me a word about Uncle John," said Emil, detaining Mr. Bhaer, as he was about hurrying away again.

"He was only ill a few hours, and died as he has lived, so cheerfully, so peacefully, that it seems a sin to mar the beauty of it with any violent or selfish grief. We were in time to say good-by; and Daisy and Demi were in his arms as he fell asleep on Aunt Meg's breast. No more now, I cannot bear it," and Mr. Bhaer went hastily away quite bowed with grief, for in John Brooke he had lost both friend and brother, and there was no one left to take his place.

All that day the house was very still; the small boys played quietly in the nursery; the others, feeling as if Sunday had come in the middle of the week, spent it in walking, sitting in the willow, or among their pets, all talking much of "Uncle John," and feeling that something gentle, just, and strong, had gone out of their little world, leaving a sense of loss that deepened every hour. At dusk, Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer came home alone, for Demi and Daisy were their mother's best comfort now, and could not leave her. Poor Mrs. Jo seemed quite spent, and evidently needed the same sort of com-

fort, for her first words, as she came up the stairs, were, "Where is my baby?"

"Here I is," answered a little voice, as Dan put Teddy into her arms, adding, as she hugged him close, "My Danny tooked tare of me all day, and I was dood."

Mrs. Jo turned to thank the faithful nurse, but Dan was waving off the boys, who had gathered in the hall to meet her, and was saying, in a low voice, "Keep back; she don't want to be bothered with us now."

"No, don't keep back. I want you all. Come in and see me, my boys. I've neglected you all day;" and Mrs. Jo held out her hands to them as they gathered round and escorted her into her own room, saying little, but expressing much by affectionate looks and clumsy little efforts to show their sorrow and sympathy.

"I am so tired, I will lie here and cuddle Teddy, and you shall bring me in some tea," she said, trying to speak cheerfully for their sakes.

A general stampede into the dining-room followed, and the supper-table would have been ravaged if Mr. Bhaer had not interfered. It was agreed that one squad should carry in the mother's tea, and another bring it out. The four nearest and dearest claimed the first honor, so Franz bore the teapot, Emil the bread, Rob the milk, and Teddy insisted on carrying the sugar-basin, which was lighter by several lumps when it arrived than when it started. Some women might have found it annoying at such a time to have boys creaking in and out, upsetting cups and rattling spoons in violent efforts to be quiet and helpful; but it suited Mrs. Jo, because just then her heart was very tender; and remembering that many of her boys were fatherless or motherless, she yearned over them, and found comfort in their

blundering affection. It was the sort of food that did her more good than the very thick bread-and-butter that they gave her, and the rough Commadore's broken whisper —

"Bear up, Aunty, it's a hard blow; but we'll weather it somehow," cheered her more than the sloppy cup he brought her, full of tea as bitter as if some salt tear of his own had dropped into it on the way. When supper was over, a second deputation removed the tray; and Dan said, holding out his arms for sleepy little Teddy, —

"Let me put him to bed, you're so tired, Mother."

"Will you go with him, lovey?" asked Mrs. Jo of her small lord and master, who lay on her arm among the sofa-pillows.

"Torse I will;" and he was proudly carried off by his faithful bearer.

"I wish I could do something," said Nat, with a sigh, as Franz leaned over the sofa, and softly stroked Aunt Jo's hot forehead.

"You can, dear. Go and get your violin, and play me the sweet little airs Uncle Teddy sent you last. Music will comfort me better than any thing else to-night."

Nat flew for his fiddle, and, sitting just outside her door, played as he had never done before, for now his heart was in it, and seemed to magnetize his fingers. The other lads sat quietly upon the steps, keeping watch that no new-comer should disturb the house; Franz lingered at his post; and so, soothed, served, and guarded by her boys, poor Mrs. Jo slept at last, and forgot her sorrow for an hour.

Two quiet days, and on the third Mr. Bhaer came in, just after school, with a note in his hand, looking both moved and pleased.

"I want to read you something, boys," he said; and as they stood round him he read this:—

"DEAR BROTHER FRITZ,—I hear that you do not mean to bring your flock to-day, thinking that I may not like it. Please do. The sight of his friends will help Demi through the hard hour, and I want the boys to hear what father says of my John. It will do them good, I know. If they would sing one of the sweet old hymns you have taught them so well, I should like it better than any other music, and feel that it was beautifully suited to the occasion. Please ask them, with my love.

MEG."

"Will you go?" and Mr. Bhaer looked at the lads, who were greatly touched by Mrs. Brooke's kind words and wishes.

"Yes," they answered, like one boy; and an hour later they went away with Franz to bear their part in John Brooke's simple funeral.

The little house looked as quiet, sunny, and home-like as when Meg entered it a bride, ten years ago, only then it was early summer, and roses blossomed everywhere; now it was early autumn, and dead leaves rustled softly down, leaving the branches bare. The bride was a widow now; but the same beautiful serenity shone in her face, and the sweet resignation of a truly pious soul made her presence a consolation to those who came to comfort her.

"O Meg! how *can* you bear it so?" whispered Jo, as she met them at the door with a smile of welcome, and no change in her gentle manner, except more gentleness.

"Dear Jo, the love that has blest me for ten happy

years supports me still. It could not die, and John is more my own than ever," whispered Meg; and in her eyes the tender trust was so beautiful and bright, that Jo believed her, and thanked God for the immortality of love like hers.

They were all there—father and mother, Uncle Teddy, and Aunt Amy, old Mr. Laurence, white-haired and feeble now, Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer, with their flock, and many friends, come to do honor to the dead. One would have said that modest John Brooke, in his busy, quiet, humble life, had had little time to make friends; but now they seemed to start up everywhere,—old and young, rich and poor, high and low; for all unconsciously his influence had made itself widely felt, his virtues were remembered, and his hidden charities rose up to bless him. The group about his coffin was a far more eloquent eulogy than any Mr. March could utter. There were the rich men whom he had served faithfully for years; the poor old women whom he cherished with his little store, in memory of his mother; the wife to whom he had given such happiness that death could not mar it utterly; the brothers and sisters in whose hearts he had made a place for ever; the little son and daughter, who already felt the loss of his strong arm and tender voice; the young children, sobbing for their kindest playmate, and the tall lads, watching with softened faces a scene which they never could forget. A very simple service, and very short; for the fatherly voice that had faltered in the marriage-sacrament now failed entirely as Mr. March endeavored to pay his tribute of reverence and love to the son whom he most honored. Nothing but the soft coo of Baby Josy's voice up-stairs broke the long hush that followed the

last Amen, till, at a sign from Mr. Bhaer, the well-trained boyish voices broke out in a hymn, so full of lofty cheer, that one by one all joined in it, singing with full hearts, and finding their troubled spirits lifted into peace on the wings of that brave, sweet psalm.

As Meg listened, she felt that she had done well; for not only did the moment comfort her with the assurance that John's last lullaby was sung by the young voices he loved so well, but in the faces of the boys she saw that they had caught a glimpse of the beauty of virtue in its most impressive form, and that the memory of the good man lying dead before them would live long and helpfully in their remembrance. Daisy's head lay in her lap, and Demi held her hand, looking often at her, with eyes so like his father's, and a little gesture that seemed to say, "Don't be troubled, mother; I am here;" and all about her were friends to lean upon and love; so patient, pious Meg put by her heavy grief, feeling that her best help would be to live for others, as her John had done.

That evening, as the Plumfield boys sat on the steps, as usual, in the mild September moonlight, they naturally fell to talking of the event of the day.

Emil began by breaking out, in his impetuous way, "Uncle Fritz is the wisest, and Uncle Laurie the jolliest, but Uncle John was the *best*; and I'd rather be like him than any man I ever saw."

"So would I. Did you hear what those gentlemen said to Grandpa to-day? I would like to have that said of me when I was dead;" and Franz felt with regret that he had not appreciated Uncle John enough.

"What did they say?" asked Jack, who had been much impressed by the scenes of the day.

"Why, one of the partners of Mr. Laurence, where Uncle John has been ever so long, was saying that he was conscientious almost to a fault as a business man, and above reproach in all things. Another gentleman said no money could repay the fidelity and honesty with which Uncle John had served him, and then Grandpa told them the best of all. Uncle John once had a place in the office of a man who cheated, and when this man wanted uncle to help him do it, uncle wouldn't, though he was offered a big salary. The man was angry and said, 'You will never get on in business with such strict principles;' and uncle answered back, 'I *never* will try to get on *without* them,' and left the place for a much harder and poorer one."

"Good!" cried several of the boys warmly, for they were in the mood to understand and value the little story as never before.

"He wasn't rich, was he?" asked Jack.

"No."

"He never did any thing to make a stir in the world, did he?"

"No."

"He was only good?"

"That's all;" and Franz found himself wishing that Uncle John *had* done something to boast of, for it was evident that Jack was disappointed by his replies.

"Only good. That is *all* and every thing," said Mr. Bhaer, who had overheard the last few words, and guessed what was going on in the minds of the lads.

"Let me tell you a little about John Brooke, and you will see why men honor him, and why he was satisfied to be good rather than rich or famous. He simply did his duty in all things, and did it so cheerfully, so faith-

fully, that it kept him patient, brave, and happy through poverty and loneliness and years of hard work. He was a good son, and gave up his own plans to stay and live with his mother while she needed him. He was a good friend, and taught Laurie much beside his Greek and Latin, did it unconsciously, perhaps, by showing him an example of an upright man. He was a faithful servant, and made himself so valuable to those who employed him that they will find it hard to fill his place. He was a good husband and father, so tender, wise, and thoughtful, that Laurie and I learned much of him, and only knew how well he loved his family, when we discovered all he had done for them, unsuspected and unassisted."

Mr. Bhaer stopped a minute, and the boys sat like statues in the moonlight until he went on again, in a subdued, but earnest voice: "As he lay dying, I said to him, 'Have no care for Meg and the little ones; I will see that they never want.' Then he smiled and pressed my hand, and answered, in his cheerful way, 'No need of that; I have cared for them.' And so he had, for when we looked among his papers, all was in order, not a debt remained; and safely put away was enough to keep Meg comfortable and independent. Then we knew why he had lived so plainly, denied himself so many pleasures, except that of charity, and worked so hard that I fear he shortened his good life. He never asked help for himself, though often for others, but bore his own burden and worked out his own task bravely and quietly. No one can say a word of complaint against him, so just and generous and kind was he; and now, when he is gone, all find so much to love and praise and honor, that I am proud to have been his

friend, and would rather leave my children the legacy he leaves his than the largest fortune ever made. Yes! Simple, genuine goodness is the best capital to found the business of this life upon. It lasts when fame and money fail, and is the only riches we can take out of this world with us. Remember that, my boys; and if you want to earn respect and confidence and love follow in the footsteps of John Brooke."

When Demi returned to school, after some weeks at home, he seemed to have recovered from his loss with the blessed elasticity of childhood, and so he had in a measure; but he did not forget, for his was a nature into which things sank deeply, to be pondered over, and absorbed into the soil where the small virtues were growing fast. He played and studied, worked and sang, just as before, and few suspected any change; but there was one — and Aunt Jo saw it — for she watched over the boy with her whole heart, trying to fill John's place in her poor way. He seldom spoke of his loss, but Aunt Jo often heard a stifled sobbing in the little bed at night; and when she went to comfort him, all his cry was, "I want my father! oh, I want my father!" — for the tie between the two had been a very tender one, and the child's heart bled when it was broken. But time was kind to him, and slowly he came to feel that father was not lost, only invisible for a while, and sure to be found again, well and strong and fond as ever, even though his little son should see the purple asters blossom on his grave many, many times before they met. To this belief Demi held fast, and in it found both help and comfort, because it led him unconsciously through a tender longing for the father whom he had seen to a childlike trust in the Father whom he had not

seen. Both were in heaven, and he prayed to both, trying to be good for love of them.

The outward change corresponded to the inward, for in those few weeks Demi seemed to have grown tall, and began to drop his childish plays, not as if ashamed of them, as some boys do, but as if he had outgrown them, and wanted something manlier. He took to the hated arithmetic, and held on so steadily that his uncle was charmed, though he could not understand the whim, until Demi said—

“I am going to be a bookkeeper when I grow up, like papa, and I must know about figures and things, else I can't have nice, neat ledgers like his.”

At another time he came to his aunt with a very serious face, and said—

“What can a small boy do to earn money?”

“Why do you ask, my deary?”

“My father told me to take care of mother and the little girls, and I want to, but I don't know how to begin.”

“He did not mean now, Demi, but by and by, when you are large.”

“But I wish to begin *now*, if I can, because I think I ought to make some money to buy things for the family. I am ten, and other boys no bigger than I earn pennies sometimes.”

“Well, then, suppose you rake up all the dead leaves and cover the strawberry bed. I'll pay you a dollar for the job,” said Aunt Jo.

“Is n't that a great deal? I could do it in one day. You must be fair, and not pay too much, because I want to truly earn it.”

“My little John, I will be fair, and not pay a penny

too much. Don't work too hard; and when that is done I will have something else for you to do,” said Mrs. Jo, much touched by his desire to help, and his sense of justice, so like his scrupulous father.

When the leaves were done, many barrowloads of chips were wheeled from the wood to the shed, and another dollar earned. Then Demi helped cover the school-books, working in the evenings, under Franz's direction, tugging patiently away at each book, letting no one help, and receiving his wages with such satisfaction that the dingy bills became quite glorified in his sight.

“Now, I have a dollar for each of them, and I should like to take my money to mother all myself, so she can see that I have minded my father.”

So Demi made a duteous pilgrimage to his mother, who received his little earnings as a treasure of great worth, and would have kept it untouched, if Demi had not begged her to buy some *useful* thing for herself and the women-children, whom he felt were left to his care.

This made him very happy, and, though he often forgot his responsibilities for a time, the desire to help was still there, strengthening with his years. He always uttered the words “my father” with an air of gentle pride, and often said, as if he claimed a title full of honor, “Don't call me Demi any more. I am John Brooke now.” So, strengthened by a purpose and a hope, the little lad of ten bravely began the world, and entered into his inheritance,—the memory of a wise and tender father, the legacy of an honest name.