

The Family Circle

THE CAT'S EXPLANATION

You ask the reason, little friends,
Why cats don't wash their faces,
Before they eat, as children do,
In all good Christian places.

Well, years ago, a famous cat,
The pangs of hunger feeling,
Had chanced to catch a fine young mouse,
Who said, as he ceased squealing:

'All gentle folks their faces wash
Before they think of eating!'
And, wishing to be thought well-bred,
Puss heeded his entreating.

But when he raised his paw to wash,
Chance for escape affording,
The sly young mouse then said good-bye,
Without respect to wording.

A feline council met that day,
And passed, in solemn meeting,
A law forbidding any cat
To wash till after eating.

JOE AND BILL

Joe was the unhappiest boy in the world. Absolutely alone, penniless, without father, mother, or friend, he did not know which way to turn or what next to do for bread and shelter. Down the avenue, through side streets, along the river front, he had been wandering all day in search of work—but work there was none. Nobody wanted a boy, nobody seemed to care, nobody was patient or wanted to listen to his story—and it was a sad one.

It was eight o'clock at night, and Joe did not know when or where he would find a place to sleep. A newsboy, bright, smiling, and looking particularly friendly, was standing near the corner lamp-post selling his latest editions to occasional passers-by. Joe felt it might do some good to talk to the boy, and with the lad he was soon standing under the glaring shadows of the electric light.

A few words and questions and Bill, the newsboy, knowing his story straight away, pledged himself Joe's friend. Joe's mother, it seemed, had been dead about a month. His father, to the boy's knowledge, was still alive, but in what part of the world Joe knew not. He only knew that his father drank and had left home for the West over two years before. Since that time nothing had been heard of him. There were no relatives, or even friends in the great city who had any interest in Joe. He found employment for a few short weeks as a boot-black, but there was too much competition, and he was forced to put away his box and brush, with no prospect of employment in the near future.

Bill, the newsboy, seemed to like Joe from the first. Being only a poor newsboy, he had no command of fine language, but in his good blunt way he told Joe that he might count on him for help. Joe thought they were the best, the sweetest words he had ever heard. Nobody had said as much for a long time! Taking half of the papers from under his arm, Bill shared them with Joe and dispatched him to the next corner to try his luck at earning a few pennies. Joe sold all but two papers, and proudly handed over the receipts to Bill, who promised to provide the cost of his lodging at the Newsboys' Quarters—Bill's only home.

With all his rough, neglected outward appearance, Bill was at heart a splendid lad. He had been a newsboy, so it seemed to him, ever since he could remember, and though his companions were none too good, none too sympathetic, one with the other, Bill never lost a chance to help a friend in need, or to offer in his own rough way a word of good cheer and sympathy. He had a way of saying things and doing things that made the world look bright both to himself and to the other little urchins with whom he sold 'latest editions' all the day long. In Joe, Bill found a companion to his liking. The two boys had much in common—both desired to make the best of opportunities, had the beginnings of a love for learning, which, unfortunately, had been denied them, and hoped for better days coming.

Bill started Joe in the paper business for himself the very next day, and gave him all the necessary hints and tips for securing trade. Both did very well, and the two lads became bosom friends. In the first days Joe often wanted to tell Bill how really grateful he was for the 'start'; but it was only when Bill proposed their continuing to live and work and share their little profits together that Joe found words in which to express himself, and then he could only say, affectionately placing his arm around the boy's neck: 'You're an all-right chum, Bill. And these words, to him, meant everything in the world.

Each morning the two lads started out together, and began their daily cry of 'Paper, sir? Paper, Miss?' at the doors of New York's busy Grand Central Station.

Now it happened that Joe's father, in the two years of his absence, had accumulated a large sum of money in some newly-worked mines of California. He had also won a contest called 'A Miner's Share,' and this entitled him to the magnificent sum of 5000 dollars. Before this good fortune came, however, and before he had journeyed as far West as California, he met with many unlooked-for reverses in some mines around Colorado. For months he was too discouraged to write home, and, under the influence of his companions none too worthy, he soon forgot that somebody in the East was patiently, hopefully waiting for news. But the news did not come, and in the meantime Mrs. Williams—that was the family name—died. Having a small fortune on hand, and good prospects ahead to look forward to, Mr. Williams made up his mind to return at once to New York to make amends, in person, for his long silence and neglect.

It was a happy man that boarded the train at the Great Western Depot. As the miles and miles and great stretches of land were covered as in a flash, Mr. Williams built beautiful air castles for the future. What dreams he had of what that future would be! He knew he would be readily forgiven, and now his wife, never very strong, might have everything that money could buy. They would return together to the great land of opportunity, and Joe, their only child, would be sent to the best schools, to the university, and educated with the best in the land! What a picture—what a paradise he was going to live in!

But in less than a week—in less than an hour after his train arrived at the great metropolis, Mr. Williams' happy dreams were shattered, and he thought there could not be a man in the world more miserable than himself. He had learned, with sorrow we cannot tell, of his wife's death, and of his boy Joe nobody knew anything.

If money, if perseverance could do anything, Mr. Williams determined that he would find Joe, dead or alive. The thought that Joe could be found, that he might see his son again, at least, was his only consolation. He had no faith in newspaper advertisements, and so he decided that the best plan would be to communicate with police headquarters, and, for the rest, to go himself on his own round of private inquiry and patient search.

His task proved to be discouraging, fruitless, almost hopeless. Three weeks of patient watching and hoping passed, yet no trace of Joe could be found, and it seemed impossible to get on any track that would lead to his finding him. Mr. Williams gave up in absolute despair. Returning to his hotel late one afternoon, tired after a long, almost endless day, he packed his trunk, labelled it for transportation to California, and got his grip in readiness for the trip to the West, which he intended to take on the morrow.

The morrow dawned. After breakfast, Mr. Williams, grip in hand, jumped on a Forty-second street crosstown car, and in a short time the voice of the conductor rang with the cry: 'Grand Central Station! Grand Central!' A glance at his watch, and Mr. Williams noted that it was just ten minutes before train time. He pushed through the standing crowd, and was soon making his way, with long strides, towards the station steps. In the act of pushing one of the glass swinging doors, he came face to face with an eager newsboy, mumbling, as newsboys do, 'Paper, sir, paper, sir? Latest editions, sir—World, Sun, Times, Herald—Paper, sir.'

'Sun—and be quick, boy,' said the man in reply, handing the 'newsy' a shining dime in payment. In an instant the lad placed the paper in his hand. In that instant—oh! who can realise the joy, the wonder, the miracle?—father and son met, gazed into each other's eyes, clasped in a binding embrace, and wept like babes before the hurrying throng.

The return West was postponed for one week, for Mr. Williams had to purchase an outfit, not for one, but for two boys. In his hour of joy Joe did not forget Bill—no, he would never forget him. The happy father learned from his son's lips all that the newsboy had done for his boy—that to him he owed his very life, and in his mind he hesitated not a moment to determine what the lad's reward should be. He would make him a second son, and Bill would be Joe's brother.

It was agreed, to the great delight of Joe, who pictured with his own boyish fancy the blessings of the future, and to the infinite gratitude of Bill, whose dream, whose hope for a school education, was now about to be realised. The boyish dreams came true in fullest measure, and in school and out, under the guidance of their devoted father, they now enjoy the happiest times together in the land of the setting sun.

AN ABSENTEE LANDLORD

A 'smart' tourist asked the Irish driver of his car the name of a bridge in Ireland.

'That's the Devil's Bridge, sorr,' he said.

'And what is that mountain called?' asked the foreigner.

'Tis the Devil's Mountain, so it is, sorr.'

'And the valley?' pursued the fare, with the inquiring mind.