

Our Boys and Girls.

THE EMPTY PLACE.

A homeless Bad Habit went searching one day
For a spot where it snugly could settle and stay;
It hung round Fred's door for three hours by the clock,
But never found courage to step up and knock.

The place was too busy and crowded, you see;
There was really no minute that seemed to be free;
There were lessons and games, there were books to be read,
And no time to be idle from breakfast to bed.

"I might push my way in," thought the Habit, "but then
Every corner is filled; I'd be turned out again.
It's no use to hang round; this is no place for me!
And it went off as downcast, as downcast could be.

But Jim's door stood open, not far down the road;
No crowd was about it, no bustle it showed;
The hall was deserted, the study was bare,
And the Habit stepped in with a satisfied air.

"Ah, here's what I want," it remarked with a grin,
"I can settle in peace, and grow into a sin.
Jim's life is so idle and empty, I see,
That it's just the right home for an inmate like me!"

So it stayed and it grew till it filled the whole place,
And owned Jim in the bargain, and brought him disgrace.
Poor Jim! Other boys, to, should keep a lookout,
For many Bad Habits go searching about!

—Priscilla Leonard, in *Children's Visitor*.

A STORY OF A BOY.

"There never was a boy so tied up? I'm just getting tired of Aunt Susan's strait jacketing." And Tom Noland looked angry as he jerked himself out of a pretty blue coat, which did not look at all like a strait jacket, though skillfully mended rents told of Aunt Susan's care—and Tom's carelessness.

"She don't know anything about a boy," the grumbling tones continued. "She expects him to be a regular pretty pussy. It's Thomas Noland, what carelessness! if a fellow happens to knock over the syrup mug; and 'Oh, Tommie, you heedless boy,' 'cause he drops a few sticks on the floor when he's filling the wood box; and, 'Oh, Tommie! what shall I do with you?' when he gets a little mud on the floor. As if a boy with all he's got on his mind, could be always remembering to wipe his feet. I should think she would be glad to see something to scrub off (she's bound to be always scrubbing). I should think she'd be tired of cleaning, when it would take six pairs of glasses to see that she's made a bit of difference!

"And now I've got to stay in the house because there's a sprinkle of rain! like a girl with the croup!"

Tom rehearsed his trials till he worked himself into such a state of indignation that when, five minutes later, Aunt Susan called, "Supper, Tommie," up the stairway, he growled, "Don't want no supper!" and pulling a book a boy had lent him from his pocket, he settled his elbows on the table, ran his fingers through his hair and commenced to read with such scowling eyes, that it was a wonder he could see the words. Possibly the half dozen doughnuts he had helped himself to had something to do with his present abstinence, though he did not realize it, but felt that going without supper was an act of heroic sacrifice to his independence which would show Aunt Susan he was not a boy to be trifled with.

Well, there was some little excuse for Tom. In the first place he was twelve years old; and when is a boy so thoroughly and unmitigatedly a boy as at that age? Then Aunt Susan did say, "Oh, Tommie!" a great number of times, and when she did not say it, her face wore an expression of martyred resignation which Tom found particularly exasperating.

And then the care of the boy was such a new responsibility to the little old lady, that he was never away from her for an hour that she was not tormented by visions of his being brought home drowned or mangled, so she never willingly let him go out of sight. This restraint Tom strongly resented.

But there is much to be said for Aunt Susan, too. During the twenty years since her husband's death she had lived alone, and in all those years there had been no syrup mug upset, no mud on her floor. No one had moved the little rocking-chair from its particular nook, dispossessed the dignified cat, Professor Grey, of his red cushion, or slammed a door, or kept a meal waiting. And Tom did all these things. Yet, with a sighing farewell to peace she wrote, "Send Thomas to me," in reply to the letter which told that her brother had died, leaving his son entirely orphaned.

Aunt Susan was a sweet old lady, a little querulous, because shaken out of her wonted calm. And really, Tom was a fair sort of a boy, given suitable surroundings. It was a bad case of incompatibility of temper, and Tom sometimes thought seriously of deserting.

One afternoon he rushed in exclaiming: "Look here, Aunt Susan! how's this for a trade?"

"Thomas Noland, take it out, quick! she cried, dropping her knitting.

"Why, aunt, it's not loaded!" and Tom came a step nearer.
"No matter, it's a gun! It'd be dangerous sunk twenty feet under water! Do take it out!" Laughing scornfully, Tom obeyed.

"Now, Thomas," she asked, tremblingly, "what did you pay for that frightful thing?"

"Nothing but my chickens," he answered slowly.

"Oh, Thomas! those fine Brahmas, whose eggs you were to sell?"

"I don't care! I'll make lots more selling the game I kill."

"No, you will not!" she answered decidedly. "You'll carry that gun back and get what you can for it. I won't have it on the place! Likely to go off and kill us both in our beds!"

Tom felt sadly abused as he walked away with his gun, and made up his mind to store it under the barn floor for the present.

"Women don't understand these

things," he said to himself, "but a man needs a weapon of defense."

Perhaps it was the frequent visits Tom paid his gun, aided by the borrowed dime novel, which fanned his spirit of independence, added to the fact that Aunt Susan had been obliged to say, "Oh, Tommie!" with increasing frequency. But the time came when he declared "no fellow of spirit would stand it any longer."

His scheme was sublime in its simplicity. He would walk to the coast (only a matter of a thousand miles) and ship as cabin boy; but if he should see an advantageous opening in some city on the route he would accept that. He would go through fields and woods whenever possible, and live on the game shot. In addition to this great plan he had twenty-three cents in cash.

He made up his bundle while Aunt Susan was busy in the kitchen—his valise stood in the closet, but whoever heard of a boy going to sea without a bundle? Half an hour's exhausting labor produced the following note, to be left for Aunt Susan:

No man will tamely submit to a tyrant. So farwel.

Thomas Addison Noland.

P. S.—Thanks for the doughnuts mittens and things. T. A. N.

Tom had doubts of the propriety of the postscript, as "Robin the Rover" showed no precedent for it; but it was prompted by his sense of justice. He laid the note on Aunt Susan's bureau, then Tom, the gun, and the bundle crept down the lane together.

An hour's walk brought him to the woods; and as the branches closed behind him Tom felt that life had really begun and awaited game. Soon a bird flashed across the open space; his arm shook as he raised the gun; before he could steady it the bird had disappeared.

"I'll do better next time!" he exclaimed as the bird disappeared; "It's a squirrel I want, anyway." Before long a saucy grey back darted up a tree, and raising his plummy tail like a challenging banner, surveyed Tom from a convenient limb. It was a splendid shot. Holding his breath in his eagerness, Tom brought his gun to his shoulder, and tried to pull the trigger; harder and harder he pressed, but it remained immovable; its damp hiding place had stiffened its joints.

Suddenly there was a flash, and to Tom it was as though earth and sky had clashed together.

Meanwhile, at home Aunt Susan was thinking of Tom as she moved about the kitchen, thinking kindly, for the sight of a filled woodbox and a pail of water, brought in unasked, warmed her heart. "He is a kind-hearted little fellow, after all!" she said to herself. "I was going to make custard pie for dinner, but I guess I'll make apple instead. Tom likes that better, apple with plenty of cinnamon."

The pie stood cooling, filling the room with spicy odor, while Aunt Susan looked anxiously down the road. She was watching for an active, boyish figure, and scarcely noticed a wagon moving slowly toward the house, till it stopped, and a neighbor lifted carefully out a limp, unconscious figure.

"I found him in Smith's woods," he explained; "he'd been fooling with an old gun and it burst—No, no, Aunt Susan. Steady now; don't give way! He ain't killed. Boys have as many lives as cats, but his arm's hurt pretty bad. Lucky I found him before he lost more blood! I'll go for the doctor!"

Poor Tom's arm was badly torn, and he had lost a finger. The fever brought

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AND

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on by his wound was severe and persistent. They were anxious days to Aunt Susan, and she longed with aching heart to see again mud tracks and to hear a door slam.

One night Tom seemed to be sleeping quietly and, with strengthening hope she knelt beside him, praying in broken words for "my boy." A weak little hand slipped into hers, and looking up she saw Tom's hollow eyes brimming with tears looking into hers.

"You've been awful good, Aunt Susan," he whispered, "and I'll be first rate to you when I get well, you'll see."

Tom's recovery was rapid. Aunt Susan was a wonderful cook, and he had a convalescing boy's appetite.

They had many talks during those quiet days, and Tom grew to know and love Aunt Susan, and she felt that she had begun to really understand a boy—she had commenced to love him when she made that apple pie.

All this happened five years ago. Now Tom is a fine looking youth of seventeen, and the possessor of a handsome gun given by Aunt Susan on his fifteenth birthday to "my trustworthy boy."

"That finger I lost is the most useful member I have," he remarked one day, with a merry twinkle in his blue eyes. "It has done the most toward making a man of me."

Aunt Susan answered with a smile. She and Tom understood each other.—*Presbyterian Banner*.

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