

**JAN OF THE
WINDMILL**

***JAN OF THE
WINDMILL***

by

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CHAPTER I

**STORM WITHOUT
AND WITHIN**

THE WINDMILLER'S WIFE—STRANGERS—TEN
SHILLINGS A WEEK—THE LITTLE JAN

STORM without and within!

So the windmiller might have said, if he had been in the habit of putting his thoughts into an epigrammatic form, as a groan from his wife and a growl of thunder broke simultaneously upon his ear, whilst the rain fell scarcely faster than her tears.

It was far from mending matters that both storms were equally unexpected. For eight full years the miller's wife had been the meekest of women. If there was a firm (and yet, as he flattered himself, a just) husband in all the dreary straggling district, the miller was that man. And he always did justice to his wife's good qualities—at least to her good quality of submissiveness—and would, till lately, have upheld her before anyone as a model of domestic obedience. From the day when he brought home his bride, tall, pretty, and perpetually smiling, to the tall old mill and the ugly old mother

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who never smiled at all, there had been but one will in the household—at any rate, after the old woman's death—for during her lifetime her stern son paid her such deference that it was a moot point, perhaps, which of them really ruled. Between them, however, the young wife was moulded to a nicety, and her voice gained no more weight in the counsels of the windmill when the harsh tones of the mother-in-law were silenced for ever.

The miller was one of those good souls who live by the light of a few small shrewdities (often proverbial), and pique themselves on sticking to them to such a point, as if it were the greater virtue to abide by a narrow rule the less it applied. The kernel of his domestic theory was, 'Never yield, and you never will have to,' and to this he was proud of having stuck against all temptations from a real, though hard affection for his own; and now, after working so smoothly for eight years, had it come to this?

The miller scratched his head, and looked at his wife almost with amazement. She moaned though he bade her be silent, she wept in spite of words which had hitherto been an effectual styptic to her tears, and she met the commonplaces of his common sense with such wild, miserable laughter that he shuddered as he heard her.

Weakness in human beings is like the strength of beasts, a power of which, fortunately, they are not always conscious. Unless positively brutal, you cannot well beat a sickly woman for wailing and weeping; and

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if she will not cease for any lesser consideration, there seems nothing for an unbending husband to do but to leave her to herself.

This the miller had to do, anyhow. For he could only spare a moment's attention to her now and then, since the mill required all his care.

In a coat and hat of painted canvas, he had been in and out ever since the storm began. Now directing the two men who were working within, now struggling along the stage that ran outside the windmill, at no small risk of being fairly blown away.

He had reefed the sails twice already in the teeth of the blinding rain. But he did well to be careful. For it was in such a storm as this, five years ago 'come Michaelmas,' that the worst of windmill calamities had befallen him—the sails had been torn off his mill and dashed into a hundred fragments upon the ground. And such a mishap to a seventy feet tower mill means—as windmillers well know—not only a stoppage of trade, but an expense of two hundred pounds for the new sails.

Many a sack of grist which should have come to him had gone down to the watermill in the valley before the new sails were at work; and the huge debt incurred to pay for them was not fairly wiped out yet. That catastrophe had kept the windmiller a poor man for five years, and it gave him a nervous dread of storms.

And talking of storms, here was another unreasonable thing. The morning sky had been (like the miller's wedded life) without a cloud. The day had been

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sultry, for the time of year unseasonably so. And, just when the miller most grudged an idle day, when times were hard, when he was in debt—for some small matters, as well as the sail business—and when, for the first time in his life, he felt almost afraid of his own hearthstone, and would fain have been busy at his trade, not a breath of wind had there been to turn the sails of the mill. Not a waft to cool his perplexed forehead, not breeze enough to stir the short grass that glared for miles over country flat enough to mock him with the fullest possible view of the cloudless sky. Then towards evening, a few grey flocks had stolen up from the horizon like thieves in the dusk, and a mighty host of clouds had followed them; and when the wind did come, it came in no moderate measure, but brought this awful storm upon its wings, which now raged as if all the powers of mischief had got loose, and were bent on turning everything topsy-turvy indoors and out.

What made the winds and clouds so perverse, the clerk of the weather best knows, but there was a reason for the unreasonableness of the windmiller's wife.

She had lost her child, her youngest-born, and therefore, at present, her best-beloved. This girl-babe was the sixth of the windmiller and his wife's children, the last that GOD gave them, and the first that it had pleased Him to take away.

The mother had been weak herself at the time that the baby fell ill, and unusually ill-fitted to bear a heavy blow. Then her watchful eyes had seen symptoms of ailing in the child long before the windmiller's good

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sense would allow a fuss to be made, and expense to be incurred about a little peevishness up or down. And it was some words muttered by the doctor when he did come, about not having been sent for soon enough, which were now doing as much as anything to drive the poor woman frantic. They struck a blow, too, at her blind belief in the miller's invariable wisdom. If he had but listened to her in this matter, were it only for love's sake! There was something, she thought, in what that woman had said who came to help her with the last offices—the miller discouraged “neighbours,” but this was a matter of decency—that it was as foolish for a man to have the say over babies and housework, as it would be for his wife to want her word in the workshop or the mill.

Perhaps a state of subjection for grown-up people does not tend to make them reasonable, especially in their indignations. The windmiller's wife dared not, for her life, have told him in so many words that she thought it would be for their joint benefit if he would give a little more consideration to her wishes and opinions; but from this suppressed idea came many sharp and peevish words at this time, which, apart from their true source, were quite as unreasonable and perverse as the miller held them to be. Nor is being completely under the control of another self-control. It may be doubted if it can even do much to teach it. The thread of her passive condition having been, for the time, broken by grief, the bereaved mother moaned and wailed, and rocked herself, and beat her breast, and turned fiercely upon all interference, like some poor beast in anguish.

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She had clung to her children with an almost morbid tenderness, in proportion as she found her worthy husband stern and cold. A hard husband sometimes makes a soft mother, and it is perhaps upon the baby of the family that her repressed affections out-pour themselves most fully. It was so in this case, at any rate. And the little one had that unearthly beauty which is seen, or imagined, about children who die young. And the poor woman had suffered and striven so for it, to have it and to keep it. The more critical grew its illness, the intenser grew her strength and resolution by watchfulness, by every means her instinct and experience could suggest, to fight and win the battle against death. And when all was vain, the maddening thought tortured her that it might have been saved.

The miller had made a mistake, and it was a pity that he made another on the top of it, with the best intentions. He hurried on the funeral, hoping that when “all was over” the mother would “settle down.”

But it was this crowning insult to her agony, the shortening of the too brief time when she could watch by all that remained to her of her child, which drove her completely wild.

She reproached him now, plainly and bitterly enough. She would neither listen to reason nor obey; and when—with more truth than taste—he observed that other people lost children, and that they had plenty left, she laughed in his face that wild laugh which drove him back to the mill and to the storm.

How it raged! The miller’s wife was an uneducated,

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commonplace woman enough, but, in the excited state of her nervous system, she was as sensible as any poet of a kind of comforting harmony in the wild sounds without; though at another time they would have frightened her.

They did not disturb the children, who were in bed. Four in the old press-bed in the corner, and one in a battered crib, and one in the narrow bed over which the coverlet was not yet green.

The day's work was over for her, though it was only just beginning for the miller, and the mother had nothing to do but weep, and her tears fell and fell, and the rain poured and poured. That last outburst had somewhat relieved her, and she almost wished her husband would come back, as a flash of lightning dazzled her eyes, and the thunder rattled round the old mill, as if the sails had broken up again, and were falling upon the roof of the round-house. All her senses were acute to-night, and she listened for the miller's footsteps, and so listening, in the lull after the thunder, she heard another sound. Wheels upon the road.

A pang shot through her heart. Thus had the doctor's gig sounded the night he came—alas, too late! How long and how intensely she had listened for that! She first heard it just beyond the milestone. This one must be a good bit on this side of it; up the hill, in fact. She could not help listening. It was so like, so terribly like! Now it spun along the level ground. Ah, the doctor had not hurried so! Now it was at the mill, at the door, and—it stopped.

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The miller's wife rose to run out, she hardly knew why. But in a moment she checked herself, and went back to her seat.

"I be crazed, surely," said the poor woman, sitting down again. "There be more gigs than one in the world, and folk often stops to ask their way of the maester."

These travellers were a long time about the putting of such a simple question, especially as the night was not a pleasant one to linger out in. The murmur of voices too which the woman overheard, betokened a close conversation, in which the familiar drawl of the windmiller's dialect blended audibly with that kind of clean-clipt speaking peculiar to gentlefolk.

"He've been talking to maester 's five minute an' more," muttered the miller's wife. "What can 'e want with un?" The talking ceased as she spoke, and the windmiller appeared, followed by a woman carrying a young baby in her arms.

He was a ruddy man for his age at any time, but there was an extra flush on his cheeks just now, and some excitement in his manner, making him look as his wife was not wont to see him more than once a year, after the Foresters' dinner at the Heart of Oak. There was a difference, too. A little too much drink made the windmiller peevish and pompous, but just now he spoke in a kindly, almost conciliating tone.

"See missus! Let this good lady dry herself a bit, and get warm, and the little un too."

A woman—ill favoured, though there was no

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positive fault to be found with her features, except that the upper lip was long and cleft, and the lower one very large—came forward with the child, and began to take off its wraps, and the miller's wife, giving her face a hasty wipe, went hospitably to help her.

“Tst! tst! little love!” she cried, gulping down a sob, due to her own sad memories, and moving the cloak more tenderly than the woman in whose arms the child lay. “What a pair of dark eyes, then! Is't a boy or girl, m'm?”

“A boy,” said a voice from the door, and the miller's wife, with a suppressed shriek of timidity, became aware of a man whose entrance she had not perceived, and to whom she dropped a hasty curtsy.

He was a man slightly above the middle height, whose slenderness made him seem taller. An old cloak, intended as much to disguise as to protect him, did not quite conceal a faultlessness of costume beneath it, after the fashion of the day. Waistcoats of three kinds, one within the other, a frilled shirt, and a well-adjusted stock, were to be seen, though he held the ends of the old cloak tightly across him, as the wind would have caught them in the doorway. He wore a countryman's hat, which seemed to suit him as little as the cloak, and from beneath the brim his dark eyes glared with a restless, dissatisfied look, and were so dark and so fierce and bright, that one could hardly see any other details of his face, unless it were his smooth chin, which, either from habit or from the stiffness of his stock, he carried strangely up in the air.

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“Indeed, sir,” said the windmiller’s wife, curtsying and setting a chair, with her eyes wandering back by a kind of fascination to those of the stranger; “be pleased to take a seat, sir.”

The stranger sat down for a moment, and then stood up again. Then he seemed to remember that he still wore his hat, and removed it, holding it stiffly before him in his gloved hands. This displayed a high, narrow head, on which the natural hair was worn short and without parting, and a face which, though worn, was not old. And for no definable reason, an impression stole over the windmiller’s wife that he, like her husband, had some wish to conciliate, which in his case struggled hard with a very different kind of feeling, more natural to him.

Then he took out a watch, of what would now be called the old turnip shape, and said impatiently to the miller, “Our time is short, my good man.”

“To be sure, sir,” said the windmiller. “Missus! a word with you here.” And he led the way into the round-house, where his wife followed, wondering. Her wonder was not lessened when he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and with flushed cheek and a tone of excitement that once more recalled the Foresters’ annual meeting, said, “We’ve had some sore times, missus, of late, but good luck have come our way to-night.”

“And how then, maester?” faltered his wife.

“That child,” said the windmiller, turning his broad thumb expressively towards the inner room, “belongs

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to folk that want to get a home for un, and can afford to pay for un, too. And the place being healthy and out of the way, and having heard of our trouble, and you just bereaved of a little un——”

“No! no! no!” shrieked the poor mother, who now understood all. “I *couldn't*, maester, 'Tis impossible, I could not. Oh dear! oh dear! isn't it bad enough to lose the sweetest child that ever saw light, without taking in an outcast to fill that dear angel's place? Oh dear! oh dear!”

“And we behindhand in more quarters than one,” continued the miller, prudently ignoring his wife's tears and remonstrances, “and a dear season coming on, and an uncertain trade that keeps a man idle by days together, and here's ten shillings a week dropped into our laps, so to speak. Ten shillings a week regular and sartin. No less now, and no more hereafter, the governor said. Them were his words.”

“What's ten shilling a week to me, and my child dead and gone?” moaned the mother, in reply.

“*What's ten shilling a week to you?*” cried the wind-miller, who was fairly exasperated, in tones so loud that they were audible in the dwelling-room, where the stranger, standing by the three-legged table, stroked his lips twice or thrice with his hand, as if to smooth out a cynical smile which strove to disturb their decorous and somewhat haughty compression. “What's ten shilling a week to you? Why, it's food to you, and drink to you, and firing to you, and boots for the children's feet. Look here, my woman. You've had a sore affliction, but that's

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not to say you're to throw good luck in the dirt for a whimsey. This matter's settled."

And the miller strode back into the inner room, whilst his wife sat upon a sack of barley wringing her hands, and moaning, "I couldn't do my duty by un, maester, I couldn't do my duty by un."

This she repeated at intervals, with her apron over her face, as before; and then, suddenly aware that her husband had left her, she hurried into the inner room to plead her own cause. It was too late. The strangers had gone. The miller was not there, and the baby lay on the end of the press bedstead, wailing as bitterly as the mother herself.

It had been placed there, with a big bundle of clothes by it, before the miller came back, and he had found it so. He found the stranger too, with his hat on his head, and his cloak fastened, glancing from time to time at the child, and then withdrawing his glance hastily, and looking forcedly round at the meagre furnishing of the miller's room, and then back at the little bundle on the bed, and away again. The woman stood with her back to the press-bed, her striped shawl drawn tightly round her, and her hands folded together as closely as her long lip pressed the heavy one below.

"Is it settled?" asked the man.

"It is, sir," said the miller. "You'll excuse my missus being as she is, but it's fretting for the child we've a lost——"

"I understand, I understand," said the stranger hastily.



"Is it settled?" asked the man.

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He was pulling back the rings of a silk netted purse, which he had drawn mechanically from his pocket, and which, from some sudden start of his, fell chinking on to the floor. Whatever the thought was which startled him, he thought it so sharply that he looked up in fear that he had said it aloud. But he had not spoken, and the miller had no other expression than that of an eager satisfaction on his face as the stranger counted out the gold by the flaring light of the tallow candle.

“A quarter’s pay in advance,” he said briefly. “It will be paid quarterly, you understand.” After which, and checking himself in a look towards the child, he went out, followed by the woman.

In the round-house he paused, however, and looked back into the meagre, dimly lighted room, where the little bundle upon the bed lay weeping. For a moment, a storm of irresolution seemed to seize him, and then muttering, “It can’t be helped for the present, it can’t be helped”—he hurried towards the vehicle, in the back seat of which the woman was already seated.

The driver touched his hat to him as he approached, and turned the cushion, which he had been protecting from the rain. The stranger stumbled over the cloak as he got in, and cursing the step, bade the man drive like something which had no connection with driving. But as they turned, the windmiller ran out and after them.

“Stop, sir!” he cried.

“Well, what now?” said the stranger sharply, as the horse was pulled back on its haunches.

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“Is it named?” gasped the miller.

“Oh, yes, all that sort of thing,” was the impatient reply.

“And what name?” asked the miller.

“Jan, J, A, N,” said the stranger, shouting against the blustering wind.

“And—and—the other name?” said the windmiller, who was now standing close to the stranger’s ear.

“What is yours?” he asked, with a sharp look of his dark eyes.

“Lake—Abel,” said the windmiller.

“It is his also, henceforth,” said the stranger, waving his hand, as if to close the subject—“Jan Lake. Drive on, will you?”

The horse started forward, and they whirled away down the wet, grey road. And before the miller had regained his mill, the carriage was a distant speck upon the storm.

CHAPTER II

PASSING OF THE STORM

THE MILLER'S CALCULATIONS—HIS HOPES
AND FEARS—THE NURSE-BOY—CALM

THE windmiller went back to his work. He had risked something over this business in leaving the mill in the hands of others, even for so short a time.

Then the storm abated somewhat. The wind went round, and blew with less violence a fine steady breeze. The miller began to think of going into the dwelling-room for a bit of supper to carry him through his night's work. And yet he lingered about returning to his wife in her present mood.

He stuck the sharp point of his windmiller's candlestick¹ into a sack that stood near, and drawing up a yellow canvas "sample bag"—which served him as a purse—from the depths of his pocket, he began to count the coins by the light of the candle.

¹Windmillers' candlesticks are flat candlesticks made of iron, with a long handle on one side and a sharp spike on the other, by which they can be stuck into the wall or into a sack of grain, or anywhere that may be convenient. Each man who works in the mill has a candlestick, and one is always kept alight and stationary on the basement floor.

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He counted them over several times with increasing satisfaction, and made several slow but sure calculations as to the sum of ten shillings a week by the month, the quarter, the half, and the whole year. He then began another set of calculations of a kind less pleasant, especially to an honest man—his debts.

“There’s a good bit to the doctor for both times,” he murmured; “and there’s the coffin, and something at the Heart of Oak for the bearers, and a couple of bottles of red wine there, too, for the missus, when she were so bad. And both the boys had new shoes to follow in—she would have it they should follow—” and so on, and so on, the windmill ran up the list of his petty debts, and saw his way to paying them. Then he put the money back into the sample bag, and folded it very neatly, and stowed it away. And then he drew near the inner door and peeped into the room.

His poor wife seemed to be in no better case than before. She sat on the old rocking-chair, swinging backwards and forwards, and beating her hands upon her knees in silence, and making no movement to comfort the wailing little creature on the bed.

For the first time there came upon the windmill a sense of the fact that it is an uncertain and a rather dangerous game to drive a desperate woman into a corner. His missus was as soft-hearted a soul as ever lived, and for her to sit unmoved by the weeping of a neglected child was a proof that something was very far wrong indeed. One or two nasty stories of what tender-hearted women had done when “crazed” by

grief haunted him. The gold seemed to grow hot at the bottom of his pocket.

He wished he had got at the stranger's name and address, in case it should be desirable to annul the bargain. He wished the missus would cry again—that silence was worse than anything. He wished that it did not just happen to come into his head that her grandmother went “melancholy mad” when she was left a young widow, and that she had had an uncle in business who died of softening of the brain.

He wished she would move across the room and take up the child, with an intensity that almost amounted to prayer. And in the votive spirit which generally comes with such moments, he mentally resolved that if his missus would but “take to” the infant, he would humour her on all other points just now to the best of his power.

A strange fulfilment often treads on the heels of such vows. At this moment the wailing of the baby disturbed the miller's eldest son as he lay in the press-bed. He was only seven years old, but he had been nurse-boy to his dead sister during the brief period of her health—the more exclusively so, that the miller's wife was then weakly—and had watched by her sick cradle with a grief scarcely less than that of the mother. He now crept out and down the coverlet to the wailing heap of clothes, with a bright, puzzled look on his chubby face.

“Mother,” he said, “mother! Is the little un come back?”

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“No, no!” she cried, “that’s not our’n. It’s—it’s another one.”

“Have the Lord sent us another?” said the boy, lifting the peak of the little hood from the baby’s eye, into which it was hanging, and then fairly gathering the tiny creature, by a great effort, into his arms, with the daring of a child accustomed to playing nurse to one nearly as heavy as himself. “I do be glad of that, mother. The Lord sent the other one in the night, too, mother; that night we slept in the round-house. Do ’ee mind? Whishty, whishty, love! Eh, mother, what eyes! Whishty, whishty, then! *I’m* seeing to thee, I am.”

There was something like a sob in the miller’s own throat, but his wife rose, and, running to the bed, fell on her knees, and with such a burst of weeping as is the thaw of bitter grief, gathered her eldest child and the little outcast together to her bosom.

At this moment another head was poked up from the bedclothes, and the second child began to say its say, hoping, perhaps, thereby to get a share of attention and kisses as well as the other.

“I see’d a lady and genle’m,” it broke forth, “and was feared of un. They was going out of doors. The genle’m looked back at us, but the lady went right on. I didn’t see her face.”

Matters were now in a domestic and straightforward condition, and the windmiller no longer hesitated to come in. But he was less disposed to a hard and triumphant self-satisfaction than was common with

him when his will ended well. An unsuccessful career had, indeed, something to do with the hardness of his nature, and in this flush of prosperity he felt softened, and resolved inwardly to "let the missus take her time," and come back to her ordinary condition without interference.

"Shall un have a bit of supper, missus?" was his cheerful greeting on coming in. "But take your time," he added, seeing her busy with the baby, "take your time."

By-and-by the nurse-boy took the child, and the woman bustled about the supper. She was still but half reconciled, and slapped the plates on to the table with a very uncommon irritability.

The windmiller ate a hearty supper, and washed it well down with home-made ale, under the satisfactory feeling that he could pay for more when he wanted it. And as he began to plug his pipe with tobacco, and his wife rocked the newcomer at her breast, he said thoughtfully,

"Do 'ee think, missus, that woman 'ud be the mother of un?"

"Mother!" cried his wife scornfully, "she've never been a mother, maester; of this nor any other one. To see her handle it was enough for me. The boy himself could see she never so much as looked back at un. To bring an infant out a night like this too, and leave it with strangers. Mother, indeed, says he!"

"Take your time, missus, take your time!" murmured

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the miller in his head. He did not speak aloud: he only puffed his pipe.

“Do you suppose the genle’m be the father, missus?” he suggested, as he rose to go back to his work.

“Maybe,” said his wife briefly; “I can’t speak one way or another to the feelings of men-folk.”

This blow was hit straight out, but the windmiller forbore reply. He was not altogether ill pleased by it, for the woman’s unwonted peevishness broke down in new tears over the child, whom she bore away to bed, pouring forth over it half inarticulate indignation against its unnatural parents.

“She ’ve a soft heart, have the missus,” said the windmiller thoughtfully, as he went to the outer door. “I’m in doubts if she won’t take to it more than her own yet. But she shall have her own time.”

The storm had passed. The wolds lay glistening and dreary under a watery sky, but all was still. The windmiller looked upwards mechanically. To be weatherwise was part of his trade. But his thoughts were not in the clouds to-night. He brought the sample bag, without thinking of it, to the surface of his pocket, and dropped it slowly back again, murmuring, “ten shillin’ a week.”

And as he turned again to his night’s work he added, with a nod of complete conviction, “It’ll more’n keep *he*.”

CHAPTER III

**GENTRY BORN,
MILLER BORN**

THE WINDMILLER'S WORDS COME TRUE—
THE RED SHAWL—IN THE CLOUDS—NURSING
VERSUS PIG-MINDING—THE ROUND-HOUSE—
THE MILLER'S THUMB

STRANGE to say, the windmillers' idea came true in time—the foster-child was the favourite. He was the youngest of the family, for the mother had no more children. This goes for something.

Then, when she had once got over her repugnance to adopting him, he did do much to heal the old grief, and to fill the empty place in her heart as well as in the cradle.

He was a frail, fretful little creature, with a very red face just fading into yellow, about as much golden down on his little pate as would furnish a moth with plumage, and eyes like sloeberries. It was fortunate rather than otherwise that he was so ailing for some weeks that the good wife's anxieties came over again, and in the triumph of being this time successful, much of the bitterness of the old loss passed away.

GENTRY BORN, MILLER BORN

In a month's time he looked healthy, if not absolutely handsome. The windmill's wife, indeed, protested that he was lovely, and she never wearied of marvelling at the unnatural conduct of those who had found it in their hearts to intrust so sweet a child to the care of strangers; though it must be confessed that nothing would have pleased her less than the arrival of two doting and conscientious parents to reclaim him.

Indeed, pity had much to do with the large measure of love that she gave to the deserted child. A meaner sentiment, too, was not quite without its influence in the predominance which he gradually gained over his foster brothers and sisters. There was little enough to be proud of in all that could be guessed as to his parentage (the windmill knew nothing), but there was scope for any amount of fancy; and if the child displayed any better manners or talents than the other children, Mrs. Lake would purse her lips, and say, with a somewhat shabby pride,

"Anybody may see 'tis gentry born."

"I've been thinking," said the windmill one day, "that if that there woman weren't the mother, 'tis likely the mother's dead."

"'Tis likely, too," said his wife, and her kindness abounded the more towards the motherless child.

Little Abel was nurse-boy to it, as he had been to his sister. Not much more than a baby himself, he would wrap an old shawl round the baby who was quite a baby, stagger carefully out at the door, and drop dexterously—

baby uppermost—on to the short dry grass that lay for miles about the mill.

The shawl was a special shawl, though old. It was red, and the bright colour seemed to take the child's fancy; he was never so good as when playing upon the gay old rag. His black eyes would sparkle, and his tiny fingers clutch at it, when the mother put it about him as he swayed in Abel's courageous grasp. And then Abel would spread it for him, like an Eastern prayer carpet, under the shadow of the old mill.

Little need had he of any medicine, when the fresh strong air that blew about the downs was filling his little lungs for most of the day. Little did he want toys, as he lay on his red shawl gazing upwards hour by hour, with Abel to point out every change in their vast field of view.

It is a part of a windmiller's trade to study the heavens, and Abel may have inherited a taste for looking skywards. Then, on these great open downs there is so much sky to be seen, you can hardly help seeing it, and there is not much else to look at. Had they lived in a village street, or even a lane, Abel and his charge might have taken to other amusements—to games, to grubbing in hedges, or amid the endless treasures of ditches. But as it was they lay hour after hour and looked at the sky, as at an open picture-book with ever-changing leaves.

“Look 'ee here!” the nurse-boy would cry. “See to the crows, the pretty black crows! Eh, there be a lapwing! Lap-py, lap-py, lap-py, there he go! Janny catch un!”



The shawl was a special shawl, though old.

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And the baby would stretch his arms responsive to Abel's expressive signs, and cry aloud for the vanishing bird.

If no living creature crossed the ether, there were the clouds. Sometimes a long triangular mass of small white fleecy clouds would stretch across half the heavens, having its shortest side upon the horizon, and its point at the zenith, where one white fleece seemed to be leading a gradually widening flock across the sky.

"See then!" the nurse-boy would cry. "See to the pretty sheep up yonder! Janny, mind un! So! So!"

And if some small grey scud, floating lower, ran past the far away cirrus, Abel would add with a quaint seriousness, "'Tis the sheep-dog. How he runs then! Bow, wow!"

At sunset such a flock wore golden fleeces, and to them and to the crimson hues about them, the little Jan stretched his fingers, and crowed as if he would have clutched the western sky as he clutched his own red shawl.

But Abel was better pleased when, in the dusk, the flock became dark grey.

"They be Master Salter's pigs now," said he. For pigs in Abel's native place were both plentiful and black; and he had herded Master Salter's flock (five and twenty black, and three spotted) for a whole month before his services were required as nurse-boy to his sister.

But for the coming of the new baby, he would probably have gone back to the pigs. And he preferred

babies. A baby demands attention as well as a herd of pigs, but you can get it home. It does not run off in twenty-eight different directions, just when you think you have safely turned the corner into the village.

Master Salter's swine suffered neglect at the hands of several successors to the office Abel had held, and Master Salter—whilst alluding to these in indignant terms as “young varments,” “gallus birds,” and so forth—was pleased to express his regret that the gentle and trustworthy Abel had given up pig-minding for nursing.

The pigs' loss was the baby's gain. No tenderer or more careful nurse could the little Jan have had. And he throve apace.

The windmiller took more notice of him than he had been wont to do of his own children in their babyhood. He had never been a playful or indulgent father, but he now watched with considerable interest the child who, all unconsciously, was bringing in so much “grist to the mill.”

When the weather was not fine enough for them to be out of doors, Abel would play with his charge in the round-house, and the windmiller never drove him out of the mill, as at one time he would have done. Now and then, too, he would pat the little Jan's head, and bestow a word of praise on his careful guardian.

It may be well, by-the-bye, to explain what a round-house is. Some of the brick or tower mills widen gradually and evenly to the base. Others widen abruptly at the lowest story, which stands out all round at the

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bottom of the mill, and has a roof running all round too. The projection is, in fact, an additional passage, encircling the bottom story of the windmill. It is the round-house. If you take a pill-box to represent the basement floor of a tower-mill, and then put another pill-box two or three sizes larger over it, you have got the circular passage, between the two boxes, and have added a round-house to the mill. The round-house is commonly used as a kind of store-room.

Abel Lake's windmill had no separate dwelling-house. His grandfather had built the windmill, and even his father had left it to the son to add a dwelling-house, when he should perhaps have extended his resources by a bit of farming or some other business, such as windmillers often add to their trade proper. But that calamity of the broken sails had left Abel Lake no power for further outlay for many years, and he had to be content to live in the mill.

The dwelling-room was the inner part of the basement floor. Near the door which led from this into the round-house was the ladder leading to the next story, and close by that the opening through which the sacks of grain were drawn up above. The story above the basement held the mill-stones and the "smutting" machine, for cleaning dirty wheat. The next above that held the dressing machine, in which the bran was separated from the flour. In the next above that were the corn-bins. To the next above that the grain was drawn up from the basement in the first instance. The top story of all held the machinery connected with the turning

of the sails. Ladders led from story to story, and each room had two windows on opposite sides of the mill.

Use is second nature, and all the sounds which haunt a windmill were soon as familiar and as pleasant to the little Jan as if he had been born a windmill's son. Through many a windy night he slept as soundly as a sailor in a breeze which might disturb the nerves of a landlubber. And when the north wind blew keen and steadily, and the chains jangled as the sacks of grist went upwards, and the mill-stones ground their monotonous music above his head, these sounds were only as a lullaby to his slumbers, and disturbed him no more than they troubled his foster-mother, to whom the revolving stones ground out a homely and welcome measure: "Dai-ly bread, dai-ly bread, dai-ly bread."

For another sign of his being a true child of the mill, his nurse Abel anxiously watched.

Though Abel preferred nursing to pig-minding, he had a higher ambition yet, which was to begin his career as a windmill. It was not likely that he could be of use to his father for a year or two, and the fact that he was of very great use to his mother naturally tended to delay his promotion to the mill.

Mrs. Lake was never allowed to say no to her husband, and she seemed to be unable, and was certainly unwilling, to say it to her children. Happily, her eldest child was of so sweet and docile a temper that spoiling did him little harm; but even with him her inability to say no got the mother into difficulties. She was obliged

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to invent excuses to “fub off,” when she could neither consent nor refuse.

So, when Abel used to cling about her crying, “Mother dear, when’ll I be put t’ help father in the mill? Do ’ee ask un to let me come in now! I be able to sweep ’s well as Gearge. I sweeps the room for thee”—she had not the heart or the courage to say, “I want thee, and thy father doesn’t,” but she would take the boy’s hand tenderly in hers, and making believe to examine his thumbs with a purpose, would reply, “Wait a bit, love. Thee’s a sprack boy, and a good un, but thee’s not rightly got the miller’s thumb.”

And thus it came about that Abel was for ever sifting bits of flour through his finger and thumb, to obtain the required flatness and delicacy which marks the latter in a miller born; and playing lovingly with little Jan on the floor of the round-house, he would pass some through the baby’s hands also, crying,

“Sift un, Janny! sift un! Thee’s a miller’s lad, and thee must have a miller’s thumb.”

CHAPTER IV

VAIR AND VOOLISH

BLACK AS SLANS—VAIR AND VOOLISH—THE
MILLER AND HIS MAN

IT was a great and important time to Abel when Jan learned to walk, but as he was neither precocious nor behindhand in this respect, his biographer may be pardoned for not dwelling on it at any length.

He had a charming, demure little face, chiefly differing from the faces of the other children of the district by an overwhelming superiority in the matter of forehead.

Mrs. Lake had had great hopes that he would differ in another respect also.

Most of the children of the neighbourhood were fair. Not fair as so many North-country children are, with locks of differing but equally brilliant shades of gold, auburn, red, and bronze; but white-headed, and often white-faced, with white-lashed inexpressive eyes, as if they had been bleaching through several generations.

Now, when the dark bright eyes of the little Jan first came to be of tender interest with Mrs. Lake, she fully

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hoped, and constantly prophesied, that he would be “as black as a rook;” a style of complexion to which she gave a distinct preference, though the miller was fair by nature as well as white by trade. Jan’s eyes seemed conclusive.

“Black as slans they be,” said his foster-mother. And slans meant sloeberries where Mrs. Lake was born.

An old local saying had something perhaps to do with her views:

“Lang and lazy,
Black and proud;
Vair and voolish,
Little and loud.”

“Fair and foolish” youngsters certainly abounded in the neighbourhood to an extent which justified a wish for a change.

As to pride, meek Mrs. Lake was far from regarding it as a failing in those who had anything to be proud of, such as black hair and a possible connection with the gentry. And fate having denied to her any chance of being proud or aggressive on her own account, she derived a curious sort of secondhand satisfaction from seeing these qualities in those who belonged to her. It did to some extent console her for the miller’s roughness to herself, to hear him rating George. And she got a sort of reflected dignity out of being able to say, “My maester’s a man as will have his way.”

But her hopes were not realized. That yellow into which the beefsteak stage of Jan’s infant complexion had faded was not destined to deepen into gipsy hues.

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It gave place to the tints of the China rose, and all the wind and sunshine on the downs could not tan, though they sometimes burnt, his cheeks. The hair on his little head became more abundant, but it kept its golden hue. His eyes remained dark—a curious mixture; for as to hair and complexion he was irredeemably fair.

The mill had at least one “vair and voolish” inmate, by common account, though by his own (given in confidence to intimate friends) he was “not zuch a vool as he looked.”

This was George Sannel, the miller’s man.

Master Lake had had a second hand in to help on that stormy night when Jan made his first appearance at the mill; but as a rule he only kept one man, whom he hired for a year at a time, at the mop or hiring fair held yearly in the next town.

George, or Gearge as he was commonly called, had been more than two years in the windmill, and was looked upon in all respects as “one of the family.” He slept on a truckle-bed in the round-house, which, though of average size, would not permit him to stretch his legs too recklessly without exposing his feet to the cold.

For “Gearge” was six feet one and three-quarters in his stockings.

He had a face in some respects like a big baby’s. He had a turn-up nose, large smooth cheeks, a particularly innocent expression, a forehead hardly worth naming, small dull eyes, with a tendency to inflammation of the

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lids, which may possibly have hindered the lashes from growing, and a mouth which was generally open, if he were neither eating nor sucking a “bennet.” When this countenance was bathed in flour, it might be an open question whether it were improved or no. It certainly looked both “vairer,” and more “voolish.”

There is some evidence to show that he was “lazy,” as well as “lang,” and yet he and Master Lake contrived to pull on together.

Either because his character was as childlike as his face, and because—if stupid and slothful by nature—he was also of so submissive, susceptible, and willing a temper that he disarmed the justest wrath; or because he was, as he said, not such a fool as he looked, and had in his own lubberly way taken the measure of the masterful windmiller to a nicety, George’s most flagrant acts of neglect had never yet secured his dismissal.

Indeed, it really is difficult to realize that any one who is lavish of willingness by word can wilfully and culpably fail in deed.

“I be a uncommon vool, maester, sartinly,” blubbered George on one occasion when the miller was on the point of turning him off, as a preliminary step on the road to the “gallus,” which Master Lake expressed his belief that he was “sartin sure to come to.”

And as he spoke, George made dismal daubs on his befloured face with his sleeve, as he rubbed his eyes with his arm from elbow to wrist.

“Sech a governor as you be, too!” he continued.

“Poor mother! she allus said I should come to no good, such a gawney as I be! No more I shouldn’t, but for you, Master Lake, akeeping of me on. Give un another chance, sir, do `ee ! I be mortal stoopid, sir, but I’d work my fingers to the bwoan for the likes of you, Master Lake!”

George stayed on, and though the very next time the windmiller was absent his “voolish” assistant did not get so much as a toll-dish of corn ground to flour, he was so full of penitence and promises that he weathered that tempest and many a succeeding one.

On that very eventful night of the storm, and of Jan’s arrival, George’s neglect had risked a recurrence of the sail catastrophe. At least if the second man’s report was to be trusted.

This man had complained to the windmiller that during his absence with the strangers, George, instead of doubling his vigilance now that the men were left short-handed, had taken himself off under pretext of attending to the direction of the wind and the position of the sails outside, a most important matter, to which he had not, after all, paid the slightest heed; and what he did with himself whilst leaving the mill to its fate and the fury of the storm, his indignant fellow-servant professed himself “blessed if he knew.”

But few people are as grateful as they should be when informed of misconduct in their own servants. It is a reflection on one’s judgment.

And unpardonable as George’s conduct was, if the tale were true, the words in which he couched his self-

defence were so much more grateful to the ears of the windmillier than the somewhat free and independent style in which the other man expressed his opinion of George's conduct and qualities, that the master took his servant's part, and snubbed the informer for his pains.

In justice to George, too, it should be said that he stoutly and repeatedly denied the whole story, with many oaths and imprecations of horrible calamities upon himself if he were lying in the smallest particular. And this with reiteration so steady, and a countenance so guileless and unmoved, as to contrast favourably with the face of the other man, whose voice trembled and whose forehead flushed, either with overwhelming indignation or with a guilty consciousness that he was bearing false witness.

Master Lake employed him no more, and George stayed on.

But, for that matter, Master Lake's disposition was not one which permitted him to profit by the best qualities of those connected with him. He was a bit of a tyrant, and more than one man, six times as clever, and ten times as hard-working as George, had gone when George would have stayed, from crossing words with the windmillier. The safety of the priceless sails, if all were true, had been risked by the man he kept, and secured by the man he sent away, but Master Lake was quite satisfied with his own decision.

"I beant so fond myself of men as is so mortal sprack

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and fussy in a strange place,” the miller observed to Mrs. Lake in reference to this matter.

Mrs. Lake had picked up several of her husband’s bits of proverbial wisdom, which she often flattered him by retailing to his face.

“Too hot to hold, mostly,” was her reply, in knowing tones.

“Aye, aye, missus, so a be,” said the windmiller. And after awhile he added, “Gearge is slow, sartinly, mortal slow; but Gearge is sure.”

CHAPTER V

A REWARD OFFERED

THE POCKET-BOOK AND THE FAMILY BIBLE—
FIVE POUNDS REWARD

OF the strange gentleman who brought Jan to the windmill, the Lakes heard no more, but the money was paid regularly through a lawyer in London.

From this lawyer, indeed, Master Lake had heard immediately after the arrival of his foster-son.

The man of business wrote to say that the gentleman who had visited the mill on a certain night had, at that date, lost a pocket-book, which he thought might have been picked up at the mill. It contained papers only valuable to the owner, and also a five-pound note, which was liberally offered to the windmillers if he could find the book, and forward it at once.

Master Lake began to have a kind of reckless, gambling sort of feeling about luck. Here would be an easily-earned five pounds, if he could but have the luck to find the missing property! That ten shillings a week had come pretty easily to him. When all is said, there *are* people into whose mouths the larks fall ready cooked!

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The windmiller looked inside the mill, and outside the mill, and wandered a long way along the chalky road with his eyes downwards, but he was no nearer to the five-pound note for his pains. Then he went to his wife, but she had seen nothing of the pocket-book; on which her husband somewhat unreasonably observed that, "Amight a been zartin *thee* couldn't help un!"

He next betook himself to George, who was slowly, and it is to be hoped surely, sweeping out the round-house.

"Gearge, my boy," said the windmiller, in not too anxious tones, "have 'ee seen a pocket-book lying about anywheres?"

George leaned upon his broom with one hand, and with the other scratched his white head.

"What be a pocket-book, then, Master Lake?" said he, grinning, as if at his own ignorance.

"Thee's eerd of a pocket-book before now, thee vool, sure-ly!" said the impatient windmiller.

"I'se eerd of a pocket of hops, Master Lake," said George, after an irritating pause, during which he still smiled, and scratched his poll as if to stimulate recollection.

"Book—book—book! pocket-*book!*" shouted the miller. "If thee can't read, thee knows what a book is, thee gawney!"

"What a vool I be, to be sure!" said George, his simple countenance lighted up with a broader smile than before. "I knows a book, sartinly, Master Lake, I

knows a book. There's one," George continued, speaking even slower than before,—“there's one inzide, sir—a big un. On the shelf it be. A Vamly Bible they calls un. And I'm sartin sure it be there,” he concluded, “for a hasn't been moved since the last time you christened, Master Lake.”

The miller turned away, biting his lip hard, to repress a useless outburst of rage, and George, still smiling sweetly, spun the broom dexterously between his hands, as a man spins the water out of a stable mop. Just before Master Lake had got beyond earshot, George lowered the broom, and began to scratch his head once more. “I be a proper vool, sartinly,” said he; and when the miller heard this, he turned back. “Mother allus said I'd no more sense in my yead than a dumbledore,” George candidly confessed. And by a dumbledore he meant a humble-bee. “It do take me such a time to mind anything, sir.”

“Well, never mind, Gearge,” said the miller; “if thee's slow thee's sure. What doo 'ee remember about the book now, Gearge? A don't mind giving thee five shilling if thee finds un, Gearge.”

“A had un down at the burying, I 'member quite well now, sir. To put the little un's name in 'twas. I thowt a hadn't been down zince christening, I be so stoopid sartinly.”

“What are ye talking about, ye vool?” roared the miller.

“The book, sir, sartinly,” said George, his honest

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face beaming with good humour. "The Vamly Bible, Master Lake."

As the windmiller went off muttering something which the Family Bible would by no means have sanctioned, George returned chuckling to a leisurely use of his broom on the round-house floor.

Master Lake did not find the pocket-book, and after a day or two it was advertised in a local paper, and a reward of five pounds offered for it.

George Sannel was seated one evening in the Heart of Oak inn, sipping some excellent home-brewed ale, which had been warmed up for his consumption in a curious funnel-shaped pipkin, when his long lop-ears caught a remark made by the innkeeper, who was reading out bits from the local paper to a small audience, unable to read it for themselves.

"Five pound reward!" he read. "Lor' massy! There be a sum to be easily earned by a sharp-eyed chap with good luck on 's side."

"And how then, Master Chuter?" said George, pausing with the steaming mug half way to his lips.

"Haw, haw!" roared the innkeeper; "you be a sharp-eyed chap too! Do 'ee think 'twould suit thee, Gearge? Thee's a sprack chap, sartinly, Gearge!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the other members of the company, as they slowly realized Master Chuter's irony at the expense of the "voolish" Gearge.

George took their rough banter in excellent part.

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He sipped his beer, and grinned like a cat at his own expense. But after the guffaws had subsided he said, "Thee's not told un about that five pound yet, Master Chuter!"

The curiosity of the company was by this time aroused, and Master Chuter explained: "'Tis a gentleman by the name of Ford as is advertising for a pocket-book a seems to have lost on the downs, near to Master Lake's windmill. 'Tis thy way, too, Gearge, after all. Thee must get up yarly, Gearge. 'Tis the yarly bird catches the worm. And tell Master Lake from me, a'll have all the young varments in the place a driving their pigs up to his mill, to look for the pocket-book, while they makes believe to be minding their pigs."

"'Tis likely, too," said George. And the two or three very aged labourers in smocks, and one other lubberly boy, who composed the rest of the circle, added severally and collectively, "'Tis likely, too."

But as George beat his way home over the downs, in the dusk, he said aloud, under cover of the roaring wind, and in all the security of the open country,

"Vive pound, vive pound! And a offered me vive shilling for un. Master Lake, you be dog-ged cute, but Gearge beant quite such a vool as a looks."

After a short time the advertisement was withdrawn.