



The Old Organ

'Home, sweet home, there's no place like home, there's no place like home,' played the unmusical notes of a barrel-organ in the top room of a lodging-house in a dreary back street. The words certainly did not seem to apply to that dismal abode; there were not many there who knew much of the sweets of home.

It was a very dark, uncomfortable place, and as the lodgers in the lower room turned over on their wretched beds, many of which were merely bare wooden benches, it may be that one and another gave a sigh as he thought how far he was from 'Home, sweet home.'



But the organ played on, though the hour was late, and the dip candle was put out, and the fire was dying away. If you had climbed





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the crooked staircase, you would have seen an old man sitting alone in his attic, smiling at his organ as he turned it with a trembling hand.



Old Treffy loved his barrel-organ; it was the one comfort of his life. He was a poor, forlorn old man, without a friend in the world. Every one that he had ever loved was dead; he had no one to whom he could talk, or to whom he could tell his troubles. And thus he gathered up all the remaining bits and fragments of love in his old heart, faded and withered though they were, and he gave them all to his old organ, which had well-nigh seen as many summers as he had. It was getting very antiquated and old fashioned now; the red silk in the front of it was very soiled and worn, and it could not play any of the new tunes of which the children were so fond. It sometimes struck old Treffy that he and his organ were very much alike - they were getting altogether behind the age; and people looked down on them and pushed past them, as they hurried along the street. And though old Treffy was very patient, yet he could not help feeling this.


He had felt it very much on the day of which I am writing. It was cold, dismal weather; a cutting east wind had swept




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round the corners of the streets, and had chilled the old man through and through. His threadbare coat could not keep it out; how could he expect it to do so, when he had worn it so many years he could scarcely count them?

His thin, trembling old hands were so benumbed with cold that he could scarcely feel the handle of the organ, and, as he turned it, he made sundry little shakes and quavers in the tune, which were certainly not intended by the maker of the old barrel-organ.



There was not much variety in the tunes old Treffy could play. There was the 'Old Hundredth,' and 'Poor Mary Ann,' and 'Rule Britannia'; the only other one was 'Home, sweet Home,' but that was old Treffy's favourite. He always played it very slowly, to make it last longer, and on this cold day the shakes and the quavers in it sounded most pathetic.




But no one took much notice of old Treffy or his organ. A little crowd of children gathered round him, and asked him for all sorts of new tunes of which he had never even heard the names.

They did not seem to care for 'Home, sweet Home,' or the 'Old Hundredth,' and




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soon moved away. Then an old gentleman put his head out of a window, and in a cross voice told him to go on, and not disturb a quiet neighbourhood with his noise. Old Treffy meekly obeyed, and, battling with the rough east wind, he tried another and a more bustling street; but here a policeman warned him to depart, lest he should crowd up the way.



Poor old Treffy was almost fainting, but he must not give up, for he had not a half-penny in his pocket, and he had come out without breakfast. At length a kind-hearted farmer's wife, who was passing with a basket on her arm, took pity on the trembling old man, and gave him a penny from her capacious pocket.



Thus all day long Treffy played on; over and over again his four tunes were sounded forth, but that was the only penny he received that cold day.

At last, as the daylight was fading, he turned homeward. On his way he parted with his solitary penny for a cake of bread, and slowly and wearily he dragged himself up the steep stairs to his lonely attic.

Poor old Treffy was in bad spirits this evening. He felt that he and his organ were getting out of date, things of the past.



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They were growing old together. He could remember the day when it was new. How proud he had been of it! Oh, how he had admired it! The red silk was quite bright, and the tunes were all in fashion. There were not so many organs about then, and people stopped to listen - not children only, but grown men and women - and Treffy had been a proud man in those days. But a generation had grown up since then, and now Treffy felt that he was a poor, lone old man, very far behind the age, and that his organ was getting too old-fashioned for the present day. Thus he felt very cast down and dismal, as he raked together the cinders, and tried to make a little blaze in the small fire he had lit.

But when he had eaten his cake, and had taken some tea which he had warmed over again, old Treffy felt rather better, and he turned as usual to his old organ to cheer his fainting spirits. For old Treffy knew nothing of a better Comforter.

The landlady of the house had objected at first to old Treffy's organ; she said it disturbed the lodgers; but on Treffy's offering to pay a penny a week extra for his little attic, on condition of his being able to play whenever he liked, she made no further opposition.





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And thus, till late in the night, he turned away, and his face grew brighter and his heart lighter, as he listened to his four tunes. It was such good company, he said, and the attic was so lonely at night. And there was no one to find fault with the organ there, or to call it old-fashioned. Treffy admired it with all his heart, and felt that at night at least it had justice done to it.

But there was one who was listening to the old organ, and admiring it as much as old Treffy, of whom the old man knew nothing. Outside his door, with his ear against a large crack, lay a little ragged boy; he had come to the lodging- room downstairs to sleep, and had laid down on one of the hard benches, when Treffy's organ began to play. He had not listened to it much at first, but when the first notes of 'Home, sweet Home' had been sounded forth, little Christie had raised his head on his elbow, and listened with all his might. It was almost too much for him; it was a memory of the past. A few months ago, little Christie had a mother, and this was the last tune she sang. It brought it all back to him: the bare, desolate room, the wasted form on the bed, the dear, loving hand which had stroked his face so gently, and the sweet voice which had sung that very tune to him.



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He could hear her, even now : 'Home, sweet home, there's no place like home; there's no place like home.' How sweetly she had sung it! - he remembered it so well. And he remembered what she had said to him just afterwards -

'I'm going home, Christie - going home - home, sweet home; I'm going home, Christie.'

And those were the last words she had said to him.

Since then, life had been very dreary to little Christopher. Life without a mother, it hardly was life to him. He had never been happy since she had died. He had worked very hard, poor little fellow, to earn his bread, for she had told him to do that. But he often wished he could go to his mother in 'Home, sweet Home.' And he wished it more than ever this night, as he heard his mother's tune. He waited very patiently for it, whilst old Treffy was playing the other three which came first, but at length some one closed the door, and the noise inside the lodging-room was so great that he could not distinguish the notes of the longed-for tune.

So Christie crept out quietly in the darkness, and closing the door softly, that no one might notice it, he stole gently upstairs.



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He knelt down by the door and listened. It was very cold, and the wind swept up the staircase, and made little Christie shiver. Yet he still knelt by the door.

At length the organ stopped; he heard the old man putting it down by the wall, and in a few minutes all was still.

Then Christie crept downstairs again, and lay down once more on his hard bench, and he fell asleep, and dreamt of the mother in the far-off land. And he thought he heard her singing "Home, sweet Home," I'm home now, Christie; I'm home now, and there's no place like home.'

