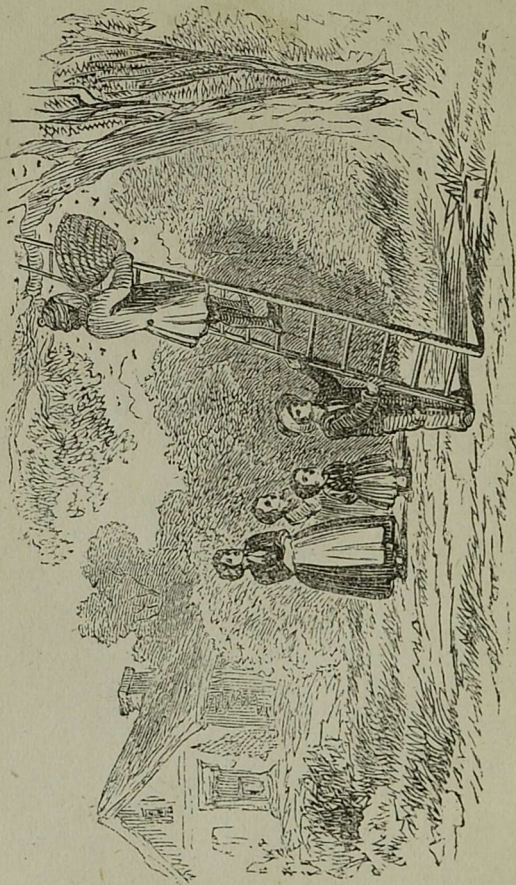


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Hiving the Swarm

BUSY BEES.



Page 19.

London :

GROOMBRIDGE & SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.

Busy Bees.

CLICKETY-CLACK! clickety-clack! went the great wheel at Brayley mill, as the water from the mill dam above fell over its paddles, and after turning it round, rushed out from beneath it again and ran away, winding among the meadows which lay between the mill and Brayley church. And the great wooden wheel, as it went round, set in motion other wheels within the mill, and they in their turn moved great flat stones between which were crushed the grains of wheat and barley, until they were ground down to the soft white flour with which we make paste and bread. The children who lived at Brayley mill liked to see the grains of corn poured into the great bin, and then watch the fine white powder come out after all the crushing and grinding.

And four children, girls and boys, lived at the old house which joined on to the mill, and

which had such a nice garden stretching down to the edge of the stream ; and the miller was their father. Climbing roses and honeysuckles grew round the porch of the house, and white clematis hung thick and heavy with blossom over the little thatched roof, under which stood the bee-hives ; while no one at Brayley ever had finer pinks, wall-flowers, and sweet-williams than those which grew in the garden of the miller. Around the mill dam tall alder trees grew whose leaves were so easily rustled by the wind that they seemed always to keep up a pleasant murmur, when the clacking of the mill did not prevent its being heard. At Brayley mill, too, it happened that every one thought as much of sounds as sights, because there was one among the little children there whose greatest pleasure it was to *hear*—for he was blind and could not *see* !

This was little Jacob, who, before he could speak or understand, had lost his sight, and now knew nothing of all the pleasant things that passed around him but what he could hear, or feel, or smell. And kind brother and sisters, and father and mother, took right good care that Jacob should know as

much as possible by what they would tell him, of all they saw themselves, so that if he could not make any use of his own eyes, there were always a good many pairs of eyes, and tongues too, belonging to others, which were busy in his behalf. Nobody was ever too tired or impatient, or in too great a hurry not to be ready to talk to little Jacob, and tell him all they saw; and when they found anything that gave them pleasure, the first thing they thought of was how they could contrive to make Jacob feel some part of the pleasure which they felt themselves. For instance; when the other children, some fine day in spring, found that there were primroses and violets come into blossom down at the lower end of the garden, just under the hedge, they ran and fetched little Jacob, and took him to where they grew, and guided his hand so that he might pick them himself; and as he smelt them he would look so pleased, and would remember quite well that they were the same flowers that he had smelt the year before, and knew that the primroses were called yellow, and the violets blue, as well as any of them. Jacob, too, was very sharp at hearing, and it was he who found

out one spring, by hearing the chirping of the little ones, that there was a nest of thrushes in the very hedge under which the violets and primroses grew; and, somehow or other, it was always Jacob who was the first to hear the strange note of the cuckoo as it sounded across the meadows from Brayley woods. When the days grew warmer, too, and the chill of the spring showers was over, it was such a pleasure for the children to have Jacob always with them in the garden; and even when they were at school, his mother would put his little chair out of doors so that he might sit in the sunshine and hear the birds sing and the bees hum, or listen to the rustle of the alders and clack of the mill. And if his mother were ever so busy, she never forgot that Jacob was out there by himself, and would go about singing to let him know that she was not far off, and would now and then call out to him to ask him how he was getting on, and if he wanted anything. For all that, it was rather dull for Jacob to be sitting there alone, and he would count the strokes of the village clock as it struck hour after hour till his brother and sisters came home from school, and then he

was dull no more, for there was always somebody then to talk with him and lead him about for the rest of the day.

Among the sounds that Jacob listened to as he sat alone in the garden, there was none that he liked better than the humming of the bees, as they flew backwards and forwards to their hive, which stood not far off. It seemed to him such a busy cheerful sound! But the more he listened to it the more anxious he was to understand what all the bees were about. During the long winter evenings, his father, as they sat round the fire, had made a new hive of straw ready for the bees when they should swarm in the summer, and Jacob had felt the shape of it, and knew quite well all about the bees being glad to make use of these nice warm thatched houses to build their wax combs in, and rear their young ones, and lay up their store of honey for the winter. Next winter Jacob was to learn to make a bee-hive himself, and this was another reason for his liking to know what all the humming and buzzing of the bees was about. His father had told him that the bees did not only get honey from the flowers, but that they collected on their little hairy

bodies a fine dust out of the middle of the flowers, which they took home in little balls on their thighs to feed their young ones with. He knew that, to obtain this, they went out early in the morning and late in the evening when the dew was on the flowers, and the flower-dust was not too dry; and that in the middle of the day they flew about from flower to flower, sucking up the sweet juice from the middle of each blossom, part of which served for their food, and the rest they kept in the inside of their bodies till they returned to the hive, when they emptied it into the little waxen cells they had made; and the wax with which they made these little six-sided cells came also from the sticky juices of plants and flowers, which was their food, and which, changing inside the bee, oozed out in tiny flakes of wax between the little rings of his body, which were afterwards kneaded together and used for cell building. And he had heard, too, about the queen bee, or mother of the hive, who does nothing but lay eggs, one in each little waxen cell, and that when the eggs are first hatched there comes out a little grub which afterwards changes to a bee. Jacob liked to hold



his ear quite down to a flower when a bee got into it and to listen to its humming buzz; while some one described to him how the little creature plunged so eagerly into the cup of the flower, and covered itself with the fine powder, and then stroked it off with his legs again and rolled it up into balls beneath his thighs, or told him how they could see them putting out their little trunks and sucking up the sweet juice. Jacob knew what the flower-juice tasted like, for he had often pul-

led to pieces the flowers of the honeysuckle and sucked out the sugary drop from the little tubes. Sometimes when Jacob sat by himself very near the hives, he could perceive that there was a greater bustle than usual going on and a louder buzzing; and then when Roger and Mabel came home from school, they found out for him that it was all because a wasp had tried to get into the hive to steal some honey, and that the bees were all crowding together to thrust him out again. Such a black cluster of them was there just at the little door, and amid the crowd they could see the poor yellow wasp struggling and fighting to get free. Jacob's father told him that the bees will treat the snails who dare to creep into the hive even more cleverly, for being too big and strong to turn out, there is nothing for them to do but to cover the shell over with wax and fasten it down, so that the snail is made a prisoner in his own house!

There was always something to observe in the goings on of the bees, which Roger and Mabel and little Lucy took care to tell to Jacob. They had learned to distinguish the drones from the working bees, which were

those who did none of the business of the hive, but surrounded the queen bee like so many attendants, whilst the others built cells and fetched honey, and fed the young ones. None of them had ever seen the queen bee herself, but they knew that she lived in the centre of the hive, like a real queen in her palace, waited on and attended by all the others, while she became the mother of all the future young bees. The warm summer days of June came, and it seemed to the children that the young bees must be hatched, and that there was such a great number of inhabitants in the hive that they would soon *swarm*—that is, a large party of them would leave the hive, and choosing a queen, would follow her wherever she went, and would be ready to fill the new hive their father made in the winter, if they could only be caught. Jacob was to listen and let them know if he perceived any unusual buzzing and humming and then they would take care to secure the swarm. It was after a very sultry morning that this happened at last, and Jacob was glad to be the first to find out that a swarm was leaving the hive. He felt his way indoors to tell his mother that the bees were

making such a strange humming and buzzing that something must be the matter, and his father was fetched out from the mill, and Roger, and Mabel, and Lucy came running in just in time from school. Everybody hastened into the garden, and sure enough it was found that a great black cluster of bees had risen up into the air ever so high, and were sending forth a loud and deep-toned buzz such as the children had never heard them make before. The father said that people sometimes got all kinds of tongs and pokers, and pots and pans, to rattle together and make a noise with, thinking it would induce the bees to settle, but that he did not believe it did any good, and that they would wait quietly to see where the queen bee would lead the swarm; he got ready, meanwhile, for taking them directly they settled. He took down the new hive from the shelf, and his wife fetched him a pair of gloves and one of her muslin handkerchiefs, which he was to throw over his face to save him from being stung. The black cluster, buzzing and humming, hovered about now here, now there for some minutes, until at last it settled on a branch of the little pear tree which luckily grew on the side of the hedge which belonged

to the miller. He put a ladder against the tree, climbed upon the branch where the black cluster of bees was hanging, swept it into the hive, and then covering it up, brought it down and placed it on the stand by the side of the old hive. There had never been anything which pleased the children better than this taking the fresh swarm of bees, and settling them in the new hive. It was so curious to them to see their father mount the pear tree with the white veil over his face and the gloves on his hands, and to watch how cleverly he contrived to sweep the swarm into the hive without a single bee escaping, and without even being stung; and they had stood in breathless suspense till their father pulled the muslin off his face and said he was not hurt. And then they clapped their hands for joy, and rejoiced to think that they had a new hive of bees to watch, and perhaps another pot or two of honey for next winter. They remembered how great a treat it had been on Sundays and birthdays, the winter before, to have the thick layer of golden honey on their bread, and the very thought of it made them merry.

SUMMER was over, and the bees both in the old and new hives in the miller's garden had worked so hard, and there had been so little rain and so many flowers that every one felt sure there must be plenty of honey. But the miller would not take the honey as long as there were any flowers left for the bees to fly to on sunny days, especially as little Jacob was always so glad to hear their hum as he sat in his chair by the porch. And when at last the waxen combs were to be taken from the hives, he was very careful only to stupefy the bees a little with burnt fungus, or beggar's tinder, as it is also called, and not to kill them, and he left in each hive enough honey to serve for their support during the months that there would be no flowers. And the nice clean-looking cakes of wax which we call honey-combs were taken from the hive, and the juice and golden coloured honey strained from out of the little six-sided waxen cells, and the wax was sold to make candles with, but the pots of honey were stowed away in their mother's cupboard. The honey pots were not to be opened till winter time, when all the fruit was gone, and

the first time the children were to have the treat of honey with their bread was to be on Jacob's birthday, which came when the trees were quite bare of leaves and there were no more pears or plums left in the miller's garden.

Meantime the days grew short, and cold, and gloomy, and Jacob could seldom go into the garden, and could never sit there to listen to the birds and bees. The only sound that he heard now, as he sat by the fireside alone when his brother and sisters were at school, was the thumping of the mill wheel. Jacob's mother talked to him as much as she could, and when she went away would fetch the kitten or the dog for him to play with; but still the hours passed heavily after the others had gone to school each morning. When Roger, too, brought home his copy book to show his father his writing, and Mabel the apron she had made for her mother, and Lucy repeated to her mother the hymn she had learned to say, it seemed to make little Jacob feel duller than ever to think that he could do none of these things himself. Roger, too, began to help his father in the mill, and would run of errands for him, and



feed the pigs, and take the horse to water, and Mabel did all kinds of things for her mother in the house, so that she had not time to sit by Jacob and talk to him. But the love Jacob's mother felt for her little blind boy helped her to find a way of making him happy. She said to herself that Jacob should be busy and useful like the rest. She set to work and taught him to knit, which a blind person learns readily to do, and she said he should make himself a pair of socks; and she got straw and taught him how to plait, and said that by the

time the spring came again he should make Lucy a bonnet; and in the long evenings, when his work in the mill was over, his father set about teaching him to make a bee-hive ready for another swarm next summer. And when there were potatoes or apples to peel, Jacob's mother set him to do it for her; and she made him learn to find his way to the pump, so that he could always fill the pitchers, and to the dairy to fill a jug with milk; and she encouraged him to venture on taking messages to his father in the mill, feeling along by the wall of the house, and then when he came back from such errands he would find his way to his seat in the chimney corner, and take up his straw-plaiting or his knitting and would say that he must make haste and get so many inches plaited or so many rows knitted before dinner, and thus feel himself busy and bustling like the rest. And then, when Jacob began to get quick and skilful with his plaiting and knitting, so that it was all regular and even, and as well done as if he had sight, no pleasure that he had ever had was so great to him as when the rest of the children, or his father or mother, or neighbours who dropped in,

took his work out of his hand and admired and praised his skill, and wondered he could do it so well and so quickly.

And another pleasure was found for Jacob. Like people in general who lose the sense of sight, the sense of musical sounds was very strong with him, and he dearly loved to hear a tune played or sung, and never forgot it again after once having heard it. His mother sung to him sometimes the tunes she had learnt when she was young, and sometimes a man with an organ would find his way to Brayley mill, and be sure to get a penny from the blind child there who liked so much to hear his tunes. And then when the organ player was gone, Jacob would try to whistle or sing the tunes that he had heard played, and he would make them out bit by bit till his mother and he agreed that they were right; so that when the twilight came, and all sat round the fire in the evening, everybody loved to hear Jacob's tunes as he went through them all, while his fingers went on busily knit, knit, knit, or plait, plait, plait; or his father and he twisted together the wisps of straw and sewed them round and round with great stitches and a

long needle so as to form the round and hollow hive. Blind Jacob was then as happy as a king!

But winter came, and it was very cold at Brayley mill. The mill dam froze so hard that there was no water to fall over the great wheel and turn it round, and no more grinding could be done. Great icicles hung from the wooden paddles, and the stream in the meadow was frozen over so hard that no one was obliged to go down to the bridge, so easy was it to cross it at any point. Roger and the village boys had fine fun with their sliding and making of snow-balls, and Mabel and Lucy, as they came from school, loitered long to see the skaters on the mill dam. Jacob, at home, could only hear about these things, for he was not strong or well and could not go out, but kept close all day to the fireside. Then he took cold, and his voice grew weak, and the doctor said he must not try to sing. And the organ-player never came now to Brayley mill, and Jacob was not even well enough to go to church on Sundays, where he dearly loved to hear the people sing and the great organ play, so that the pleasure of music was thus

lost to him. Everybody was very sorry for this, and missed his merry songs and whistle as he sat at his work, and wished that he could only make music in some other way; but Jacob said that when spring came again and the warm sunshine made the birds begin to sing and the bees to hum, he too should sing as merrily as the rest.

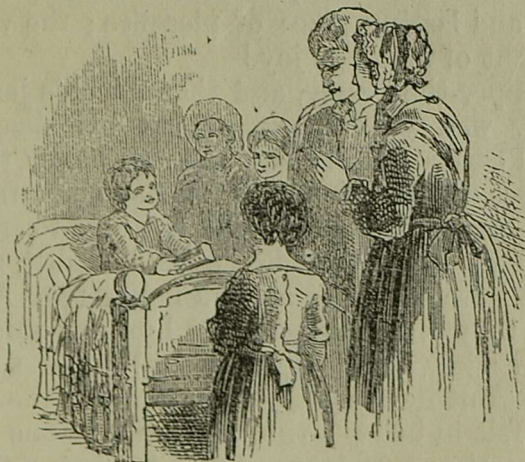
Jacob did not complain. But though he was still busy and happy, his mother was often thinking how glad she should be if she had only money enough to buy her little blind boy one of the musical instruments that she had seen the children playing at the great house in the village. She wished she did not want all the money that was in the house for other things, because the frost prevented the mill from being at work and the miller from earning more.

The cold days and long dark evenings passed slowly on, and meantime did the four jars of honey still stand upon the cupboard shelf, waiting for Jacob's birthday? No, they were all gone but one!—and yet when the children's eyes glanced up at the shelf where they stood, they looked at each other and smiled. One day that their mother had

been going to the market in the town which was four or five miles off—unknown to little Jacob,—three of the honey pots had been taken from the shelf and stowed in the back of the cart, and Roger, and Mabel, and Lucy had helped to put them there. And when the time came for their mother to return from market, the children had looked eagerly up the road, to see if she were coming, and when they had caught a sight of the old brown horse with the white line down his nose that they knew so well, they had ran down to the yard gate to meet her, that they might have a look at the strange musical instrument she had bought for Jacob with the money that had been given at the market for their honey. And the instrument—the ACCORDIAN, as it was called—was placed on the shelf on which the honey pots had stood by the side of the one which was left for Jacob. The children, much as they loved honey, had rejoiced when their mother had thought of this plan for giving Jacob pleasure, and enabling him to make music when his voice was too weak to sing and his fingers tired of knitting and plaiting.

And Jacob's birthday came; and before

he was out of bed that morning his wonderful present was placed in his hands. He



soon found out how to bring out its sweet and solemn sounds, so that every one in the house came around him to listen; and as they saw how delighted he was, the children could not doubt how happy their gift would make him. All that day it was in his hands—he could scarcely lay it aside to take his dinner; and he contrived to play upon it al

the tunes he knew, and all the hymns he had heard at church, and found that there would be no end to the tunes that he could even make with it himself, so that it would be a long and lasting piece of pleasure; the very thought of that was joy!

Supper-time came, and then Jacob's jar of honey was opened, and he had his slice of bread covered thick with the rich honey that the bees had gathered in the summer from their garden flowers; he did not care to taste it till he knew that Roger, and Mabel, and Lucy were eating bread and honey too. And then they all smacked their lips, and said—'How nice it is!—how sweet!'—and so it was. But nicer and sweeter far was the joy they felt in being loving and kind to one another; that was very sweet—"*sweeter than honey or the honey-comb.*"



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