

WEE BOBBIE BAREFEET.

WEE Bobbie Barefeet was an orphan laddie, wha lived wi' his granny. He was a rare wee city Arab, who had a natural genius for plunkin' the schule, harryin' birds' nests, and raisin' slides on the pavement in the winter time.

Bobbie was just ten years of age come Martinmas, and rejoiced in open-air freedom, and a small daily independency acquired by selling the earliest and latest editions of the evening newspapers.

Up till the date of our story, Bobbie had successfully eluded anything more than a very irregular, and, what the spectacled School Board considered, a highly informal attendance at school.

Bobbie's progress at school had thus been very slow, and he had never got beyond the plain line of reading existing in the "High Sevenpenny." Grammar was a mysterious conundrum to Bobbie, and his knowledge of geography was limited to the street in which he lived, and the alleys adjoining it. Spelling was confusion to him; and, in the matter of

writing he was wofully behind. As a latest effort in writing, he had done a copy-book of German text, the more promising pages of which looked as if a half-drowned fly, just escaped from an ink-bottle, had incontinently crawled across the surface of the paper. Then, as for arithmetic, figures were always a terribly trying task to Bobbie. In fact, Bobbie had not in any way a genius for figures, although, it must be admitted, he was a smart hand at counting out "change back" for a sixpence, to all such customers as purchased an evening newspaper off his hands. Daily practice in that matter had brought about perfection, but as for figures on a school-slate, Bobbie always sat down to the terrible task like a sick child making wry faces at medicine. And at length when he had struggled through Simple Addition, and graduated into the profounder mysteries of Subtraction, he one day applied the principle at issue to his own small case, and cleverly subtracted himself from the grasp of a School-Board officer, who had actually caught him playing on the pavement during school hours.

School Board officers and policemen, in fact, were the two terrors of Bobbie's innocent life. The policeman he knew little of by his proper name; but he was familiar with him as "the Nick," "the Slop," "the Scuffer," and "the Bobby," and the glance of a policeman's buttons coming suddenly round a street-corner, was sufficient to scatter like stour a stiff game at the "bools," or an exciting throw-up at pitch-and-toss, at both of which amusements Bobbie was an experienced adept.

As for the dreaded officers of the local School Board, Bobbie simply spoke of them in the lump as the "Schule-Board," and the cry of "The Schule-Board—there's the Schule-Board Man!" was sufficient at any moment to make Bobbie leap three feet into the air, and bound away from the spot like a young antelope.

When the officer of the district looked Bobbie up, which

occurred almost daily for a time, Bobbie was usually out; and when by accident he happened to be in, he was invariably out also—in the sense that the instant the dread official voice was heard at the door, the kitchen-window, which opened on a back court, stood Bobbie handy, and through it he would instantly go, with the precision of a clown doing the disappearing leap at a pantomime. The next moment he was down the close, and flying away along the street at full speed, to escape the clutches of the terrible Schule-Board Man!

In this way, as may be readily understood, Bobbie's very existence, by and by, came to be almost officially forgotten, when one day, while he was merrily propelling himself along the street by a series of side-somersaults, making his little body gyrate along the pavement like an animated wheel, he was suddenly confronted by a spectacled and very important-looking School-Board officer, who seized him with a sort of official snap, as if he felt assured that he had at length made such a clever capture as would assuredly gain him promotion with the Board—if not, indeed, public thanks.

The incident happened thus: Bobbie that morning had just demolished his bowl of porridge, and having washed his face at a street-pump, he began revolving himself along the pavement as described, hand over hand, like a self-acting wheel, singing aloud—

“A, B, buff,
Gi'e the maister a cuff;
Gi'e him yin, gi'e him twa,
Knock his heid against the wa',”

when, horror of horrors! on recovering his equilibrium, he found that he had unwittingly plunged right into the grasp of the dreaded School-Board Man!

“Hillo! my fine boy; what school are you attending—eh?”

"Oh, it wisna me, sir; as sure as death I wisna daein' anything; let me awa' an' I'll never say't again!"

"Ay, ay, a very likely story; and what's your name, boy?"

"My name?"

"Yes; what do they call you?"

"Bobbie, sir,"

"Bobbie what?"

"N—no; it's no Bobbie What; it's jist Bobbie they ca' me—that's a."

"And where do you live, boy?"

"Roun' the corner, sir."

"And what's your father's name, boy?"

"M—m—my faither's name, sir?"

"Yes, boy; what is your father's name?"

"I never had nae faither."

"Your mother's name, then?"

"I never had a mither naither."

"What! never—had—a—mother, boy?"

"Na; as sure's death, sir—my granny's my mither."

"Oh, yes, yes; I understand your meaning, boy; you're what's called an orphan—is that it?"

"An orphan, sir?"

"Yes, an orphan laddie, of course."

"Na; I'm a Gleska laddie."

"Tuts, tuts! And how does your grandmother do then?"

"She's quite weel the noo."

"Oh, nonsense, boy; I mean what occupation does she follow?"

"She's—she's—she's——"

"Well, yes, boy; answer my question: she's a what?"

"She's—she's—she's——"

"Come now, boy, answer the question: What does your grandmother do? She's a what—ch?"

"She's a—she's a—she's a candyman, sir."

"A—a—a candyman?—your grandmother a candyman?"

"Ay; for when auld Candyman Jock dee't, his widow sell't my granny his hand-barrow, along wi' the guidwill o' the bisness for 9½d., payable in weekly instalments."

"Then your grandmother really wheels a candy barrow, boy?"

"Ay, an' she keeps awfu' guid glessie."

"Do you know who made you, boy?"

"Made *me*?" (scratching his head distractedly).

"Yes, you; who made you?"

"If it's my claes ye mean, my granny made them doon for me."

"What deplorable ignorance!" exclaimed the officer.

"Were you ever at school, boy?"

"Ay."

"You're quite sure of that now?"

"As sure as death, sir."

"What reading-book was you in?"

"The 'High Sevenpenny.'"

"Can you write?"

"Ay."

"What length were you in writing?"

"I gaed through *whups*, *strokes*, an' *big text*."

"And you can count a bit, of course?"

"Y—y—yes, sir."

"What length in figures were you?"

"Distraction, sir."

"*Subtraction*, you mean, of course?"

"Ay, *Distraction*," persisted Bobbie.

"Well, Bobbie, my boy, answer me this—take one from two, and how many's left. Now, take time and think it well out; take one from two, and how many's left?"

Bobbie vigorously scratched his touzie head with both hands, as if undergoing acute mental distress. The proposition seemed to fairly stagger him for a moment. Then his

eyes showed a gleam of merry light, as if an idea had taken acute inspirational possession of him. Glancing straight ahead to see if the way was clear, he exclaimed—

“Tak’ yin frae twa, an’ there’s *yin left*, an’ that’s *you!*” and giving his small body a sudden, eel-like twist, he swung himself free of the officer’s grasp in a moment, and was presently bounding away along the street at a high-rate of speed in the direction of—freedom!

And that outwitted School-Board officer dashed madly after him, with a word of anger on his lips, and a prophecy in his mind that he would speedily recapture and bring to book the long-headed little rogue; but—he hasn’t caught him just yet!