

JACK AND JANE.

FARMERS have a saying that a boy is a boy, two boys are worth a boy and a half, and three boys are no boy at all. That means, that if a little fellow is sent crow-keeping and so on by himself, he may, perhaps, be of some use, but that if he has mates he is sure to waste his time. I am afraid, though, that little Jack Lycett was not of much use to his master at any time. Jack was an idle, mischievous little urchin. What he earned on the farm did not pay his parents for the extra clothes and boots he wore out in the fields, but they thought he had better be doing something, and he would learn nothing at school; so it was mere waste of money to pay twopence a week for him there. His sister Jane would have liked to have the chance of going to school, but it was not often she could get it, she was such a useful little body at home.

Mrs. Lycett had younger children than Jane and Jack, and she was not very strong; and yet she took in washing from the farm and other places, and her two big sons boarded with her, so there was plenty for little Jane to do at the cottage. She was cook, and nurse, and housemaid, and water-bearer. She helped her mother to fetch and carry home the linen; and when her father and brothers didn't take their food with them to the field, she carried them their dinner and their "beavers"—I forget the West-country phrase for the intermediate snacks. Jane would have liked to learn gloving, but, even if her other work had left her time, it would have made her hands too rough. Jack was not an ill-natured little fellow. He was fond of Jane, and was ready enough to help her in her fetching and carrying, when he happened to be at hand. But that was not often. Master Jack was generally away "at work"—such funny "work!" When he first went out bird-keeping, he did stick to it pretty closely, because he was allowed to have a rusty old horse-pistol; but he blazed away such a lot of powder in the first week that the farmer took away the pistol, and gave him "clappers" instead. Rattling them was no fun after an hour or two, and so Jack became a very lazy bird-keeper. In fine weather he used to poke about in the hedges and ditches, hunting for nests, and rabbits, and effets, and blindworms; and in wet weather he made a wigwam with a thatched hurdle in the snugest corner he could find, and warmed his toes at the stick fire he had lighted. Sometimes Jack got a job of pig-tending in the woods, or of cow-watching

on the moor. He liked jobs of that kind a great deal better than bird-keeping, because they gave him a good excuse for wandering. And he learnt a good deal in his wanderings; and when Jack did know things, he could tell you right off what he'd "zeed 'em do with his own eyes."

Though Jane was such an industrious little body, and Jack such an idle young scamp, she was very fond and proud of Brother Jack. Jane was a year or two older, yet she looked upon Jack as a protector. To get out with idle Jack was the greatest treat that industrious Jane could have. At "whort harvest," and at "mazing," all the women and children of the country side turned out to pick the crimson juicy beads, and the smooth, golden eggs in their rough green cups; and then Jane could be out for days together with her pet brother. But what Jane liked best was a long day's stroll with him, without work of any kind to do. Jack often took such strolls, but it was not often that Jane got the chance of a real holiday. When she did, and could spend it in wandering about with Jack, she enjoyed the day even more than he did, though Jack liked to have his sister with him.

In their part of the country a few red deer still roam wild, and Jack knew where every stag had his bed. Jane was afraid of the stags, especially at the season when they fight so fiercely, and you can hear their horns clashing together like a little timber stack falling down. Jack rather liked that time, because it gave him a better chance of getting near the deer; but *he* was very cautious, too, then, though he pretended not to be in the least afraid when Jane was with him. Once when they were out together on the moor, a stag charged them; but Jack pushed his sister up to the top of a great block of grey rock rising out of the furze, then scrambled up himself, and bellowed back at the stag, and shied stones at him, and behaved altogether with such apparently undaunted courage, that Jane felt more comfortable than Jack did. He was very pleased when the stag stopped pawing up the turf, snuffed contemptuously at his defier, tossed his head, and cantered off. After that, Jane believed that Jack could do anything; but, even with Jack to protect her, she had no wish to go near an angry stag again. Once they came upon a fawn asleep in a patch of glossy fern. It was so sound asleep that it let Jane pat it, and lay down her sun-bonneted head on its soft warm little side. Suddenly, how-