

JACK-BY-THE- HEDGE

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Jack-by-the-Hedge by Selina Gaye

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SELINA GAYE

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HEDGE**



'I be a-waiting for my horsu.'—Page 8.

JACK-BY-THE-HEDGE

A TRUE STORY

BY

SELINA GAYE

AUTHOR OF 'COMING,' 'SMUTS AND DIAMONDS,' ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

SEELEY, JACKSON & HALLIDAY, 54, FLEET STREET
LONDON. MDCCCLXXXIII

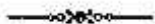
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IN case the following little account of Jack's career should appear improbable, it may be as well to state that it was received, in outline, from a member of the family which befriended his early years. This outline, though filled in, has not been in any way altered ; but the names of all the characters introduced are fictitious.

S. G.

LONDON, *May*, 1883.

JACK-BY-THE-HEDGE.



I.

JACK'S HORSE.

'EH! you unlucky young dog! And what mischief be you up to now?'

The inquiry was addressed to a little boy of seven or eight years old, who was sitting in the hedge by the roadside, and doing, at that precise moment, nothing worse than whistle. But it was not the first time that he had heard it that evening; for it was market-day, and several of the women as they passed him on their way home had asked him the same question; while a farmer had raised his whip and threatened him with 'a good dressing' if ever he caught him breaking his hedges.

They all seemed to take it for granted that he

was 'after no good ;' but perhaps Jack was used to such speeches, for he did not seem either alarmed or offended, and only interrupted himself for a moment or two to make to each and all the same answer :

' I be a-waiting for my horse.'

He was an unusually handsome little fellow, with straight, sturdy limbs, a mop of curly, chestnut hair, a broad forehead, and dark, bright eyes, full of life and intelligence. But, with all his good looks, he was hatless and shoeless ; and was clothed, so far as he could be said to be clothed at all, in such a scanty and dilapidated set of rags as would hardly have sufficed to fit out a respectable scarecrow.

Father he had none, that he had ever known or heard of ; and as for his other parent—who lived in a wretched mud hovel, on a bit of waste land a little farther up the road—just now he preferred keeping out of her way ; for she had but lately come back from market, and at such times she was apt to be anything but pleasant company.

So Jack sat in the hedge whistling to himself, but in soft, low tones, that she might not find out where he was.

He was, as he had said, 'waiting for his horse.'

Not that little 'Jack-by-the-Hedge,' as he was nicknamed, had ever in his life owned any animal bigger than a kitten; but this horse was his by virtue of the fact that he remembered him as long as he remembered anything; and moreover, the horse's master had a way of sometimes tossing Jack a halfpenny or a cake, or a paper of bull's-eyes, which was uncommonly pleasant, and made their daily passing to and fro a matter of great interest.

Jack prided himself much on being able to distinguish the sound of *his* horse's hoofs from that of any other; and though two or three farmers, as well as the doctor and squire, all rode past him, he did not stir an inch from his place to look at them.

But presently he pricked up his ears and listened with all his might, while a smile broke over his sunburnt little face; and with a 'There he be!' he darted out of the hedge, just as a man on horseback came round a bend in the road.

He had not made any mistake, and his smile expanded into a broad grin of satisfaction.