

**A
LITTLE WIZARD**

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A little wizard by Stanley J. Weyman

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BY
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"A GENTLEMAN OF FRANCE," "FRANCIS CLUDD,"
"UNDER THE RED MOON," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

PATTENHALL.

WHEN the agent of General Skippon, to whom the estate of Pattenhall by Ripon fell, as part of his reward after the battle of Nasby, went down to take possession, he found a little boy sitting on a heap of stones a few paces from the entrance gate. The old house (which has since been pulled down) lay a quarter of a mile from the road and somewhat in a hollow ; but its many casements, blushing and sparkling in the glow of the evening sun, caught the rider's eye, and led him into the comfortable belief that he had reached his destination. He had come from Ripon, how-

ever, and the village lies on the farther side of the house from that town; consequently he had seen no one whom he could question, and he hailed the boy's presence with relief, checking his horse, and calling to him to know if this was Pattenhall.

The lad crouching on the stones, and nervously plucking the grass beside him, looked up at the four stern men sitting squarely in their saddles. But he did not answer. He might have been deaf.

"Come!" Agent Hoby said, repeating his question roughly. "You have got a tongue, my lad. Is this old squire Patten's?"

The boy shook his head mutely. He looked about twelve years old.

"Is it farther on?"

"Yes, farther on," the lad muttered, scarcely moving his lips.

"Where?"

Still keeping his eyes, which were large

and brown, on his questioner, the boy pointed towards the tower of the church, a quarter of a mile away.

The agent stifled an exclamation, such as in other times would have been an oath. "Umph! I thought we were there!" he muttered. "However, it is but a step. Come up, marc."

The boy watched the four riders plod on along the road until the trees, which were in the full glory of their summer foliage, and almost met across the dusty way, hid them from his eyes. Then he rose, and shaking his fist with passionate vehemence in the direction in which they had gone, turned towards the gateway as if he would go up to the house. Before he had taken three steps, however, he changed his mind, and coming slowly back to the heap of stones, sat down in the same place and posture as before. The movement to retreat and the return were alike characteristic.

In frame the boy was altogether childish, being puny and slight, and somewhat stunted; but his small face, browned by wind and sun, expressed both will and sensibility. As he sat waiting for the travellers to return, there was a sparkle, and not of tears only, in his eyes. His mouth took an ugly shape, and his small hand found and clutched one of the stones on which he sat.

Agent Hoby had never been more astonished in his life than when he returned hot and angry and found him still there. It was the last thing he had expected. "You little villain!" he cried, shortening his whip in his hand, and spurring his horse on to the strip of turf, which then, as now, bordered the road—"how dare you tell lies to the Commons' Commissioners?"

There was a slender gap in the wall behind the heap of stones, and the lad fell back into this, still clutching his missile in