



BY ROBERT BARR.

HE was a good little boy, was Tom, a quiet, thoughtful, nice little fellow, who never gave his parents any trouble, and never got into mischief; in fact, just such another boy as the lad who is reading this story. He lived a long time ago in a small cottage, with his father and mother, who had no other children. His father was a working man, and his mother had to work also, for they kept no servant.

One afternoon his mother went out to meet his father, and said she could not take Tom along with her because it looked so much like rain. She knew that Tom would not be frightened at being left alone in the house, for he was a lonely little boy, and not used to having companions. He was afraid of only one thing, and that was thunder. When the thunder rolled and crashed, Tom was apt to become rather pale, and to be even more silent than usual. However, he was not in the least frightened of the lightning, and loved to watch it from the window. If it were not for the curious coincidence that thunder always accompanied the lightning, he would have enjoyed the storm exceedingly. But as it was, the pleasure he

had in looking at the lightning was almost counterbalanced by his fear of the thunder.

For some time after his mother left him, Tom gazed out of the window until he noticed it was growing dark. Then he heard the distant rumble of the thunder, and he did not like it. He kept saying to himself, "Mamma, mamma, mamma," as if there were comfort in the reiteration of the word, and he hoped she would hurry home when she saw the storm coming on. Suddenly the dark sky was lit by a vivid flash of lightning, and the thunder rolled heavily and nearer. There was an interval of darkness, then the whole sky became a dome of flame, the thunder crashing quickly after it.

Poor Tom turned away from the window and sat down in the middle of the room. He admitted to himself that he was very much frightened, but thought he was not crying, although he could not account to himself for the tears that steadily flowed down his cheeks. There was an ominous silence for a few minutes, then the room became filled with an intense, quivering light, and the world seemed to split in two with the most awful crash Tom had ever heard. Tom would have shrieked with fear had it not been for a strange thing that

immediately happened, and which riveted his attention. All the blinding light in the room concentrated in one spot, near the place he was sitting. At first he thought it was a huge ball of fire, but as he looked closer he saw that it was a grotesque human shape, such as he had seen in fairy picture-books, only, in this case, the shape seemed to be made of glowing melting fire. Sparks shot from its eyes like little lightning darts; it leered at Tom with a wide grin on its mouth, and then it shouted "Ha, ha, ha, yah!" and as it did so the thunder rolled along the ceiling of the room, and Tom thought this was rather an uncomfortable visitor whose laughter caused thunder.

"You don't know me," said the Goblin to Tom, with a malicious glare.

"No, I don't," admitted Tom.

"Well, I'll tell you who I am: I'm the Lightning Fiend! What do you think of that?"

"Oh, I like lightning," said Tom, anxious not to offend the Goblin, "but I'm afraid of thunder."

The Fiend laughed at this, and again the thunder rolled through the room.

"That shows what a silly boy you are. I'm the one to fear. Thunder couldn't hurt

you, but if I were to point my finger at you, you would drop dead."

"Oh, dear me!" said Tom, in alarm; "I didn't know that."

Then the Lightning Fiend spread out his hands, and from the ends of its glowing fingers sparks flew in every direction. The Fiend was floating midway between the floor and the ceiling; it reached up its right hand, with the forefinger extended, and touched the ceiling; some plaster fell, and blue smoke curled out from where the finger had rested. Then the Fiend reached down with his right foot until the toes touched the carpet; flame and smoke rose from the spot, and the room was filled with the smell of burning wool.

"Oh, don't do that," cried Tom. "Mother wouldn't like it. She'll be very angry if the carpet is burned."

The Fiend laughed again, and again the thunder rolled overhead.

"Much I care for your mother, or your father either," he said. "I'm not afraid of them, but they're afraid of me."

Tom now realized what a desperate Goblin he had to deal with, who was afraid of neither his father nor his mother.

"I can do a million things your father cannot do," bragged the Fiend, with a malicious leer. "I can go a thousand miles while your father is taking a step."

The Fiend saw that, frightened as Tom was, he did not believe this, for Tom knew his father to be the greatest man in all the world, and that nobody could do the things which he could; but he did not dare to contradict a Fiend who was powerful enough to set fire to the house by merely touching it with his toe, and so he was silent. The Fiend seemed to read Tom's thoughts, for he said:—

"Oh, I see you don't believe that, so I'll show you what I can do. I'll go ten miles and be back here before you can wink," and, with a shriek, the Fiend shot out of the room. There was an instant's crackle as he left, and in another instant he was back, grinning at Tom.

"There," he said, "I've been ten miles away; I touched a tree, and it blazed up like a powder magazine. Coming back, my foot



"I'M THE LIGHTNING FIEND!"

rested for the hundredth part of a second on a barn, and now look at it !”

Tom gazed out of the window, and sure enough their neighbour's barn was in flames. He shuddered as he recognised the power the Goblin possessed ; nevertheless, he was a brave little boy, and he asked, with some unconscious contempt in his voice :—

“Is that all you can do? To go about burning people's things is not very nice ; at least, I don't think so.”

“Oh, no, that's not all I can do,” said the Fiend, again laughing his thundery laugh. “I frighten little boys sometimes ; you are as frightened as you can be now.”

“Yes, I know I am,” said Tom, quaveringly. “But if I were as powerful as you are, I wouldn't go about frightening little boys. Anybody can do that.”

“Oh, ho !” shouted the Fiend, apparently not liking what Tom said. “I haven't shown you yet what fright is ; what I have done is nothing to what I can do, and since you dare to talk to me like that, I'll teach you a lesson.” He shrieked, and with that the Fiend split into a thousand pieces with the most awful crash that anyone ever heard. The room seemed to fill with flame, and the yell of the Fiend was so terrible that Tom threw up his arm to cover his eyes, and fell fainting to the floor.

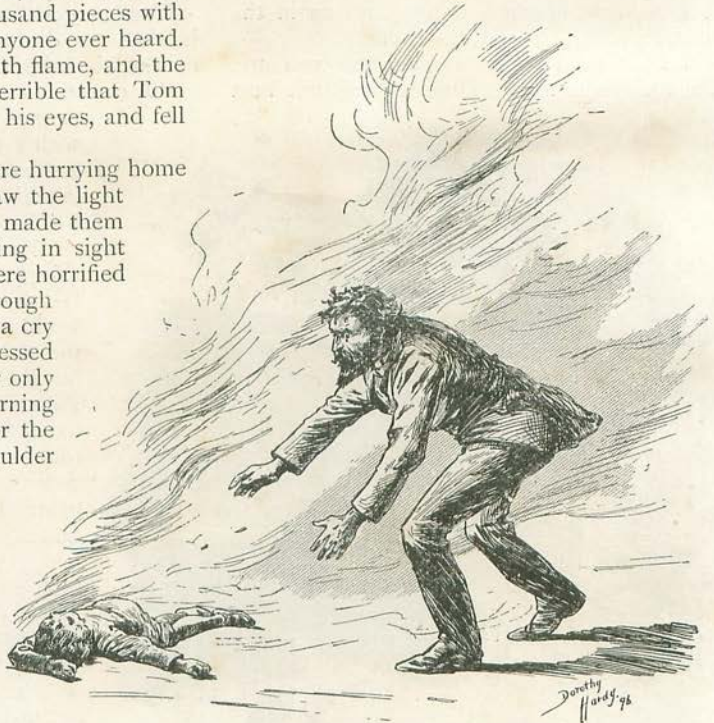
His father and mother were hurrying home through the rain. They saw the light of the burning barn, and it made them very anxious ; at last, coming in sight of their own cottage, they were horrified to see flames breaking through the roof ; the mother gave a cry of despair as they both pressed forward, realizing that their only son was locked up in the burning house. Without waiting for the key, the father put his shoulder to the door and forced it open, for he was a very strong man. The house was filled with smoke, and he had great difficulty in making his way to the small parlour, where, by the light of the flames, he saw his little boy lying on the carpet, his head resting on his arm.

The father quickly raised the insensible child in his arms, and carried him from the burning house. There was no shelter for them, and all they could do was to stand in the pouring rain and

watch the destruction of their home. It was a terrible thing for the Lightning Fiend to have done, for in the cottage was everything the poor people possessed.

The mother took the boy and rocked him in her arms. The cold rain splashing on his face quickly revived him, and he was soon able to tell his parents what he had seen and what the Fiend had said to him. They looked one at the other, and the mother began to weep. She was afraid their boy had lost his mind, but that turned out not to be the case, for when Tom grew up he became one of the famous men of the day. His name travelled all over the world. He was a great electrician, inventing many useful things, and the man who invents useful articles gathers wealth ; so Tom was rich, rejoicing in having money, because he had a boy of his own to whom he could give advantages he had not himself possessed when he was young.

When Tom the second was the same age as Tom the first had been at the time of the



“HE SAW HIS LITTLE BOY LYING ON THE CARPET.”

Lightning Fiend's visit, his father took him on his knee, and told him the story that I have set down. Young Tom was greatly interested, and watched his father with wide-

open eyes as he told the story of the Lightning Fiend.

"Why do you say, father, that you thought you saw the Goblin? Aren't you sure you saw it?"

"I was sure at the time, my boy, but I have thought since that it may have been a dream I had while I was falling to the floor."

Young Tom pondered over this for a while, and at last said:—

"I would rather believe, father, that you really saw the Goblin."

"Well, perhaps I did," said the father, thoughtfully; "in fact, I am never quite sure whether I saw it or not, so we will take it for granted that I did, if you like it better."

And so young Tom went up to his room thinking deeply of the Goblin story. He wondered whether or not he

would be afraid if a Goblin visited him. Young Tom possessed a much finer room than the one in which his father saw the Goblin, for, as I have said, his father was rich, while his grandfather had been very poor; it had been years before his grandfather recovered from the loss caused by the burning of his cottage. Tom felt glad that his grandfather was still alive to enjoy the comforts now provided for him.

There was an easy-chair in Tom's room, and he seated himself in it and thought over the Goblin story until he felt a little bit frightened, for the room was growing dark. He then arose and pressed a button that rang a bell downstairs. In a little time a servant rapped lightly at the door.

"Did you ring, Master Tom?" she asked.

"Yes, Betty; it is getting dark, and father doesn't like me to meddle with the light."

The maid walked to a projection in the wall, and, giving it a slight turn, the chandelier was instantly illuminated, flooding the apartment with light. Tom seated himself again before the fire, and the servant went downstairs. All at once Tom noticed the electric lights of the chandelier growing dimmer and dimmer. He was surprised at this; but his surprise increased when, on looking up at the chandelier, he saw hanging from it by the hands a curious object, which glowed in the semi-darkness as if it had been rubbed with phosphorus. Tom at once re-

cognised it as the Lightning Fiend, although he felt sure it was much changed from what it had been when his father had seen it. Its long arms were thin and lean, and in its face was a look of fear. It seemed afraid to let go of the chandelier, but at last it did so, and fell upon the table. It sat up presently, and drew its hand wearily across its brow. Seeing that Tom was looking, it drew a deep sigh.

"You are the Lightning Fiend?" said Tom, by way of beginning a conversation.



"IT SEEMED AFRAID TO LET GO OF THE CHANDELIER."

"Alas, yes," said the Goblin, again mopping its brow.

"Well, if you think to frighten me," said Tom, "you will find yourself disappointed. I know all about you; you are negative and positive, and if you go round a piece of soft iron by means of an insulated copper wire, you make that iron a magnet. You can be produced by a dynamo revolving rapidly; it brings you up out of the ground, and we can also make you by different chemical solutions. You see, I know all about

you, and you can't frighten me as you did my father a long time ago. If I were to stand on a sheet of plate-glass you couldn't even touch me. You can't frighten him now," said Tom, who had the same confidence in his father that most little boys have in theirs.

"No," said the Fiend, dejectedly, "I don't want to frighten anybody. The frightening of your father was the greatest mistake of my life. I am very sorry I did it; no one can be more sorry."

"I don't wonder at it," said Tom; "for you burnt my grandfather's house, and he was very poor then."

"Oh, I don't know that I mind the burning of the house so much," said the Fiend, with some return of his old jauntness. "I have burnt lots of houses and will again. It's about the only fun I have left. It is the frightening of your father I regret, not on his account either, because, you see, I'm a selfish brute. It is because he has set me to work that I am sorry. I had nothing at all to do when your father was a boy, but now I am almost worked to death. Even when a little boy like you pressed that button, I had to jump right down to the kitchen and tell the servant you wanted her, and that is not the worst of it."

"Well, what is the worst of it?" asked Tom.

"I have to do heavy work all day. Those street trams that run past your door with a wire above them, I have to pull; I have to run them filled with people from early morning until late at night—until all the people are home from the theatres, and it is very hard work, I tell you; but that isn't the worst of it," he added, as he drew his hand again across his anxious brow.

"Well, what is it?" asked Tom, growing very curious to know what might be the very worst of it.

"Long before the street-cars stop I have to light up the whole city, and keep it lighted until daybreak. Think of that! But that isn't the worst of it."

"I shouldn't think that anything could be worse than having to work both night and day," said Tom. "Most people have to work only in the daytime."

"Ah, but there's no rest for me," said the Goblin, sighing. "All night long, as well as all day, I have to carry messages. Any little boy can call me up. I have to plunge under

the sea, and carry the news to all parts of the world. People used to be satisfied when a steamer brought the news across the ocean in eight or nine days, but if I am half a second carrying it to any part of the world, they think I am slow. And then I have to look after the signals of all the railways in the world; but that isn't the worst of it."

"Dear me," said Tom, wonderingly, "whatever is it, then?"

"Well, I run motors that drive sewing-machines, fans, and all sorts of machinery, so that with lighting, message-carrying, and all that I have to do, what I fear is that your father will go on inventing more work for me, and that's the worst of it," said the Fiend, sighing heavily.

"Well, you won't have time to frighten any more little boys then," said Tom.

"Oh, don't talk about that any more," said the Fiend, angrily; "I've had enough of it. If I had never frightened your father I would never have had all this work to do, and he perhaps would not be the greatest electrician in the world. Hark!" said the Fiend, after a pause, "that is your father's step. I must go."

He caught hold of the chandelier, swung himself up, and immediately the lights blazed up in the room.

"Well, I'm glad," said Tommy, "to know the worst of it."

"So-ho, my boy, you've been asleep," said his father, as he entered the room, and saw Tom blinking at him.

"Oh, no, father. I was just thinking over that Goblin story, and, very strangely, while I was thinking the Goblin came. He remembered you, and was sorry he had frightened you; so, you see, it was true, and you did see him."

"Really?" said the father, and he smiled at his son's earnestness. "And how did he look: just the same as when I saw him?"

"No, father, he was tired out. He has to work night and day, and he doesn't like it."

"Well, Tom, then this is a secret between you and me; we've both seen the Goblin in the two stages of his existence; and now," stroking Tom's curly head, "when little boys begin to see Goblins, it is time to go to bed."

And so Tom went to bed, and what he dreamed about that night you may easily guess.