

SUSAN BOLTON'S
WHITE FEATHER.

BY

E. A. H.

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F. PITMAN, 20, PATERNOSTER ROW.
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Susan Bolton's father was a waggoner, he had worked many years for Mr. London, and took much pride in the beautiful horses he had charge of ; he often told his children many curious things about them—how knowing they were, and how grateful to those who fed and took care of them. He was very careful and industrious, and his master often said the harness, whips, and other things under his charge, lasted as long as possible, because he took such good care of them ; and John Bolton said it was only because he attended to his father's example and *did not mind trouble*, and put everything to its proper use and place.

The sun was shining brightly and glanced on the row of glittering bells (half hidden

though they were under their red fringe) that hung against the walls of the nice, cheerful-looking kitchen, where John Bolton was at breakfast with his family. There were John Bolton, his wife, and four children ; two boys and two girls. Susan, the eldest, is the one I intend telling you about ; she was nearly twelve years old, and had a pleasant rosy face and kind thoughtful ways. She had one fault of which she took no pains to get rid, indeed she nursed it up and petted it, and grew at last quite fond of it, and hardly thought it a fault at all. This fault was *vanity*.

Sometimes, when her mother would try to cure her of it, she would say—"It is such a little fault, hardly one at all, mother ; besides it doesn't hurt any one but me. It is not like selfishness, or story-telling, or stealing ;" and once when she said so her mother showed her a fly caught in a cob-web, saying to her—"Look, Susan, how fine and weak those threads are, finer than any silk ; the fly could break *one* of them easily, but a good many together hold him fast, and there is no escape for him."

Susan only laughed and took her mother's knitting pin, and broke all the silvery web,

saying—"There, mother, he is free! he is free!"

But Mrs. Bolton only said, quietly—"Ah! Susan, who will do that for you?"

Breakfast was just finished, and Susan with busy careful hands washed and put away the cups and saucers, and then helped her mother to get her little brother and sister ready for the Sunday-school.

Some time later Susan was in church, sitting with her class in her usual place. She had been up early, and had a long walk in the sunshine, and I am afraid would have been rather sleepy but for one thing. Not far from where she sat was Mr. London's pew. Mr. and Mrs. London and their children were always objects of interest to Susan; her mother often did a day's work at Mr. London's house, Beech Hall, and often brought home some book or toy for her children, which Mrs. London had given her; and once when Susan was ill, little Miss London brought her some jam and nice cakes. To day, however, Susan did not think of books or toys, but of little Miss Ethel's new hat. Oh, how pretty it was, what a beautiful feather, so long, so white, so curly! Oh, if *she* could have a feather like that,

she would look as nice as Miss Ethel! She had often heard people say—"Fine feathers make fine birds;" they must be feathers like that. Indeed she thought so much about that long white curly feather that she quite forgot where she was, and sat down when she ought to have stood up, and stood up when she ought to have sat down; and once got up so quickly that she knocked her books down with *such a noise!* And when her teacher spoke to her to recall her wandering thoughts, she thought it was part of the service, and said "Amen" out loud, which made her much hotter than her long walk, but made her more attentive to the rest of the service. But for several days all her thoughts seemed bent on that white feather, wondered how much one would cost, and at last asked her mother; and when she knew how much money would be wanted, she began to think how she could ever get enough to buy one, and to wonder if her mother would let her wear it if she did.

Mrs. Bolton gave her little daughter Susan sixpence a-week for keeping her brothers' and little sister's clothes in order, so far as she knew how,—looking after the buttons and strings and rents and holes; and as she could

knit nicely she used to make stockings, and all the money she earned for a certain number of pairs her mother allowed her to keep. Her little money box was nearly empty just now, and Susan was in a great hurry to get the sum she wanted. Her boots wanted mending ; but she was silly enough to wear them in holes rather than part with any of her precious store, and she would not take the money from her mother as she knew how badly she wanted it herself. When the weather was fine she used to take her little brother and sister into the fields that they might play in the nice fresh air. So with taking care of the children, helping her mother, and going to school, she had not much time for knitting. She used to take a little bag with her needles and worsted with her into the fields, and often managed to do a good piece ; but sometimes the little ones were tiresome or not well, and then she had to devote all her thoughts to them ; for her mother told her she could hardly do two things at once well, and if the children were fretful or mischievous she must see first to them. Sometimes they would be very happy and amuse themselves, or listen while Susan told them stories, and then she

would be glad of her knitting ; it was better employment than pulling flowers to pieces, or making remarks on every passer-by, as so many idle girls did, or else spending her time in gossiping about their homes, which so often led to discontent and envy or mischief-making and conceit.

Now Susan was in such a great hurry to get money enough to buy the white feather she was more industrious than ever, and, instead of enjoying a game of play, she was impatient and cross when her little brother and sister or her school-fellows teased her to join them. Another thing she did that showed also she was in *too* great a hurry to add to the contents of her money box. All in John Bolton's little cottage were accustomed to be at rest early as they were all up betimes in the morning, and Susan after a happy, busy day was seldom sorry to go to bed, or loth to get up after a nice refreshing sleep.

But now she grumbled, when her mother said—"Now Susan, dear, put up your knitting and go to bed, you look quite tired, child." And although she was *so* sleepy she only obeyed reluctantly, or entreated to sit up later ; and when her mother, after yielding

two or three nights to her wish, would not continue to let Susan sit up late, she only thought, as she slowly went upstairs, of how she could possibly get a little more time. At last she determined to get up *very, very* early, and so she did. Once the clock in the kitchen struck five when she had already done fifteen rows of her knitting. This went on some time, then Susan began to lose her cheerful industrious ways and manners ; she yawned at breakfast time, and did not care to eat her nice bread and butter ; moved slowly about, and got ready for school as if she were half asleep ; she could not half learn her lessons, or do her sums, because she had a headache. Something was amiss, and Mrs. Bolton soon found out what it was, and set matters right.

When the children were gone out to play, and Susan and her mother were busy in-doors, she said—"My dear Susan, how tired you seem ; you are yawning and stretching as if you had been up all night ; you are just like pussy, look at her." And Susan could not help laughing as a large tabby cat rose slowly, hunched up her back, stretched out her forelegs, arched her tail, and gaped wide enough for any mouse however fat to jump

in if it had any wish to do so ; then she slowly turned round with a most contented air (which was certainly wanting just now on Susan's face) and was soon fast asleep again with her tail over her nose. Then Susan, knitting away, briskly told her mother how early she had got up, and why she had done so.

"Ah, Susan, I fear you are in *too great a hurry to be rich*, dear," said Mrs. Bolton kindly ; "if you were to go on so fast and take away from yourself your needful sleep, you would not be able to wear that beautiful white feather you want so much. Children like you, who are growing fast, want a certain quantity of sleep as well as food ; you cannot be *too* thankful, Susan, you can have it without interruption. So, dear, you must be content to be a little longer in getting your money, and never forget to be grateful that you are not obliged to deprive yourself of sweet sleep to work hard for needful bread, or to watch by the sick bed of those you love, and that no aches or pains, or sad anxieties or painful thoughts, prevent you from enjoying one of our Heavenly Father's good gifts to His children."

Susan, who was sensible and affectionate,

gladly promised to attend to her mother's advice, and went to bed and got up at her usual time ; but still the thought of how she *could* get the feather often clouded her face. There was to be a school treat, with tea and games, in Mr. London's park, and she so wanted her feather before. Only one way seemed left : she could not make money any faster nor could she beg for it, so she must *save* it and not *spend any* until she had enough, and very soon her new resolution was tested and unexpectedly she had some help.

One morning her father said—"Now, Susan, I am going to Newchester, I can give you a lift, and your mother has some errands for you ; run for your hat, I shall be ready soon."

It was a lovely morning, and Susan enjoyed her beautiful drive. The splendid team of Mr. London's horses, the jingling bells flashing in the sunshine, the blackbird's mellow song, all helped to make it delightful, and she was sorry when the five-mile drive was over, and her father put her down at the foot of the steep street that led to her aunt Jane's house, where she was going to have her dinner. She just waited to watch the horses toss their noble heads as they started again, as if they liked the

jingling music, and then went to her aunt Jane's.

"How are you going back, Susan?" her cousin Lizzie asked, when she was ready to start again home.

"Uncle Tom is going to take me back, I am to meet him at the bottom of the hill, and I must be sure not to keep him waiting, father says; he is the carrier for the village, you know, Lizzie."

The drive home in the cool, pleasant evening was as delightful as the one in the morning, and Susan was not sorry for a long rest after trotting about the town all day. Her uncle found her a nice place at the back of the van, and his little dog Snap curled himself up beside her. Susan was amused at first by looking at all the different parcels and goods around her. A kettle was swung up on one side, and band boxes and hampers and packages of all sorts gave her many guesses as to their contents. Susan thought she had never had so nice a journey before, and looked the picture of content.

Her aunt Millar had given her a shilling, and her uncle a sixpence, and now she had all the money she wanted; she *might* have a

sixpence over, but she was not certain how much she would want. She was sadly afraid of not having enough to buy the feather, and she could not have hoped for one, but her aunt in London had promised to get one for her, as she was a milliner.

Susan was tired and almost sleepy, yet she only shut her eyes to look in fancy at the white feather she so longed for, and not to sleep. By and by, when the town was far behind and home drew near, and Susan forgot the busy scenes she had been in, as she watched the silver moon setting over the well-known trees behind her father's cottage, and saw the evening star come twinkling out in the blue sky, and the smoke curl slowly up out of the distant chimney; but the look of content and pleasure faded, and she seemed to be thinking gravely, as if not pleased with herself, as indeed she was not.

In all her visits to Newchester before she had never failed to think of those at home, and to bring home some trifle for each. She always took a few pence she had saved on purpose. Generally she bought a penny newspaper for her father with plenty of pictures; a few shrimps for her mother, as she knew how

fond she was of them ; and some toy or cake, or other trifle for her little sister and brothers. To-day she had not brought anything, not even for her mother, yet she had a shilling and six-pence in her purse. Susan did not talk as much as usual when she got home, for her visit to her aunt Jane's generally set her tongue off at a gallop, and when the children clustered round her, she only said—"I'm tired, let me have my supper ; trot away, baby." Instead of laughing gaily, and holding her parcels over their heads, and bidding them guess twenty guesses as to what was in them, she turned crossly away with empty hands. Mrs. Bolton saw what was the matter, and kindly called the children away, and sent Susan early to bed.

The next day Mrs. Bolton having some work she was obliged to finish, kept Susan at home to help, and when both were busy and settled at work, Susan told her mother she had enough money, and asked if she might buy the feather to wear at the school treat the next week.

Mrs. Bolton stitched on and considered before she said—"Certainly if you so much wish it; but, Susan, have you thought of all

I said to you when we talked about this matter before. Feathers do not wear well ; the first shower of rain will injure it, and white feathers soon lose their beauty."

But Susan would hardly listen ; she had made up her mind to have her coveted treasure, and did not wish to be convinced that it was foolish to persist in having it. She only said—"Just see, mother, it will last ever so long. I shall be *so* careful of it, and if it looks rainy—if the clouds are only a little black—I will not wear it."

"There is one possible disappointment, Susan, I must prepare you for," Mrs. Bolton began as a last warning ; but a neighbour coming in prevented any more being said, and in a few days Susan rejoiced in the possession of the beautiful white feather.

"I can see, mother," Susan said a few days later, "you think I am too fond of dress, don't you, now?"

Mrs. Bolton smiled, and said—"What do you think yourself, Susie, I do not fancy you have thought of much besides for the last month."

Susan coloured a little, and then said—
"Ah, mother, but that is only once in a

while, about such a beautiful feather, besides, I do not see any harm in thinking about it ; look, what beautiful robes the angels wear ! ”

“ Certainly, but then the angels have no need to give *all* their thought and time to get them, and neglect everything else for the sake of them, as you would seem to say. They have them according to their needs and necessities ; the more obedient they are to the will of the Lord, the more beautiful and pure are their robes. Do you not remember in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew, our Lord says—‘ Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink : nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment ? ’ And then in another verse it is written—‘ And why take ye thought for raiment ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’ And the 32nd verse says—‘ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed ? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek) ; for your

heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' And so, Susan, it would be doubtless with us if we did obey this command, if we were faithful and obedient: even as our Lord gives suitable clothing to every flower, and bird, and beast, so He would to us were we as truly His children as He is our Father. That the command 'take no thought' does not mean we are not to think or use our reason about our food and clothing, is evident. One of the first commands in the Word of God has reference to eating, and one of the earliest narratives there, is about it. As well as the record of the first clothing of Adam and Eve, mention in the Bible is frequently made of clothing and food. Unlike any of the lower animals or the birds or flowers, man is endowed with the power and will to choose his food and clothing; it is evident it is intended he should do so. If he abuses this power—becomes a glutton, drunkard, or vain and frivolous—he is ungrateful and disobedient, and turns a useful pleasure into a great evil, and misuses his freedom. You have often

noticed and read in books of flowers and plants and animals, that they are 'clothed' according to their needs and different places of abode; some thrive only in warm, sunny places, others amid snow and ice; some on dry and sandy places, and others in water or on marshes; and each has the leaves and colour, the clothing most suited to it; and so, doubtless, shall we be cared for, according to our need, when we are faithful and trusting. It is because we will not be contented, or will wish for things unsuitable for us, that we take so much '*care*,' such anxious thought.

"There is a difference also in the way in which the Lord cares for flowers and animals and His immortal creatures. He has endowed us with many gifts, and with many affections, that we may use them. He clothes all other beings and things without their knowledge, as it were, and without their co-operation; they 'toil not, neither do they spin,' but man can do both, and the Lord has surrounded him with all things of use and beauty, and given him reason to use them; for instance, the cotton tree and the silk worm, and the wool and hair of animals, are given to man for him

to use, but too often all these gifts are misused, as in the fault we are speaking of—too great fondness for dress. In moderation there is much good in this care for clothing, which is also so necessary. See how many people are employed to furnish it; how many wonderful inventions have been the result of it; how many beautiful things discovered."

"Yes, mother, I see the good of it; and see how lovely flowers are and birds. I should like to be clothed like them."

"*Some* of them, my dear; and I have no doubt you could have as pretty a dress as theirs if ——"

"Oh! now do tell me."

"Just think, Susan, if you were like the birds and flowers you admire so much, you would have to be content with *one* dress all your life—the same colour, the same shape, the same material. How would you like that? Look at the gayest bird you know—Miss London's parrot, for instance—he is always content with his *one* coat. *I* fancy if the dress were ever so pretty you would like a change."

"I never thought of that; you always think such clever things, mother," said Susan, looking proudly at her mother.

"Then again, Susan, all birds and flowers have not gay robes. How would you like to be a sober little sparrow, or linnet, or even a glossy *black crow*, or a dandelion, or sprig of rosemary?"

"Oh! mother, I did not mean such birds and flowers as those," said Susan, as her mother put on her bonnet, and went out to do some errands, leaving Susan to think over their talk.

The evening before the school-treat Susan was very anxious about the weather, and was very eager in looking for all the signs of a fine morrow. The beautiful sunset was watched most anxiously, and Susan almost frightened the spiders with her long stare at their silky webs; and then she and her brother Tom welcomed the tall columns of gnats that would get into their eyes and mouths, and ran into the fields to find if the dew lay thick and heavy or if the grass was dry, and looked sharply after any toad or beetle that crossed the path. But bedtime came at last, and Susan went to sleep and dreamt of her white feather.

The next day what a beautiful morning greeted Susan's eyes! How sunny! How

bright! What a lovely breeze! Susan's dressing that day was a long affair, and she was some time collecting her mug and her ticket for the prize, and lastly, in putting on her hat. When she first had possession of her hat with its new feather, not one of her least troubles had been where to keep it. She put it in a box in her own room, and her little sister got at it, and Susan was just in time to prevent serious damage. Then the neat little box where she kept her own clothes would not hold it as it was, and so they had to be turned out and kept on a chair, which vexed Susan, as she was a neat little girl and liked her room to look nice. So she longed for a pretty wardrobe like Miss London's, forgetting that it could not possibly stand anywhere in her father's little cottage.

At last the time came for Susan to put on her hat "for good," and with many a careful pat and touch it was securely placed, with its long feather, white, curling, and floating behind. But somehow she was not quite satisfied: her dress looked coarse and her boots clumsy, and her hair would *not* go right. Time was getting on and Tom was waiting, so she ran down stairs, and brother and sister were soon on their way.

The beautiful breeze had freshened into quite a rough wind, and Susan's feather had rather a boisterous welcome on its first appearance ; and once, to poor Susan's fright, her hat blew off, and, in her alarm lest the boys should chase it, she ran as she had never run before, not even when, a *little* girl, the old gander in farmer Wilson's field had run after her. Luckily the hat was none the worse, and Susan thoroughly enjoyed herself ; though one or two things vexed her a little.

Miss London was, of course, at the treat, busy helping with tea and buns ; but her hat had *no white feather !* it was quite a different one, with only a wreath of white and pink daisies.

And Susan heard her say to a young friend near her—"Oh ! Nellie, I am so glad you like my new hat ; I was so tired of the other, it was quite old fashioned, I had it early in the spring !"

Susan was astonished. "Old fashioned !" why she knew Miss London had only had it three months ; and then she thought of her mother's words, and said to herself, if it was necessary to have a new hat so often as *that*, it was not much use to try for one with a white feather,

as she had done. *That* would indeed be shabby and old fashioned before she had another,—it must last at least a year!

The afternoon continued fine in spite of large brown clouds; but just after the children dispersed a heavy storm came on, and though they ran as fast as they could, the girls with their frocks and handkerchiefs over their heads, many were very wet, and best coats, and frocks, and hats had to be shaken, and brushed, and dried. But no shaking or drying would do any good to Susan's poor feather, and she could hardly help crying, although her mother tried to comfort her; and she could not even smile at little Phœbe's suggestion "to give her feather to the old white duck to do up, as she kept her own feathers so nice." It was many days before Susan recovered from her disappointment, and one evening when Mrs. Bolton and Susan were seated at work they had a long talk about it—one Susan always remembered, and which was often useful to her.

"Did you think it would rain at the school-treat, mother?" Susan asked.

"No, indeed, I did not. Why do you ask?"

“Don’t you remember you told me to be prepared for a disappointment?”

“Yes, and I meant one you did meet with. Have you forgotten what you told me little Miss London said to her friend, and that you were so disappointed she had no white feather?”

“Oh! yes, mother.” Susan thought some time, and her needle went slower and slower, until it stopped altogether; then she said—

“I know, mother, you think me too fond of dress, but I really cannot see the harm, and it does not hurt anyone but myself. ’Tis not like a selfish fault, like greediness, or always wanting to go out playing or on pleasure.”

“Stop, stop, Susan, are you so sure of that. Now, shall I give you six reasons against this fault?”

“Six reasons! Can there be more than one?”

“You shall see. First of all, if you are too fond of dress, you spend more than you can afford.”

“Oh! but mother, I would never buy more than I could pay for, that would be getting in debt.”

“Perhaps you think so now, but by and bye, when your love of dress grows stronger, you will find excuses for even that ; but if you just listen you will find you have already spent more than you can afford. How badly you wanted boots, and yet you could not buy them, because you had spent so much on your feather that you could not afford them, and so you caught cold. Again, your best frock is almost spoilt, because you said you could not buy stuff to mend your every-day one with and the feather as well ; and you could not wear it until it was mended. I could mention besides one or two little things that you have not noticed, and they all show that you have spent more than you can afford, although you have not run into debt. Then, Susan, I have known girls not only deprive themselves as you have done of needful articles of dress, but have even stinted themselves of wholesome food, for the sake of a ribbon, or a tie, or a collar ; and one deprived herself of needful health-giving sleep, because of her love of dress.”

“That was your little girl, Susan, mother,” Susan said quickly.

“And there is another reason yet, a very

serious one : think of the time that is wasted through this fault, wishing to dress beyond your means, more or better than you can afford. How many hours are spent in plotting, planning, and contriving to try and make a dress or bonnet like one that is admired ; and often before they are ready other fashions prevail, or prettier ones are seen, and all the time is lost. Many girls I have known waste hour after hour in which many other things should have been done—learning useful things, helping others, or getting health by exercise in the fresh air. It is very useful, and nice, and pleasant, to know how to contrive and to plan so as to make the best and prettiest of every thing, and this must be learnt like everything else, but not to the hindrance of other things."

"Ah!" said Susan, "that makes me think of my poor feather,—how, after all my saving and care, it was old fashioned and spoiled."

"And, Susan, you know, without my telling you, how too great a love of dress leads to envy and discontent. And then, Susan, think, if you had plenty of good things would you be satisfied ?"

"I think I should, if you had them too, mother!"

“ Not quite, I fear, Susan ; I knew a little girl who had everything very nice once, and yet she was not content, she wanted to be as *tall* as someone else, and very likely if she had been as tall, she would have wished to be fairer or darker,—or prettier or older,—or something else,—that she might do as she liked, eh, Susan ? ”

“ Oh ! mother, I only wanted to have my hair curl without any trouble, like Mary Wood’s,” said Susan, as she remembered her disappointment in the effect of her new hat, with its long white feather, and that she thought light pretty curls like Mary Wood’s would make all the difference.

Mrs. Bolton smiled at her little girl’s excuse, and then said gravely—

“ Now, Susan, for my last caution, and remember it well, for it will be of use to you when you grow up. If you had *all* the dresses and pretty bonnets or hats you wanted, the next thing would be you would not be content to wear them at home for us only to see ; you would want to show them off to others. And, by and bye, instead of being a good affectionate girl, you would be a silly restless woman, always seeking your own pleasure—

and too often not finding it—with no higher aim than to be finer dressed than your friends, and more noticed. And then, when you grow old and dress can no longer please you or make you pleasing in the eyes of others, how sad an end of wasted time and money! That day seems a long way off, still it *must* come if it pleases our Heavenly Father to spare you until you grow old. Your white feather, Susan, will not be quite a useless thing, if it has helped to teach you a useful lesson."



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