



## 1

In the old city of London, on an autumn day in the sixteenth century, a boy was born to a poor family of the name of Canty, who did not want him. On the same day another English child was born to a rich family of the name of Tudor, who wanted him. All England wanted him too. England had so wanted him, and hoped for him, that now the people were full of joy. Everybody kissed each other and cried. Everybody took a holiday, and rich and poor ate and danced and sang for days and nights. There was no talk in all England but of the new baby, Edward Tudor, **Prince of Wales**<sup>1</sup>. But there was no talk about the other baby, Tom Canty, except among the family of poor people whom he had only brought more trouble.

London was an old and great town. The streets were very narrow and dirty, especially in the part where Tom Canty lived, which was not far from London Bridge. The houses were made of wood, with the second floor projecting over the first, and the third



projecting over the second. The higher the houses grew, the wider they were. The windows were small, and they opened outward, like doors.

The house in which Tom's father lived was in a dirty little place called **Offal Court**<sup>2</sup>, near Pudding Lane. It was full of poor families. Canty's family had a room on the third floor. The mother and father had a bed in the corner; but Tom, his grandmother, and his two sisters, Bet and Nan, slept on the floor on bags of dirty straw.

Bet and Nan were fifteen-year-old twins. They were kind girls, dirty, dressed in rags, and ignorant. Their mother was like them. But the father and the grandmother got drunk whenever they could; then they fought each other or anybody who came their way; they cursed and swore always. John Canty was a thief, and his mother was a beggar. They made beggars of the children, but could not make thieves of them. Among those who lived in the house, was a good old priest, and he taught the children secretly. Father Andrew also taught Tom a little Latin, and how to read and write.

All Offal Court was just like the Canties. Drinking and fighting were there every night. Broken heads were as common as hunger in that place. Yet little Tom was not unhappy. All the Offal Court boys lived like that and thought it was correct. When he came home empty-handed at night, he knew his father and grandmother would curse and beat him. In the night his mother would slip to him and give him something to eat.

So Tom's life went along quite well. By day he begged, and by night he listened to Father Andrew's tales and legends about giants and fairies, and kings and princes. His head was full of these wonderful things, and he dreamed of seeing a real prince, with his own eyes. He often read the priest's old books, and his dreams and reading worked some changes in him by-and-by. His dream-people were so fine that he wished to be clean and better dressed. He began to wash himself sometimes in the Thames.

By-and-by Tom's reading and dreaming about princes' life had such a strong effect on him that he began to *act* the prince, unconsciously. His speech and manners became ceremonious and courtly to everybody's admiration and amusement. Tom's influence among young people began to grow. He seemed to know so much! and he could do and say such marvellous things! and he was so wise! Even old people asked him for an advice.

## EXERCISES

### 1. Answer the questions:

1. Who was born in London on the same autumn day?
2. Why did everybody in England have a holiday?
3. What did the English speak about at the time?
4. What did the Canties think about their new baby?
5. Where did Tom Canty live?
6. What did the houses in that part of London look like?
7. How many rooms did Tom's family have? What did it look like?
8. Who did the family consist of?
9. How did the Canties earn their living?
10. They were a happy friendly family, weren't they?
11. Did Tom go to school? Could he read and write?
12. What were Tom's neighbours like at Offal Court?
13. What was Tom's everyday life like?
14. What did Tom think and dream of all the time?
15. How did Tom's reading and dreams change him?
16. What did people at Offal Court think of Tom?

### 2. Think and say if these statements are right or wrong. Correct the wrong ones, give your reasons.

1. Neither the family of Tom Canty nor the family of Edward Tudor wanted their babies.

2. The streets in the part of London where Tom Canty lived were narrow but clean and nice looking.
3. The Canty family slept on the floor.
4. Tom's mother and sisters were kind to him, but his father and grandmother beat and cursed him.
5. The Canties were a family of beggars.
6. Tom couldn't read and write like all poor children of that time.
7. All people living at Offal Court were all beggars and thieves, and drank and fought each other every night.
8. Tom Canty thought such life normal and was quite happy.
9. Tom Canty dreamed of becoming a prince.
10. Tom was as dirty as other boys at Offal Court.
11. Everybody admired Tom's new manners and speech.
12. Tom was an intelligent boy and everybody recognized it.

### **3. Find out and say.**

1. Why was it such a big joy when Edward Tudor was born? Whose son was he? What do you know about his parents? What do you know about that time in England?
2. Do the houses look the same in the central part of London now? What do streets near London Bridge look like now?

3. Was it usual for a poor boy to learn to read and write, and to learn Latin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century?
4. Why did Father Andrew teach Tom Latin? Was it spoken in England at that time?
5. Why did Tom wash himself in the Thames? Why didn't he wash at home? Didn't his parents wash him?



## 2

One January day Tom got up hungry, and left home hungry. He walked around the city, hardly noticing where he was going, or what was happening around him. Some time later he found himself near a majestic palace — Westminster — the farthest from home he had ever walked.

At each side of the gate stood a soldier. There was a crowd of people waiting for a chance to see a royalty. Poor little Tom, in his rags, approached, and saw a boy, whose clothes were shining with jewels; and on his head was a red cap with plumes. Several fine gentlemen stood near — his servants, no doubt. Oh! he was a prince — a living prince, a real prince!

Tom's eyes grew big with wonder and delight. Before he knew what he was doing, he went up to the gate. The next moment one of the soldiers grabbed him rudely, and threw him into the crowd and laughed; but the young prince ran to the gate, and cried out, "How dare you treat a poor boy like that? Open the gates, and let him in!"

The crowd shouted, "Long live the Prince of Wales!"

The soldiers opened the gates, and Tom came in.

Edward Tudor said —

"You look tired and hungry. Come with me."

Edward took Tom to the palace, and a meal was brought such as Tom had only read about in books. The prince sent away the servants, then he sat nearby, and asked questions while Tom ate.

"What is your name, boy?"

"Tom Canty, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"In the city, sir. Offal Court, near Pudding Lane."

"Offal Court! An odd name. Do you have parents?"

"I have parents, sir, and a grandmother, also twin sisters, Nan and Bet."

"How old are they?"

"Fifteen, sir."

"Lady Elizabeth, my sister, is fourteen, and Lady Jane Grey, my cousin, is of my own age; but my sister Lady Mary — Are your sisters kind to their servants?"

"Do you think, sir, that they have servants?"

"And who helps them undress at night? Who dresses them when they get up?"

"Nobody, sir. **Why should they take off their dress<sup>3</sup>**, and sleep like the animals?"

"Their dress! Do they have only one?"

"Ah, what would they do with more? They do not have two bodies each."

“It is a marvellous thought! You speak well. Are you learned?”

“I do not know, sir. The good priest that is called Father Andrew taught me from his books.”

“Do you know Latin?”

“A little, sir.”

“Tell me of your Offal Court. Do you have a pleasant life there?”

“Yes, sir, except when one is hungry. There are **Punch-and-Judy shows**<sup>4</sup>, and monkeys, and plays, and it is so fine to see them.”

“Tell me more.”

“We boys of Offal Court fight with each other sometimes. In summer, sir, we swim in the canals and in the river. We dance and sing around the May-pole; we play in the sand, and we make mud pastry —”

“Oh, it is marvellous! If I could put on your clothes and walk in the sand once, I could refuse the crown!”

“And if I could be dressed once like you, sir, — just once—”

“Oho, would you like it? **Then so shall it be**<sup>5</sup>. Take off your rags, and put on my clothes! We will have our happiness.”

A few minutes later the Prince of Wales was dressed in Tom’s rags, and Tom put on the clothes of royalty. The two went and stood side by side before a great mirror, and they saw they looked very much alike! At last the puzzled prince said —

“You have the same hair, the same eyes, the same voice and manner, the same face that I have. Without clothes, nobody could say which is you, and which the Prince of Wales. And, now that I am dressed as you were dressed, I shall be able to feel as you do. Stay here till I come again! It is a command!”