LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE

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LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE,

THE BROWNIES,

AND

OTHER TALES.

BY

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"JACKANAPES AND OTHER TALES," "A FLAT
IRON FOR A FARTHING," "MELCHIOR'S DREAM, BROTHERS
OF PITY, AND OTHER TALES."

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LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE.

INTRODUCTORY.

Lob Lie-by-the-fire—the Lubber-fiend, as Milton calls him—is a rough kind of Brownie or House Elf, supposed to haunt some north-country homesteads, where he does the work of the farm laborers, for no grander wages than

> "—to earn his cream-bowl duly set."

Not that he is insensible of the pleasures of rest, for

> "—When, in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
> His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn
> That ten day-laborers could not end,
> Then lies him down the Lubber-fiend,
> And, stretched out all the chimney's length,
> Basks at the fire his hairy strength."

It was said that a Lob Lie-by-the-fire once haunted the little old Hall at Lingborough. It was an old stone house on the Borders, and seemed to have got its tints from the gray skies that hung above it. It was cold-looking without, but cosy within, "like a north-country heart," said Miss Kitty, who was a woman of sentiment, and kept a common-place book.

It was long before Miss Kitty's time that Lob Lie-by-the-fire first came to Lingborough. Why and whence he came is not recorded, nor when and wherefore he withdrew his valuable help, which, as wages rose, and prices rose also, would have been more welcome than ever.

This tale professes not to record more of him than comes within the memory of man.

Whether (as Fletcher says) he were the son of a witch, if curds and cream won his heart, and new clothes put an end to his labors, it does not pretend to tell. His history is less known than that of any other sprite. It may

be embodied in some oral tradition that shall one day be found; but as yet the mists of forgetfulness hide it from the story-teller of to-day as deeply as the sea frogs are wont to lie between Lingborough and the adjacent coast.

THE LITTLE OLD LADIES.—ALMS DONE IN SECRET.

THE little old ladies of Lingborough were heiresses.

Not, mind you, in the sense of being the children of some mushroom millionaire, with more money than manners, and (as Miss Betty had seen with her own eyes, on the daughter of a manufacturer who shall be nameless) dresses so fine in quality and be-furbelowed in construction as to cost a good quarter's income (of the little old ladies), but trailed in the dirt from "beggarly extravagance," or kicked out behind at every step by feet which fortune (and a very large fortune too) had never taught to walk properly.

"And how should she know how to walk?" said Miss Betty. "Her mother can't have taught her, poor body! that ran through the streets of Leith, with a creel on her back, as a lassie; and got out of her coach (lined with satin, you mind, sister Kitty?) to her dying day, with a bounce, all in a heap, her dress caught, and her stockings exposed (among ourselves, ladies!) like some good wife that's afraid to be late for the market. Aye, aye! Malcolm Midden—good man!—made a fine pocket of silver in a dirty trade, but his women'll jerk, and toss, and bounce, and fuss, and fluster for a generation or two yet, for all the silks and satins he can buy 'em."

From this it will be seen that the little old ladies inherited some prejudices of their class, and were also endowed with a shrewdness of observation common among all classes of north-country women.

But to return to what else they inherited. They were heiresses, as the last representatives of a family as old in that Border country as the bold blue hills which broke its horizon. They were heiresses also in default of heirs male to their father, who got the land from his uncle's dying childless—sons being scarce in the family. They were heiresses, finally, to the place and the farm, to the furniture that was made when folk seasoned their wood before they worked it, to a diamond brooch which they wore by turns, besides two diamond rings, and two black lace shawls, that had belonged to their mother and their Auntie Jean, long since departed thither where neither moth nor rust corrupt the true riches.

As to the incomings of Lingborough, "It was nobody's business but their own," as Miss Betty said to the lawyer who was their man of business, and whom they consulted on little matters of rent and repairs at as much length,

and with as much formal solemnity, as would have gone elsewhere to the changing hands of half a million of money. Without violating their confidence, however, we may say that the estate paid its way, kept them in silk stockings, and gave them new tabbinet dresses once in three years. It supplied their wants the better that they had inherited house plenishing from their parents, "which they thanked their stars was not made of tag-rag, and would last their time," and that they were quite content with an old home and old neighbors, and never desired to change the grand air that blew about their native hills for worse, in order to be poisoned with bad butter, and make the fortunes of extortionate lodging-house keepers.

The rental of Lingborough did more. How much more the little old ladies did not know themselves, and no one else shall know till that which was done in secret is proclaimed from the housetops.

For they had had a religious scruple, founded upon a literal reading of the scriptural command that a man's left hand should not know what his right hand gives in alms, and this scruple had been ingeniously set at rest by the parson, who, failing in an attempt to explain the force of eastern hyperbole to the little ladies' satisfaction, had said that Miss Betty, being the elder, and the head of the house, might be likened to the right hand, and Miss Kitty, as the younger, to the left, and that if they pursued their good works without ostentation, or desiring the applause even of each other, the spirit of the injunction would be fulfilled.

The parson was a good man and a clever. He had (as Miss Betty justly said) a very spiritual piety. But he was also gifted with much shrewdness in dealing with the various members of his flock. And his work was law to the sisters.

Thus it came about that the little ladies' charities were not known to each other—that Miss Betty turned her morning camlet twice instead of once, and Miss Kitty denied herself in sugar, to carry out benevolent little projects which were accomplished in secret and of which no record appears in the Lingborough ledger.

AT TEA WITH MRS. DUNMAW.

THE little ladies of Lingborough were very sociable, and there was, as they said, "as much gaiety as was good for anyone" within their reach. There were at least six houses at which they drank tea from time to time, all within a walk. As hosts or guests, you always met the same people, which was a friendly arrangement, and the programmes of the entertainments were so uniform, that no one could possibly feel awkward. The best of manners and

home-made wines distinguished these tea parties, where the company was strictly genteel, if a little faded. Supper was served at nine, and the parson and the lawyer played whist for love with different partners on different evenings with strict impartiality.

Small jealousies are apt to be weak points in small societies, but there was a general acquiescence in the belief that the parson had a friendly preference for the little ladies of Lingborough.

He lived just beyond them, too, which led to his invariably escorting them home. Miss Betty and Miss Kitty would not for worlds have been so indelicate as to take this attention for granted, though it was a custom of many years standing. The older sister always went through the form of asking the younger to "see if the servant had come," and at this signal the parson always bade the lady of the house good night, and respectfully proffered his services as an escort to Lingborough.

It was a lovely evening in June, when the little ladies took tea with the widow of General Dunmaw at her cottage, not quite two miles from their own home.

It was a memorable evening. The tea party was an agreeable one. The little ladies had new tabbinets on, and Miss Kitty wore the diamond brooch. Miss Betty had played whist with the parson, and the younger sister (perhaps because of the brooch) had been favored with a good deal of conversation with the lawyer. It was an honor, because the lawyer bore the reputation of an *esprit fort*, and was supposed to have, as a rule, a contempt for feminine intellects, which good manners led him to veil under an almost officious politeness in society. But honors are apt to be uneasy blessings, and this one was at least as harassing as gratifying. For a somewhat monotonous vein of sarcasm, a painful power of producing puns, and a dexterity in suggesting doubts of everything, were the main foundation of his intellectual reputation, and Miss Kitty found them hard to cope with. And it was a warm evening.

But women have much courage, especially to defend a friend or a faith, and the less Miss Kitty found herself prepared for the conflict the harder she esteemed it her duty to fight. She fought for Church and State, for parsons and poor people, for the sincerity of her friends, the virtues of the Royal Family, the merit of Dr. Drugson's prescriptions, and for her favorite theory that there is some good in everyone and some happiness to be found everywhere.

She rubbed nervously at the diamond brooch with her thin little mittened hands. She talked very fast; and if the lawyer were guilty of feeling any

ungallant indifference to her observations, she did not so much as hear his, and her cheeks became so flushed that Mrs. Dunmaw crossed the room in her China crape shawl and said, “My dear Miss Kitty, I’m sure you feel the heat very much. Do take my fan, which is larger than yours.”

But Miss Kitty was saved a reply, for at this moment Miss Betty turned on the sofa, and said, “Dear Kitty, will you kindly see if the servant——”

And the parson closed the volume of ‘Friendship’s Offering’ which lay before him, and advanced towards Mrs. Dunmaw and took leave in his own dignified way.

Miss Kitty was so much flustered that she had not even presence of mind to look for the servant, who had never been ordered to come, but the parson relieved her by saying in his round, deep voice, “I hope you will not refuse me the honor of seeing you home, since our roads happen to lie together.” And she was glad to get into the fresh air, and beyond the doubtful compliments of the lawyer’s nasal suavity—“You have been very severe upon me to-night, Miss Kitty. I’m sure I had no notion I should find so powerful an antagonist,” &c.

MIDSUMMER EVE—A LOST DIAMOND.

It was Midsummer eve. The long light of the North was pale and clear, and the western sky shone luminous through the fir-wood that bordered the road. Under such dim lights colors deepen, and the great bushes of broom, that were each one mass of golden blossom, blazed like fairy watch-fires up the lane.

Miss Kitty leaned on the left arm of the parson and Miss Betty on his right. She chatted gaily, which left her younger sister at leisure to think of all the convincing things she had not remembered to say to the lawyer, as the evening breeze cooled her cheeks.

“A grand prospect for the crops, sir,” said Miss Betty; “I never saw the broom so beautiful.” But as she leaned forward to look at the yellow blaze which foretells good luck to farmers, as it shone in the hedge on the left-hand side of the road, she caught sight of the Brooch in Miss Kitty’s lace shawl. Through a gap in the wood the light from the western sky danced among the diamonds. But where one of the precious stones should have been, there was a little black hole.

“Sister, you’ve lost a stone out of your brooch!” screamed Miss Betty. The little ladies were well-trained, and even in that moment of despair Miss Betty would not hint that her sister’s ornaments were not her sole property.

When Miss Kitty burst into tears the parson was a little astonished as well as distressed. Men are apt to be so, not perhaps because women cry on such very small accounts, as because the full reason does not always transpire. Tears are often the climax of nervous exhaustion, and this is commonly the result of more causes than one. Ostensibly Miss Kitty was "upset" by the loss of the diamond, but she also wept away a good deal of the vexation of her unequal conflict with the sarcastic lawyer, and of all this the parson knew nothing.

Miss Betty knew nothing of that, but she knew enough of things in general to feel sure the diamond was not all the matter.

"What is amiss, sister Kitty?" said she. "Have you hurt yourself? Do you feel ill? Did you know the stone was out?"—"I hope you're not going to be hysterical, sister Kitty," added Miss Betty anxiously; "there never was a hysterical woman in our family yet."

"Oh dear no, sister Betty," sobbed Miss Kitty; "but it's all my fault. I know I was fidgeting with it whilst I was talking; and it's a punishment on my fidgety ways, and for ever presuming to wear it at all, when you're the head of the family, and solely entitled to it. And I shall never forgive myself if it's lost, and if it's found I'll never, never wear it any more." And as she deluged her best company pocket-handkerchief (for the useful one was in a big pocket under her dress, and could not be got at, the parson being present), Church, State, the Royal Family, the family Bible, her highest principles, her dearest affections, and the diamond brooch, all seemed to swim before her disturbed mind in one sea of desolation.

There was not a kinder heart than the parson's towards women and children in distress. He tucked the little ladies again under his arms, and insisted upon going back to Mrs. Dunmaw's, searching the lane as they went. In the pulpit or the drawing-room a ready anecdote never failed him, and on this occasion he had several. Tales of lost rings, and even single gems, recovered in the most marvellous manner and the most unexpected places—dug up in gardens, served up to dinner in fishes, and so forth. "Never," said Miss Kitty, afterwards, "never, to her dying day, could she forget his kindness."

She clung to the parson as a support under both her sources of trouble, but Miss Betty ran on and back, and hither and thither, looking for the diamond. Miss Kitty and the parson looked too, and how many aggravating little bits of glass and silica, and shining nothings and good-for-nothings there are in the world, no one would believe who has not looked for a lost diamond on a high road.

But another story of found jewels was to be added to the parson's stock. He had bent his long back for about the eighteenth time, when such a shimmer as no glass or silica can give flashed into his eyes, and he caught up the diamond out of the dust, and it fitted exactly into the little black hole.

Miss Kitty uttered a cry, and at the same moment Miss Betty, who was farther down the road, did the same, and these were followed by a third, which sounded like a mocking echo of both. And then the sisters rushed together.

"A most miraculous discovery!" gasped Miss Betty.

"You must have passed the very spot before," cried Miss Kitty.

"Though I'm sure, sister, what to do with it now we have found it I don't know," said Miss Betty, rubbing her nose, as she was wont to do when puzzled.

"It shall be taken better care of for the future, sister Betty," said Miss Kitty, penitently. "Though how it got out I can't think now."

"Why, bless my soul! you don't suppose it got there of itself, sister?" snapped Miss Betty. "How did it get there is another matter."

"I felt pretty confident about it, for my own part," smiled the parson as he joined them.

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you knew it was there?" asked Miss Betty, solemnly.

"I didn't know the precise spot, my dear madam, but——"

"You didn't see it, sir, I hope?" said Miss Betty.

"Bless me, my dear madam, I found it!" cried the parson.

Miss Betty bridled and bit her lip.

"I never contradict a clergyman, sir," said she, "but I can only say that if you did see it, it was not like your usual humanity to leave it lying there."

"Why { I've got it in my hand, ma'am!
He's got it in his hand, sister!"

cried the parson and Miss Kitty in one breath. Miss Betty was too much puzzled to be polite.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

“The diamond, oh dear, oh dear! *The Diamond!*” cried Miss Kitty. “But what are you talking about, sister?”

“*The Baby*,” said Miss Betty.

WHAT MISS BETTY FOUND.

It was found under a broom-bush. Miss Betty was poking her nose near the bank that bordered the wood, in her hunt for the diamond, when she caught sight of a mass of yellow of a deeper tint that the mass of broom-blossom above it, and this was the baby.

This vivid color, less opaque than “deep chrome” and a shade more orange, seems to have a peculiar attraction for wandering tribes. Gipsies use it, and it is a favorite color with Indian squaws. To the last dirty rag it is effective, whether it flutters near a tent on Bagshot Heath, or in some wigwam doorway makes a point of brightness against the gray shadows of the pine forest.

A large kerchief of this, wound about its body, was the baby’s only robe, but he seemed quite comfortable in it when Miss Betty found him, sleeping on a pillow of deep hair moss, his little brown fists closed as fast as his eyes, and a crimson toadstool grasped in one of them.

When Miss Betty screamed the baby awoke, and his long black lashes tickled his cheeks and made him wink and cry. But by the time she returned with her sister and the parson, he was quite happy again, gazing up with dark eyes full of delight into the glowing broom-bush, and fighting the evening breeze with his feet, which were entangled in the folds of the yellow cloth, and with the battered toadstool which was still in his hand.

“And, indeed, sir,” said Miss Betty, who had rubbed her nose till it looked like the twin toadstool to that which the baby was flourishing in her face, “you won’t suppose I would have left the poor little thing another moment, to catch its death of cold on a warm evening like this; but having no experience of such cases, and remembering that murder at the inn in the Black Valley, and that the body was not allowed to be moved till the constables had seen it, I didn’t feel to know how it might be with foundlings, and——”

But still Miss Betty did not touch the bairn. She was not accustomed to children. But the parson had christened too many babies to be afraid of them, and he picked up the little fellow in a moment, and tucked the yellow rag round him, and then addressing the little ladies precisely as if they were sponsors, he asked in his deep round voice, “Now where on the face of earth are the vagabonds who have deserted this child?”

The little ladies did not know, the broom-bushes were silent, and the question has remained unanswered from that day to this.

THE BABY, THE LAWYER, AND THE PARSON.

There were no railways near Lingborough at this time. The coach ran three times a week, and a walking postman brought the letters from the town to the small hamlets. Telegraph wires were unknown, and yet news traveled quite as fast then as it does now, and in the course of the following morning all the neighborhood knew that Miss Betty had found a baby under a broom-bush, and the lawyer called in the afternoon to inquire how the ladies found themselves after the tea party at Mrs. General Dunmaw's.

Miss Kitty was glad on the whole. She felt nervous, but ready for a renewal of hostilities. Several clinching arguments had occurred to her in bed last night, and after hastily looking up a few lines from her common-place book, which always made her cry when she read them, but which she hoped to be able to hurl at the lawyer with a steady voice, she followed Miss Betty to the drawing-room.

It was half a relief and half a disappointment to find that the lawyer was quite indifferent to the subject of their late contest. He overflowed with compliments; was quite sure he must have had the worst of the argument, and positively dying of curiosity to hear about the baby.

The little ladies were very full of the subject themselves. An active search for the baby's relations, conducted by the parson, the clerk, the farm-bailiff, the constable, the cowherd, and several supernumeraries, had so far proved quite vain. The country folk were most anxious to assist, especially by word of mouth. Except a small but sturdy number who had seen nothing, they had all seen "tramps," but unluckily no two could be got together whose accounts of the tramps themselves, of the hour at which they were seen, or of the direction in which they went, would tally with each other.

The little ladies were quite alive to the possibility that the child's parents might never be traced, indeed the matter had been constantly before their minds ever since the parson had carried the baby to Lingborough, and laid it in the arms of Thomasina, the servant.

Miss Betty had sat long before her toilette-table that evening, gazing vacantly at the looking-glass. Not that the reflection of the eight curl-papers she had neatly twisted up was conveyed to her brain. She was in a brown study, during which the following thoughts passed through her mind, and they all pointed one way:

That that fine little fellow was not to blame for his people's misconduct.

That they would never be found.

That it would probably be the means of the poor child's ruin, body and soul, if they were.

That the master of the neighboring workhouse bore a bad character.

That a child costs nothing to keep—where cows are kept too—for years.

That just at the age when a boy begins to eat dreadfully and wear out his clothes, he is very useful on a farm (though not for these reasons).

That Thomasina had taken to him.

That there need be no nonsense about it, as he could be brought up in his proper station in life in the kitchen and the farmyard.

That tramps have souls.

That he would be taught to say his prayers.

Miss Betty said hers, and went to bed; but all through that midsummer night the baby kept her awake, or flaunted his yellow robe and crimson toadstool through her dreams.

The morning brought no change in Miss Betty's views, but she felt doubtful as to how her sister would receive them. Would she regard them as foolish and unpractical, and her respect for Miss Betty's opinion be lessened thenceforward?

The fear was needless. Miss Kitty was romantic and imaginative. She had carried the baby through his boyhood about the Lingborough fields whilst she was dressing; and he was attending her own funeral in the capacity of an attached and faithful servant, in black livery with worsted frogs, as she sprinkled salt on her buttered toast at breakfast, when she was startled from this affecting day-dream by Miss Betty's voice.

"Dear sister Kitty, I wish to consult you as to our plans in the event of those wicked people who deserted the baby not being found."

The little ladies resolved that not an inkling of their benevolent scheme must be betrayed to the lawyer. But they dissembled awkwardly, and the tone in which they spoke of the tramp-baby roused the lawyer's quick suspicions. He had a real respect for the little ladies, and was kindly anxious to save them from their own indiscretion.

"My dear ladies," said he, "I do hope your benevolence—may I say your romantic benevolence?—of disposition is not tempting you to adopt this gipsy waif?"

"I hope we know what is due to ourselves, and to the estate—small as it is—sir," said Miss Betty, "as well as to Providence, too well to attempt to

raise any child, however handsome, from that station of life in which he was born."

"Bless me, madam! I never dreamed you would adopt a beggar child as your heir; but I hope you mean to send it to the workhouse, if the gipsy tramps it belongs to are not to be found?"

"We have not made up our minds, sir, as to the course we propose to pursue," said Miss Betty, with outward dignity proportioned to her inward doubts.

"My dear ladies," said the lawyer anxiously, "let me implore you not to be rash. To adopt a child in the most favorable circumstances is the greatest of risks. But if your benevolence *will* take that line, pray adopt some little boy out of one of your tenants' families. Even your teaching will not make him brilliant, as he is likely to inherit the minimum of intellectual capacity; but he will learn his catechism, probably grow up respectable, and possibly grateful, since his forefathers have (so Miss Kitty assures me) had all these virtues for generations. But this baby is the child of a heathen, barbarous, and wandering race. The propensities of the vagabonds who have deserted him are in every drop of his blood. All the parsons in the diocese won't make a Christian of him, and when (after anxieties I shudder to foresee) you flatter yourselves that he is civilized, he will run away and leave his shoes and stockings behind him."

"He has a soul to be saved, if he is a gipsy," said Miss Kitty, hysterically.

"The soul, my dear Miss Kitty"—began the lawyer, facing round upon her.

"Don't say anything dreadful about the soul, sir, I beg," said Miss Betty, firmly. And then she added in a conciliatory tone, "Won't you look at the little fellow, sir? I have no doubt his relations are shocking people; but when you see his innocent little face and his beautiful eyes, I think you'll say yourself that if he were a duke's son he couldn't be a finer child."

"My experience of babies is so limited, Miss Betty," said the lawyer, "that really—if you'll excuse me—but I can quite imagine him. I have before now been tempted myself to adopt stray—puppies, when I have seen them in the round, soft, innocent, bright-eyed stage. And when they have grown up in the hands of more credulous friends into lanky, ill-conditioned, misconducted curs, I have congratulated myself that I was not misled by the graces of an age at which ill-breeding is less apparent than later in life."

The little ladies both rose. "If you see no difference, sir," said Miss Betsy in her stateliest manner, "between a babe with an immortal soul and the beasts that perish, it is quite useless to prolong the conversation."

“Reason is apt to be useless when opposed to the generous impulses of a sex so full of sentiment as yours, madam,” said the lawyer, rising also. “Permit me to take a long farewell, since it is improbable that our friendship will resume its old position until your *protegé* has—run away.”

The words “long farewell” and “old friendship” were quite sufficient to soften wrath in the tender hearts of the little ladies. But the lawyer had really lost his temper, and, before Miss Betty had decided how to offer the olive branch without conceding her principles he was gone.

The weather was warm. The little ladies were heated by discussion and the parson by vain scouring of the country on foot, when they asked his advice upon their project, and related their conversation with the lawyer. The two gentlemen had so little in common that the parson felt it his duty not to let his advice be prejudiced by this fact. For some moments he sat silent, then he began to walk about as if he were composing a sermon; then he stepped before the little ladies (who were sitting as stiffly on the sofa as if it were a pew) and spoke as if he were delivering one.

“If you ask me, dear ladies, whether it is your duty to provide for this child because you found him, I say that there is no such obligation. If you ask if I think it wise in your own interests, and hopeful as to the boy’s career, I am obliged to agree with your legal adviser. Vagabond ways are seldom cured in one generation, and I think it is quite probable that, after much trouble and anxiety spent upon him, he may go back to a wandering life. But, Miss Betty,” continued the parson in deepening tones, as he pounded his left palm with his right fist for want of a pulpit, “If you ask me whether I believe any child of any race is born incapable of improvement, and beyond benefit from the charities we owe to each other, I should deny my faith if I could say yes. I shall not, madam, confuse the end of your connection with him with the end of your training in him, even if he runs away, or fancy that I see the one because I see the other. I do not pretend to know how much evil he inherits from his forefathers as accurately as our graphic friend; but I do know that he has a Father whose image is also to be found in His children—not quite effaced in any of them—and whose care of this one will last when yours, madam, may seem to have been in vain.”

As the little ladies rushed forward and each shook a hand of the parson, he felt some compunction for his speech.

“I fear I am encouraging you in grave indiscretion,” said he. “But, indeed, my dear ladies, I am quite against your project, for you do not realize the anxieties and disappointments that are before you, I am sure. The child will give you infinite trouble. I think he will run away. And yet I

cannot in good conscience say that I believe love's labor must be lost. He may return to the woods and wilds; but I hope he will carry something with him."

"Did the reverend gentleman mean Miss Betty's teaspoons?" asked the lawyer, stroking his long chin, when he was told what the person had said.

BABYHOOD.—PRETTY FLOWERS.—THE ROSE-COLORED TULIPS.

THE matter of the baby's cap disturbed the little ladies. It seemed so like the beginning of a fulfilment of the lawyer's croakings.

Miss Kitty had made it. She had never seen a baby without a cap before, and the sight was unusual, if not indecent. But Miss Kitty was a quick needlewoman, and when the new cap was fairly tied over the thick crop of silky black hair, the baby looked so much less like Puck, and so much more like the rest of the baby world, that it was quite a relief.

Miss Kitty's feelings may therefore be imagined when going to the baby just after the parson's departure, she found him in open rebellion against his cap. It had been tied on whilst he was asleep, and his eyes were no sooner open than he commenced the attack. He pulled with one little brown hand and tugged with the other; he dragged a rosette over his nose and got the frills into his eyes; he worried it as a puppy worries your handkerchief if you tie it round its face and tell it to "look like a grandmother." At last the strings gave way, and he cast it triumphantly out of the clothes-basket which served him for cradle.

Successive efforts to induce him to wear it proved vain, so Thomasina said the weather was warm and his hair was very thick, and she parted this and brushed it, and Miss Kitty gave the cap to the farm-bailiff's baby, who took to it as kindly as a dumpling to a pudding-cloth.

How the boy was ever kept inside his christening clothes, Thomasina said she did not know. But when he got into the parson's arms he lay quite quiet, which was a good omen. That he might lack no advantage, Miss Betty stood godmother for him, and the parish clerk and the sexton were his godfathers.

He was named John.

"A plain, sensible name," said Miss Betty. "And while we are about it," she added, "we may as well choose his surname. For a surname he must have, and the sooner it is decided upon the better."

Miss Kitty had made a list of twenty-seven of her favorite Christian names which Miss Betty had sternly rejected, that everything might be plain, practical, and respectable at the outset of the tramp-child's career. For the same reason she refused to adopt Miss Kitty's suggestions for a surname.

"It's so seldom there's a chance of *choosing* a surname for anybody, sister," said Miss Kitty, "it seems a pity not to choose a pretty one."

"Sister Kitty," said Miss Betty, "don't be romantic. The boy is to be brought up in that station of life for which one syllable is ample. I should have called him Smith if that had not been Thomasina's name. As it is, I propose to call him Broom. He was found under a bush of broom, and it goes very well with John, and sounds plain and respectable."

So Miss Betty bought a Bible, and on the fly-leaf of it she wrote in her fine, round, gentlewoman's writing—"*John Broom. With good wishes for his welfare, temporal and eternal. From a sincere friend.*" And when the inscription was dry the Bible was wrapped in brown paper, and put by in Thomasina's trunk till John Broom should come to years of discretion.

He was slow to reach them, though in other respects he grew fast.

When he began to walk he would walk barefoot. To be out of doors was his delight, but on the threshold of the house he always sat down and discarded his shoes and stockings. Thomasina bastinadoed the soles of his feet with the soles of his shoes "to teach him the use of them," so she said. But Miss Kitty sighed and thought of the lawyer's prediction.

There was no blinking the fact that the child was as troublesome as he was pretty. The very demon of mischief danced in his black eyes, and seemed to possess his feet and fingers as if with quicksilver. And if, as Thomasina said, you "never knew what he would be at next," you might also be pretty sure that it would be something he ought to have left undone.

John Broom early developed a taste for glass and crockery, and as the china cupboard was in that part of the house to which he by social standing also belonged, he had many chances to seize upon cups, jugs and dishes. If detected with anything that he ought not to have had, it was his custom to drop the forbidden toy and toddle off as fast as his unpractised feet would carry him. The havoc which this caused amongst the glass and china was bewildering in a household where tea-sets and dinner-sets had passed from generation to generation, where slapdash, giddy-pated kitchen-maids never came, where Miss Betty washed the best teacups in the parlor, where Thomasina was more careful than her mistress, and the breaking of a single plate was a serious matter, and if beyond riveting, a misfortune.

Thomasina soon found that her charge was safest, as he was happiest, out of doors. A very successful device was to shut him up in the drying-ground, and tell him to "pick the pretty flowers." John Broom preferred flowers even to china cups with gilding on them. He gathered nosegays of daisies and buttercups, and the winning way in which he would present these to the little ladies atoned, in their benevolent eyes, for many a smashed teacup.

But the tramp-baby's restless spirit was soon weary of the drying ground, and he set forth one morning in search of "fresh fields and pastures new." He had seated himself on the threshold to take off his shoes, when he heard the sound of Thomasina's footsteps, and, hastily staggering to his feet, toddled forth without farther delay. The sky was blue above him, the sun was shining, and the air was very sweet. He ran for a bit and then tumbled, and picked himself up again, and got a fresh impetus, and so on till he reached the door of the kitchen garden, which was open. It was an old-fashioned kitchen-garden with flowers in the borders. There were single rose-colored tulips which had been in the garden as long as Miss Betty could remember, and they had been so increased by dividing the clumps that they now stretched in two rich lines of color down both sides of the long walk. And John Broom saw them.

"Pick the pretty f'owers, love," said he, in imitation of Thomasina's patronising tone, and forthwith beginning at the end, he went steadily to the top of the right-hand border mowing the rose-colored tulips as he went.

Meanwhile, when Thomasina came to look for him, he could not be found, and when all the back premises and the drying-ground had been searched in vain, she gave the alarm to the little ladies.

Miss Kitty's vivid imagination leaped at once to the conclusion that the child's vagabond relations had fetched him away, and she became rigid with alarm. But Miss Betty rushed out into the shrubbery and Miss Kitty took a whiff of her vinaigrette and followed her.

When they came at last to the kitchen-garden, Miss Betty's grief for the loss of John Broom did not prevent her observing that there was something odd about the borders, and when she got to the top, and found that all the tulips had been picked from one side, she sank down on the roller which happened to be lying beside her.

And John Broom staggered up to her, and crying "For 'oo, Miss Betty," fell headlong with a sheaf of rose-colored tulips into her lap.

As he did not offer any to Miss Kitty, her better judgment was not warped, and she said, "You must slap him, sister Betty."

"Put out your hand, John Broom," said Miss Betty, much agitated.

And John Broom, who was quite composed, put out both his little grubby paws so trustfully that Miss Betty had not the heart to strike him. But she scolded him, "Naughty boy!" and she pointed to the tulips and shook her head. John Broom looked thoughtfully at them, and shook his.

"Naughty boy!" repeated Miss Betty, and she added in very impressive tones, "John Broom's a very naughty boy!"

After which she took him to Thomasina, and Miss Kitty collected the rose-colored tulips and put them into water in the best old china punch-bowl.

In the course of the afternoon she peeped into the kitchen, where John Broom sat on the floor, under the window, gazing thoughtfully up into the sky.

"As good as gold, bless his little heart!" murmured Miss Kitty. For as his feet were tucked under him, she did not know that he had just put his shoes and stockings into the pig-tub, into which he all but fell himself from the exertion. He did not hear Miss Kitty, and thought on. He wanted to be out again, and he had a tantalising remembrance of the ease with which the tender juicy stalks of the tulips went snap, snap, in that new place of amusement he had discovered. Thomasina looked into the kitchen and went away again. When she had gone, John Broom went away also.

He went both faster and steadier on his bare feet, and when he got into the kitchen garden, it recalled Miss Betty to his mind. And he shook his head, and said, "Naughty boy!" And then he went up the left-hand border, mowing the tulips as he went; after which he trotted home, and met Thomasina at the back door. And he hugged the sheaf of rose-colored tulips in his arms, and said, "John Broom a very naughty boy!"

Thomasina was not sentimental, and she slapped him well—his hands for picking the tulips and his feet for going barefoot.

But his feet had to be slapped with Thomasina's slipper, for his own shoes could not be found.

EDUCATION.—FIRESIDE TALES.

In spite of all his pranks, John Broom did not lose the favor of his friends. Thomasina spoiled him, and Miss Betty and Miss Kitty tried not to do so.

The parson had said, "Treat the child fairly. Bring him up as he will have to live hereafter. Don't make him half pet and half-servant." And following

this advice, and her own resolve that there should be "no nonsense" in the matter, Miss Betty had made it a rule that he should not be admitted to the parlor. It bore more heavily on the tender hearts of the little ladies than on the light heart of John Broom, and led to their waylaying him in the passages and gardens with little gifts, unknown to each other. And when Miss Kitty kissed his newly-washed cheeks, and pronounced them "like ripe russets," Miss Betty murmured, "Be judicious, sister Kitty;" and Miss Kitty would correct any possible ill effects by saying, "*Now* make your bow to your betters, John Broom, and say, 'Thank you, ma'am!' " which was accomplished by the child's giving a tug to the forelock of his thick black hair, with a world of mischief in his eyes.

When he was old enough, the little ladies sent him to the village school.

The total failure of their hopes for his education was not the smallest of the disappointments Miss Betty and Miss Kitty endured on his behalf. The quarrel with the lawyer had been made up long ago, and though there was always a touch of raillery in his inquiries after "the young gipsy," he had once said, "If he turns out anything of a genius at school, I might find a place for him in the office, by-and-by." The lawyer was kind-hearted in his own fashion, and on this hint Miss Kitty built up hopes, which unhappily were met by no responsive ambition in John Broom.

As to his fitness to be an errand boy, he could not carry a message from the kitchen to the cowhouse without stopping by the way to play with the yard-dog, and a hedgehog in the path would probably have led him astray, if Thomasina had had a fit and he had been dispatched for a doctor.

During school hours he spent most of his time under the fool's-cap when he was not playing truant. With his school-mates he was good friends. If he was seldom out of mischief, he was seldom out of temper. He could beat any boy at a foot-race (without shoes); he knew the notes and nests of every bird that sang, and whatever an old pocket-knife is capable of, that John Broom could and would do with it for his fellows.

Miss Betty had herself tried to teach him to read, and she continued to be responsible for his religious instruction. She had tried to stir up his industry by showing him the Bible, and promising that when he could read it he should have it for his "very own." But he either could not or would not apply himself, so the prize lay unearned in Thomasina's trunk. But he would listen for any length of time to Scripture stories, if they were read or told to him, especially to the history of Elisha, and the adventures of the Judges.

Indeed, since he could no longer be shut up in the drying-ground, Thomasina had found that he was never so happy and so safe as when he

was listening to tales, and many a long winter evening he lay idle on the kitchen hearth, with his head on the sheep dog, whilst the more industrious Thomasina plied her knitting-needles, as she sat in the ingle-nook, with the flickering firelight playing among the plaits of her large cap, and told tales of the country side.

Not that John Broom was her only hearer. Annie "the lass" sat by the hearth also, and Thomasina took care that she did not "sit with her hands before her." And a little farther away sat the cowherd.

He had a sleeping-room above the barn, and took his meals in the house. By Miss Betty's desire he always went in to family prayers after supper, when he sat as close as possible to the door, under an uncomfortable consciousness that Thomasina did not think his boots clean enough for the occasion, and would find something to pick off the carpet as she followed him out, however hardly he might have used the door-scraper beforehand.

It might be a difficult matter to decide which he liked best, beer or John Broom. But next to these he liked Thomasina's stories.

Thomasina was kind to him. With all his failings and the dirt on his boots, she liked him better than the farm-bailiff. The farm-bailiff was thrifty and sensible and faithful, and Thomasina was faithful and sensible and thrifty, and they each had a tendency to claim the monopoly of those virtues. Notable people complain, very properly, of thriftless and untidy ones, but they sometimes agree better with them than with rival notabilities. And so Thomasina's broad face beamed benevolently as she bid the cowherd "draw up" to the fire, and he who (like Thomasina) was a native of the country, would confirm the marvels she related, with a proper pride in the wonderful district to which they both belonged.

He would help her out sometimes with names and dates in a local biography. By his own account he knew the man who was murdered at the inn in the Black Valley so intimately that it turned Annie the lass as white as a dish-cloth to sit beside him. If Thomasina said that folk were yet alive who had seen the little green men dance in Dawborough Croft, the cowherd would smack his knees and cry, "Scores on 'em!" And when she whispered of the white figure which stood at the cross roads after midnight, he testified to having seen it himself—tall beyond mortal height, and pointing four ways at once. He had a legend of his own too, which Thomasina sometimes gave him the chance of telling, of how he was followed home one moonlight night by a black Something as big as a young calf, which "wimmled and wammled" around him till he fell senseless into the ditch, and being found

there by the farm-bailiff on his return from market, was unjustly accused of the vice of intoxication.

"Fault-finders should be free of flaws," Thomasina would say with a prim chin. She *had* seen the farm-bailiff himself "the worse" for more than his supper beer.

But there was one history which Thomasina was always loth to relate, and it was that which both John Broom and the cowherd especially preferred —the history of Lob Lie-by-the-fire.

Thomasina had a feeling (which was shared by Annie the lass) that it was better not to talk of "anything" peculiar to the house in which you were living. One's neighbors' ghosts and bogles are another matter.

But to John Broom and the cowherd no subject was so interesting as that of the Lubber-fiend. The cowherd sighed to think of the good old times when a man might sleep on in spite of cocks, and the stables be cleaner, and the beasts better tended than if he had been up with the lark. And John Broom's curiosity was never quenched about the rough, hairy Good-fellow who worked at night that others might be idle by day, and who was sometimes caught at his hard-earned nap, lying, "like a great hurgin bear," where the boy loved to lie himself, before the fire, on this very hearth.

Why and where he had gone, Thomasina could not tell. She had heard that he had originally come from some other household, where he had been offended. But whether he had gone elsewhere when he forsook Lingborough, or whether "such things had left the country" for good, she did not pretend to say.

And when she had told, for the third or fourth time, how his porridge was put into a corner of the cowhouse for him overnight, and how he had been often overheard at his work, but rarely seen, and then only lying before the fire, Miss Betty would ring for prayers, and Thomasina would fold up her knitting and lead the way, followed by Annie the lass, whose nerves John Broom would startle by treading on her heels, the rear being brought up by the cowherd, looking hopelessly at his boots.

THE FARM-BAILIFF.—PRETTY COCKY.—IN THE WILLOW TREE.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty did really deny themselves the indulgence of being indulgent, and treated John Broom on principles, and for his good. But they did so in their own tremulous and spasmodic way, and got little credit for it. Thomasina, on the other hand, spoiled him with such a masterful

managing air, and so much sensible talk, that no one would have thought that the only system she followed was to conceal his misdemeanors, and to stand between him and the just wrath of the farm-bailiff.

The farm-bailiff, or grieve, as he liked to call himself, was a Scotchman, with a hard-featured face (which he washed on the Sabbath), a harsh voice, a good heart rather deeper down in his body than is usual, and a shrewd, money-getting head, with a speckled straw hat on the top of it. No one could venture to imagine when that hat was new, or how long ago it was that the farm-bailiff went to the expense of purchasing those work-day clothes. But the dirt on his face and neck was an orderly accumulation, such as gathers on walls, oil-paintings, and other places to which soap is not habitually applied; it was not a matter of spills and splashes, like the dirt John Broom disgraced himself with. And his clothes, if old, fitted neatly about him; they never suggested raggedness, which was the normal condition of the tramp-boy's jackets. They only looked as if he had been born (and occasionally buried) in them. It is needful to make this distinction, that the good man may not be accused of inconsistency in the peculiar vexation which John Broom's disorderly appearance caused him.

In truth, Miss Betty's *protegé* had reached the age at which he was to "eat dreadfully, wear out his clothes, and be useful on the farm;" and the last condition was quite unfulfilled. At eleven years old he could not be trusted to scare birds, and at half that age the farm-bailiff's eldest child could drive cattle.

"And no' just ruin the leddies in new coats and compliments, either, like some ne'er-do-weels," added the farm-bailiff, who had heard with a jealous ear of six-pences given by Miss Betty and Miss Kitty to their wasteful favorite.

When the eleventh anniversary of John Broom's discovery was passed, and his character at school gave no hopes of his ever qualifying himself to serve the lawyer, it was resolved that—"idleness being the mother of mischief," he should be put under the care of the farm-bailiff, to do such odd jobs about the place as might be suited to his capacity and love of out-door life. And now John Broom's troubles began. By fair means or foul, with here an hour's weeding and there a day's bird scaring, and with errands perpetual, the farm-bailiff contrived to "get some work out of" the idle little urchin. His speckled hat and grim face seemed to be everywhere, and always to pop up when John Broom began to play.

They lived "at daggers drawn." I am sorry to say that John Broom's fitful industry was still kept for his own fancies. To climb trees, to run races

with the sheep dog, to cut grotesque sticks, gather hedge fruits, explore a bog, or make new friends among beasts and birds—at such matters he would labor with feverish zeal. But so far from trying to cure himself of his indolence about daily drudgery, he found a new and pleasant excitement in thwarting the farm-bailiff at every turn.

It would not sound dignified to say that the farm-bailiff took pleasure in thwarting John Broom. But he certainly did not show his satisfaction when the boy did do his work properly. Perhaps he thought that praise is not good for young people; and the child did not often give him the chance of trying. Of blame he was free enough. Not a good scolding to clear the air, such as Thomasina would give to Annie the lass, but his slow, caustic tongue was always growling, like muttered thunder, over John Broom's incorrigible head.

He has never approved of the tramp-child, who had the overwhelming drawbacks of having no pedigree and of being a bad bargain as to expense. This was not altogether John Broom's fault, but with his personal failings the farm-bailiff had even less sympathy. It has been hinted that he was born in the speckled hat, and whether this were so or not, he certainly had worn an old head whilst his shoulders were still young, and could not remember the time when he wished to waste his energies on anything that did not earn or at least save something.

Once only did anything like approval of the lad escape his lips.

Miss Betty's uncle's second cousin had returned from foreign lands with a good fortune and several white cockatoos. He kept the fortune himself, but he gave the cockatoos to his friends, and he sent one of them to the little ladies of Lingborough.

He was a lovely creature (the cockatoo, not the cousin, who was plain), and John Broom's admiration of him was boundless. He gazed at the sulphur-colored crest, the pure white wings with their deeper-tinted lining, and even the beak and the fierce round eyes, as he had gazed at the broom bush in his babyhood, with insatiable delight.

The cousin did things handsomely. He had had a ring put around one of the cockatoo's ankles, with a bright steel chain attached and a fastener to secure it to the perch. The cockatoo was sent in the cage by coach, and the perch, made of foreign wood, followed by the carrier.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty were delighted both with the cockatoo and the perch, but they were a good deal troubled as to how to fasten the two together. There was a neat little ring on the perch, and the cockatoo's chain was quite complete, and he evidently wanted to get out, for he shook the

walls of his cage in his gambols. But he put up his crest and snapped when any one approached, in a manner so alarming that Annie the lass shut herself up in the dairy, and the farm-bailiff turned his speckled hat in his hands, and gave cautious counsel from a safe distance.

"How he flaps!" cried Miss Betty. "I'm afraid he has a very vicious temper."

"He only wants to get out, Miss Betty," said John Broom. "He'd be all right with his perch, and I think I can get him on it."

"Now heaven save us from the sin o' presumption!" cried the farm-bailiff, and putting on the speckled hat, he added, slowly: "I'm thinking, John Broom, that if ye're engaged wi' the leddies this morning it'll be time I turned my hand to singling these few turnips ye've been thinking about the week past."

On which he departed, and John Broom pressed the little ladies to leave him alone with the bird.

"We shouldn't like to leave you alone with a wild creature like that," said Miss Betty.

"He's just frightened on ye, Miss Betty. He'll be like a lamb when you're gone," urged John Broom.

"Besides, we should like to see you do it," said Miss Kitty.

"You can look in through the window, miss. I must fasten the door, or he'll be out."

"I should never forgive myself if he hurt you, John," said Miss Betty, irresolutely, for she was very anxious to have the cockatoo and perch in full glory in the parlor.

"He'll none hurt me, miss," said John, with a cheerful smile on his rosy face. "I likes him, and he'll like me."

This settled the matter. John was left with the cockatoo. He locked the door, and the little ladies went into the garden and peeped through the window.

They saw John Broom approach the cage, on which the cockatoo put up his crest, opened his beak slowly, and snarled, and Miss Betty tapped on the window and shook her black satin workbag.

"Don't go near him!" she cried. But John Broom paid no attention.

"What are you putting up that top-knot of yours at me for?" said he to the cockatoo. "Don't ye know your own friends? I'm going to let ye out, I am. You're going on to your perch, you are."

“Eh, but you’re a bonny creature!” he added, as the cockatoo filled the cage with snow and sulphur flutterings.

“Keep away, keep away!” screamed the little ladies, playing a duet on the window panes.

“Out with you!” said John Broom, as he unfastened the cage door.

And just when Miss Betty had run round, and as she shouted through the key-hole, “Open the door, John Broom, we’ve changed our minds; we’ve decided to keep it in its cage,” the cockatoo strode solemnly forth on his eight long toes.

“Pretty Cocky!” said he.

When Miss Betty got back to the window, John Broom had just made an injudicious grab at the steel chain, on which Pretty Cocky flew fiercely at him, and John, burying his face in his arms, received the attack on his thick poll, laughing into his sleeves and holding fast to the chain, whilst the cockatoo and the little ladies screamed against each other.

“It’ll break your leg—you’ll tear its eyes out!” cried Miss Kitty.

“Miss Kitty means that you’ll break its leg, and it will tear your eyes out,” Miss Betty explained through the glass. “John Broom! Come away! Lock it in! Let it go!”

But Cocky was now waddling solemnly round the room, and John Broom was creeping after him, with the end of the chain in one hand, and the perch in the other, and in a moment more he had joined the chain and the ring, and just as Miss Betty was about to send for the constable and have the door broken open, Cocky—driven into a corner—clutched his perch, and was raised triumphantly to his place in the bow-window.

He was now a parlor pet, and John Broom saw little of him. This vexed him, for he had taken a passionate liking for the bird. The little ladies rewarded him well for his skill, but this brought him no favor from the farm-bailiff, and matters went on as ill as before.

One day the cockatoo got his chain entangled, and Miss Kitty promptly advanced to put it right. She had unfastened that end which secured it to the perch, when Cocky, who had been watching the proceeding with much interest, dabbed at her with his beak. Miss Kitty fled, but with great presence of mind shut the door after her. She forgot, however, that the window was open, in front of which stood the cockatoo scanning the summer sky with his fierce eyes, and flapping himself in the breeze.

And just as the little ladies ran into the garden, and Miss Kitty was saying, “One comfort is, sister Betty, that it’s quite safe in the room, till we

can think what to do next," he bowed his yellow crest, spread his noble wings, and sailed out into the ether.

In ten minutes the whole able-bodied population of the place was in the grounds of Lingborough, including the farm-bailiff.

The cockatoo was on the top of a fir-tree, and a fragment of the chain was with him, for he had broken it, and below on the lawn stood the little ladies, who, with the unfailing courage of women in a hopeless cause, were trying to dislodge him by waving their pocket-handkerchiefs and crying "sh!"

He looked composedly down out of one eye for some time, and then he began to move.

"I think it's coming down now," said Miss Kitty.

But in a quarter of a minute, Cocky had sailed a quarter of a mile, and was rocking himself on the top of an old willow tree. And at this moment John Broom joined the crowd which followed him.

"I'm thinking he's got his chain fast," said the farm-bailiff; "if anybody that understood the beastie daured to get near him——"

"I'll get him," said John Broom, casting down his hat.

"Ye'll get your neck thrawed," said the farm-bailiff.

"We won't hear of it," said the little ladies.

But to their horror, John Broom kicked off his shoes after which he spat upon his hands (a shock which Miss Kitty thought she never could have survived), and away he went up the willow.

It was not an easy tree to climb, and he had one or two narrow escapes, which kept the crowd breathless, but he shook the hair from his eyes, moistened his hands afresh, and went on. The farm-bailiff's far-away heart was stirred. No Scotchman is insensible to gallantry. And courage is the only thing a "canny" Scot can bear to see expanded without return.

"John Broom," screamed Miss Betty, "come down! I order, I command you to come down."

The farm-bailiff drew his speckled hat forward to shade his upward gaze, and folded his arms.

"Dinna call on him, leddies," he said, speaking more quickly than usual. "Dinna mak him turn his head. Steady, lad! Grip wi' your feet. Spit on your pawms, man."

Once the boy trod on a rotten branch, and as he drew back his foot, and it came crashing down, the farm-bailiff set his teeth, and Miss Kitty fainted

in Thomasina's arms.

"I'll reward anyone who'll fetch him down," sobbed Miss Betty. But John Broom seated himself on the same branch as the cockatoo, and undid the chain and prepared his hands for the downward journey.

"You've got a rare perch, this time," said he. And Pretty Cocky crept towards him, and rubbed its head against him and chuckled with joy.

What dreams of liberty in the tree-tops, with John Broom for a playfellow, passed through his crested head, who shall say? But when he found that his friend meant to take him prisoner, he became very angry and much alarmed. And when John Broom grasped him by both legs and began to descend, Cocky pecked him vigorously. But the boy held the back of his head towards him, and went steadily down.

"Weel done!" roared the farm-bailiff. "Gently lad! Gude save us! ha'e a care o' yoursen. That's weel. Keep your pow at him. Didna let the beast get at your een."

But when John Broom was so near the ground as to be safe, the farm-bailiff turned wrathfully upon his son, who had been gazing open-mouthed at the sight which had so interested his father.

"Ye look weel standing gawping here, before the leddies," said he, "wasting the precious hours, and bringing your father's gray hairs wi' sorrow to the grave; and John Broom yonder shaming ye, and you not so much as thinking to fetch the perch for him, ye lazy loon. Away wi' ye and get it before I lay a stick about your shoulders."

And when his son had gone for the perch, and John Broom was safely on the ground, laughing, bleeding, and triumphant, the farm-bailiff said,—

"Ye're a bauld chil, John Broom, I'll say that for ye."

INTO THE MIST.

UNFORTUNATELY the favorable impression produced by "the gipsy lad's" daring soon passed from the farm-bailiff's mind. It was partly effaced by the old jealousy of the little ladies' favor. Miss Betty gave the boy no less than four silver shillings, and he ungraciously refused to let the farm-bailiff place them in a savings bank for him.

Matters got from bad to worse. The farming man was not the only one who was jealous, and John Broom himself was as idle and reckless as ever. Though, if he had listened respectfully to the Scotchman's counsels, or shown any disposition to look up to and be guided by him, much might have been overlooked. But he made fun of him and made a friend of the cowherd.

And this latter most manifest token of low breeding vexed the respectable taste of the farm-bailiff.

John Broom had his own grievances too, and he brooded over them. He thought the little ladies had given him over to the farm-bailiff, because they had ceased to care for him, and that the farm-bailiff was prejudiced against him beyond any hope of propitiation. The village folk taunted him, too, with being an outcast, and called him Gipsy John, and this maddened him. Then he would creep into the cowhouse and lie in the straw against the white cow's warm back, and for a few of Miss Betty's coppers, to spend in beer or tobacco, the cowherd would hide him from the farm-bailiff and tell him country-side tales. To Thomasina's stories of ghosts and gossip, he would add strange tales of smugglers on the near-lying coast, and as John Broom listened, his restless blood rebelled more and more against the sour sneers and dry drudgery that he got from the farm-bailiff.

Nor were sneers the sharpest punishment his misdemeanors earned. The farm-bailiff's stick was thick and his arm was strong, and he had a tendency to believe that if a flogging was good for a boy, the more he had of it the better it would be for him.

And John Broom, who never let a cry escape him at the time would steal away afterwards and sob out his grief into the long soft coat of the sympathizing sheep dog.

Unfortunately he never tried the effect of deserving better treatment as a remedy for his woes. The parson's good advice and Miss Betty's entreaties were alike in vain. He was ungrateful even to Thomasina. The little ladies sighed and thought of the lawyer. And the parson preached patience.

"Cocky has been tamed," said Miss Kitty, thoughtfully, "perhaps John Broom will get steadier by-and-by."

"It seems a pity we can't chain him to a perch, Miss Kitty," laughed the parson; "he would be safe then, at any rate."

Miss Betty said afterwards that it did seem so remarkable that the parson should have made this particular joke on this particular night—the night when John Broom did not come home.

He had played truant all day. The farm-bailiff had wanted him, and he had kept out of the way.

The wind was from the east, and a white mist rolled in from the sea, bringing a strange invigorating smell, and making your lips clammy with salt. It made John Broom's heart beat faster, and filled his head with dreams of ships and smugglers; and rocking masts higher than the willow tree, and winds wilder than this wind, and dancing waves.

Then something loomed through the fog. It was the farm-bailiff's speckled hat. John Broom hesitated—the thick stick became visible.

Then a cloud rolled between them, and the child turned, and ran, and ran, and ran, coastwards, into the sea mist.

THE SEA.—THE ONE-EYED SAILOR.—THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD.

John Broom was footsore when he reached the coast, but that keen, life-giving smell had drawn him on and held him up. The fog had cleared off, and he strained his black eyes through the darkness to see the sea.

He had never seen it—that other world within this, on which one lived out of doors, and climbed about all day, and no one blamed him.

When he did see it, he thought he had got to the end of the world. If the edge of the cliff were not the end, he could not make out where the sky began; and if that darkness were the sea, the sea was full of stars.

But this was because the sea was quiet and reflected the color of the night sky, and the stars were the lights of the herring-boats twinkling in the bay.

When he got down by the water he saw the vessels lying alongside, and they were dirtier than he had supposed. But he did not lose heart, and remembering, from the cowherd's tales, that people who cannot pay for their passage must either work it out or hide themselves on board ship, he took the easier alternative, and got on to the first vessel which had a plank to the quay, and hid himself under some tarpaulin on the deck.

The vessel was a collier bound for London, and she sailed with the morning tide.

When he was found out he was not ill-treated. Indeed, the rough skipper offered to take him home again on his return voyage. He would have liked to go, but pride withheld him, and home sickness had not yet eaten into his very soul. Then an old sailor with one eye (but that a sly one) met him, and told him tales more wonderful than the cowherd's. And with him he shipped as cabin-boy, on a vessel bound for the other side of the world.

* * * * * *

A great many sins bring their own punishment in this life pretty clearly, and sometimes pretty closely; but few more directly or more bitterly than rebellion against the duties, and ingratitude for the blessings, of home.

There was no playing truant on board ship; and as to the master poor John Broom served now, his cruelty made the memory of the farm-bailiff a memory of tenderness and gentleness and indulgence. Till he was half-naked and half-starved, and had only short snatches of sleep in hard corners, it had never occurred to him that when one has got good food and clothes, and sound sleep in a kindly home, he has got more than many people, and enough to be thankful for.

He did everything he was told now as fast as he could do it, in fear for his life. The one-eyed sailor had told him that the captain always took orphans and poor friendless lads to be his cabin-boys, and John Broom thought what a nice kind man he must be, and how different from the farm-bailiff, who thought nobody could be trustworthy unless he could show parents and grandparents, and cousins to the sixth degree. But after they had sailed, when John Broom felt very ill, and asked the one-eyed sailor where he was to sleep, the one-eyed sailor pleasantly replied that if he hadn't brought a four-post bed in his pocket he must sleep where he could, for that all the other cabin-boys were sleeping in Davy's Locker, and couldn't be disturbed. And it was not till John Broom had learned ship's language that he found out that Davy's Locker meant the deep, and that the other cabin-boys were dead. "And as they'd nobody belonging to 'em, no hearts was broke," added the sailor, winking with his one eye.

John Broom slept standing sometimes for weariness, but he did not sleep in Davy's Locker. Young as he was he had dauntless courage, a careless hopeful heart, and a tough little body; and that strong, life-giving sea smell bore him up instead of food, and he got to the other side of the world.

Why he did not stay there, why he did not run away into the wilderness to find at least some easier death than to have his bones broken by the cruel captain, he often wondered afterwards. He was so much quicker and braver than the boys they commonly got, that the old sailor kept a sharp watch over him with his one eye whilst they were ashore; but one day he was too drunk to see out of it, and John Broom ran away.

It was Christmas day, and so hot that he could not run far, for it was at the other side of the world, where things are upside down, and he sat down by the roadside on the outskirts of the city; and as he sat, with his thin, brown face resting on his hands, a familiar voice beside him said, "Pretty Cocky!" and looking up he saw a man with several cages of birds. The speaker was a cockatoo of the most exquisite shades of cream-color, salmon, and rose, and he had a rose-colored crest. But lovely as he was, John Broom's eyes were on another cage, where, silent, solemn and sulky, sat a big white one with sulphur-colored trimmings and fierce black eyes; and he

was so like Miss Betty's pet, that the poor child's heart bounded as if a hand had been held out to him from home.

"If you let him get at you, you'll not do it a second time, mate," said the man. "He's the nastiest-tempered beast I ever saw. I'd have wrung his neck long ago if he hadn't such a fine coat."

But John Broom said as he had said before, "I like him, and he'll like me."

When the cockatoo bit his finger to the bone, the man roared with laughter, but John Broom did not draw his hand away. He kept it still at the bird's beak, and with the other he gently scratched him under the crest and wings. And when the white cockatoo began to stretch out his eight long toes, as cats clutch with their claws from pleasure, and chuckled, and sighed, and bit softly without hurting, and laid his head against the bars till his snow and sulphur feathers touched John Broom's black locks, the man was amazed.

"Look here, mate," said he, "you've the trick with birds, and no mistake. I'll sell you this one cheap, and you'll be able to sell him dear."

"I've not a penny in the world," said John Broom.

"You do look cleaned out, too," said the man scanning him from head to foot. "I tell you what, you shall come with me a bit and tame the birds, and I'll find you something to eat."

Ten minutes before, John Broom would have jumped at this offer, though he now refused it. The sight of the cockatoo had brought back the fever of home sickness in all its fierceness. He couldn't stay out here. He would dare anything, do anything, to see the hills about Lingborough once more before he died; and even if he did not live to see them, he might live to sleep in that part of Davy's Locker which should rock him on the shores of home.

The man gave him a shilling for fastening a ring and chain on to the cocky's ankle, and with this he got the best dinner he had eaten since he lost sight of the farm-bailiff's speckled hat in the mist.

And then he went back to the one-eyed sailor, and shipped as cabin-boy again for the homeward voyage.

THE HIGHLANDER.—BARRACK LIFE.—THE GREAT CURSE—JOHN BROOM'S MONEY-BOX.

When John Broom did get home he did not go to sea again. He lived from hand to mouth in the seaport town, and slept, as he was well accustomed to sleep, in holes and corners.

Every day and every night, through the long months of the voyage, he had dreamed of begging his way barefoot to Miss Betty's door. But now he did not go. His life was hard, but it was not cruel. He was very idle, and there was plenty to see. He wandered about the country as of old. The ships and shipping too had a fascination for him now that the past was past, and here he could watch them from the shore; and, partly for shame and partly for pride, he could not face the idea of going back. If he had been taunted with being a vagrant boy before, what would be said now if he presented himself, a true tramp, to the farm-bailiff? Besides, Miss Betty and Miss Kitty could not forgive him. It was impossible!

He was wandering about one day when he came to some fine high walls with buildings inside. There was an open gateway, at which stood a soldier with a musket. But a woman and some children went in, and he did not shoot them; so when his back was turned, and he was walking stiffly to where he came from, John Broom ran in through the gateway.

The first man he saw was the grandest-looking man he had ever seen. Indeed, he looked more like a bird than a man, a big bird, with a big black crest. He was very tall. His feet were broad and white, like the feathered feet of some plumy bird; his legs were bare and brown and hairy. He was clothed in many colors. He had fur in front, which swung as he walked, and silver and shining stones about him. He held his head very high, and from it dropped great black plumes. His face looked as if it had been cut—roughly but artistically—out of a block of old wood, and his eyes were the color of a summer sky. And John Broom felt as he had felt when he first saw Miss Betty's cockatoo.

In repose the Highlander's eye was as clear as a cairngorm and as cold, but when it fell upon John Broom it took a twinkle not quite unlike the twinkle in the one eye of the sailor; and then, to his amazement, this grand creature beckoned to John Broom with a rather dirty hand.

"Yes, sir," said John Broom, staring up at the splendid giant, with eyes of wonder.

"I'm saying," said the Highlander, confidentially (and it had a pleasant homely sound to hear him speak like the farm-bailiff)—"I'm saying, I'm confined to barracks, ye ken; and I'll gi'e ye a hawpenny if ye'll get the bottle filled wi' whusky. Roun' yon corner ye'll see the 'Britain's Defenders.' "

But at this moment he erected himself, his turquoise eyes looked straight before them, and he put his hand to his head and moved it slowly away again, as a young man with more swinging grandeur of colors and fur and

plumes, and with greater glittering of gems and silver, passed by, a sword clattering after him.

Meanwhile John Broom had been round the corner and was back again.

"What for are ye standin' there ye fule?" asked his new friend. "What for didna ye gang for the whusky?"

"It's here, sir."

"My certy, ye dinna let the grass grow under your feet," said the Highlander; and he added, "If ye want to run errands, laddie, ye can come back again."

It was the beginning of a fresh life for John Broom. With many other idle or homeless boys he now haunted the barracks, and ran errands for the soldiers. His fleetness of foot and ready wit made him the favorite. Perhaps, too, his youth and his bright face and eyes pleaded for him, for British soldiers are a tender-hearted race.

He was knocked about, but never cruelly, and he got plenty of coppers and broken victuals, and now and then an old cap or a pair of a boots, a world too large for him. His principal errands were to fetch liquor for the soldiers. In arms and pockets he would sometimes carry a dozen bottles at once, and fly back from the canteen or public-house without breaking one.

Before the summer was over he was familiar with every barrack-room and guard-room in the place; he had food to eat and coppers to spare, and he shared his bits with the mongrel dogs who lived, as he did, on the good-nature of the garrison.

It must be confessed that neatness was not among John Broom's virtues. He looped his rags together with bits of string, and wasted his pence or lost them. The soldiers standing at the bar would often give him a drink out of their pewter-pots. It choked him at first, and then he got used to it, and liked it. Some relics of Miss Betty's teaching kept him honest. He would not condescend to sip by the way out of the soldiers' jugs and bottles as other errand-boys did, but he came to feel rather proud of laying his twopence on the counter, and emptying his own pot of beer with a grimace to the by-standers through the glass at the bottom.

One day he was winking through the froth of a pint of porter at the canteen sergeant's daughter, who was in fits of laughing, when the pewter was knocked out of his grasp, and the big Highlander's hand was laid on his shoulder and bore him twenty or thirty yards from the place in one swoop.

"I'll trouble ye to give me your attention," said the Highlander, when they came to a standstill, "and to speak the truth. Did ye ever see me the

worse of liquor?”

John Broom had several remembrances of the clearest kind to that effect, so he put up his arms to shield his head from the probable blow, and said, “Yes, McAlister.”

“How often?” asked the Scotchman.

“I never counted,” said John Broom; “pretty often.”

“How many good-conduct stripes do ye ken me to have lost of your ain knowledge?”

“Three, McAlister.”

“Is there a finer man than me in the regiment?” asked the Highlander, drawing up his head.

“That there’s not,” said John Broom, warmly.

“Our sairgent, now,” drawled the Scotchman, “wad ye say he was a better man than me?”

“Nothing like so good,” said John Broom, sincerely.

“And what d’ye suppose, man,” said the Highlander, firing with sudden passion, till the light of his clear blue eyes seemed to pierce John Broom’s very soul—“what d’ye suppose has hindered me that I’m not sairgent, when yon man is? What has keepit me from being an officer, that has served my country in twa battles when oor quartermaster hadn’t enlisted? Wha gets my money? What lost me my stripes? What loses me decent folks’ respect, and waur than that, my ain? What gars a hand that can grip a broadsword tremble like a woman’s? What fills the canteen and the kirkyard? What robs a man of health and wealth and peace? What ruins weans and women, and makes mair homes desolate than war? Drink, man, drink! The deevil of drink!”

It was not till the glare in his eyes had paled that John Broom ventured to speak. Then he said,—

“Why don’t ye give it up, McAlister?”

The man rose to his full height, and laid his hand heavily on the boy’s shoulder, and his eyes seemed to fade with that pitiful, weary look, which only such blue eyes show so well, “Because I *canna*,” said he; “because, for as big as I am, I canna. But for as little as you are, laddie, ye can, and, Heaven help me, ye shall.”

That evening he called John Broom into the barrack-room where he slept. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, and had a little wooden money-box in his hands.

"What money have ye, laddie?" he asked.

John Broom pulled out three halfpence lately earned, and the Scotchman dropped them slowly into the box. Then he turned the key, and put it into his pocket, and gave the box to the boy.

"Ye'll put what you earn in there," said he, "I'll keep the key, and ye'll keep the box yourself; and when its opened we'll open it together, and lay out your savings in decent clothes for ye against the winter."

At this moment some men passing to the canteen shouted, "McAlister!" The Highlander did not answer, but he started to the door. Then he stood irresolute, and then turned and reseated himself.

"Gang and bring me a bit o' tobacco," he said, giving John Broom a penny. And when the boy had gone he emptied his pocket of the few pence left, and dropped them into the box, muttering, "If he manna, I wunna."

And when the tobacco came, he lit his pipe, and sat on the bench, outside and snarled at every one who spoke to him.

OUTPOST DUTY.—THE SERGEANT'S STORY.—GRAND ROUNDS.

It was a bitterly cold winter. The soldiers drank a great deal, and John Broom was constantly trotting up and down, and the box grew very heavy.

Bottles were filled and refilled, in spite of greatly increased strictness in the discipline of the garrison, for there were rumors of invasion, and penalties were heavy, and sentry posts were increased, and the regiments were kept in readiness for action.

The Highlander had not cured himself of drinking, though he had cured John Broom. But, like others, he was more wary just now, and had hitherto escaped the heavy punishments inflicted in a time of probable war; and John Broom watched over him with the fidelity of a sheep dog, and more than once had roused him with a can of cold water when he was all but caught by his superiors in a state of stupor, which would not have been credited to the frost alone.

The talk of invasion had become grave, when one day a body of men were ordered for outpost duty, and McAlister was among them. The officer had got a room for them in a farmhouse, where they sat round the fire, and went out by turns to act as sentries at various posts for an hour or two at a time.

The novelty was delightful to John Broom. He hung about the farmhouse, and warmed himself at the soldiers' fire.

In the course of the day McAlister got him apart, and whispered, “I’m going on duty the night at ten, laddie. It’s fearsome cold, and I hav’na had a drop to warm me the day. If ye could ha’ brought me a wee drappie to the corner of the three roads—its twa miles from here I’m thinking—”

“It’s not the miles, McAlister,” said John Broom, “but you’re on outpost duty, and——”

“And you’re misdoubting what may be done to ye for bringing liquor to a sentry on duty! Aye, aye, lad, ye do weel to be cautious,” said the Highlander, and he turned away.

But it was not the fear of consequences to himself which had made John Broom hesitate, and he was stung by the implication.

The night was dark and very cold, and the Highlander had been pacing up and down his post for about half an hour, when his quick ear caught a faint sound of footsteps.

“Wha goes there?” said he.

“It’s I, McAlister,” whispered John Broom.

“Whisht, laddie,” said the sentry; “are ye there after all? Did no one see ye?”

“Not a soul; I crept by the hedges. Here’s your whisky, McAlister; but, oh, be careful!” said the lad.

The Scotchman’s eye glistened greedily at the bottle.

“Never fear,” said he, “I’ll just rub a wee drappie on the pawms of my hands to keep away the frost-bite, for it’s awsome cold, man. Now away wi’ ye, and take tent, laddie, keep off the other sentries.”

John Broom went back as carefully as he had come, and slipped in to warm himself by the guard-room fire.

It was a good one, and the soldiers sat close round it. The officer was writing a letter in another room, and in a low, impressive voice, the sergeant was telling a story which was listened to with breathless attention. John Broom was fond of stories, and he listened also.

It was of a friend of the sergeant’s, who had been a boy with him in the same village at home, who had seen active service with him abroad, and who had slept at his post on such a night as this, from the joint effects of cold and drink. It was war time, and he had been tried by court-martial, and shot for the offense. The sergeant had been one of the firing party to execute his friend, and they had taken leave of each other as brothers, before the final parting face to face in this last awful scene.

The man's voice was faltering, when the tale was cut short by the jingling of the field officer's accoutrements as he rode by to visit the outposts. In an instant the officer and men turned out to receive him; and, after the usual formalities, he rode on. The officer went back to his letter, and the sergeant and his men to their fireside.

The opening of the doors had let in a fresh volume of cold, and one of the men called to John Broom to mend the fire. But he was gone.

John Broom was fleet of foot, and there are certain moments which lift men beyond their natural powers, but he had set himself a hard task.

As he listened to the sergeant's tale, an agonizing fear smote him for his friend McAlister. Was there any hope that the Highlander could keep himself from the whisky? Officers were making their rounds at very short intervals just now, and if drink and cold overcame him at his post!

Close upon these thoughts came the jingling of the field officer's sword, and the turn out of the guard. "Who goes there?"—"Rounds."—"What rounds?"—"Grand rounds?"—"Halt, grand rounds, advance one, and give the countersign!" The familiar words struck coldly on John Broom's heart, as if they had been orders to a firing party, and the bandage were already across the Highlander's blue eyes. Would the grand rounds be challenged at the three roads to-night? He darted out into the snow.

He flew, as the crow flies, across the fields, to where McAlister was on duty. It was a much shorter distance than by the road, which was winding; but whether this would balance the difference between a horse's pace and his own was the question, and there being no time to question, he ran on.

He kept his black head down, and ran from his shoulders. The clatter, clatter, jingle, jingle, on the hard road came to him through the still frost on a level with his left ear. It was terrible, but he held on, dodging under the hedges to be out of sight, and the sound lessened, and by-and-by, the road having wound about, he could hear it faintly, *but behind him*.

And he reached the three roads, and McAlister was asleep in the ditch.

But when, with jingle and clatter, the field officer of the day reached the spot, the giant Highlander stood like a watch-tower at his post, with a little snow on the black plumes that drooped upon his shoulders.

HOSPITAL.—"HAME."

John Broom did not see the Highlander again for two or three days. It was Christmas week, and, in spite of the war panic, there was festivity enough in the barracks to keep the errand-boy very busy.

Then came New Year's Eve—"Hogmenay," as the Scotch call it—and it was the Highland regiment's particular festival. Worn-out with whisky-fetching and with helping to deck barrack-rooms and carrying pots and trestles, John Broom was having a nap in the evening, in company with a mongrel deerhound, when a man shook him, and said, "I heard some one asking for ye an hour or two back; McAlister wants ye."

"Where is he?" said John Broom, jumping to his feet.

"In hospital; he's been there a day or two. He got cold on out-post duty, and it's flown to his lungs, they say. Ye see he's been a hard drinker, has McAlister, and I expect he's breaking up."

With which very just conclusion the speaker went on into the canteen, and John Broom ran to the hospital.

Stripped of his picturesque trappings, and with no plumes to shadow the hollows in his temples, McAlister looked gaunt and feeble enough, as he lay in the little hospital bed, which barely held his long limbs. Such a wreck of giant powers of body, and noble qualities of mind as the drink-shops are preparing for the hospitals every day!

Since the quickly-reached medical decision that he was in a rapid decline, and that nothing could be done for him, McAlister had been left a good deal alone. His intellect (and it was no fool's intellect,) was quite clear, and if the long hours by himself, in which he reckoned with his own soul, had hastened the death-damps on his brow, they had also written there an expression which was new to John Broom. It was not the old sour look, it was a kind of noble gravity.

His light, blue eyes brightened as the boy came in, and he held out his hand, and John Broom took it with both his, saying,

"I never heard till this minute, McAlister. Eh, I do hope you'll be better soon."

"The Lord being merciful to me," said the Highlander. "But *this* world's nearly past, laddie, and I was fain to see ye again. Dinna greet, man, for I've important business wi' ye, and I should wish your attention. Firstly, I'm aboot to hand ower to ye the key of your box. Tak it, and put it in a pocket that's no got a hole in it, if you're worth one. Secondly, there's a bit bag I made mysel, and it's got a trifle o' money in it that I'm giving and bequeathing to ye, under certain conditions, namely, that ye shall spend the contents of the box according to my last wishes and instructions, with the ultimate end of your ain benefit, ye'll understand."

A fit of coughing here broke McAlister's discourse; but after drinking from a cup beside him, he put aside John Broom's remonstrances with a

dignified movement of his hand, and continued,—

"When a body comes of decent folk, he won't just care, maybe, to have their names brought up in a barrack-room. Ye never heard me say aught of my father or my mither?"

"Never, McAlister."

"I'd a good hame," said the Highlander, with a decent pride in his tone. "It was a strict hame—I've no cause now to deceive mysel', thinking it was a wee bit ower strict—but it was a good hame. I left it, man—I ran away."

The glittering blue eyes turned sharply on the lad, and he went on:—

"A body doesna' care to turn his byeganes oot for every fool to peck at. Did I ever speer about your past life, and whar ye came from?"

"Never, McAlister."

"But that's no to say that, if I knew manners, I dinna obsairve. And there's been things now and again, John Broom, that's gar'd me think that ye've had what I had, and done as I did. Did ye rin awa', laddie?"

John Broom nodded his black head, but tears choked his voice.

"Man!" said the Highlander, "ane word's as gude's a thousand. Gang back! Gang hame! There's the bit siller here that's to tak ye, and the love yonder that's waiting ye. Listen to a dying man, laddie, and gang hame!"

"I doubt if they'd have me," sobbed John Broom, "I gave 'em a deal of trouble, McAlister."

"And d'ye think, lad, that that thought has na' cursed *me*, and keepit me from them that loved me? Aye, lad, and till this week I never overcame it."

"Weel may I want to save ye, bairn," added the Highlander tenderly, "for it was the thocht of a' ye riskit for the like of me at the three roads, that made me consider wi' mysel' that I've aiblins been turning my back a' my wilfu' life on love that's bigger than a man's deservings. It's near done now, and it'll never lie in my poor power so much as rightly to thank ye. It's strange that a man should set store by a good name that he doesna' deserve; but if ony blessings of mine could bring ye good, they're yours, that saved an old soldier's honor, and let him die respected in his regiment."

"Oh, McAlister, let me fetch one of the chaplains to write a letter to fetch your father," cried John Broom.

"The minister's been here this morning," said the Highlander, "and I've tell't him mair than I've tell't you. And he's jest directed me to put my sinful trust in the Father of us a'. I've sinned heaviest against *Him*, laddie, but His love is stronger than the lave."

John Broom remained by his friend, whose painful fits of coughing, and of gasping for breath, were varied by intervals of seeming stupor. When a candle had been brought in and placed near the bed, the Highlander roused himself and asked,—

"Is there a Bible on yon table? Could ye read a bit to me, laddie?"

There is little need to dwell on the bitterness of heart with which John Broom confessed,—

"I can't read big words, McAlister."

"Did ye never go to school?" said the Scotchman.

"I didn't learn," said the poor boy; "I played."

"Aye, aye. Weel, ye'll learn, when ye gang hame," said the Highlander, in gentle tones.

"I'll never get home," said John Broom, passionately. "I'll never forgive myself. I'll never get over it, that I couldn't read to ye when ye wanted me, McAlister."

"Gently, gently," said the Scotchman. "Dinna daunt yoursel' owermuch wi' the past, laddie. And for me—I'm not that presoomptious to think that I can square up a misspent life as a man might compound wi's creditors. 'Gin He forgi'es me, He'll forgi'e; but it's not a prayer up or a chapter down that'll stan' between me and the Almighty. So dinna fret yoursel', but let me think while I may."

And so, far into the night, the Highlander lay silent, and John Broom watched by him.

It was just midnight when he partly raised himself, and cried,—

"Whist, laddie! do ye hear the pipes?"

The dying ears must have been quick, for John Broom heard nothing; but in a few moments he heard the bagpipes from the officers' mess, where they were keeping Hogmenay. They were playing the old year out with "Auld lang syne," and the Highlander beat the tune out with his hand, and his eyes gleamed out of his rugged face in the dim light, as cairngorms glitter in dark tartan.

There was a pause after the first verse, and he grew restless, and turning doubtfully to where John Broom sat, as if his sight were failing, he said, "Ye'll mind your promise, ye'll gang hame?" And after awhile he repeated the last word,

"*Hame!*"

But as he spoke there spread over his face a smile so tender and so full of happiness, that John Broom held his breath as he watched him. As the light of sunrise creeps over the face of some rugged rock, it crept from chin to brow, and the pale blue eyes shone tranquil, like water that reflects heaven.

And when it had passed it left them still open, but gems that had lost their ray.

LUCK GOES.—AND COMES AGAIN.

THE spirit does not always falter in its faith because the flesh is weary with hope deferred. When week after week, month after month, and year after year, went by and John Broom was not found, the disappointment seemed to "age" the little ladies, as Thomasina phrased it. But yet they said to the parson, "We do not regret it."

"God forbid that you should regret it," said he.

And even the lawyer (whose heart was kinder than his tongue) abstained from taunting them with his prophecies, and said, "The force of the habits of early education is a power as well as that of inherent tendencies. It is only for your sake that I regret a too romantic benevolence." And Miss Betty and Miss Kitty tried to put the matter quite away. But John Broom was very closely bound up with the life of many years past. Thomasina mourned him as if he had been her son, and Thomasina being an old and valuable servant, it is needless to say that when she was miserable no one in the house was permitted to be quite at ease.

As to Pretty Cocky, he lived, but Miss Kitty fancied that he grew less pretty and drooped upon his polished perch.

There were times when the parson felt almost conscience-stricken because he had encouraged the adoption of John Broom. Disappointments fall heavily upon elderly people. They may submit better than the young, but they do not so easily revive. The little old ladies looked grayer and more nervous, and the little old house looked grayer and gloomier than of old.

Indeed there were other causes of anxiety. Times were changing, prices were rising, and the farm did not thrive. The lawyer said that the farm-bailiff neglected his duties, and that the cowherd did nothing but drink; but Miss Betty trembled, and said they could not part with old servants.

The farm-bailiff had his own trouble, but he kept it to himself. No one knew how severely he had beaten John Broom the day before he ran away, but he remembered it himself with painful clearness. Harsh men are apt to

have consciences, and his was far from easy about the lad who had been entrusted to his care. He could not help thinking of it when the day's work was over, and he had to keep filling up his evening whisky-glass again and again to drown disagreeable thoughts.

The whisky answered this purpose, but it made him late in the morning; it complicated business on market days, not to the benefit of the farm, and it put him at a disadvantage in dealing with the drunken cowherd.

The cowherd was completely upset by John Broom's mysterious disappearance, and he comforted himself as the farm-bailiff did, but to a larger extent. And Thomasina winked at many irregularities in consideration of the groans of sympathy with which he responded to her tears as they sat around the hearth where John Broom no longer lay.

At the time that he vanished from Lingborough the gossips of the country side said, "This comes of making pets of tramps' brats, when honest folk's sons may toil and moil without notice." But when it was proved that the tramp-boy had stolen nothing, when all search for him was vain, and when prosperity faded from the place season by season and year by year, there were old folk who whispered that the gaudily-clothed child Miss Betty had found under the broom-bush had something more than common in him, and that whoever and whatever had offended the eerie creature, he had taken the luck of Lingborough with him when he went away.

It was early summer. The broom was shining in the hedges with uncommon wealth of golden blossoms. "The lanes look for all the world as they did the year that poor child was found," said Thomasina, wiping her eyes. Annie the lass sobbed hysterically, and the cowherd found himself so low in spirits that after gazing dismally at the cow-stalls, which had not been cleaned for days past, he betook himself to the ale-house to refresh his energies for this and other arrears of work.

On returning to the farm, however, he found his hands still feeble, and he took a drop or two more to steady them, after which it occurred to him that certain new potatoes which he had had orders to dig were yet in the ground. The wood was not chopped for the next day's use, and he wondered what had become of a fork he had had in the morning and had laid down somewhere.

So he seated himself on some straw in the corner to think about it all, and whilst he was thinking he fell fast asleep.

By his own account many remarkable things had befallen him in the course of his life, including that meeting with a Black Something to which

allusion has been made, but nothing so strange as what happened to him that night.

When he awoke in the morning and sat up on the straw, and looked around him, the stable was freshly cleaned, the litter in the stalls was shaken and turned, and near the door was an old barrel of newly-dug potatoes, and the fork stood by it. And when he ran to the wood-house there lay the wood neatly chopped and piled to take away.

He kept his own counsel that day and took credit for the work, but when on the morrow the farm-bailiff was at a loss to know who had thinned the turnips that were left to do in the upper field, and Annie the lass found the kitchen-cloths she had left overnight to soak, rubbed through and rinsed, and laid to dry, the cowherd told his tale to Thomasina, and begged for a bowl of porridge and cream to set in the barn, as one might set a mouse-trap baited with cheese.

"For," said he, "the luck of Lingborough's come back, missis. *It's Lob Lie-by-the-fire!*"

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE.

"It's Lob Lie-by-the-fire!"

So Thomasina whispered exultingly, and Annie the lass timidly. Thomasina cautioned the cowherd to hold his tongue, and she said nothing to the little ladies on the subject. She felt certain that they would tell the parson, and he might not approve. The farm-bailiff knew of a farm on the Scotch side of the Border where a brownie had been driven away by the minister preaching his last Sunday's sermon over again at him, and as Thomasina said, "There'd been little enough luck at Lingborough lately, that they should wish to scare it away when it came."

And yet the news leaked out gently, and was soon known all through the neighborhood—as a secret.

"The luck of Lingborough's come back. Lob's lying by the fire!"

He could be heard at his work any night, and several people had seen him, though this vexed Thomasina, who knew well that the Good People do not like to be watched at their labors.

The cowherd had not been able to resist peeping down through chinks in the floor of the loft above the barn, where he slept, and one night he had seen Lob fetching straw for the cowhouse. "A great, rough, black fellow," said he, and he certainly grew bigger and rougher and blacker every time the cowherd told the tale.

The Lubber-fiend appeared next to a boy who was loitering at a late hour somewhere near the little ladies' kitchen-garden, and whom he pursued and pelted with mud till the lad nearly lost his wits with terror. (It was the same boy who was put in the lock-up in the autumn for stealing Farmer Mangel's Siberian crabs.)

For this trick, however, the rough elf atoned by leaving three pecks of newly-gathered fruit in the kitchen the following morning. Never had there been such a preserving season at Lingborough within the memory of Thomasina.

The truth is, hobgoblins, from Puck to Will-o'-the-wisp, are apt to play practical jokes and knock people about whom they meet after sunset. A dozen tales of such were rife, and folk were more amused than amazed by Lob Lie-by-the-fire's next prank.

There was an aged pauper who lived on the charity of the little ladies, and whom it was Miss Betty's practice to employ to do light weeding in the fields for heavy wages. This venerable person was toddling to his home in the gloaming with a barrow-load of Miss Betty's new potatoes, dexterously hidden by an upper sprinkling of groundsel and hemlock, when the Lubber-fiend sprang out from behind an elder-bush, ran at the old man with his black head, and knocked him, heels uppermost into the ditch. The wheel-barrow was afterwards found in Miss Betty's farmyard, quite empty.

And when the cowherd (who had his own opinion of the aged pauper, and it was a very poor one) went that evening, to drink Lob Lie-by-the-fire's health from a bottle he kept in the harness-room window, he was nearly choked with the contents, which had turned into salt and water, as fairy jewels turn to withered leaves.

But luck had come to Lingborough. There had not been such crops for twice seven years past.

The lay-away hen's eggs were brought regularly to the kitchen.

The ducklings were not eaten by rats.

No fowls were stolen.

The tub of pig-meal lasted three times as long as usual.

The cart-wheels and gate-hinges were oiled by unseen fingers.

The mushrooms in the croft gathered themselves and lay down on a dish in the larder.

It is by small savings that a farm thrives, and Miss Betty's farm throve.

Everybody worked with more alacrity. Annie, the lass, said the butter came in a way that made it a pleasure to churn.

The neighbors knew even more than those on the spot. They said—That since Lob came back to Lingborough the hens laid eggs as large as turkeys' eggs, and the turkeys' eggs were—oh, you wouldn't believe the size!

That the cows gave nothing but cream, and that Thomasina skimmed butter off it as less lucky folk skim cream from milk.

That her cheeses were as rich as butter.

That she sold all she made, for Lob took the fairy butter from the old trees in the avenue, and made it up into pats for Miss Betty's table.

That if you bought Lingborough turnips, you might feed your cows on them all the winter and the milk would be as sweet as new-mown hay.

That horses foddered on Lingborough hay would have thrice the strength of others, and that sheep who cropped Lingborough pastures would grow three times as fat.

That for as good a watch-dog as it was the sheep dog never barked at Lob, a plain proof that he was more than human.

That for all its good luck it was not safe to loiter near the place after dark, if you wished to keep your senses. And if you took so much as a fallen apple belonging to Miss Betty, you might look out for palsy or St. Vitus's dance, or to be carried off bodily to the underground folk.

Finally, that it was well that all the cows gave double, for that Lob Lie-by-the-fire drank two gallons of the best cream every day, with curds, porridge, and other dainties to match. But what did that matter, when he had been overheard to swear that luck should not leave Lingborough till Miss Betty owned half the country side?

MISS BETTY IS SURPRISED.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty having accepted a polite invitation from Mrs. General Dunmaw, went down to tea with that lady one fine evening in this eventful summer.

Death had made a gap or two in the familiar circle during the last fourteen years, but otherwise it was quite the same except that the lawyer was married and not quite so sarcastic, and that Mrs. Brown Jasey had brought a young niece with her dressed in the latest fashion, which looked quite as odd as new fashions are wont to do, and with a *coiffure* "enough to frighten the French away," as her aunt told her.

It was while this young lady was getting more noise out of Mrs. Dunmaw's red silk and rosewood piano than had been shaken out of it during the last thirty years, that the lawyer brought his cup of coffee to Miss

Betty's side, and said, suavely, "I hear wonderful accounts of Lingborough, dear Miss Betty."

"I am thankful to say, sir, that the farm is doing well this year. I am very thankful, for the past few years have been unfavorable, and we had begun to face the fact that it might be necessary to sell the old place. And, I will not deny, sir, that it would have gone far to break my heart, to say nothing of my sister Kitty's."

"Oh, we shouldn't have let it come to that," said the lawyer, "I could have raised a loan——"

"Sir," said Miss Betty, with dignity; "If we have our own pride, I hope it's an honest one. Lingborough will have passed out of our family when it's kept up on borrowed money."

"I *could* live in lodgings," added Miss Betty, firmly, "little as I've been accustomed to it, but *not in debt*."

"Well, well, my dear madam, we needn't talk about it now. But I'm dying of curiosity as to the mainstay of all this good luck."

"The turnips—" began Miss Betty.

"Bless my soul, Miss Betty!" cried the lawyer, "I'm not talking turnips. I'm talking of Lob Lie-by-the-fire, as all the country side is for that matter."

"The country people have plenty of tales of him," said Miss Betty, with some pride in the family goblin. "He used to haunt the old barns, they say, in my great-grandfather's time."

"And now you've got him back again," said the lawyer.

"Not that I know of," said Miss Betty.

On which the lawyer poured into her astonished ear all the latest news on the subject, and if it had lost nothing before reaching his house in the town, it rather gained in marvels as he repeated it to Miss Betty.

No wonder that the little lady was anxious to get home to question Thomasina, and that somewhat before the usual hour she said.—

"Sister Kitty, if it's not too soon for the servant——"

And the parson, threading his way to where Mrs. Dunmaw's china crape shawl (dyed crimson) shone in the bow window, said, "The clergy should keep respectable hours; especially when they are as old as I am. Will you allow me to thank you for a very pleasant evening, and to say good-night?"

THE PARSON AND THE LUBBER-FIEND.

“Do you think there’d be any harm in leaving it alone, sister Betty?” asked Miss Kitty, tremulously.

They had reached Lingborough, and the parson had come in with them, by Miss Betty’s request, and Thomasina had been duly examined:

“Eh, Miss Betty, why should ye chase away good luck with the minister?” cried she.

“Sister Kitty! Thomasina!” said Miss Betty. “I would not accept good luck from a doubtful quarter to save Lingborough. But if It can face this excellent clergyman, the Being who haunted my great-grandfather’s farm is still welcome to the old barns, and you, Thomasina, need not grudge It cream or curds.”

“You’re quite right, sister Betty,” said Miss Kitty, “you always are; but oh dear, oh dear!”—

“Thomasina tells me,” said Miss Betty, turning to the parson, “that on chilly evenings It sometimes comes and lies by the kitchen fire after they have gone to bed, and I can distinctly remember my grandmother mentioning the same thing. Thomasina has of late left the kitchen door on the latch for Its convenience, as they had to sit up late for us, she and Annie have taken their work into the still-room to leave the kitchen free for Lob Lie-by-the-fire. They have not looked into the kitchen this evening, as such beings do not like to be watched. But they fancy that they heard It come in. I trust, sir, that neither in myself nor my sister Kitty does timidity exceed a proper feminine sensibility, where duty is concerned. If you will be good enough to precede us, we will go to meet the old friend of my great-grandfather’s fortunes, and we leave it entirely to your valuable discretion to pursue what course you think proper on the occasion.”

“Is this the door?” said the parson, cheerfully, after knocking his head against black beams and just saving his legs down shallow and unexpected steps on his way to the kitchen—beams so unfelt and steps so familiar to the women that it had never struck them that the long passage was not the most straightforward walk a man could take—“I think you said It generally lies on the hearth?”

The happy thought struck Thomasina that the parson might be frightened out of his unlucky interference.

“Aye, aye, sir,” said she from behind. “We’ve heard him rolling by the fire, and growling like thunder to himself. They say he’s an awful size, too, with the strength of four men, and a long tail, and eyes like coals of fire.”

But Thomasina spoke in vain, for the parson opened the door, and as they pressed in, the moonlight streaming through the lattice window showed

Lob lying by the fire.

"There's his tail! Ay——k!" screeched Annie the lass, and away she went, without drawing breath, to the top garret, where she locked and bolted herself in, and sat her bandbox flat, screaming for help.

But it was the plumy tail of the sheep dog, who was lying there with the Lubber-fiend. And Lob was asleep, with his arms round the sheep dog's neck, and the sheep dog's head lay on his breast, and his own head touched the dog's.

And it was a smaller head than the parson had been led to expect, and it had thick black hair.

As the parson bent over the hearth, Thomasina took Miss Kitty round the waist, and Miss Betty clutched her black velvet bag till the steel beads ran into her hands, and they were quite prepared for an explosion, and sulphur, and blue lights, and thunder.

And then the parson's deep round voice broke the silence, saying,—

"Is that you, lad? God bless you, John Broom. You're welcome home!"

THE END.

Some things—such as gossip—gain in the telling, but there are others before which words fail, though each heart knows its own power of sympathy. And such was the joy of the little ladies and of Thomasina at John Broom's return.

The sheep dog had his satisfaction out long ago, and had kept it to himself, but how Pretty Cocky crowed, and chuckled, and danced, and bowed his crest, and covered his face with his amber wings, and kicked his seed-pot over, and spilt his water-pot on to the Derbyshire marble chess-table, and screamed till the room rang again, and went on screaming, with Miss Kitty's pocket-handkerchief over his head to keep him quiet, my poor pen can but imperfectly describe.

The desire to atone for the past which had led John Broom to act the part of one of those Good-Fellows who have, we must fear, finally deserted us, will be easily understood. And to a nature of his type, the earning of some self-respect, and of a new character before others, was perhaps a necessary prelude to future well-doing.

He did do well. He became "a good scholar," as farmers were then. He spent as much of his passionate energies on the farm as the farm would absorb, and he restrained the rest. It is not cockatoos only who have

sometimes to live and be happy in this unfinished life with one wing clipped.

In fine weather, when the perch was put into the garden, Miss Betty was sometimes startled by stumbling on John Broom in the dusk, sitting on his heels, the unfastened chain in his hand, with his black head lovingly laid against Cocky's white and yellow poll, talking in a low voice, and apparently with the sympathy of his companion; and, as Miss Betty justly feared, of that "other side of the world," which they both knew, and which both at times had cravings to revisit.

Even after the sobering influences of middle age had touched him, and a wife and children bound him with the quiet ties of home, he had (at long intervals) his "restless times," when his good "missis" would bring out a little store laid by in one of the children's socks, and would bid him "Be off, and get a breath of the sea-air," but on condition that the sock went with him as his purse. John Broom always looked ashamed to go, but he came back the better, and his wife was quite easy in his absence with that confidence in her knowledge of "the master," which is so mysterious to the unmarried, and which Miss Betty looked upon as "want of feeling" to the end. She always dreaded that he would not return, and a little ruse which she adopted of giving him money to make bargains for foreign articles of *vertu* with the sailors, is responsible for many of the choicest ornaments in the Lingborough parlor.

"The sock'll bring him home," said Mrs. Broom, and home he came, and never could say what he had been doing. Nor was the account given by Thomasina's cousin, who was a tide-waiter down yonder, particularly satisfying to the women's curiosity. He said that John Broom was always about; that he went aboard of all the craft in the bay, and asked whence they came and whither they were bound. That, being once taunted to it, he went up the rigging of a big vessel like a cat, and came down it looking like a fool. That, as a rule, he gossipped and shared his tobacco with sailors and fishermen, and brought out the sock much oftener than was prudent for the benefit of the ragged boys who haunt the quay.

He had two other weaknesses, which a faithful biographer must chronicle.

A regiment on the march would draw him from the ploughtail itself, and "With daddy to see the soldiers" was held to excuse any of Mrs. Broom's children from household duties.

The other shall be described in the graphic language of that acute observer the farm-bailiff.

“If there cam’ an Irish beggar, wi’ a stripy cloot roond him and a bellows under’s arm, and ca’d himself a Hielander, the lad wad gi’e him his silly head off his shoulders.”

As to the farm-bailiff, perhaps no one felt more or said less than he did on John Broom’s return. But the tones of his voice had tender associations for the boy’s ears as he took off his speckled hat, and after contemplating the inside for some moments, put it on again, and said,—

“Aweel, lad, sae ye’ve cam hame?”

But he listened with quivering face when John Broom told the story of McAlister, and when it was ended he rose and went out, and “took the pledge” against drink, and—kept it.

Moved by similar enthusiasm, the cowherd took the pledge also, and if he didn’t keep it, he certainly drank less, chiefly owing to the vigilant oversight of the farm-bailiff, who now exercised his natural severity almost exclusively in the denunciation of all liquors whatsoever, from the cowherd’s whisky to Thomasina’s elder-flower wine.

The plain cousin left his money to the little old ladies, and Lingborough continued to flourish.

Partly perhaps because of this, it is doubtful if John Broom was ever looked upon by the rustics as quite “like other folk.”

The favorite version of his history is that he was Lob under the guise of a child; that he was driven away by new clothes; that he returned from unwillingness to see an old family go to ruin “which he had served for hundreds of years;” that the parson preached his last Sunday’s sermon at him; and that having stood that test, he took his place among Christian people.

Whether a name invented off-hand, however plain and sensible, does not stick to a man as his father’s does, is a question. But John Broom was not often called by his.

With Scotch caution, the farm-bailiff seldom exceeded the safe title of “Man!” and the parson was apt to address him as “My dear boy” when he had certainly outgrown the designation.

Miss Betty called him John Broom, but the people called him by the name that he had earned.

And long after his black hair lay white and thick on his head, like snow on the old barn roof, and when his dark eyes were dim in an honored old age, the village children would point him out to each other, crying, “There goes Lob Lie-by-the-fire, the Luck of Lingborough!”

TIMOTHY'S SHOES.

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER.

TIMOTHY'S mother was very conscientious. When she was quite a young woman, just after the birth of her first baby, and long before Timothy saw the light, she was very much troubled about the responsibilities of having a family.

"Suppose," she murmured, "they catch measles, whooping cough, chicken-pox, scarlatina, croup, or inflammation of the lungs, when I might have prevented it; and either die, or have weak eyes, weak lungs or a chronic sore throat to the end of their days. Suppose they have bandy legs from walking too soon, or crooked spines from being carried too long. Suppose, too, that they grow up bad—that they go wrong, do what one will to keep them right. Suppose I cannot afford to educate them properly, or that they won't learn if I can afford to have them taught. Suppose that they die young, when I might have kept them alive; or live only to make me think they had better have died young. Oh dear, it's a terrible responsibility having a family!"

"It's too late to talk about that now, my dear," said her godmother (a fairy godmother, too!); "the baby is a very fine boy, and if you will let me know when the christening-day is fixed, I will come and give him a present. I can't be godmother, though; I'm too old, and you've talked about responsibilities till I'm quite alarmed." With which the old lady kissed her goddaughter, and nearly put out the baby's eye with the point of her peaked hat, after which she mounted her broomstick and rode away.

"A very fine boy," continued the young mother. "Ah! that's just where it is; if it had only been a girl I shouldn't have felt so much afraid. Girls are easily managed. They have got consciences, and they mend their own clothes. You can make them work, and they can amuse themselves when they're not working. Now with boys it is quite different. And yet I shouldn't wonder if I have a large family of boys, just because I feel it to be such a responsibility."

She was quite right. Years went by; one baby after another was added to the family, and they were all boys. “Twenty feet that want socks,” sighed the good woman, “and not a hand that can knit or darn!”

But we must go back to the first christening. The godmother arrived, dressed in plum-colored satin, with a small brown-paper parcel in her hand.

“Fortunatus’s purse!” whispered one of the guests, nudging his neighbor with his elbow. “The dear child will always be welcome in my poor establishment,” he added aloud to the mother.

“A mere trifle, my love,” said the fairy godmother, laying the brown-paper parcel beside her on the table and nodding kindly to her goddaughter.

“That means a mug,” said one of the godfathers, decidedly. “Rather shabby! I’ve gone as far as a knife, fork, and spoon myself.”

“Doubtless ’tis of the more precious metal,” said Dr. Dixon Airey, the schoolmaster (and this was his way of saying that it was a gold mug), “and not improbably studded with the glittering diamond. Let us not be precipitate in our conclusions.”

At this moment the fairy spoke again. “My dear goddaughter,” she began, laying her hand upon the parcel, “I have too often had reason to observe that the gift of beauty is far from invariably proving a benefit to its possessor.” (“I told you it was a purse,” muttered the guest.) “Riches,” continued the fairy, “are hardly a less doubtful boon; and the youth who is born to almost unlimited wealth is not always slow to become a bankrupt. Indeed, I fear that the experience of many centuries has almost convinced us poor fairies that extraordinary gifts are not necessarily blessings. This trifle,” she continued, beginning to untie the string of the parcel, “is a very common gift to come from my hands, but I trust it will prove useful.”

“There!” cried the godfather, “didn’t I say it was a mug? Common? Why there’s nothing so universal except, indeed, the knife, fork, and spoon.”

But before he had finished his sentence the parcel was opened, and the fairy presented the young mother with—*a small pair of strong leather shoes, copper tipped and heeled*. “They’ll never wear out, my dear,” she said; “rely upon it, you’ll find them a ‘mother’s blessing,’ and however large a family you may have, your children will step into one another’s shoes just at the age when little feet are the most destructive.” With which the old lady carefully wound the string on her finger into a neat twist, and folding the bit of brown paper put both in her pocket, for she was a very economical dame.

I will not attempt to describe the scandalized buzz in which the visitors expressed their astonishment at the meanness of the fairy’s gift. As for the young mother, she was a sensible, sweet-tempered woman, and very fond of

her old godmother, so she set it down to a freak of eccentricity; and, dismissing a few ambitious day-dreams from her mind, she took the shoes, and thanked the old lady pleasantly enough.

When the company had departed, the godmother still lingered, and kissed her goddaughter affectionately. “If your children inherit your good sense and good temper, my love, they will need nothing an old woman like me can give them,” said she; “but, all the same, my little gift is not *quite* so shabby as it looks. These shoes have another quality besides that of not wearing out. The little feet that are in them cannot very easily go wrong. If, when your boy is old enough, you send him to school in these shoes, should he be disposed to play truant, they will pinch and discomfit him so that it is probable he will let his shoes take him the right way; they will in like manner bring him home at the proper time. And——”

“Mrs. Godmother’s broomstick at the door!” shouted the farming man who was acting as footman on this occasion.

“Well, my dear,” said the old lady, “you will find out their virtues all in good time, and they will do for the whole family in turn; for I really can come to no more christenings. I am getting old—besides, our day is over. Farewell, my love.” And mounting her broomstick, the fairy finally departed.

KINGCUPS.

As years went by, and her family increased, the mother learned the full value of the little shoes. Her nine boys wore them in turn, but they never wore them out. So long as the fairy shoes were on their feet they were pretty sure to go where they were sent and to come back when they were wanted, which, as all parents know, is no light matter. Moreover, during the time that each boy wore them, he got into such good habits that he was thenceforward comparatively tractable. At last they descended to the ninth and youngest boy, and became—Timothy’s shoes.

Now the eighth boy had very small feet, so he had worn the shoes rather longer, and Timothy got them somewhat later than usual. Then, despite her conscientiousness, Timothy’s mother was not above the weakness of spoiling the youngest of the family; and so, for one reason or another, Master Timothy was wilful, and his little feet pretty well used to taking their own way before he stepped into the fairy shoes. But he played truant from the dame’s school and was late for dinner so often, that at length his mother resolved to bear it no longer; and one morning the leather shoes were brightly blacked and the copper tips polished, and Master Tim was duly

shod, and dismissed to school with many a wise warning from his fond parent.

"Now, Tim, dear, I know you will be a good boy," said his mother, a strong conviction that he would be no such thing pricking her conscience. "And mind you don't loiter or play truant, for if you do, these shoes will pinch you horribly, and you'll be sure to be found out."

Tim's mother held him by his right arm, and Tim's left arm and both his legs were already as far away as he could stretch them, and Tim's face looked just as incredulous as yours would look if you were told that there was a bogy in the store-closet who would avenge any attack upon the jam-pots with untold terrors. At last the good woman let go her hold, and Tim went off like an arrow from a bow, and he gave not one more thought to what his mother had said.

The past winter had been very cold, the spring had been fitful and stormy, and May had suddenly burst upon the country with one broad bright smile of sunshine and flowers. If Tim had loitered on the school path when the frost nipped his nose and numbed his toes, or when the trees were bare and the ground muddy, and the March winds crept up his jacket-sleeves, one can imagine the temptations to delay when every nook had a flower and every bush a bird. It is very wrong to play truant, but still it was very tempting. Twirr-r-r-r-r—up into the blue sky went the larks; hedge-birds chirped and twittered in and out of the bushes, the pale milkmaids opened their petals, and down in the dark marsh below the kingcups shone like gold.

Once or twice Tim loitered to pick milkmaids and white starflowers and speedwell; but the shoes pinched him, and he ran on all the more willingly that a newly fledged butterfly went before him. But when the path ran on above the marsh, and he looked down and saw the kingcups, he dismissed all thoughts of school. True, the bank was long and steep, but that only added to the fun. Kingcups he must have. The other flowers he flung away. Milkmaids are wan-looking at the best; starflowers and speedwell are ragged; but those shining things that he had not seen for twelve long months, with cups of gold and leaves like water-lilies—Tim flung his satchel on to the grass, and began to scramble down the bank. But though he turned his feet towards the kingcups, the shoes seemed resolved to go to school; and as he persisted in going towards the marsh, he suffered such twitches and twinges that he thought his feet must have been wrenched off. But Tim was a very resolute little fellow, and though his ankles bid fair to be dislocated at every step, he dragged himself, shoes and all, down to the marsh. And now, provokingly enough, he could not find a kingcup within reach; in very perversity, as it seemed, not one would grow on the safe edge, but, like so

many Will-o'-the-wisps, they shone out of the depths of the treacherous bog. And as Tim wandered round the marsh, jerk, wrench—oh, dear! every step was like a galvanic shock. At last, desperate with pain and disappointment, he fairly jumped into a brilliant clump that looked tolerable near, and was at once ankle-deep in water. Then, to his delight, the wet mud sucked the shoes off his feet, and he waded about among the rushes, reeds, and kingcups, sublimely happy.

And he was none the worse, though he ought to have been. He moved about very cautiously, feeling his way with a stick from tussock to tussock of reedy grass, and wondering how his eight brothers had been so feeble-minded as never to think of throwing the obnoxious shoes into a bog and so getting rid of them once for all. True, in fairy stories, the youngest brother always does accomplish what his elders had failed to do: but fairy tales are not always true. At last Tim began to feel tired; he hurt his foot with a sharp stump. A fat yellow frog jumped up in his face and so startled him that he nearly fell backwards into the water. He was frightened, and had culled more kingcups than he could carry. So he scrambled out, and climbed the bank, and cleaned himself up as well as he could with a small cotton pocket handkerchief, and thought he would go on to school.

Now, with all his faults, Tim was no coward and no liar, so with a quaking heart and a stubborn face he made up his mind to tell the dame that he had played truant; but even when one has resolved to confess, the words lag behind, and Tim was still composing a speech in his mind, and had still got no farther than, "Please, ma'am," when he found himself in the school and under the dame's very eye.

But Tim heeded not her frown, nor the subdued titters of the children; his eyes were fixed on the schoolroom floor, where—in Tim's proper place in the class—stood the little leather shoes, very muddy, and with a kingcup in each.

"You've been in the marsh, Timothy," said the dame. "*Put on your shoes.*"

It will be believed that when his punishment and his lessons were over, Tim allowed his shoes to take him quietly home.

THE SHOES AT SCHOOL.

When Timothy's mother heard how he had been in the marsh, she decided to send him at once to a real boys' school, as he was quite beyond dame's management. So he went to live with Dr. Dixon Airey, who kept a school on the moors, assisted by one Usher, a gentleman who had very long

legs and used very long words, and who wore common spectacles of very high power on work days, and green ones on Sundays and holidays.

And Timothy's shoes went with him.

On the whole he liked being at school. He liked the boys, he did not hate Dr. Airey much, and he would have felt kindly towards the Usher but for certain exasperating circumstances. The Usher was accustomed to illustrate his lessons by examples from familiar objects, and as he naturally had not much imagination left after years of grinding at the rudiments of everything with a succession of lazy little boys, he took the first familiar objects that came to hand, and his examples were apt to be tame. Now though Timothy's shoes were well-known in his native village, they created quite a sensation in Dr. Dixon Airey's establishment, and the Usher brought them into his familiar examples till Timothy was nearly frantic. Thus: "If Timothy's shoes cost 8*s.* 7*d.* without the copper tips, &c." or, illustrating the genitive case, "Timothy's shoes, or the shoes of Timothy," or again: "The shoes. Of the shoes. To or for the shoes. The shoes. O shoes! By, with, or from the shoes."

"I'll run away by, with, or from the shoes shortly," groaned Timothy, "see if I don't. I can't stand it any longer."

"I wouldn't mind it, if I were you," returned Bramble minor. "They all do it. Look at the fellow who wrote the Latin Grammar! He looks around the schoolroom, and the first thing that catches his eyes goes down for the first declension, *forma*, a form. They're all alike."

But when the fruit season came round, and boys now and then smuggled cherries into school, which were forfeited by the Usher, he sometimes used these for illustrations instead of the shoes, thus (in the arithmetic class): "Two hundred and fifty-four cherries added to one thousand six hundred and seventy-five will make——?"

"A *very* big pie!" cried Tim on one of these occasions. He had been sitting half asleep in the sunshine, his mind running on the coming enjoyments of the fruit season, cooked and uncooked; the Usher had appealed to him unexpectedly, and the answer was out of his lips before he could recollect himself. Of course he was sent to the bottom of the class; and the worst of going down in class for Timothy was that his shoes were never content to rest there. They pinched his poor feet till he shuffled them off in despair, and then they pattered back to his proper place where they stayed till, for very shame, Tim was obliged to work back to them: and if he kept down in his class for two or three days, for so long he had to sit in his socks, for the shoes always took the place that Tim ought to have filled.

But, after all, it was pleasant enough at that school upon the moors, from the time when the cat heather came out upon the hills to the last of the blackberries; and even in winter, when the northern snow lay deep, and the big dam was "safe" for skaters, and there was a slide from the Doctor's gate to the village post-office—one steep descent of a quarter of a mile on the causeway, and as smooth as the glass mountain climbed by the princes in the fairy tale. Then Saturday was a half-holiday, and the boys were allowed to ramble off on long country walks, and if they had been particularly good they were allowed to take out Nardy.

This was the Doctor's big dog, a noble fellow of St. Bernard breed. The Doctor called him Bernardus, but the boys called him Nardy.

Sometimes, too, the Usher would take one or two boys for a treat to the neighboring town, and when the Usher went out holidaying, he always wore the green spectacles, through which he never saw anything amiss, and indeed (it was whispered) saw very little at all.

Altogether Timothy would have been happy but for the shoes. They did him good service in many ways, it is true. When Timothy first came the little boys groaned under the tyranny of a certain big bully of whom all were afraid. One day when he was maltreating Bramble minor in a shameful and most unjust fashion, Timothy rushed at him and with the copper tips of his unerring shoes he kicked him so severely that the big bully did not get over it for a week, and no one feared him any more. Then in races, and all games of swift and skilful chase, Timothy's shoes won him high renown. But they made him uncomfortable whenever he went wrong, and left him no peace till he went right, and he grumbled loudly against them.

"There is a right way and a wrong way in all sublunary affairs," said the Usher. "Hereafter, young gentleman, you will appreciate your singular felicity in being incapable of taking the wrong course without feeling uncomfortable."

"What's the use of his talking like that?" said Timothy, kicking the bench before him with his "copper tips." "I don't want to go the wrong way, I only want to go my own way, that's all." And night and day he beat his brains for a good plan to rid himself of the fairy shoes.

THE SHOES AT CHURCH.

On Sunday, Dr. Dixon Airey's school went to the old church in the valley. It was a venerable building with a stone floor, and when Dr. Dixon Airey's young gentlemen came in they made such a clattering with their feet

that everybody looked round. So the Usher very properly made a point of being punctual that they might not disturb the congregation.

The Usher always went to church with the boys, and he always wore his green spectacles. It has been hinted that on Sundays and holidays he was slow to see anything amiss. Indeed if he were directly told of misconduct he would only shake his head and say:

"*Humanum est errare*, my dear boy, as Dr. Kerchever Arnold truly remarks in one of the exercises."

And the boys liked him all the better, and did not on the whole behave any the worse for this occasional lenity.

Four times in the year, on certain Sunday afternoons, the young people of the neighborhood were publicly catechised in the old church after the second lesson at Evening Prayer, and Dr. Dixon Airey's young gentlemen with the rest. They all filed down on the nave in a certain order, and every boy knew beforehand which question and answer would fall to his share. Now Timothy's mother had taught him the Catechism very thoroughly, and so on a certain Sunday he found that the lengthy answer to the question, "What is thy duty towards thy neighbor?" had been given to him. He knew it quite well; but a stupid, half-shy, and wholly aggravating fit came upon him, and he resolved that he would not stand up with the others to say his Catechism in church. So when they were about half-way there, Timothy slipped off unnoticed, and the Usher—all confidence and green spectacles—took the rest of the party on without him.

Oh, how the shoes pinched Tim's feet as he ran away over the heather, and how Tim vowed in his heart never to rest till he got rid of them! At last the wrenching became so intolerable that Tim tore them off his feet, and kicked them for very spite. Fortunately for Tim's shins the shoes did not kick back again, but they were just setting off after the Usher, when Tim snatched them up and put them in his pocket. At last he found among the gray rocks that peeped out of the heather and bracken, one that he could just move, and when he had pushed it back, he popped the shoes under it, and then rolled the heavy boulder back on them to keep them fast. After which he ate bilberries till his teeth were blue, and tried to forget the shoes and to enjoy himself. But he could hot do either.

As to the Usher, when he found that Timothy was missing, he was very much vexed; and when the Psalms were ended and still he had not come, the Usher took off his green spectacles and put them into his pocket. And Bramble minor, who came next to Timothy, kept his Prayer-Book open at the Church Catechism and read his Duty to his Neighbor instead of

attending to the service. At last the time came, and all the boys filed down the nave. First the Parish schools and then Doctor Dixon Airey's young gentlemen; and just as they took their places between Bramble minor and the next boy—in the spot where Timothy should have been—stood Timothy's shoes.

After service the shoes walked home with the boys, and followed the Usher into Dr. Dixon Airey's study.

"I regret, sir," said the Usher, "I deeply regret to have to report to you that Timothy was absent from Divine worship this evening."

"And who did his Duty to his Neighbor?" asked the Doctor, anxiously.

"Bramble minor, sir."

"And how did he do it?" asked the Doctor.

"Perfectly, sir."

"Mrs. Airey and I," said the Doctor, "shall have much pleasure in seeing Bramble minor at tea this evening. I believe there are greengage turnovers. We hope also for the honor of *your* company, sir," added the Doctor. "And when Timothy retraces his erring steps, *tell him to come and fetch his shoes*."

THE POOR PERSON.

I REGRET to say that the events just related only confirmed Timothy in his desire to get rid of his shoes. He took Bramble minor into his confidence, and they discussed the matter seriously after they went to bed.

What a gift it is to be able to dispose in one trenchant sentence of a question that has given infinite trouble to those principally concerned! Most journalists have this talent, and Bramble minor must have had some of it, for when Timothy had been stating his grievance in doleful and hopeless tones, his friend said:

"What's the use of putting them under stones and leaving them in bogs? Give your shoes to some one who wants 'em, my boy, and they'll be kept fast enough, you may be sure!"

"But where am I to find any one who wants them?" asked Timothy.

"Why, bless your life!" said Bramble minor, "go to the first poor person's cottage you come to, and offer them to the first person you see. Strong shoes with copper tips and heels will not be refused in a hurry, and will be taken very good care of, you'll find."

With which Bramble minor rolled over in his little bed and went to sleep, and Timothy turned over in his, and thought what a thing it was to have a practical genius—like Bramble minor! And the first half-holiday he borrowed a pair of shoes, and put his own in his pocket, and set forth for the nearest poor person's cottage.

He did not go towards the village (it was too public he thought); he went over the moors, and when he had walked about half a mile, down by a sandy lane just below him, he saw a poor person's cottage. The cottage was so tumble-down and so old and inconvenient, there could be no doubt but that it belonged to a poor person, and to a very poor person indeed!

When Timothy first rapped at the door he could hear no answer, but after knocking two or three times he accepted a faint sound from within as a welcome, and walked into the cottage. Though more comfortable within than without, it was unmistakably the abode of a "poor person," and the poor person himself was sitting crouched over a small fire, coughing after a manner that shook the frail walls of the cottage and his own frailer body. He was an old man and rather deaf.

"Good afternoon," said Timothy, for he did not know what else to say.

"Good day to ye," coughed the old man.

"And how are you this afternoon?" asked Tim.

"No but badly, thank ye," said the old man; "but I'm a long age, and it's what I mun expect."

"You don't feel as if a small pair of strong leather shoes would be of any use to you?" asked Tim in his ear.

"Eh? Shoes? It's not many shoes I'm bound to wear out now. These'll last my time, I expect. I'm a long age, sir. But thank ye kindly all the same."

Tim was silent, partly because the object of his visit had failed, partly with awe of the old man, whose time was measured by the tattered slippers on his feet.

"You be one of Dr. Airey's young gentlemen, I reckon," said the old man at last. Tim nodded.

"And how's the old gentleman? He wears well, do the Doctor. And I expect he's a long age, too?"

"He's about sixty, I believe," said Timothy.

"I thowt he'd been better nor seventy," said the old man, in almost an injured tone, for he did not take much interest in any one younger than threescore years and ten.

"Have you any children?" asked Tim, still thinking of the shoes.

"Four buried and four living," said the old man.

"Perhaps *they* might like a pair——" began Timothy; but the old man had gone on without heeding him.

"And all four on 'em married and settled, and me alone; for my old woman went Home twenty years back, come next fift' o' March."

"I daresay you have grandchildren, then?" said Tim.

"Ay, ay. Tom's wife's brought him eleven, *so* fur; and six on 'em boys."

"They're not very rich, I daresay," said Tim.

"Rich!" cried the old man; "Why, bless ye, last year Tom were out o' work six month, and they were a'most clemmed."

"I'm so sorry," said Tim; "and will you please give them these shoes? They're sure to fit one of the boys, and they are very very strong leather, and copper-tipped and heeled, and——."

But as Tim enumerated the merits of his shoes the old man tried to speak, and could not for a fit of coughing, and as he choked and struggled he put back the shoes with his hand. At last he found voice to gasp,—"Lor', bless you, Tom's in Osstraylee."

"Whatever did he go there for?" cried Tim, impatiently, for he saw no prospect of getting rid of his tormentors.

"He'd nowt to do at home, and he's doing well out yonder. He says he'll send me some money soon, but I doubt it won't be in time for my burying. I'm a long age," muttered the old man.

Tim put the shoes in his pocket again, and pulled out a few coppers, the remains of his pocket-money. These the old man gratefully accepted, and Tim departed. And as he was late, he took off the borrowed shoes and put on his own once more, for they carried him quicker over the ground.

And so they were still Timothy's shoes.

THE DIRTY BOY.

One day the Usher invited Timothy to walk to the town with him. It was a holiday. The Usher wore his green spectacles; Tim had a few shillings of pocket-money, and plums were in season. Altogether the fun promised to be good.

Timothy and the Usher had so much moor breeze and heather scents every day, that they quite enjoyed the heavier air of the valley and the smell and smoke of town life. Just as they entered the first street a dirty little boy,

in rags and with bare feet, ran beside them, and as he ran he talked. And it was all about his own trouble and poverty, and hunger and bare feet, and he spoke very fast, with a kind of whine.

"I feel quite ashamed, Timothy," said the Usher (who worked hard for twelve hours a day, and supported a blind mother and two sisters),—"I feel quite ashamed to be out holidaying when a fellow-creature is barefooted and in want." And as he spoke the Usher gave a sixpence to the dirty little boy (who never worked at all, and was supported by kind people out walking). And when the dirty little boy had got the sixpence, he bit it with his teeth and rang it on the stones, and then danced catherine-wheels on the pavement till somebody else came by. But the Usher did not see this through his green spectacles.

And Timothy thought, "My shoes would fit that barefooted boy."

After they had enjoyed themselves very much for some time, the Usher had to pay a business visit in the town, and he left Timothy to amuse himself alone for a while. And Timothy walked about, and at last he stopped in front of a bootmaker's shop, and in the window he saw a charming little pair of boots just his own size. And when he turned away from the window, he saw something coming very fast along the pavement like the three legs on an Isle of Man halfpenny, and when it stood still it was the barefooted boy.

Then Timothy went into the shop, and bought the boots, and this took all his money to the last farthing.

And when he came out of the shop the dirty little boy was still there.

"Come here, my poor boy," said Tim, speaking like a young gentleman out of 'Sanford and Merton.' "You look very poor, and your feet must be very cold."

The dirty boy whined afresh, and said his feet were so bad he could hardly walk. They were frost-bitten, sun-blistered, sore, and rheumatic; and he expected shortly to become a cripple like his parents and five brothers, all from going barefoot. And Timothy stooped down and took off the little old leather shoes.

"I will give you these shoes, boy," said he, "on one condition. You must promise not to lose them, nor to give them away."

"Catch me!" cried the dirty boy, as he took the shoes. And his voice seemed quite changed, and he put one of his dirty fingers by the side of his nose.

"I could easily catch you if I wished," said Tim. (For slang was not allowed in Dr. Dixon Airey's establishment, and he did not understand the

remark.)

"Well, you *are* green!" said the dirty boy, putting on the shoes.

"It's no business of yours what color I am," said Tim, angrily. "You're black, and that's your own fault for not washing yourself. And if you're saucy or ungrateful, I'll kick you—at least, I'll try," he added, for he remembered that he no longer wore the fairy shoes, and could not be sure of kicking or catching anybody now.

"Walker!" cried the dirty boy. But he did not walk, he ran, down the street as fast as he could go, and Timothy was parted from his shoes.

He gave a sigh, just one sigh, and then he put on the new boots, and went to meet the Usher.

The Usher was at the door of a pastrycook's shop, and he took Tim in, and they had veal-pies and ginger-wine; and the Usher paid the bill. And all this time he beamed affably through his green spectacles, and never looked at Timothy's feet.

Then they went out into the street, where there was an interesting smell of smoke, and humanity, and meat, and groceries, and drapery, and drugs, quite different to the moor air, and the rattling and bustling were most stimulating. And Tim and the Usher looked in at all the shop-windows gratis, and choose the things they would have bought if they had had the money. At last the Usher went into a shop and bought for Tim a kite which he had admired; and Tim would have given everything he possessed to have been able to buy some small keep-sake for the Usher, but he could not, for he had spent all his pocket-money on the new boots.

When they reached the bottom of the street, the Usher said, "Suppose we go up the other side and look at the shops there." And when they were half way up the other side, they found a small crowd round the window of a print-seller, for a new picture was being exhibited in the window. And outside the crowd was the dirty boy, but Tim and the Usher did not see him. And they squeezed in through the crowd and saw the picture. It was a historical subject with a lot of figures, and they were all dressed so like people on the stage of a theatre that Tim thought it was a scene out of Shakespeare. But the Usher explained that it was the signing of the Magna Charta, or the Foundation Stone of our National Liberties, and he gave quite a nice little lecture about it, and the crowd said, "Hear, hear!" But as everybody wanted to look at King John at the same moment when the Usher called him "treacherous brother and base tyrant," there was a good deal of pushing, and Tim and he had to stand arm-in-arm to keep together at all. And thus it was that when the dirty boy from behind put his hand in the

Usher's waistcoat pocket, and took out the silver watch that had belonged to his late father, the Usher thought it was Tim's arm that seemed to press his side, and Tim thought it was the Usher's arm that *he* felt. But just as the dirty boy had secured the watch the shoes gave him such a terrible twinge, that he started in spite of himself. And in his start he jerked the Usher's waistcoat, and in one moment the Usher forgot what he was saying about our national liberties, and recalled (as with a lightning flash) the connection between crowds and our national pickpockets. And when he clapped his hand to his waistcoat—his watch was gone!

"My watch has been stolen!" cried the Usher, and, as he turned round, the dirty boy fled, and Tim, the Usher, and the crowd ran after him crying, "Stop thief!" and every one they met turned round and ran with them, and at the top of the street they caught a policeman, and were nearly as glad as if they had caught the thief.

Now if the dirty boy had still been barefoot no one could ever have stopped *him*. But the wrenching and jerking of the shoes made running most difficult, and just as he was turning a corner they gave one violent twist that turned him right round, and he ran straight into the policeman's arms.

Then the policeman whipped out the watch as neatly as if he had been a pickpocket himself, and gave it back to the Usher. And the dirty boy yelled, and bit the policeman's hand, and butted him in the chest with his head, and kicked his shins; but the policeman never lost his temper, and only held the dirty boy fast by the collar of his jacket, and shook him slightly. When the policeman shook him, the dirty boy shook himself violently, and went on shaking in the most ludicrous way, pretending that it was the policeman's doing, and he did it so cleverly that Tim could not help laughing. And then the dirty boy danced, and shook himself faster and faster, as a conjuror shakes his chains of iron rings. And as he shook, he shook the shoes off his feet, and drew his arms in, and ducked his head, and, as the policeman was telling the Usher about a pickpocket he had caught the day before yesterday, the dirty boy gave one wriggle, dived, and leaving his jacket in the policeman's hand, fled a way like the wind on his bare feet.

The policeman looked seriously annoyed; but the Usher said he was very glad, as he shouldn't like to prosecute anybody, and had never been in a police-court in his life. And he gave the policeman a shilling for his trouble, and the policeman said the court "wouldn't be no novelty to him,"—meaning to the dirty boy.

And when the crowd had dispersed, Timothy told the Usher about the boots, and said he was very sorry; and the Usher accepted his apologies, and

said, "*Humanum est errare*, my dear boy, as Dr. Kerchever Arnold truly remarks in one of the exercises." Then Timothy went to the bootmaker, who agreed to take back the boots "for a consideration." And with what was left of his money, Tim bought some things for himself and for Bramble minor and for the Usher.

And the shoes took him very comfortably home.

THE CHILDREN'S PARTY.

When Timothy went home for the Christmas holidays, his mother thought him greatly improved. His friends thought so too, and when Tim had been at home about a week, a lady living in the same town invited him to a children's party and dance. It was not convenient for any one to go with him; but his mother said, "I think you are to be trusted now, Timothy, especially in the shoes. So you shall go, but on one condition. The moment ten o'clock strikes, you must start home at once. Now remember!"

"I can come home in proper time without those clod-hopping shoes," said Timothy to himself. "It is really too bad to expect one to go to a party in leather shoes with copper tips and heels!"

And he privately borrowed a pair of pumps belonging to his next brother, made of patent leather and adorned with neat little bows, and he put a bit of cotton wool into each toe to make them fit. And he went by a little by-lane at the back of the house, to avoid passing under his mother's window, for he was afraid she might see the pumps.

Now the little by-lane was very badly lighted, and there were some queer-looking people loitering about, and one of them shouted something at him, and Timothy felt frightened, and walked on pretty fast. And then he heard footsteps behind him, and walked faster, and still the footsteps followed him, and at last he ran. Then they ran too, and he did not dare to look behind. And the footsteps followed him all down the by-lane and into the main street and up to the door of the lady's house, where Tim pulled the bell and turned to face his pursuer.

But nothing was to be seen save Timothy's little old leather shoes, which stood beside him on the steps.

"Your shoes, sir?" said the very polite footman who opened the door. And he carried the shoes inside, and Tim was obliged to put them on and leave the pumps with the footman, for (as he said) "they'll be coming up stairs, and making a fool of me in the ball-room."

Tim had no reason to regret the exchange. Other people are not nearly so much interested in one's appearance as one is oneself; and then they danced so beautifully that every little girl in the room wanted Tim for her partner, and he was perfectly at home, even in the Lancers. He went down twice to supper, and had lots of gooseberry-fool; and they were just about to dance Sir Roger de Coverley, when the clock struck ten.

Tim knew he ought to go, but a very nice little girl wanted to dance with him, and Sir Roger is the best of fun, and he thought he would just stay till it was over. But though he secured his partner and began, the shoes made dancing more a pain than a pleasure to him. They pinched him, they twitched him, they baulked his *glissades*, and once when he should have gone down the room they fairly turned him around and carried him off towards the door. The other dancers complained, and Tim kicked off the shoes in a pet, and resolved to dance it out in his socks.

But when the shoes were gone, Tim found how much the credit of his dancing was due to them. He could not remember the figure. He swung the little lady round when he should have bowed, and bowed when he should have taken her hand, and led the long line of boys the wrong way, and never made a triumphal arch at all. The boys scolded and squabbled, the little ladies said he had had too much gooseberry-fool, and at last Timothy left them and went down stairs. Here he got the little pumps from the footman and started home. He ran to make up for lost time, and as he turned out of the first street he saw the leather shoes running before him, the copper tips shining in the lamplight.

And when he reached his own door the little shoes were waiting on the threshold.

THE SNOW STORM.

When Timothy went back to school in the beginning of the year, the snow lay deep upon the moors. The boys made colossal snow men and buried things deep under drifts, for the dog Bernardus to fetch out. On the ice Timothy's shoes were invaluable. He was the best skater and slider in the school, and when he was going triumphantly down a long slide with his arms folded and his friends cheering, Tim was very glad he had not given away his shoes.

One Saturday the Usher took him and Bramble minor for a long walk over the hills. They had tea with a friendly farmer, whose hospitality would hardly let them go. So they were later than they had intended, and about the time that they set out to return a little snow began to fall. It was small snow,

and fell very quietly. But though it fell so quietly, it was wonderful how soon the walls and gates got covered; and though the flakes were small they were so dense that in a short time no one could see more than a few yards in front of him. The Usher thought it was desirable to get home as quickly as possible, and he proposed to take a short cut across the moors, instead of following the high road all the way. So they climbed a wall, and ploughed their way through the untrodden snow, and their hands and feet grew bitterly painful and then numb, and the soft snow lodged in their necks and drifted on to their eyelashes and into their ears, and at last Timothy fairly cried. For he said, that besides the biting of the frost his shoes pinched and pulled his feet.

"It's because we are not on the high road," said the Usher; "but this will take half an hour off our journey, and in five minutes we shall strike the road again, and then the shoes will be all right. Bear it for a few minutes longer if you can, Tim."

But Tim found it so hard to bear, that the Usher took him on to his back and took his feet into his hands, and Bramble minor carried the shoes. And five minutes passed but they did not strike the road, and five more minutes passed, and though Tim lay heavy upon the Usher's shoulder (for he was asleep) the Usher's heart was heavier still. And five minutes more passed, and Bramble minor was crying, and the Usher said, "Boys, we've lost our way. I see nothing for it but to put Timothy's shoes down and follow them."

So Bramble minor put down the shoes, and they started off to the left, and the Usher and the boys followed them.

But the shoes tripped lightly over the top of the snow, and went very fast, and the Usher and Bramble minor waded slowly through it, and in a few seconds the shoes disappeared into the snowstorm, and they lost sight of them altogether, and Bramble minor said—"I *can't* go any further. I don't mind being left, but I must lie down, I am so very, very tired."

Then the Usher woke Timothy, and made him put on Bramble minor's boots and walk, and he took Bramble minor on to his back, and made Timothy take hold of his coat, and they struggled on through the storm, going as nearly as they could in the way that the shoes had gone.

"How are you getting on, Timothy?" asked the Usher after a long silence. "Don't be afraid of holding on to me, my boy."

But Timothy gave no answer.

"Keep a brave heart, laddie!" cried the Usher, as cheerfully as his numb and languid lips could speak.

Still there was silence, and when he looked round, *Timothy was not there*.

When and where he had lost his hold the distracted Usher had no idea. He shouted in vain.

"How could I let him take off the shoes?" groaned the poor man. "Oh! what shall I do? Shall I struggle on to save this boy's life, or risk all our lives by turning back after the other?"

He turned round as he spoke, and the wild blast and driving snow struck him in the face. The darkness fell rapidly, the drifts grew deeper, and yet the Usher went after Timothy.

And he found him, but too late—for his own strength was exhausted, and the snow was three feet deep all round him.

BERNARDUS ON DUTY.

When the snow first began to fall, Dr. Dixon Airey observed,—"Our friends will get a sprinkling of sugar this evening;" and the boys laughed, for this was one of Dr. Dixon Airey's winter jokes.

When it got dusk, and the storm thickened, Dr. Dixon Airey said—"I hope they will come home soon."

But when the darkness fell, and they did not come, Dr. Dixon Airey said, "I think they must have remained at the farm." And when an hour passed and nothing was to be seen or heard without but the driving wind and snow, the Doctor said, "Of course they are at the farm. Very wise and proper." And he drew the study curtains, and took up a newspaper, and rang for tea. But the Doctor could not eat his tea, and he did not read his paper, and every five minutes he opened the front door and looked out, and all was dark and silent, only a few snow-flakes close to him looked white as they fell through the light from the open door. And the Doctor said, "There can't be the slightest doubt they are at the farm."

But when Dr. Dixon Airey opened the door for the seventh time, Timothy's shoes ran in, and they were filled with snow. And when the Doctor saw them he covered his face with his hands.

But in a moment more he had sent his man-servant to the village for help, and Mrs. Airey was filling his flask with brandy, and he was tying on his comforter and cap, and fastening his leggings and great-coat. Then he took his lantern and went out in the yard.

And there lay Bernardus with his big nose at the door of his kennel smelling the storm. And when he saw the light and heard footsteps, his

great, melancholy, human eyes brightened, and he moaned with joy. And when the men came up from the village and moved about with shovels and lanterns, he was nearly frantic, for he thought, “This looks like business;” and he dragged at his kennel, as much as to say, “If you don’t let me off the chain now, of all moments, I’ll come on my own responsibility and bring the kennel with me.”

Then the Doctor unfastened the chain, and he tied Timothy’s shoes round the dog’s neck, saying, “Perhaps they will help to lead their wearer aright.” And either the shoes did pull in the right direction, or the sagacity of Bernardus sufficed him, for he started off without a moment’s hesitation. The men followed him as fast as they were able, and from time to time Bernardus would look round to see if they were coming, and would wait for them. But if he saw the lanterns he was satisfied and went on.

“It’s a rare good thing there’s some dumb animals cleverer than we are ourselves,” observed one of the laborers as they struggled blindly through the snow, the lanterns casting feeble and erratic patches of light for a yard or two before their feet. To Bernardus his own wonderful gift was light, and sight, and guide, its own sufficient stimulus, and its own reward.

“There’s some’at amiss,” said another man presently; “t’dog’s whining; he’s stuck fast.”

“Or perhaps he has found something,” said the Doctor trembling.

The Doctor was right. He had found Timothy and Bramble minor, and the Usher: and they were still alive.

* * * * * *

“Mrs. Airey,” said the Doctor, as an hour later, they sat round the study fire wrapped in blankets, and drinking tumblers of hot compounds—“Mrs. Airey, that is a creature above kennels. From this eventful evening I wish him to sleep under our roof.”

And Mrs. Airey began, “Bless him!” and then burst into tears.

And Bernardus, who lay with his large eyes upon the fire, rejoiced in the depths of his doggish heart.

THE SHOES GO HOME.

It is hardly needful to say that Timothy was reconciled to his shoes. As to being ashamed of them—he would as soon have been ashamed of that other true friend of his, the Usher. He would no more have parted with them now than Dr. Dixon Airey would have parted with the dog Bernardus.

But, alas! how often it happens that we do not fully value our best friends till they are about to be taken from us! It was a painful fact, but Timothy was outgrowing his shoes.

He was at home when the day came on which the old leather shoes into which he could no longer squeeze his feet were polished for the last time, and put away in a cupboard in his mother's room: Timothy blacked them with his own hands, and the tears were in his eyes as he put them on the shelf.

"Good-bye, good little friends;" said he; "I will try and walk as you have taught me."

Timothy's mother was much affected by this event. She could not sleep that night for thinking of the shoes in the cupboard. She seemed to live over again all the long years of her married life. Her first anxieties, the good conduct of all her boys, the faithful help of those good friends to her nine sons in turn—all passed through her mind as she knitted her brows under the frill of her nightcap and gazed at the cupboard door with sleepless eyes. "Ah!" she thought, "how wise the good godmother was! No money, no good luck, would have done for my boys what the early training of these shoes has done. That early discipline which makes the prompt performance of duty a habit in childhood, is indeed the quickest relief to parental anxieties, and the firmest foundation for the fortunes of one's children."

Such, and many more, were the excellent reflections of this conscientious woman; but excellent as they were, they shall not be recorded here. One's own experience preaches with irresistible eloquence; but the second-hand sermons of other people's lives are apt to seem tedious and impertinent.

Her meditations kept her awake till dawn. The sun was just rising, and the good woman was just beginning to feel sleepy, and had once or twice lost sight of the bed-room furniture in a half-dream, when she was startled by the familiar sound as of a child jumping down from some height to the floor. The habit of years was strong on her, and she cried, "Bless the boy! He'll break his neck!" as she had had reason to exclaim about one or other of her nine sons any day for the last twenty years.

But as she spoke the cupboard door swung slowly open, and Timothy's shoes came out and ran across the floor. They paused for an instant by his mother's bed, as if to say farewell, and then the bed-room door opened also and let them pass. Down the stairs they went, and they ran with that music of a childish patter that no foot in the house could make now; and the

mother sobbed to hear it for the last time. Then she thought, “The house door’s locked, they can’t go right away yet.”

But in that moment she heard the house door turn slowly on its hinges. Then she jumped out of bed, and ran to the window, pushed it open, and leaned out.

In front of the house was a little garden, and the little garden was kept by a gate, and beyond the gate was a road, and beyond the road was a hill, and on the grass of the hill the dew lay thick and white, and morning mists rested on the top. The little shoes pattered through the garden, and the gate opened for them and snecked after them. And they crossed the road, and went over the hill, leaving little footprints in the dew. And they passed into the morning mists, and were lost to sight.

And when the sun looked over the hill and dried the dew, and sent away the mists, TIMOTHY’S SHOES were gone.

* * * * * *

“If they never come back,” said Timothy’s mother, “I shall know that I am to have no more children!” and though she had certainly had her share, she sighed.

But they never did come back; and Timothy remained the youngest of the family.

OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS.

CHAPTER I.

"CAN you fancy, young people," said Godfather Garbel, winking with his prominent eyes, and moving his feet backwards and forwards in his square shoes, so that you could hear the squeak-leather, half a room off —"can you fancy my having been a very little boy, and having a godmother? But I had, and she sent me presents on my birthdays too. And young people did not get presents when I was a child as they get them now. We had not half so many toys as you have, but we kept them twice as long. I think we were fonder of them too, though they were neither so handsome, nor so expensive as these new-fangled affairs you are always breaking about the house.

"You see, middle-class folk were more saving then. My mother turned and dyed her dresses, and when she had done with them, the servant was very glad to have them; but, bless me! your mother's maids dress so much finer than their mistress, I do not think they would say 'thank you' for her best Sunday silk. The bustle's the wrong shape.

"What's that you are laughing at, little miss? It's *pannier*, is it? Well, well, bustle or pannier, call it what you like; but only donkeys wore panniers in my young days, and many's the ride I've had in them.

"Now, as I say, my relations and friends thought twice before they pulled out five shillings in a toy-shop, but they didn't forget me, all the same. On my eighth birthday my mother gave me a bright blue comforter of her own knitting. My little sister gave me a ball. My mother had cut out the divisions from various bits in the rag bag, and my sister had done some of the seaming. It was stuffed with bran, and had a cork inside which had broken from old age, and would no longer fit the pickle jar it belonged to. This made the ball bound when we played 'prisoner's base.' My father gave me the riding-whip that had lost the lash and the top of the handle, and an old pair of his gloves, to play coachman with; these I had long wished for. Kitty the servant gave me a shell that she had had by her for years. How I had

coveted that shell! It had this remarkable property: when you put it to your ear you could hear the roaring of the sea. I had never seen the sea, but Kitty was born in a fisherman's cottage, and many an hour have I sat by the kitchen fire whilst she told me strange stories of the mighty ocean, and ever and anon she would snatch the shell from the mantelpiece and clap it to my ear, crying, 'There child, you couldn't hear it plainer than that. It's the very moral!'

"When Kitty gave me that shell for my very own I felt that life had little more to offer. I held it to every ear in the house, including the cat's; and, seeing Dick the sexton's son go by with an armful of straw to stuff Guy Fawkes, I ran out, and in my anxiety to make him share the treat, and learn what the sea is like, I clapped the shell to his ear so smartly and unexpectedly, that he, thinking me to have struck him, knocked me down then and there with his bundle of straw. When he understood the rights of the case, he begged my pardon handsomely, and gave me two whole treacle sticks and part of a third out of his breeches' pocket, in return for which I forgave him freely, and promised to let him hear the sea roar on every Saturday half-holiday till farther notice.

"And, speaking of Dick and the straw reminds me that my birthday falls on the fifth of November. From this it came about that I always had to bear a good many jokes about being burnt as a Guy Fawkes; but, on the other hand, I was allowed to make a small bonfire of my own, and to have six potatoes to roast therein, and eight-pennyworth of crackers to let off in the evening.

"On this eighth birthday, having got all the above-named gifts, I cried, in the fulness of my heart, 'There never was such a day!' And yet there was more to come, for the evening coach brought me a parcel, and the parcel was my godmother's picture book.

"My godmother was a woman of small means; but she was accomplished. She could make very spirited sketches, and knew how to color them after they were outlined and shaded in India ink. She had a pleasant talent for versifying. She was very industrious. I have it from her own lips that she copied the figures in my picture-book from prints in several different houses at which she visited. They were fancy portraits of characters, most of which were familiar to my mind. There were Guy Fawkes, Punch, his then Majesty the King, Bogy, the Man in the Moon, the Clerk of the Weather Office, a Dunce, and Old Father Christmas. Beneath each sketch was a stanza of my godmother's own composing.

"My godmother was very ingenious. She had been mainly guided in her choice of these characters by the prints she happened to meet with, as she

did not trust herself to design a figure. But if she could not get exactly what she wanted, she had a clever knack of tracing an outline of the attitude from some engraving, and altering the figure to suit her purpose in the finished sketch. She was the soul of truthfulness, and the notes she added to the index of contents in my picture-book spoke at once for her honesty in avowing obligations, and her ingenuity in availing herself of opportunities. They ran thus:—

> No. 1.—Guy Fawkes. Outlined from a figure of a warehouse man rolling a sherry cask into Mr. Rudd's wine vaults. I added the hat, the cloak, and boots in the finished drawing.
>
> No. 2.—Punch. I sketched him from the life.
>
> No. 3.—His Most Gracious Majesty the King. On a quart jug bought in Cheapside.
>
> No. 4.—Bogy, *with bad boys in the bag on his back*. Outlined from Christian bending under his burden, in my mother's old copy of the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The face from Giant Despair.
>
> No. 5 and No. 6.—The Man in the Moon, and The Clerk of the Weather Office. From a book of caricatures belonging to Dr. James.
>
> No. 7.—A Dunce. From a steel engraving framed in rosewood that hangs in my Uncle Wilkinson's parlor.
>
> No. 8.—Old Father Christmas. From a German book at Lady Littleham's.

CHAPTER II.

"My sister Patty was six years old. We loved each other dearly. The picture-book was almost as much hers as mine. We sat so long together on one big foot-stool by the fire, with our arms around each other, and the book resting on our knees, that Kitty called down blessings on my godmother's head for having sent a volume that kept us both so long out of mischief.

" 'If books was allus as useful as that, they'd do for me,' said she; and though this speech did not mean much, it was a great deal for Kitty to say; since, not being herself an educated person, she naturally thought that 'little enough good comes of larning.'

"Patty and I had our favorites amongst the pictures. Bogy, now, was a character one did not care to think about too near bed-time. I was tired of Guy Fawkes, and thought he looked more natural made of straw, as Dick did

him. The Dunce was a little too personal; but old Father Christmas took our hearts by storm; we had never seen anything like him, though now-a-days you may get a plaster figure of him in any toy-shop at Christmas-time, with hair and beard like cotton wool, and a Christmas-tree in his hand.

"The custom of Christmas-trees came from Germany. I can remember when they were first introduced into England, and what wonderful things we thought them. Now, every village school has its tree, and the scholars openly discuss whether the presents have been 'good,' or 'mean' as compared with other trees in former years. The first one that I ever saw I believed to have come from good Father Christmas himself; but little boys have grown too wise now to be taken in for their own amusement. They are not excited by secret and mysterious preparations in the back drawing-room; they hardly confess to the thrill—which I feel to this day—when the folding-doors are thrown open, and amid the blaze of tapers, mamma, like a Fate, advances with her scissors to give every one what falls to his lot.

"Well, young people, when I was eight years old I had not seen a Christmas-tree, and the first picture of one I ever saw was the picture of that held by Old Father Christmas in my godmother's picture book.

" 'What are those things on the tree?' I asked.

" 'Candles,' said my father.

" 'No, father, not the candles; the other things?'

" 'Those are toys, my son.'

" 'Are they ever taken off?'

" 'Yes, they are taken off, and given to the children who stand around the tree.'

"Patty and I grasped each other by the hand, and with one voice murmured, 'How kind of Old Father Christmas!'

"By-and-by I asked, 'How old is Father Christmas?'

"My father laughed, and said, 'One thousand eight hundred and thirty years, child,' which was then the year of our Lord, and thus one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the first great Christmas Day.

" 'He *looks* very old,' whispered Patty.

"And I, who was, for my age, what Kitty called 'Bible-learned,' said thoughtfully, and with some puzzledness of mind, 'Then he's older than Methusaleh.'

"But my father had left the room, and did not hear my difficulty.

“November and December went by, and still the picture-book kept all its charm for Patty and me; and we pondered on and loved Old Father Christmas as children can love and realize a fancy friend. To those who remember the fancies of their childhood I need say no more.

“Christmas week came, Christmas Eve came. My father and mother were mysteriously and unaccountably busy in the parlor (we had only one parlor), and Patty and I were not allowed to go in. We went into the kitchen, but even here was no place of rest for us. Kitty was ‘all over the place,’ as she phrased it, and cakes, mince-pies, and puddings were with her. As she justly observed, ‘There was no place there for children and books to sit with their toes in the fire, when a body wanted to be at the oven all along. The cat was enough for *her* temper,’ she added.

“As to puss, who obstinately refused to take a hint which drove her out into the Christmas frost, she returned again and again with soft steps, and a stupidity that was, I think, affected, to the warm hearth, only to fly at intervals, like a football, before Kitty’s hasty slipper.

“We had more sense, or less courage. We bowed to Kitty’s behests, and went to the back door.

“Patty and I were hardy children, and accustomed to ‘run out’ in all weathers, without much extra wrapping up. We put Kitty’s shawl over our two heads, and went outside. I rather hoped to see something of Dick, for it was holiday time; but no Dick passed. He was busy helping his father bore holes in the carved seats of the church, which were to hold sprigs of holly for the morrow—That was the idea of church decoration in my young days. You have improved on your elders there, young people, and I am candid enough to allow it. Still, the sprigs of red and green were better than nothing, and, like your lovely wreaths and pious devices, they made one feel as if the old black wood were bursting into life and leaf again for very Christmas joy; and, if one only knelt carefully, they did not scratch his nose.

“Well, Dick was busy, and not to be seen. We ran across the little yard and looked over the wall at the end to see if we could see anything or anybody. From this point there was a pleasant meadow field sloping prettily away to a little hill about three-quarters of a mile distant; which, catching some fine breezes from the moors beyond, was held to be a place of cure for whooping-cough, or ‘kincough,’ as it was vulgarly called. Up to the top of this Kitty had dragged me, and carried Patty, when we were recovering from the complaint, as I well remember. It was the only ‘change of air’ we could afford, and I dare say it did as well as if we had gone into badly-drained lodgings at the seaside.

“This hill was now covered with snow and stood off against the gray sky. The white fields looked vast and dreary in the dusk. The only gay things to be seen were the berries on the holly hedge, in the little lane—which, running by the end of our back-yard, led up to the Hall—and the fat robin, that was staring at me. I was looking at the robin, when Patty, who had been peering out of her corner of Kitty’s shawl, gave a great jump that dragged the shawl from our heads, and cried,

“ ‘Look!’ ”

CHAPTER III.

“I LOOKED. An old man was coming along the lane. His hair and beard were as white as cotton-wool. He had a face like the sort of apple that keeps well in winter; his coat was old and brown. There was snow about him in patches, and he carried a small fir-tree.

“The same conviction seized upon us both. With one breath we exclaimed, ‘*It’s old Father Christmas!*’

“I know now that it was only an old man of the place, with whom we did not happen to be acquainted, and that he was taking a little fir-tree up to the Hall, to be made into a Christmas tree. He was a very good-humored old fellow, and rather deaf, for which he made up by smiling and nodding his head a good deal, and saying, ‘Aye, aye, *to* be sure!’ at likely intervals.

“As he passed us and met our earnest gaze, he smiled and nodded so earnestly that I was bold enough to cry, ‘Good-evening, Father Christmas!’

“ ‘Same to you!’ said he, in a high-pitched voice.

“ ‘Then you *are* Father Christmas,’ said Patty.

“ ‘And a happy New Year,’ was Father Christmas’ reply, which rather put me out. But he smiled in such a satisfactory manner, that Patty went on, ‘You’re very old, aren’t you?’

“ ‘So I be, miss, so I be,’ said Father Christmas, nodding.

“ ‘Father says you’re eighteen hundred and thirty years old,’ I muttered.

“ ‘Aye, aye, to be sure,’ said Father Christmas, ‘I’m a very long age.’

“A *very* long age, thought I, and I added, ‘You’re nearly twice as old as Methusaleh, you know,’ thinking that this might not have struck him.

“ ‘Aye, aye,’ said Father Christmas; but he did not seem to think anything of it. After a pause he held up the tree, and cried, ‘D’ye know what this is, little miss?’

“ ‘A Christmas tree,’ said Patty.

“And the old man smiled and nodded.

“I leant over the wall, and shouted, ‘But there are no candles.’

“ ‘By-and-by,’ said Father Christmas nodding as before. ‘When it’s dark they’ll all be lighted up. That’ll be a fine sight!’

“ ‘Toys too, there’ll be, won’t there?’ said Patty.

“Father Christmas nodded his head. ‘And sweeties,’ he added, expressively.

“I could feel Patty trembling, and my own heart beat fast. The thought which agitated us both, was this—‘Was Father Christmas bringing the tree to us?’ But very anxiety, and some modesty also, kept us from asking outright.

“Only when the old man shouldered his tree, and prepared to move on, I cried in despair, ‘Oh, are you going?’

“ ‘I’m coming back by-and-by,’ said he.

“ ‘How soon?’ cried Patty.

“ ‘About four o’clock,’ said the old man smiling, ‘I’m only going up yonder.’

“And, nodding and smiling as he went, he passed away down the lane.

“ ‘Up yonder.’ This puzzled us. Father Christmas had pointed, but so indefinitely, that he might have been pointing to the sky, or the fields, or the little wood at the end of the Squire’s grounds. I thought the latter, and suggested to Patty that perhaps he had some place underground like Aladdin’s cave, where he got the candles, and all the pretty things for the tree. This idea pleased us both, and we amused ourselves by wondering what Old Father Christmas would choose for us from his stores in that wonderful hole where he dressed his Christmas-trees.

“ ‘I wonder, Patty,’ said I, ‘why there’s no picture of Father Christmas’s dog in the book.’ For at the old man’s heels in the lane there crept a little brown and white spaniel, looking very dirty in the snow.

“ ‘Perhaps it’s a new dog that he’s got to take care of his cave,’ said Patty.

“When we went in-doors we examined the picture afresh by the dim light from the passage window, but there was no dog there.

“My father passed us at this moment, and patted my head. ‘Father,’ said I, ‘I don’t know, but I do think Old Father Christmas is going to bring us a Christmas-tree to-night.’

“ ‘Who’s been telling you that?’ said my father. But he passed on before I could explain that we had seen Father Christmas himself, and had had his word for it that he would return at four o’clock, and that the candles on his tree would be lighted as soon as it was dark.

“We hovered on the outskirts of the rooms till four o’clock came. We sat on the stairs and watched the big clock, which I was just learning to read; and Patty made herself giddy with constantly looking up and counting the four strokes, towards which the hour hand slowly moved. We put our noses into the kitchen now and then, to smell the cakes and get warm, and anon we hung about the parlor door, and were most unjustly accused of trying to peep. What did we care what our mother was doing in the parlor?—we, who had seen Old Father Christmas himself, and were expecting him back again every moment!

“At last the church clock struck. The sounds boomed heavily through the frost, and Patty thought there were four of them. Then, after due choking and whirring, our own clock struck, and we counted the strokes quite clearly —one! two! three! four! Then we got Kitty’s shawl once more, and stole out into the back-yard. We ran to our old place, and peeped, but could see nothing.

“ ‘We’d better get up on to the wall,’ I said; and with some difficulty and distress from rubbing her bare knees against the cold stones, and getting the snow up her sleeves, Patty got on to the coping of the little wall. I was just struggling after her, when something warm and something cold coming suddenly against the bare calves of my legs, made me shriek with fright. I came down ‘with a run,’ and bruised my knees, my elbows, and my chin; and the snow that hadn’t gone up Patty’s sleeves, went down my neck. Then I found that the cold thing was a dog’s nose and the warm thing was his tongue; and Patty cried from her post of observation, ‘It’s Father Christmas’s dog and he’s licking your legs.’

“It really was the dirty little brown and white spaniel; and he persisted in licking me, and jumping on me, and making curious little noises, that must have meant something if one had known his language. I was rather harassed at the moment. My legs were sore, I was a little afraid of the dog and Patty was very much afraid of sitting on the wall without me.

“ ‘You won’t fall,’ I said to her. ‘Get down, will you?’ I said to the dog.

“ ‘Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall,’ said Patty.

“ ‘Bow! wow!’ said the dog.

“I pulled Patty down, and the dog tried to pull me down; but when my little sister was on her feet, to my relief, he transferred his attentions to her.

When he had jumped at her, and licked her several times, he turned round and ran away.

" 'He's gone,' said I; 'I'm so glad.'

"But even as I spoke he was back again, crouching at Patty's feet, and glaring at her with eyes the color of his ears.

"Now, Patty was very fond of animals, and when the dog looked at her she looked at the dog, and then she said to me, 'He wants us to go with him.'

"On which (as if he understood our language, though we were ignorant of his) the spaniel sprang away, and went off as hard as he could; and Patty and I went after him, a dim hope crossing my mind—'Perhaps Father Christmas had sent him for us.'

"The idea was rather favored by the fact that the dog led us up the lane. Only a little way; then he stopped by something lying in the ditch—and once more we cried in the same breath, 'It's Old Father Christmas!'

CHAPTER IV.

"RETURNING from the Hall, the old man had slipped upon a bit of ice, and lay stunned in the snow.

"Patty began to cry. 'I think he's dead,' she sobbed.

" 'He is so very old, I don't wonder,' I murmured; 'but perhaps he's not. I'll fetch father.'

"My father and Kitty were soon on the spot. Kitty was as strong as a man; and they carried Father Christmas between them into the kitchen. There he quickly revived.

"I must do Kitty the justice to say that she did not utter a word of complaint at this disturbance of her labors; and that she drew the old man's chair close up to the oven with her own hand. She was so much affected by the behavior of his dog, that she admitted him even to the hearth; on which puss, being acute enough to see how matters stood, lay down with her back so close to the spaniel's that Kitty could not expel one without kicking both.

"For our parts, we felt sadly anxious about the tree; otherwise we could have wished for no better treat than to sit at Kitty's round table taking tea with Father Christmas. Our usual fare of thick bread and treacle was to-night exchanged for a delicious variety of cakes, which were none the worse to us for being 'tasters and wasters'—that is, little bits of dough, or shortbread, put in to try the state of the oven, and certain cakes that had got broken or burnt in the baking.

“Well, there we sat, helping Old Father Christmas to tea and cake, and wondering in our hearts what could have become of the tree. But you see, young people, when I was a child parents were stricter than they are now. Even before Kitty died (and she has been dead many a long year) there was a change, and she said that ‘children got to think anything became them.’ I think we were taught more honest shame about certain things than I often see in little boys and girls now. We were ashamed of boasting, or being greedy, or selfish; we were ashamed of asking for anything that was not offered to us, and of interrupting grown-up people, or talking about ourselves. Why, papas and mammas now-a-days seem quite proud to let their friends see how bold and greedy and talkative their children can be! A lady said to me the other day, ‘You wouldn’t believe, Mr. Garbel, how forward dear little Harry is for his age. He has his word in everything, and is not a bit shy; and his papa never comes home from town but Harry runs to ask if he’s brought him a present. Papa says he’ll be the ruin of him!’

“ ‘Madam,’ said I, ‘even without your word for it, I am quite aware that your child is forward. He is forward and greedy and intrusive, as you justly point out, and I wish you joy of him when those qualities are fully developed. I think his father’s fears are well founded.’

“But, bless me! now-a-days, it’s ‘Come and tell Mr. Smith what a fine boy you are, and how many houses you can build with your bricks,’ or, ‘The dear child wants everything he sees,’ or ‘Little pet never lets mamma alone for a minute; does she, love?’ But in my young days it was, ‘Self-praise is no recommendation’ (as Kitty used to tell me), or, ‘You’re knocking too hard at No. One’ (as my father said when we talked about ourselves), or, ‘Little boys should be seen but not heard’ (as a rule of conduct ‘in company’), or ‘Don’t ask for what you want, but take what’s given you, and be thankful.’

“And so you see, young people, Patty and I felt a delicacy in asking Old Father Christmas about the tree. It was not till we had had tea three times round, with tasters and wasters to match, that Patty said very gently, ‘It’s quite dark now.’ And then she heaved a deep sigh.

“Burning anxiety overcame me. I leaned towards Father Christmas, and shouted—I had found out that it was needful to shout,—

“ ‘I suppose the candles are on the tree now?’

“ ‘Just about putting of ’em on,’ said Father Christmas.

“ ‘And the presents, too?’ said Patty.

“ ‘Aye, aye, *to* be sure,’ said Father Christmas, and he smiled delightfully.

“I was thinking what farther questions I might venture upon, when he pushed his cup towards Patty, saying, ‘Since you are so pressing, miss, I’ll take another dish.’

“And Kitty, swooping on us from the oven, cried ‘Make yourself at home, sir; there’s more where these came from. Make a long arm, Miss Patty, and hand them cakes.’

“So we had to devote ourselves to the duties of the table; and Patty, holding the lid with one hand and pouring with the other, supplied Father Christmas’s wants with a heavy heart.

“At last he was satisfied. I said grace, during which he stood, and indeed he stood for some time afterwards with his eyes shut—I fancy under the impression that I was still speaking. He had just said a fervent ‘Amen,’ and reseated himself, when my father put his head into the kitchen, and made this remarkable statement,—

“ ‘Old Father Christmas has sent a tree to the young people.’

“Patty and I uttered a cry of delight, and we forthwith danced round the old man, saying, ‘Oh, how nice! Oh, how kind of you!’ which I think must have bewildered him, but he only smiled and nodded.

“ ‘Come along,’ said my father, ‘Come children. Come Reuben. Come Kitty.’

“And he went into the parlor, and we all followed him.

“My godmother’s picture of a Christmas-tree was very pretty; and the flames of the candles were so naturally done in red and yellow, that I always wondered that they did not shine at night. But the picture was nothing to the reality. We had been sitting almost in the dark, for, as Kitty said, ‘Firelight was quite enough to burn at meal-times.’ And when the parlor door was thrown open, and the tree, with lighted tapers on all the branches, burst upon our view, the blaze was dazzling, and threw such a glory round the little gifts, and the bags of colored muslin, with acid drops and pink rose drops and comfits inside, as I shall never forget. We all got something; and Patty and I, at any rate, believed that the things came from the stores of Old Father Christmas. We were not undeceived even by his gratefully accepting a bundle of old clothes which had been hastily put together to form his present.

“We were all very happy; even Kitty, I think, though she kept her sleeves rolled up, and seemed rather to grudge enjoying herself (a weak point in some energetic characters). She went back to her oven before the lights were out and the angel on the top of the tree taken down. She locked up her present (a little work-box) at once. She often showed it off afterwards, but it

was kept in the same bit of tissue paper till she died. Our presents certainly did not last so long!

“The old man died about a week afterwards, so we never made his acquaintance as a common personage. When he was buried, his little dog came to us. I suppose he remembered the hospitality he had received. Patty adopted him, and he was very faithful. Puss always looked on him with favor. I hoped during our rambles together in the following summer that he would lead us at last to the cave where Christmas-trees are dressed. But he never did.

“Our parents often spoke of his late master as ‘old Reuben,’ but children are not easily disabused of a favorite fancy, and in Patty’s thoughts and in mine the old man was long gratefully remembered as Old Father Christmas.”

BENJY IN BEASTLAND.

A BAD BOY.

BENJY was a bad boy. His name was Benjamin, but he was always called Benjy. He looked like something ending in jy or gy, or rather dgy, such as *podgy*. Indeed he was podgy, and moreover smudgy, having that cloudy, slovenly look (like a slate *smudged* instead of washed) which is characteristic of people whose morning toilet is not so thorough as it should be.

Boys are very nice creatures. Far be it from us to think, with some people, that they are nuisances to be endured as best may be till they develop into men. An intelligent and modest boy is one of the most charming of companions. As to an obliging boy (that somewhat rare but not extinct animal), there is hardly a limit to his powers of usefulness; or anything—from emigrating to a desert island to cleaning the kitchen clock—that one would not feel justified in undertaking with his assistance, and free access to his pocket stores.

Then boys' wholesale powers of accumulation and destruction render their dens convenient storehouses of generally useless and particularly useful lumber. If you want string or wire, or bottles or flower-pots, or a bird-cage, or an odd glove or shoe, or anything of any kind to patch up something of a similar kind, or missing property of your own or another's—go to a boy's room! There one finds abundance of everything, from cobbler's wax to the carmine from one's own water-color box.

(One is apt to recognize old acquaintances, and one occasionally reclaims their company!)

All things are in a more or less serviceable condition, and at the same time sufficiently damaged to warrant appropriation to the needs of the moment. One suffers much loss at boys' hands from time to time, and it is trying to have dainty feminine bowers despoiled of their treasures; but there are occasions when one spoils the spoiler!

Then what admirable field naturalists boys can make! They are none the worse for nocturnal moth hunts, or for wading up a stream for a Batrachosperma, or for standing in a pond pressing recruits for the fresh-water aquarium. A "collection" more or less is as nothing in the vast chaos of their possessions, though some scrupulous sister might be worried to find "a place for it." And Fortune (capricious dame!) is certainly fond of boys, and guides some young "harum-scarum" to a *habitat* that has eluded the spectacles of science. And their cuttings always grow!

Then as to boys' fun; within certain limits, there is no rough-and-ready wit to be compared with it.

Thus it is a pity that some boys bring a delightful class into disrepute—boys who are neither intelligent, modest, obliging, nor blest with cultivated tastes—boys who kick animals, tease children, sneer at feminine society, and shirk any company that is better than their own—boys, in short, like Benjy, who at one period of his career did all this, and who had a taste for low company, too, and something about his general appearance which made you think how good for him it would be if he could be well scrubbed with hot and soft soap both inside and out.

But Benjy's worst fault, *the* vice of his character, was cruelty to animals. He was not merely cruel with the thoughtless cruelty of childhood, nor with the cruelty which is a secondary part of sport, nor with the occasional cruelty of selfishness or ill-temper. But he had that taste for torture, that pleasure in other creatures' pain, which does seem to be born with some boys. It is incomprehensible by those who have never felt the hateful temptation, and it certainly seems more like a fiendish characteristic than a human infirmity.

Benjy was one of three children, and the only boy. He had two little sisters, but they were younger than himself, and he held them in supreme contempt. They were nice, merry little things, and many boys (between teasing, petting, patronizing, and making them useful) would have found them companionable enough, at any rate for the holidays. But Benjy, as I have said, liked low company, and a boy with a taste for low company seldom cares for the society of his sisters. Benjy thought games stupid; he never touched his garden (though his sisters kept it religiously in order during his absence at school); and as to natural history, or reading, or any civilizing pursuit, such matters were not at all in Benjy's line.

But he was proud of being patronized by Tom, the coachman's scapegrace son—a coarse, cruel, and uneducated lad, whose ideas of "fun" Benjy unfortunately made his own. With him he went to see pigs killed,

helped to drown supernumerary pups and kittens, and became learned in dog-fights, cock-fights, rat-hunting, cat-hunting, and so forth.

Benjy's father was an invalid, and he had no brothers, so that he was without due control and companionship. His own lack of nice pursuits made the excitement of cruelty an acceptable amusement for his idleness, and he would have thought it unmanly to be more scrupulous and tender-hearted than the coachman's son.

The society of this youth did not tend to improve Benjy's manners, and indeed he was very awkward in the drawing-room. But he was talkative enough in the stable, and rather a hero amongst the village boys who stoned frogs by the riverside, in the sweet days of early summer.

Truly Benjy had little in common with those fair, grey-eyed, demure little maidens, his sisters. As one of them pathetically said, "Benjy does not care for us, you know, because we are only girls, so we have taken Nox for our brother."

NOX,

so called because he was (as poets say) "as black as night," was a big, curly dog, partly retriever and partly of Newfoundland breed. He was altogether black, except his paws, which were brown, and for a grey spot under his tail. Now as the grey-eyed, gentle little sisters elected him for their brother in the room of Benjy it is but fair to compare the two together.

Benjy, to look at, was smudgy and slovenly, and not at all handsome, for he hated tubs, and brushes, and soap, and cold water, and he liked to lie late in a morning, and then was apt to shuffle on his clothes and come down after very imperfect ablutions, having forgotten to brush his teeth, and with his hair still in dusky "cockatoos" from tossing about in bed.

Nox rose early, delighted in cold water, and had teeth like ivory and hair as glossy as a raven's wing; his face beamed with intelligence and trustfulness, and his clear brown eyes looked straight into yours when you spoke to him, as if he would say, "Let my eyes speak for me, if you please; I have not the pleasure of understanding your language."

Benjy's waistcoat and shirt-front were untidy and spotted with dirt.

The covering of Nox's broad chest was always glossy and in good order.

Benjy came into the drawing room with muddy boots and dirty hands.

Nox, if he had been out in the mud, would lie down on his return and lick his broad, soft, brown paws, like a cat, till they were clean.

It has been said that Benjy did not care for the society of girls; but when Nox was petted by his lady-sisters, he put his big head on their shoulders, and licked their faces with his big red tongue (which was his way of kissing). And he would put up his brown feet in the most insinuating manner, and shake paws over and over again, pressing tightly with his strong toes, but never hurting the little girls' hands.

Benjy destroyed lives with much wanton cruelty.

Nox saved lives at the risk of his own.

The ruling idea of his life, and what he evidently considered his most important pursuit, in fact, his duty, or vocation, must be described at some length.

Near the dog's home ran a broad deep river. Here one could bathe and swim most delightfully. Here also many an unfortunate animal found a watery grave. There was one place from which (the water being deep and the bank convenient at this spot) the poor wretches were generally thrown. A good deal of refuse and worn-out articles of various sorts also got flung in here, for at this point the river skirted the back part of the town.

Hither at early morning Nox would come, in conformity with his own peculiar code of duty, which may be summed up in these words: "*Whatever does not properly or naturally belong to the water should be fetched out.*"

Now near the River Seine, in Paris, there is a building called the *Morgue*, where the bodies of the drowned are laid out for recognition by their friends. There was no such institution in the town where Nox lived, so he established a Morgue for himself. Not far from the spot I have mentioned, an old willow tree spread its branches widely over the bank, and here and there stretched a long arm, and touched the river with its pointed fingers. Under the shadow of this tree was the Morgue, and here Nox brought the bodies he rescued from the river and laid them down.

I use the word bodies in its most scientific sense, for it was not alone the bodies of men or animals that Nox felt himself bound to reclaim. He would strive desperately for the rescue of an old riding boot, the rung of a chair, a worn-out hearthbrush, or anything obviously out of place in the deep waters. Whatever the prize might be, when he had successfully brought it ashore, he would toss his noble head, arch his neck, paw with his forefeet, and twist and stick out his curly back, as much as to say, "Will no one pat me as I deserve?" Though he held his prize with all the delicacy of his retriever instincts, he could seldom resist the temptation to give it one proud shake, after which he would hurry with it to the willow tree, as if conscious that it was high time it should be properly attended to.

There the mother whose child had fallen into the river, and the mother whose child had thrown her broom into the water, might come to reclaim their property, with equal chances of success.

Now it is hardly needful to say that between Benjy and Nox there was very little in common. And if there were two things about Nox which Benjy disliked more than others, they were his talent for rescue and the institution of the Morgue.

There was a reason for this. Benjy had more than once been concerned in the death of animals belonging to other people, and the owners had made an inconvenient fuss and inquiry. In such circumstances Benjy and Tom were accustomed to fasten a stone to the corpse and drop it into the river, and thus, as they hoped, get rid of all testimony to the true reason of the missing favorite's disappearance.

But of all the fallacies which shadow the half-truths of popular proverbs, none is greater than that of the saying, "Dead men tell no tales." For, to begin with, the dead body is generally the first witness to a murder, and that despite the most careful hiding. And so the stones which had been tied with hurried or nervous fingers were apt to come off, and then the body of Neighbor Goodman's spaniel, or old Lady Dumble's Angola cat, would float on the river, and tell their own true and terrible tale.

But even then the current might have favored Benjy, and carried the corpses away, had it not been for Nox's early rounds whilst Benjy was still in bed, and for that hateful and too notorious Morgue.

MISTER ROUGH,

was another dog belonging to Benjy's father, and commonly regarded as the property of Benjy himself. He was a wiry-haired terrier, with clipped ears and tail, and a chain collar that jingled as he trotted about on his bent legs. He was of a grizzled brown color excepting his shirt-front, which was white, and his toe-tips, which were like the light-colored toes of woolen socks. His eyes had been scratched by cats—though not quite out—his lean little body bore marks of all kinds of rough usage, and his bark was hoarse from a long imprisonment in a damp outhouse in winter. Much training (to encounter rats and cats), hard usage, short commons, and a general preponderance of kicks over halfpence in his career had shortened his temper and his bark, and caused both to be exhibited more often than would probably have been the case in happier circumstances. He had been characterized as "rough, tough, gruff, and up to snuff," and the description fitted well.

If Benjy had a kind feeling for any animal, it was for Mister Rough, though it might more truly be called admiration. And yet he treated him worse than Nox, to whom he bore an unmitigated dislike. But Nox was a large dog and could not be ill-treated with impunity. So Benjy feared him and hated him doubly.

Next to an animal too strong to be ill-used at all Benjy disliked an animal too weak to be ill-used much or long. Now as to this veteran Mister Rough, there was no saying what he had not borne, and would not bear. He seemed to absorb the nine lives of every cat he killed into his own constitution, and only to grow leaner, tougher, more scarred, more grizzled, and more "game" as time went on.

And so there grew up in Benjy an admiration for his powers of endurance which almost amounted to regard.

MORE MISCHIEF.

BENJY had got a bad fit on him. He was in a mood for mischief. Perhaps he was not well; he certainly was intolerable by all about him. He even ventured to play a trick on Nox. Thus:

Nox was a luxurious, comfort-loving old fellow, and after a good deal of exercise in the fresh air he thoroughly enjoyed the drowsy effect of a plentiful meal, a warm room, and a comfortable hearth-rug.

If anything in the events of the day had disturbed his composure, or affected his feelings, how he talked it all over to himself, with curious, expressive little noises, marvellously like human speech, till by degrees the remarks came few and far between, the velvety eyelids closed, and with one expressive grunt Nox was asleep! But in a few moments, though the handsome black body was at rest on the crimson sheep-skin that was so becoming to his beauty, his—whatever you please to allow in the shape of an "inner consciousness"—was in the land of dreams. He was talking once more, this time with short, muffled barks and whines, and twitching violently with his legs. Perhaps he fancied himself accomplishing a rescue. But a whistle from his master would pierce his dream, and quiet without awaking him.

In his most luxurious moments he would roll on to his back, and stretching his neck and his four legs to their uttermost, would abandon himself to sleep and enjoyment.

It was one of these occasions which Benjy chose for teasing poor Nox. As he sat near him he kept lightly pricking his sensitive lips with a fine needle. Nox would half awake, shake his head, rub his lips with his paw in

great disgust, and finally drop off again. When he was fairly asleep, Benjy recommenced, for he did dearly love to tease and torment, and this evening he was in a restless, mischievous mood. At last one prick was a little too severe; Nox jumped up with a start, and the needle went deeply in, the top breaking off with the jerk, but the remainder was fast in the flesh, where his little sisters discovered it.

Oh! how they wept for the sufferings of their pet! *They* were not afraid of Nox, and had no scruple in handling the powerful mouth whose sharp white teeth had so often pretended to bite their hands, with a pretence as gentle as if they had been made of eggshell. At last the braver of the two held his lips and extracted the needle, whilst the other wiped the tears from her sister's eyes that she might see what she was about. Nox himself sat still and moaned faintly, and wagged his tail very feebly; but when the operation was over he fairly knocked the little sisters down in his gratitude, and licked their faces till he was out of breath.

Then he talked to himself for a full half-hour about the injury, and who could have been the culprit.

And then he fell asleep and dreamed of his enemy, and growled at him.

But Benjy went out and threw a stick at Mister Rough. And when Mister Rough caught it he swung him by it violently round and round. But Mister Rough's teeth were beginning to be the worse for wear, and at the fifth round he lost his hold for the first time in his career.

Then Benjy would have caught him to punish him, but either unnerved by his failure, or suspicious of the wicked look in Benjy's eye, Mister Rough for the first time "feared his fate," and took to his heels.

Benjy could not find him, but he found Tom, who was chasing a Scotch terrier with stones. So Benjy joined the sport, which would have been very good fun, but that one of the stones perversely hit the poor beast on the head, and put an end to the chase.

And that night a neighbor's dog was lost, and there was another corpse in the river.

FROM THE MORGUE TO THE MOON.

BENJY went to bed, but he could not sleep. He wished he had not put that dog in the river—it would get him into a scrape. He had been flogged for Mr. Goodman's spaniel, and though Mister Rough had been flogged for Lady Dumble's cat, Benjy knew on whose shoulders the flogging should by rights have descended. Then Nox seemed all right, in spite of the needle, and

would no doubt pursue his officious charities with sunrise. Benjy could not trust himself to get up early in the morning, but he could go out that night, and he would—with a hayfork—and get the body out of the water, and hide or bury it.

When Benjy came to the river-side a sort of fascination drew him to the Morgue. What if the body were already there! But it was not. There were only a kitten, part of an old basket, and the roller of a jack-towel. And when Benjy looked up into the willow, the moon was looking down at him through the forked limbs of the tree, and it looked so large and so near, that Benjy thought that if he were sitting upon a certain branch he could touch it with his hand.

Then he bethought him of a book which had been his mother's and now belonged to his sisters, in which it was amusingly pretended that dogs went to the moon after their existence on earth was over. The book had a frontispiece representing the dogs sitting in the moon and relating their former experiences.

"It would be odd if the one we killed last were up there now," said Benjy to himself. And he fancied that as he said it the man in the moon winked at him.

"I wonder if it is really true," said Benjy, aloud.

"Not exactly," said the man in the moon, "but something like it. This is Beastland. Won't you come up?"

"Well, I never did!" cried Benjy, whose English was not of the refined order.

"Oh, yes, you have," said the man in the moon, waggishly. "Now, are you coming up? But perhaps you can't climb."

"Can't I?" said Benjy, and in three minutes he was on the branch, and close to the moon. The higher he climbed the larger the moon looked, till it was like the biggest disc of light ever thrown by a magic lantern, and when he was fairly seated on the branch close by, he could see nothing but a blaze of white light all round him.

"Walk boldly in," he heard the man in the moon say. "Put out your feet, and don't be afraid; it's not so bright inside." So Benjy put his feet down, and dropped, and thought he was certainly falling into the river. But he only fell upon his feet, and found himself in Beastland. It was an odd place, truly!

As Cerberus guarded the entrance to Pluto's domains, so there sat at the going in to Beastland a black dog—the very black dog who gets on to sulky children's backs. And on the back of the black dog sat a crow—the crow

that people pluck when they quarrel; and though it has been plucked so often it has never been plucked bare, but is in very good feather yet, unfortunately. And in a field behind was an Irish bull, a mad bull, but quite harmless. The old cow was there too, but not the tune she died of, for being still popular on earth, it could not be spared. Near these the nightmare was grazing, and in a corner of the field was the mare's nest, on which sat a round-robin, hatching plots.

And about the mare's nest flew a tell-tale-tit—the little bird who tells tales and carries news. And it has neither rest nor nest of its own, for gossips are always gadding, and mischief is always being made. And in a cat's cradle swung from the sky slept the cat who washes the dishes, with a clean dishcloth under her head, ready to go down by the first sunbeam to her work. Whilst the bee that gets into Scotchmen's bonnets went buzzing restlessly up and down with nothing to do, for all the lunatics in North Britain happened to be asleep that evening. And on the head of the right nail hung a fancy portrait of the cat who "does it," when careless or dishonest servants waste and destroy things. I need hardly say that the cat could not be there herself, because (like Mrs. Gamp's friend, Mrs. Harris) "there ain't no such a person."

Benjy stared about him for a bit, and then he began to feel uncomfortable.

"Where is the man in the moon?" he inquired.

"Gone to Norwich," said the tell-tale-tit.

"And have you anything to say against that?" asked the crow. "Caw, caw, caw! pluck me, if you dare!"

"It's very odd," thought Benjy; "but I'll go on."

The black dog growled, but let him pass; the bee buzzed about, and the cat in the cradle swung and slept serenely through it all.

"I should get on quicker if I rode instead of walking," thought Benjy; so he went up to the nightmare and asked if she would carry him a few miles.

"You must be the victim of a very singular delusion," said the nightmare, coolly. "It is for me to be carried by you, not for you to ride on me." And as Benjy looked, her nose grew longer and longer, and her eyes were so hideous, they took Benjy's breath away; and he fled as fast as his legs would carry him. And so he got deep, deep into Beastland.

Oh! it was a beautiful place. There were many more beasts than there are in the Zoölogical Garden; and they were all free. They did not devour each

other, for a peculiar kind of short grass grew all over Beastland, which was eaten by all alike.

If by chance there were any quarrelling, or symptoms of misbehavior, the man in the moon would cry “Manners!” and all was quiet at once.

Talking of manners, the civility of the beasts in Beastland was most conspicuous. They came in crowds and welcomed Benjy, each after his own fashion. The cats rubbed their heads against his legs and held their tails erect, as if they were presenting arms. The dogs wagged theirs, and barked and capered round him; except one French poodle, who “sat up” during the whole visit, as an act of politeness. The little birds sang and chirruped. The pigeons sat on his shoulders and cooed; two little swallows clung to the eaves of his hat, and twitched their tails, and said “Kiwit! kiwit!” A peacock with a spread tail went before him; and a flock of rose-colored cockatoos brought up the rear. Presently a wise and solemn old elephant came and knelt before Benjy; and Benjy got on to his back and rode in triumph, the other beasts following.

“Let us show him the lions!” cried all the beasts, and on they went.

But when Benjy found that they meant real lions—like the lions in a menagerie, but not in cages—he was frightened, and would not go on. And he explained that by the “lions” of a place *he* meant the “sights” that are exhibited to strangers, whether natural curiosities or local manufactures. When the beasts understood this, they were most anxious to show him “lions” of his own kind.

So the wise-eyed beavers, whose black faces were as glossy as that of Nox, took him to their lodges, and showed him how they fell or collect wood “up stream” with their sharp teeth, and so float it down to the spot where they have decided to build, as the “logs” from American forests float down the rivers in spring. And as they displayed the wonderous forethought and ingenuity of their common dwellings, a little caddis worm, in the water hard by, begged Benjy to observe that, on a smaller scale, his own house bore witness to similar patience and skill, with its rubble walls of motley variety.

In another stream a doughty little stickleback sailing round and round the barrel-shaped nest, over which he was keeping watch, displayed its construction with pardonable pride.

Then Benjy saw, with an interest it was impossible not to feel, the wonderful galleries in the earth cities of the ants; the nest of the large hornet, the wasp, and the earwig, where hive as well as comb is the work of the industrious proprietors; and whilst he was looking at these, a message came

from three patches of lepraliæ on the back of an old oyster-shell by the sea, to beg that Benjy would come and see their dwelling, where the cells were not of one uniform pattern, but in all varieties of exquisite shapes, each tribe or family having its own proper style of architecture. And it must not be supposed that, because lepralæ cells can only be seen under a microscope with us, that it was so in Beastland; for there all the labors and exquisite performances of every small animal were equally manifest to sight.

But invitations came in fast. The "social grosbecks" requested him to visit their city of nests in a distant wood; the "prairie dogs" wished to welcome him to their village of mounds, where each dog, sitting on his own little hut, eagerly awaited the honor of his visit. The rooks bade him to a solemn conference; and a sentinel was posted on every alternate tree, up to the place of meeting, to give notice of his approach. A spider (looking very like some little, old, hard-headed, wizen-faced, mechanical genius!) was really anxious to teach Benjy to make webs.

"Look here," said he; "we will suppose that you are ready and about to begin. Well. You look—anywhere, in fact—down into space, and decide to what point you wish to affix your first line. Then—you have a ball of thread in your inside, of course?"

"I can't say that I have," said Benjy; "but I have a good deal of string in my pocket."

"That's all right," said the spider; "I call it thread; you call it string. Pocket or stomach, it's all the same, I suppose. Well——"

But just as the spider was at the crisis of his lesson, and all was going on most pleasantly—whizz!—the tell-tale-tit made its appearance, and soon whispered, first to one animal and then to another, who and what Benjy was. The effect was magical. "Scandalous!" cried all the beasts; "the monster!" An old tabby cat puffed out her tail, and ran up a tree. "Boy!" she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest disgust; for in Beastland they say "boy" as a term of reproach where we should say "beast."

The confusion was great, and the tell-tale-tit revelled in it, hopping and flitting about, and adding a word here or there if the excitement seemed to flag.

"To think what he might do to us, if we were down yonder!" cried an old pug. (She was a great-grand-mother and so fat that she could hardly waddle.)

"He is in *your* power up here, you know," said the tell-tale-tit, suggestively.

“So he is!” cried the beasts; and with one voice they shouted —“Punishment! Punishment! Bring him to the lion!” And to the lion he was brought, the beasts still crying, “Punishment! Punishment!”

“I’ll punish him!” cried a donkey, who trotted up on hearing of the matter. “Let me get a lump of cold iron between his teeth, and tug and jerk it against the corners of his mouth. Let me pull in and flog at the same moment. Let me knock him over the head, and kick him in the ribs, and thwack his back, and prod his side; and I’ll soon make him run, and take his nasty temper out of him, and teach him to carry any weight, and go gaily in harness.”

“Gently, gently, my friend,” said the lion. “You speak under a very natural feeling of irritation; but if I am to be judge of this case, the prisoner must have fair play.”

Accordingly the beasts placed themselves in a sort of circle, Benjy being put in the middle; and a bull-frog who lived in a ditch hard by was appointed to watch the case on his behalf. The bull-frog had big, watchful eyes, and was cool and cautious. As the case proceeded he occasionally said “Omph!” which sounded thoughtful, and committed him to nothing.

“What is the prisoner accused of?” asked the lion.

At this question everybody looked round for the tell-tale-tit; but, like most mischief-makers, the good gossip liked nothing less than being brought to book, and had taken advantage of the confusion to fly away. So the other animals had to recall what they had heard as best they might.

“He ill-uses and drowns dogs, hunts and kills cats——”

“Rough kills the cats,” interrupted Benjy, for he was becoming alarmed.

“Omph!” said the bull-frog.

“Send for Mr. Rough,” said the lion; and a messenger was despatched. (It is not always needful to disturb yourself, dear reader, when your pet dog is absent without leave: he may have gone on business to Beastland.)

“Cock-a-doodle-do! Flap, flap! send for more whilst you are about it,” cried a handsome gamecock, strutting into the midst. “Cock-a-doodle-do! when I crow, let no other cock open his beak. There’s a nice-cock-fighting, good-for-nothing young scapegrace! I know a pullet of the same breed down yonder: his name is Tom. Let him be fetched up, and we will fasten spurs to their heels, and set them to kick each other and tear each other’s eyes out. It will be rare sport, and sport is a noble taste, and should be encouraged. Flap, flap! cock-a-doodle-do!”

The cock was just stretched on his tiptoes, in the act of crowing, when a pattering of feet and the jingling of a chain collar was heard, and Mister Rough trotted brusquely into the circle, with his clipped ears and his stumpy tail erect.

"Mister Rough," said the lion; "the prisoner says it is you and not he who torment the cats."

"Bowf, bowf, bowf!" replied the terrier, jumping wildly about in his stocking feet. "Whose fault is it? Wowf, wowf, wowf who taught me to do it? Bowf, wowf! that bad boy there. Rowf, rowf! let me get hold of him by the small of the back, and I'll shake him as I would shake a rat. Rowf, wowf, bowf!"

"*Manners!*" cried the man in the moon, and there was silence at once.

"Then he has not gone to Norwich, after all!" said Benjy to himself.

After a short pause the examination was resumed. Mister Rough deposed that he hunted cats by the teaching and imperative orders of Benjy and other human beings. That he could not now see a cat without a feeling which he could only describe as madness seizing him, which obliged him to chase and despatch puss without any delay. He never felt this sensation towards the cat of his own house, in her own kitchen. They were quite friendly, and ate from the same dish. In cross examination he admitted that he had a natural taste for tearing things, and preferred fur to any other material. But he affirmed that an occasional slipper or other article would have served the purpose, but for his unfortunate education, especially if the slipper or other article were hairy or trimmed with fur.

"But all that is as nothing," cried the old tabby, indignantly; "he has been guilty of the most horrible cruelties, and they ought to be paid back to him in kind. Sss, spt, he's a boy, I say, a regular boy!"

"Omph!" said the bull-frog, and went below to consider the case.

"Gentlebeasts," said the lion, "I consider it unnecessary to hear more evidences against the prisoner, especially as no attempt is made to deny his cruelties, though in the matter of cat-hunting he implicates Mister Rough. There are not two opinions as to his guilt; the only open question is that of punishment. As you have placed the matter in my hands, I will beg you to wait until I have taken three turns and given the subject my serious consideration."

But instead of three turns the lion took seven, pacing majestically round and round, and now and then lashing his tail. At last he resumed his seat; the bull-frog put his green head up again, and the lion gave judgment.

“Gentlebeasts, birds, and fishes, I have given this subject my most serious consideration, and I trust that my decision will not give offense. Our friend, Madame Tabby, declares that the prisoner should be punished with a like cruelty to that which he has inflicted. Friend Donkey is ready to ride or drive him with all the kicking, beating, and pulling which soured his own temper, and stunted his faculties in their early development. I must frankly roar that I am not in favor of this. My friends, let us not degrade ourselves to the level of men. We know what they are. Too often stupid in their kindness, vindictive in their anger, and not seldom wantonly cruel. Is this our character as a class? Do we even commonly retaliate? Ask friend Donkey himself. Does the treatment (even more irrational than unkind) which blunts the intelligence, and twists the temper of so many of his race, prevent their rendering on the whole the largest labor for the roughest usage of any servant of man? Need I speak of dogs? Do they bear malice towards a harsh master? Are they unfaithful because he is unkind? Would Mister Rough himself permit any one to touch an article of his master’s property, or grudge his own life in his defense? No, my friends, we are beasts, remember—not boys. We have our own ideas of chase and sport, like men; but cruelty is not one of our vices. I believe, gentlebeasts, that it is a principle with the human race to return good for evil; but according to my experience the practice is more common amongst ourselves. Gentlebeasts, we *cannot* treat this boy as he has treated us: but he is unworthy of our society, and I condemn him to be expelled. Some of our dog-friends have taken refuge here with tin-kettles at their tails. Let one of these be fastened to Benjy, and let him be chased from Beastland.”

This was no sooner said than done. And with an old tin pan cutting his heels at every step, Benjy was hunted from the moon. The lion gave one terrific roar as the signal for starting, and all the beasts, with Mister Rough at their head, gave chase.

Dear readers, did you ever wonder—as I used to wonder—if one could get to the end of the world *and jump off*? One is bound to confess that, as regards our old earth, it is not feasible; but permit me (in a story) to state that Benjy ran and ran till he got to the end of the moon and jumped off, Mister Rough jumping after him. Down, down they went through space; past the Great Bear (where were all the ghosts of the big wild beasts); past the Little Bear (where were the ghosts of all the small wild beasts); close by the Dog Star, where good dogs go to when they die, and where “the dog in the manger” sat outside and must never go in till all the dogs are assembled. This they passed so close that they could see the dog of Montargis and the hound Gelert affably licking each other’s noses, and telling stories of old

times to the latest comer. This was a white poodle, whose days on earth had been prolonged by tender care till he outlived almost every faculty and sense but the power to eat, and a strange intuitive knowledge of his master's presence, surviving every other instinct. There he sat now, no longer the blind, deaf, feeble, shrunken heap of bones and matted wool, that died of sheer old age, and was buried on the garden side of the church-yard wall, as near as permissible to the family vault; but the snowy, fluffy, elegant poodle of his youth, with graceful ears raised in respectful attention to the hero of Montargis.

Down, down they went, on, on! How far and long it seemed! And now it was no longer night but morning, and the sun shone, and still they went on, on, down, down: Benjy crying "Oh! oh!" and Rough and his chain collar going "Bowf, wowf, jingle, jingle," till they came close above the river, and before Benjy could give an extra shriek the two were floundering in the water. Rough soon swam ashore, but Benjy could not swim, and the water sucked him down as it had sucked down many a dog in that very spot. Then Benjy choked, and gasped, and struggled as his victims had so often choked, and gasped, and struggled under his eyes. And he fought with the intolerable suffocation till it seemed as if his head must burst, yet he could not cry out, for the cold water gagged him. Then he grasped at something that floated by, but it gave him no help, for it was a dead dog—the one he had thrown into the river the evening before. And horror chilled him more than the cold water had done, as he thought that now he himself must be drowned, and rot among these ghastly relics of his cruelty. And a rook on a tree hard by cried, "Serve him right! serve him right!" whilst the frogs on the river's brink sat staring at the crushed bodies of their relatives, and croaked, "Stone him! stone him!"

A pike hovering near could owe him no grudge, for the creatures he had drowned had afforded it many a meal. But, like most accomplices, the pike was selfish, and only waited for the time when it could eat Benjy too.

Meanwhile, some one on the bank was giving short barks, like minute guns of distress, that had quite a different meaning.

And then Benjy sank; and as he went down the remembrance of all his cruelties rushed over his mind, as the water rushed over his body. All, from the first bumble-bee he had tortured, to the needle in Nox's lip, came together in one hideous crowd to his remembrance, till even the callous soul of Benjy sickened, and he loathed himself.

And now he rose again for a moment to the surface, and caught a breath of air, and saw the blue sky, and heard a corn-crake in the field where his

sisters had wanted him to go cowslip-gathering; and he fancied that he saw the beautiful black head of Nox also in the water, and found himself saying in his heart, "No, no! thank GOD I didn't kill *him*."

And then he sank again. And he thought of his home, and his father and mother, and the little sisters whom he had teased; and how he had got them into scrapes, and killed their pets, and laughed at their tears. And he remembered how they had come to meet him last midsummer holidays, with flowers in their hats and flowers round the donkey's ears; and how he had prodded poor Neddy with a stick having a sliding spike, which he had brought with him. And what fun he had found in the starts of the donkey and the terror and astonishment of the children. Oh! how often had he not skulked from the society of these good and dear ones, to be proud of being noticed and instructed in evil by some untaught village blackguard! And then he thought of the cosy bed and his mother's nightly blessing, never more to be his, who must now lie amongst dead dogs as if he himself were such another!

And then he rose again, and there was the noble head of old Nox not three feet from him. He could see the clear brown eyes fixed eagerly upon him, and he thought, "He is coming to revenge himself on me." But he did not mind, for he was almost past feeling any new pain. Only he gave one longing, wistful look towards the home that had been his. And as he looked a lark rose and went up into the summer sky. And as the lark went, up, up, Benjy went down, down.

Now as he sank there came into his mind a memory of something he had once read, comparing the return of a Christian soul to GOD to the soaring of a lark into the heavens. And no animal that he had seized in his pitiless grasp ever felt such despair and helplessness as Benjy felt when the strong, pitiless thought seized his soul that though his body might decay among dead dogs, he could not die as the dogs had died—irresponsible for the use of life. And many a sin, besides sins of cruelty came back to poor Benjy's mind—known sins, for which he had been punished, but not penitent; sins that were known to no human being but himself, and sins, that he had forgotten until now. And he remembered one day at school, when the head master had given some serious warnings and advice to himself and a few other boys in private. And how he had sat mum and meek, with his smudgy and secretive face, till the old doctor had departed, and how he had then delivered a not very clever mimic address in the doctor's style, to the effectual dissipation of all serious thought. And now—opportunities, advice, and time of amendment were all but gone, and what had he to look forward to? From the

depths of his breaking heart Benjy prayed he might somehow or other be spared to do better. And for the third and last time he rose to the surface.

The lark was almost out of sight; but close to Benjy's pallid face was a soft black nose, and large brown eyes met his with an expression neither revengeful nor affectionate. It was business-like, earnest, and somewhat eager and proud. And then the soft, sensitive mouth he had wounded seized Benjy with a hold as firm and as gentle as if he had been a rare water-fowl, and Nox paddled himself round with his broad, brown paws, and made gallantly for shore. Benjy was much heavier than a dead cat, and the big brave beast had hard work of it; so that by the time he had dragged the body to land, Nox was too far spent to toss his head and carry his prize about as usual. He dropped Benjy, and lay down by him, with one paw on the body, as much as to say, "Let no unauthorized person meddle in this matter."

But when he had rested, he took up Benjy in his mouth, and—not deigning so much as a glance in the direction of some men who were shouting and running towards him—he trotted with his burden to the Morgue under the willow tree, where he laid Benjy down side by side with two dead dogs, a kitten, and an old hat.

After which he shook himself, and went home to breakfast.

* * * * * *

WHAT BECAME OF BENJY.

BENJY was duly found under the willow tree, and taken home. For a long time he was very ill, though at last he recovered; and I am bound to state that some of his relatives consider his visit to Beastland to be entirely mythical. They believe that he fell from the willow tree into the water, and that his visit to the moon is a fanciful conceit woven during illness by his fevered brain.

However that may be, Benjy and beasts were thenceforward on very different terms. Some other causes may have helped towards this. Perhaps when the boys of a family are naturally disagreeable, the fact is apt to be too readily acquiesced in. They have a license which no one would dream of according to "the girls," but it may sometimes be too readily decided that "boys will be boys," in the most obnoxious sense of the phrase, and a "bad name" is unfavorable to them as well as to dogs.

Now, during long weeks of convalescence, Benjy's only companions were his parents and the little sisters whose sympathy with beastkind had always been in such manifest contrast with his own tastes. And as the little

maids could only amuse him with their own amusements, and as, moreover, there is no occupation so soothing, healing, and renovating to mind and body, so full of interest without hurtful excitement, as the study of Nature, it came about that Benjy's sick-room was so decorated with plants, aquariums, and so forth, that it became a sort of miniature Beastland. From watching his sisters, Benjy took to feeding the fresh-water beasts himself; and at last became so tenderly interested in their fate, that he privately "tipped" the house-maid with his last half-crown, to induce her to come up the stairs in the morning with great circumspection. For the cray-fish was given to escaping from his tank for an early stroll, and had once been all but trodden on at the bottom of the first flight of stairs.

But it was a very sad event which finally and fully softened Benjy's heart.

As Benjy was being carried into the house after his accident, Mister Rough caught sight of his master in this doleful position, and was anxious to follow and see what became of him. But as he was in the way, a servant was ordered to fasten him up in his own out-house; and to this man's care he was confided through Benjy's illness. The little girls often asked after him, and received satisfactory reports of his health, but as the terrier's temper was supposed to be less trustworthy than that of Nox, they were not allowed to play with him, or take him out with them. Hence it came about that he was a good deal neglected at this time, Benjy's parents being so absorbed by the anxiety of his illness, and the sisters not being allowed to make the dog their companion. Once or twice the servant took him out for a run; but Mister Rough would not take a proper "constitutional." The instant he was free, he fled to the house to see what had become of Benjy. As he did this every time, and it was inconvenient, the servant finally left him alone, and did not take him out at all. Food was put within his reach, but Mister Rough's appetite failed daily. A cat crept in under the roof and looked at her old enemy with impunity. A rat stole his crusts; and Mister Rough never moved his eyes nor his nose from the opening under the barn-door. Oh, for one sniff of Benjy passing by! Oh, to be swung round a dozen times by the teeth or tail! Oh, for a kicking, a thrashing—for *anything* from Benjy! So the gentle heart within that rough little body pined day by day in its loving anxiety for a harsh master.

But the first time that Benjy came downstairs he begged that Mister Rough might be brought into the drawing-room; for, as I have said, if he had a regard for any animal, it was for the wiry terrier. So the servant opened the barn-door; and Mister Rough thought of Benjy, and darted into the house. And when he got into the front hall, he smelt Benjy, and ran into the

drawing-room; and when he got into the drawing-room, he saw Benjy, who had heard the jingle of his collar, and stood up to receive him with outstretched arms. Then with one wild sound, that was neither a bark nor a whine, Mister Rough sprang to Benjy's arms, and fell at his feet.

Dead? Yes dead; with one spasm of unspeakable joy!

Benjy's grief for his faithful friend was not favorable to his bodily health just then, but it was good for him in other ways. And as the bitter tears poured over his cheeks and dropped on to the scarred, grizzled little face that could feel cruelty or kindness no more, the smudginess seemed to be washed away from him body and soul.

Yes, in spite of all past sins, Benjy lived to amend, and to become, eventually, a first-rate naturalist and a good friend to beasts. For there is no doubt that some most objectionable boys do get scrubbed, and softened, and ennobled into superior men. And Benjy was one of these.

By the time he was thoroughly strong again, he and his little sisters had a common interest in the animals under their care—their own private Beastland. He tried to pet another terrier, but in vain. So the new "Rough" was given to the sisters, and Benjy adopted Nox. For he said, "I should like a dog who knew Mister Rough;" and, "If Nox likes, me in spite of old times, I shall believe I am fit to keep a pet." And no one who knows dogs needs to be told that not the ghost of a bit of malice lessened the love which the benevolent retriever bore to his new master.

The savings of Benjy's pocket-money for some time were expended on a tombstone for the terrier's grave, with this inscription:

TO A FAITHFUL FRIEND,
ROUGH WITHOUT AND GENTLE WITHIN,
WHO DIED OF JOY,
APRIL 3, 18—
ON HIS MASTER'S RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

And that true and tender beast, who bore so much hard usage for so long, but died of his one great happiness——

Dear reader, do you not think he is in the Dog Star?

THE PEACE-EGG.

A CHRISTMAS TALE.

EVERY one ought to be happy at Christmas. But there are many things which ought to be, and yet are not; and people are sometimes sad even in the Christmas holidays.

The Captain and his wife were sad, though it was Christmas Eve. Sad, though they were in the prime of life, blessed with good health, devoted to each other and to their children, with competent means, a comfortable house on a little freehold property of their own, and, one might say, everything the heart could desire. Sad, though they were good people, whose peace of mind had a firmer foundation than their earthly goods alone; contented people, too, with plenty of occupation for mind and body. Sad—and in the nursery this was held to be past all reason—though the children were performing that ancient and most entertaining play or Christmas mystery of Good St. George of England, known as *The Peace-Egg*, for their benefit and behoof alone.

The play was none the worse that most of the actors were too young to learn parts, so that there was very little of the rather tedious dialogue, only plenty of dress and ribbons, and of fighting with the wooden swords. But though St. George looked bonny enough to warm any father's heart, as he marched up and down with an air learned by watching many a parade in barrack-square and drill-ground, and though the Valiant Slasher did not cry in spite of falling hard and the Doctor treading accidentally on his little finger in picking him up, still the Captain and his wife sighed nearly as often as they smiled, and the mother dropped tears as well as pennies into the cap which the King of Egypt brought round after the performance.

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.

MANY many years back the Captain's wife had been a child herself, and had laughed to see the village mummers act the Peace-Egg, and had been quite happy on Christmas Eve. Happy, though she had no mother. Happy,

though her father was a stern man, very fond of his only child, but with an obstinate will that not even she dared thwart. She had lived to thwart it, and he had never forgiven her. It was when she married the Captain. The old man had a prejudice against soldiers which was quite reason enough, in his opinion, for his daughter to sacrifice the happiness of her future life by giving up the soldier she loved. At last he gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favor and money. She chose the Captain, and was disowned and disinherited.

The Captain bore a high character, and was a good and clever officer, but that went for nothing against the old man's whim. He made a very good husband, too; but even this did not move his father-in-law, who had never held any intercourse with him or his wife since the day of their marriage, and who had never seen his own grandchildren. Though not so bitterly prejudiced as the old father, the Captain's wife's friends had their doubts about the marriage. The place was not a military station, and they were quiet country folk who knew very little about soldiers, whilst what they imagined was not altogether favorable to "red-coats," as they called them. Soldiers are well-looking generally, it is true (and the Captain was more than well-looking—he was handsome); brave, of course, it is their business (and the Captain had V.C. after his name and several bits of ribbon on his patrol jacket). But then, thought the good people, they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, you "never know where you have them;" they are probably in debt, possibly married to several women in several foreign countries, and, though they are very courteous in society, who knows how they treat their wives when they drag them off from their natural friends and protectors to distant lands where no one can call them to account?

"Ah, poor thing!" said Mrs. John Bull, junior, as she took off her husband's coat on his return from business, a week after the Captain's wedding, "I wonder how she feels? There's no doubt the old man behaved disgracefully; but it's a great risk marrying a soldier. It stands to reason, military men aren't domestic; and I wish—Lucy Jane, fetch your papa's slippers, quick!—she'd had the sense to settle down comfortably amongst her friends with a man who would have taken care of her."

"Officers are a wild set, I expect," said Mr. Bull, complacently, as he stretched his limbs in his own particular arm-chair, into which no member of his family ever intruded. "But the red-coats carry the day with plenty of girls who ought to know better. You women are always caught by a bit of finery. However, there's no use our bothering *our* heads about it. As she has brewed she must bake."

The Captain's wife's baking was lighter and more palatable than her friends believed. The Captain (who took off his own coat when he came home, and never wore slippers but in his dressing-room) was domestic enough. A selfish companion must, doubtless, be a great trial amid the hardships of military life, but when a soldier is kind-hearted he is often a much more helpful and thoughtful and handy husband than an equally well-meaning civilian. Amid the ups and downs of their wanderings, the discomforts of shipboard and of stations in the colonies, bad servants, and unwonted sicknesses, the Captain's tenderness never failed. If the life was rough the Captain was ready. He had been, by turns, in one strait or another, sick-nurse, doctor, carpenter, nurse-maid, and cook to his family, and had, moreover, an idea that nobody filled these offices quite so well as himself. Withal, his very profession kept him neat, well-dressed, and active. In the roughest of their ever-changing quarters he was a smarter man, more like the lover of his wife's young days, than Mr. Bull amid his stationary comforts. Then if the Captain's wife was—as her friends said—"never settled," she was also for ever entertained by new scenes; and domestic mischances do not weigh very heavily on people whose possessions are few and their intellectual interests many. It is true that there were ladies in the Captain's regiment who passed by sea and land from one quarter of the globe to another, amid strange climates and customs, strange trees and flowers, beasts and birds; from the glittering snows of North America to the orchids of the Cape, from beautiful Pera to the lily-covered hills of Japan, and who in no place rose above the fret of domestic worries, and had little to tell on their return but of the universal misconduct of servants, from Irish "helps" in the colonies, to *compradors* and China-boys at Shanghai. But it was not so with the Captain's wife. Moreover, one becomes accustomed to one's fate, and she moved her whole establishment from the Curragh to Corfu with less anxiety than that felt by Mrs. Bull over a port-wine stain on the best table-cloth.

And yet, as years went and children came, the Captain and his wife grew tired of travelling. New scenes were small comfort when they heard of the death of old friends. One foot of murky English sky was dearer, after all, than miles of the unclouded heavens of the South. The gray hills and over-grown lanes of her old home haunted the Captain's wife by night and day, and home-sickness (that weariest of all sicknesses) began to take the light out of her eyes before their time. It preyed upon the Captain too. Now and then he would say, fretfully, "*I should* like an English resting-place, however small, before *everybody* is dead! But the children's prospects have to be considered." The continued estrangement from the old man was an abiding

sorrow also, and they had hopes that, if only they could get to England, he might be persuaded to peace and charity this time.

At last they were sent home. But the hard old father still would not relent. He returned their letters unopened. This bitter disappointment made the Captain's wife so ill that she almost died, and in one month the Captain's hair became an iron gray. He reproached himself for having ever taken the daughter from her father, "to kill her at last," as he said. And (thinking of his own children) he even reproached himself for having robbed the old widower of his only child. After two years at home his regiment was ordered to India. He failed to effect an exchange, and they prepared to move once more—from Chatham to Calcutta. Never before had the packing to which she was so well accustomed been so bitter a task to the Captain's wife.

It was at the darkest hour of this gloomy time that the Captain came in, waving above his head a letter which changed all their plans.

Now close by the old home of the Captain's wife there had lived a man, much older than herself, who yet had loved her with a devotion as great as that of the young Captain. She never knew it, for when he saw that she had given her heart to his younger rival, he kept silence, and he never asked for what he knew he might have had—the old man's authority in his favor. So generous was the affection which he could never conquer, that he constantly tried to reconcile the father to his children whilst he lived, and, when he died, he bequeathed his house and small estate to the woman he had loved.

"It will be a legacy of peace," he thought, on his death-bed. "The old man cannot hold out when she and her children are constantly in sight. And it may please God that I shall know of the reunion I have not been permitted to see with my eyes."

And thus it came about that the Captain's regiment went to India without him, and that the Captain's wife and her father lived on opposite sides of the same road.

MASTER ROBERT.

The eldest of the Captain's children was a boy. He was named Robert, after his grandfather, and seemed to have inherited a good deal of the old gentleman's character, mixed with gentler traits. He was a fair, fine boy, tall and stout for his age, with the Captain's regular features, and (he flattered himself) the Captain's firm step and martial bearing. He was apt—like his grandfather—to hold his own will to be other people's law, and (happily for the peace of the nursery) this opinion was devoutly shared by his brother Nicholas. Though the Captain had sold his commission, Robin continued to

command an irregular force of volunteers in the nursery, and never was Colonel more despotic. His brothers and sisters were by turns infantry, cavalry, engineers, and artillery, according to his whim, and when his affections finally settled upon the Highlanders of "The Black Watch," no female power could compel him to keep his stockings above his knees or his knickerbockers below them.

The Captain alone was a match for his strong-willed son.

"If you please, sir," said Sarah, one morning, flouncing in upon the Captain, just as he was about to start for the neighboring town,—"If you please, sir, I wish you'd speak to Master Robert. He's past my powers."

"I've no doubt of it," thought the Captain, but he only said, "Well, what's the matter?"

"Night after night do I put him to bed," said Sarah, "and night after night does he get up as soon as I'm out of the room, and says he's orderly officer for the evening, and goes about in his night-shirt and his feet as bare as boards."

The Captain fingered his heavy moustache to hide a smile, but he listened patiently to Sarah's complaints.

"It ain't so much *him* I should mind, sir," she continued, "but he goes round the beds and wakes up the other young gentlemen and Miss Dora, one after another, and when I speak to him, he gives me all the sauce he can lay his tongue to, and says he's going round the guards. The other night I tried to put him back into his bed, but he got away and ran all over the house, me hunting him everywhere, and not a sign of him till he jumps out on me from the garret-stairs and nearly knocks me down. 'I've visited the outposts, Sarah,' says he; 'all's well.' And off he goes to bed as bold as brass."

"Have you spoken to your mistress?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah. "And missis spoke to him, and he promised not to go round the guards again."

"Has he broken his promise?" asked the Captain, with a look of anger, and also of surprise.

"When I opened the door last night, sir," continued Sarah, in her shrill treble, "what should I see in the dark but Master Robert a-walking up and down with the carpet-brush stuck in his arm. 'Who goes there?' says he. 'You owdacious boy!' says I, 'Didn't you promise your ma you'd leave off them tricks?' 'I'm not going round the guards,' says he; 'I promised not. But I'm for sentry duty to-night.' And say what I would to him, all he had for me was, 'You mustn't speak to a sentry on duty.' So I says, 'As sure as I live till

morning, I'll go to your pa,' for he pays no more attention to his ma than to me, nor to any one else."

"Please to see that the chair-bed in my dressing-room is moved into your mistress's bed-room," said the Captain. "I will attend to Master Robert."

With this Sarah had to content herself, and she went back to the nursery. Robert was nowhere to be seen, and made no reply to her summons. On this the unwary nurse-maid flounced into the bed-room to look for him, when Robert, who was hidden beneath a table, darted forth, and promptly locked her in.

"You're under arrest," he shouted, through the key-hole.

"Let me out!" shrieked Sarah.

"I'll send a file of the guard to fetch you to the orderly-room, by-and-by," said Robert, "for 'preferring frivolous complaints.' " And he departed to the farm-yard to look at the ducks.

That night, when Robert went up to bed, the Captain quietly locked him into his dressing-room, from which the bed had been removed.

"You're for sentry duty, to-night," said the Captain. "The carpet-brush is in the corner. Good-evening."

As his father anticipated, Robert was soon tired of the sentry game in these new circumstances, and long before the night had half worn away he wished himself safely undressed and in his own comfortable bed. At half-past twelve o'clock he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and knocked at the Captain's door.

"Who goes there?" said the Captain.

"Mayn't I go to bed, please?" whined poor Robert.

"Certainly not," said the Captain. "You're on duty."

And on duty poor Robert had to remain, for the Captain had a will as well as his son. So he rolled himself up in his father's railway rug, and slept on the floor.

The next night he was very glad to go quietly to bed, and remain there.

IN THE NURSERY.

THE Captain's children sat at breakfast in a large, bright nursery. It was the room where the old bachelor had died, and now *her* children made it merry. This was just what he would have wished.

They all sat round the table, for it was breakfast-time. There were five of them, and five bowls of boiled bread-and-milk smoked before them. Sarah

(a foolish, gossiping girl, who acted as nurse till better could be found) was waiting on them, and by the table sat Darkie, the black retriever, his long, curly back swaying slightly from the difficulty of holding himself up, and his solemn hazel eyes fixed very intently on each and all of the breakfast bowls. He was as silent and sagacious as Sarah was talkative and empty-headed. The expression of his face was that of King Charles I. as painted by Vandyke. Though large, he was unassuming. Pax, the pug, on the contrary, who came up to the first joint of Darkie's leg, stood defiantly on his dignity (and his short stumps). He always placed himself in front of the bigger dog, and made a point of hustling him in doorways and of going first downstairs. He strutted like a beadle, and carried his tail more tightly curled than a bishop's crook. He looked as one may imagine the frog in the fable would have looked had he been able to swell himself rather nearer to the size of the ox. This was partly due to his very prominent eyes, and partly to an obesity favored by habits of lying inside the fender and of eating meals proportioned more to his consequence than to his hunger. They were both favorites of two years' standing, and had very nearly been given away, when the good news came of an English home for the family, dogs and all.

Robert's tongue was seldom idle, even at meals. "Are you a Yorkshirewoman, Sarah?" he asked, pausing, with his spoon full in his hand.

"No, Master Robert," said Sarah.

"But you understand Yorkshire, don't you? I can't, very often; but mamma can, and can speak it, too. Papa says mamma always talks Yorkshire to servants and poor people. She used to talk Yorkshire to Themistocles, papa said, and he said it was no good; for though Themistocles knew a lot of langages, he didn't know that. And mamma laughed, and said she didn't know she did."—"Themistocles was our man-servant in Corfu," Robin added, in explanation. "He stole lots of things, Themistocles did; but papa found him out."

Robin now made a rapid attack on his bread-and-milk, after which he broke out again.

"Sarah, who is that tall old gentleman at church, in the seat near the pulpit? He wears a cloak like what the Blues wear, only all blue, and is tall enough for a Life-guardsman. He stood up while we were kneeling, and said, *Almighty and most merciful Father* louder than anybody."

Sarah knew who the old gentleman was, and knew also that the children did not know, and that their parents did not see fit to tell them as yet. But she had a passion for telling and hearing news, and would rather gossip with a

child than not gossip at all. “Never you mind, Master Robin,” she said, nodding sagaciously. “Little boys aren’t to know everything.”

“Ah, then, I know you don’t know,” replied Robert; “if you did, you’d tell. Nicholas, give some of your bread to Darkie and Pax. I’ve done mine. *For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful.* Say your grace and put your chair away, and come along. I want to hold a court-martial.” And seizing his own chair by the seat, Robin carried it swiftly to its corner. As he passed Sarah he observed tauntingly, “You pretend to know, but you don’t.”

“I do,” said Sarah.

“You don’t,” said Robin.

“Your ma’s forbid you to contradict, Master Robin,” said Sarah; “and if you do, I shall tell her. I know well enough who the old gentleman is, and perhaps I might tell you, only you’d go straight off and tell again.”

“No, no, I wouldn’t!” shouted Robin. “I can keep a secret, indeed I can! Pinch my little finger, and try. Do, do tell me, Sarah, there’s a dear Sarah, and then I shall know you know.” And he danced round her, catching at her skirts.

To keep a secret was beyond Sarah’s powers.

“Do let my dress be, Master Robin,” she said, “you’re ripping out all the gathers, and listen while I whisper. As sure as you’re a living boy, that gentleman’s your own grandpapa.”

Robin lost his hold on Sarah’s dress; his arms fell by his side, and he stood with his brows knit for some minutes, thinking. Then he said, emphatically, “What lies you do tell, Sarah!”

“Oh, Robin!” cried Nicholas, who had drawn near, his thick curls standing stark with curiosity, “mamma said ‘lies’ wasn’t a proper word, and you promised not to say it again.”

“I forgot,” said Robin. “I didn’t mean to break my promise. But she does tell—ahem!—*you know what*.”

“You wicked boy!” cried the enraged Sarah; “how dare you to say such a thing, and everybody in the place knows he’s your ma’s own pa.”

“I’ll go and ask her,” said Robin, and he was at the door in a moment; but Sarah, alarmed by the thought of getting into a scrape herself, caught him by the arm.

“Don’t you go, love; it’ll only make your ma angry. There; it was all my nonsense.”

“Then it’s not true?” said Robin, indignantly. “What did you tell me so for?”

“It was all my jokes and nonsense,” said the unscrupulous Sarah. “But your ma wouldn’t like to know I’ve said such a thing. And Master Robert wouldn’t be so mean as to tell tales, would he love?”

“I’m not mean,” said Robin, stoutly; “and I don’t tell tales; but you do, and you tell *you know what*, besides. However, I won’t go this time; but I’ll tell you what—if you tell tales of me to papa any more, I’ll tell him what you said about the old gentleman in the blue coat.” With which parting threat Robin strode off to join his brothers and sisters.

Sarah’s tale had put the court-martial out of his head, and he leaned against the tall fender, gazing at his little sister, who was tenderly nursing a well-worn doll. Robin sighed.

“What a long time that doll takes to wear out, Dora!” said he. “When will it be done?”

“Oh, not yet, not yet!” cried Dora, clasping the doll to her, and turning away. “She’s quite good, yet.”

“How miserly you are,” said her brother; “and selfish, too; for you know I can’t have a military funeral till you’ll let me bury that old thing.”

Dora began to cry.

“There you go, crying!” said Robin, impatiently. “Look here; I won’t take it till you get the new one on your birthday. You can’t be so mean as not to let me have it then?”

But Dora’s tears still fell. “I love this one so much,” she sobbed. “I love her better than the new one.”

“You want both; that’s it,” said Robin, angrily. “Dora, you’re the meanest girl I ever knew!”

At which unjust and painful accusation Dora threw herself and the doll upon their faces, and wept bitterly. The eyes of the soft hearted Nicholas began to fill with tears, and he squatted down before her looking most dismal. He had a fellow-feeling for her attachment to an old toy, and yet Robin’s will was law to him.

“Couldn’t we make a coffin, and pretend the body was inside?” he suggested.

“No, we couldn’t,” said Robin. “I wouldn’t play the Dead March after an empty candle-box. It’s a great shame—and I promised she should be chaplain in one of my night-gowns, too.”

"Perhaps you'll get just as fond of the new one," said Nicholas, turning to Dora.

But Dora only cried, "No, no! He shall have the new one to bury, and I'll keep my poor, dear, darling Betsy." And she clasped Betsy tighter than before.

"That's the meanest thing you've said yet," retorted Robin; "for you know mamma wouldn't let me bury the new one." And, with an air of great disgust, he quitted the nursery.

"A MUMMING WE WILL GO."

NICHOLAS had sore work to console his little sister, and Betsy's prospects were in a very unfavorable state, when a diversion was caused in her favor by a new whim which put the military funeral out of Robin's head.

After he left the nursery he strolled out of doors, and, peeping through the gate at the end of the drive, he saw a party of boys going through what looked like a military exercise with sticks and a good deal of stamping; but, instead of mere words of command, they all spoke by turns as in a play. In spite of their strong Yorkshire accent, Robin overheard a good deal, and it sounded very fine. Not being at all shy, he joined them, and asked so many questions that he soon got to know all about it. They were practising a Christmas mumming-play, called "The Peace-Egg." Why it was called thus they could not tell him, as there was nothing whatever about eggs in it, and so far from being a play of peace, it was made up of a series of battles between certain valiant knights and princes, of whom St. George of England was the chief and conqueror. The rehearsal being over, Robin went with the boys to the sexton's house (he was father to the "King of Egypt"), where they showed him the dresses they were to wear. These were made of gay-colored materials, and covered with ribbons, except that of the "Black Prince of Paradine," which was black, as became his title. The boys also showed him the book from which they learned their parts, and which was to be bought for one penny at the post-office shop.

"Then are you the mummers who come round at Christmas, and act in people's kitchens, and people give them money, that mamma used to tell us about?" said Robin.

St. George of England looked at his companions as if for counsel as to how far they might commit themselves, and then replied, with Yorkshire caution, "Well, I suppose we are."

"And do you go out in the snow from one house to another at night; and oh, don't you enjoy it?" cried Robin.

"We like it well enough," St. George admitted.

Robin bought a copy of "The Peace-Egg." He was resolved to have a nursery performance, and to act the part of St. George himself. The others were willing for what he wished, but there were difficulties. In the first place, there are eight characters in the play, and there were only five children. They decided among themselves to leave out "the Fool," and mamma said that another character was not to be acted by any of them, or indeed mentioned; "the little one who comes in at the end," Robin explained. Mamma had her reasons, and these were always good. She had not been altogether pleased that Robin had bought the play. It was a very old thing, she said, and very queer; not adapted for a child's play. If mamma thought the parts not quite fit for the children to learn, they found them much too long; so in the end she picked out some bits for each, which they learned easily, and which, with a good deal of fighting, made quite as good a story of it as if they had done the whole. What may have been wanting otherwise was made up for by the dresses, which were charming.

Robin was St. George, Nicholas the Valiant Slasher, Dora the Doctor, and the other two Hector and the King of Egypt. "And now we've no Black Prince!" cried Robin in dismay.

"Let Darkie be the Black Prince," said Nicholas. "When you wave your stick he'll jump for it, and then you can pretend to fight with him."

"It's not a stick, it's a sword," said Robin. "However, Darkie may be the Black Prince."

"And what's Pax to be?" asked Dora; "for you know he will come if Darkie does, and he'll run in before everybody else too."

"Then he must be the Fool," said Robin, "and it will do very well, for the Fool comes in before the rest, and Pax can have his red coat on, and the collar with the little bells."

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Robin thought that Christmas would never come. To the Captain and his wife it seemed to come too fast. They had hoped it might bring reconciliation with the old man, but it seemed they had hoped in vain.

There were times now when the Captain almost regretted the old bachelor's bequest. The familiar scenes of her old home sharpened his wife's grief. To see her father every Sunday in church, with marks of age and infirmity upon him, but with not a look of tenderness for his only child, this tried her sorely.

“She felt it less abroad,” thought the Captain. “An English home in which she frets herself to death is, after all, no great boon.”

Christmas eve came.

“I’m sure it’s quite Christmas enough now,” said Robin. “We’ll have ‘The Peace-Egg’ to-night.”

So as the Captain and his wife sat sadly over their fire, the door opened, and Pax ran in shaking his bells, and followed by the nursery mummers. The performance was most successful. It was by no means pathetic, and yet, as has been said, the Captain’s wife shed tears.

“What is the matter, mamma?” said St. George, abruptly dropping his sword and running up to her.

“Don’t tease mamma with questions,” said the Captain; “she’s not very well, and rather sad. We must all be very kind and good to poor dear mamma;” and the Captain raised his wife’s hand to his lips as he spoke. Robin seized the other hand and kissed it tenderly. He was very fond of his mother. At this moment Pax took a little run, and jumped on to mamma’s lap, where, sitting facing the company, he opened his black mouth and yawned, with a ludicrous inappropriateness worthy of any clown. It made everybody laugh.

“And now we’ll go and act in the kitchen,” said Nicholas.

“Supper at nine o’clock, remember,” shouted the Captain. “And we are going to have real frumenty and yule cakes, such as mamma used to tell us of when we were abroad.”

“Hurray!” shouted the mummers, and they ran off, Pax leaping from his seat just in time to hustle the Black Prince in the doorway. When the dining-room door was shut, St. George raised his hand, and said “Hush!”

The mummers pricked their ears, but there was only a distant harsh and scraping sound, as of stones rubbed together.

“They’re cleaning the passages,” St. George went on, “and Sarah told me they meant to finish the mistletoe, and have everything cleaned up by supper-time. They don’t want us, I know. Look here, we’ll go *real mumming* instead. That *will* be fun!”

The Valiant Slasher grinned with delight.

“But will mamma let us?” he inquired.

“Oh, it will be all right if we’re back by supper-time,” said St. George, hastily. “Only of course we must take care not to catch cold. Come and help me to get some wraps.”

The old oak chest in which spare shawls, rugs, and coats were kept was soon ransacked, and the mummers' gay dresses hidden by motley wrappers. But no sooner did Darkie and Pax behold the coats, &c., than they at once began to leap and bark, as it was their custom to do when they saw any one dressing to go out. Robin was sorely afraid that this would betray them; but though the Captain and his wife heard the barking they did not guess the cause.

So the front door being very gently opened and closed, the nursery mummers stole away.

THE NURSERY MUMMERS AND THE OLD MAN.

It was a very fine night. The snow was well-trodden on the drive, so that it did not wet their feet, but on the trees and shrubs it hung soft and white.

"It's much jollier being out at night than in the daytime," said Robin.

"Much," responded Nicholas, with intense feeling.

"We'll go a wassailing next week," said Robin. "I know all about it, and perhaps we shall get a good lot of money, and then we'll buy tin swords with scabbards for next year. I don't like these sticks. Oh, dear, I wish it wasn't so long between one Christmas and another."

"Where shall we go first?" asked Nicholas, as they turned into the high road. But before Robin could reply, Dora clung to Nicholas, crying, "Oh, look at those men!"

The boys looked up the road, down which three men were coming in a very unsteady fashion, and shouting as they rolled from side to side.

"They're drunk," said Nicholas; "and they're shouting at us."

"Oh, run, run!" cried Dora; and down the road they ran, the men shouting and following them. They had not run far, when Hector caught his foot in the Captain's great-coat, which he was wearing, and came down head-long in the road. They were close by a gate, and when Nicholas had set Hector upon his legs, St. George hastily opened it.

"This is the first house," he said. "We'll act here;" and all, even the Valiant Slasher, pressed in as quickly as possible. Once safe within the grounds, they shouldered their sticks, and resumed their composure.

"You're going to the front door," said Nicholas. "Mummers ought to go to the back."

"We don't know where it is," said Robin, and he rang the front door bell. There was a pause. Then lights shone, steps were heard, and at last a sound

of much unbarring, unbolting, and unlocking. It might have been a prison. Then the door was opened by an elderly, timid-looking woman, who held a tallow candle above her head.

"Who's there?" she said, "at this time of night."

"We're Christmas mummers," said Robin, stoutly; "we didn't know the way to the back door, but——"

"And don't you know better than to come here?" said the woman. "Be off with you, as fast as you can."

"You're only the servant," said Robin. "Go and ask your master and mistress if they wouldn't like to see us act. We do it very well."

"You impudent boy, be off with you!" repeated the woman. "Master'd no more let you nor any other such rubbish set foot in this house——"

"Woman!" shouted a voice close behind her, which made her start as if she had been shot, "who authorizes you to say what your master will or will not do, before you've asked him? The boy is right. You *are* the servant, and it is not your business to choose for me whom I shall or shall not see."

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure," said the housekeeper; "but I thought you'd never——"

"My good woman," said her master, "if I had wanted somebody to think for me, you're the last person I should have employed. I hire you to obey orders, not to think."

"I'm sure, sir," said the housekeeper, whose only form of argument was reiteration, "I never thought you would have seen them——"

"Then you were wrong," shouted her master. "I will see them. Bring them in."

He was a tall, gaunt old man, and Robin stared at him for some minutes, wondering where he could have seen somebody very like him. At last he remembered. It was the old gentleman of the blue cloak.

The children threw off their wraps, the housekeeper helping them, and chattering ceaselessly, from sheer nervousness.

"Well, to be sure," said she, "their dresses are pretty, too. And they seem quite a better sort of children, they talk quite genteel. I might ha' knowed they weren't like common mummers, but I was so flustrated hearing the bell go so late, and——"

"Are they ready?" said the old man, who had stood like a ghost in the dim light of the flaring tallow candle, grimly watching the proceedings.

"Yes, sir. Shall I take them to the kitchen, sir?"

“—— for you and the other idle hussies to gape and grin at? No. Bring them to the library,” he snapped, and then stalked off, leading the way.

The housekeeper accordingly led them to the library, and then withdrew, nearly falling on her face as she left the room by stumbling over Darkie, who slipped in last like a black shadow.

The old man was seated in a carved oak chair by the fire.

“I never said the dogs were to come in,” he said.

“But we can’t do without them, please,” said Robin, boldly. “You see there are eight people in ‘The Peace-Egg,’ and there are only five of us; and so Darkie has to be the Black Prince, and Pax has to be the fool, and so we have to have them.”

“Five and two make seven,” said the old man, with a grim smile; “what do you do for the eighth?”

“Oh, that’s the little one at the end,” said Robin, confidentially. “Mamma said we weren’t to mention him, but I think that’s because we’re children.”—“You’re grown up, you know, so I’ll show you the book, and you can see for yourself,” he went on, drawing ‘The Peace-Egg’ from his pocket: “there, that’s the picture of him, on the last page; black, with horns and a tail.”

The old man’s stern face relaxed into a broad smile as he examined the grotesque woodcut; but when he turned to the first page the smile vanished in a deep frown, and his eyes shone like hot coals with anger. He had seen Robin’s name.

“Who sent you here?” he asked, in a hoarse voice. “Speak, and speak the truth! Did your mother send you here?”

Robin thought the old man was angry with them for playing truant. He said, slowly “N—no. She didn’t exactly send us; but I don’t think she’ll mind our having come if we get back in time for supper. Mamma never *forbid* our going mumming, you know.”

“I don’t suppose she ever thought of it,” Nicholas said, candidly, wagging his curly head from side to side.

“She knows we’re mummers,” said Robin, “for she helped us. When we were abroad, you know, she used to tell us about the mummers acting at Christmas, when she was a little girl; and so we thought we’d be mummers, and so we acted to papa and mamma, and so we thought we’d act to the maids, but they were cleaning the passages, and so we thought we’d really go mumming; and we’ve got several other houses to go to before supper-

time; we'd better begin, I think," said Robin; and without more ado he began to march round and round, raising his sword and shouting,—

> "I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,
> My famous name throughout the world hath rung."

And the performance went off quite as creditably as before.

As the children acted the old man's anger wore off. He watched them with an interest he could not express. When Nicholas took some hard thwacks from St. George without flinching, the old man clapped his hands; and after the encounter between St. George and the Black Prince, he said he would not have had the dogs excluded on any consideration. It was just at the end, when they were all marching round and round, holding on by each other's swords "over the shoulder," and singing "A mumming we will go, &c.," that Nicholas suddenly brought the circle to a standstill by stopping dead short, and staring up at the wall before him.

"What *are* you stopping for?" said St. George, turning indignantly round.

"Look there!" cried Nicholas, pointing to a little painting which hung above the old man's head.

Robin looked, and said, abruptly, "It's Dora."

"Which is Dora?" asked the old man, in a strange sharp tone.

"Here she is," said Robin and Nicholas in one breath, as they dragged her forward.

"She's the Doctor," said Robin; "and you can't see her face for her things. Dor, take off your cap and pull back that hood. There! Oh, it *is* like her!"

It was a portrait of her mother as a child; but of this the nursery mummers knew nothing. The old man looked as the peaked cap and hood fell away from Dora's face and fair curls, and then he uttered a sharp cry, and buried his head upon his hands. The boys stood stupefied, but Dora ran up to him, and, putting her little hands on his arms, said, in childish pitying tones, "Oh, I am so sorry! Have you got a headache? May Robin put the shovel in the fire for you? Mamma has hot shovels for her headaches." And, though the old man did not speak or move, she went on coaxing him, and stroking his head, on which the hair was white. At this moment Pax took one of his unexpected runs, and jumped on to the old man's knee, in his own particular fashion, and then yawned at the company. The old man was startled and lifted his face suddenly. It was wet with tears.

“Why, you’re crying!” exclaimed the children with one breath.

“It’s very odd,” said Robin, fretfully. “I can’t think what’s the matter to-night. Mamma was crying too when we were acting, and papa said we weren’t to tease her with questions, and he kissed her hand, and I kissed her hand too. And papa said we must all be very good and kind to poor dear mamma, and so I mean to be, she’s so good. And I think we’d better go home, or perhaps she’ll be frightened,” Robin added.

“She’s so good, is she?” asked the old man. He had put Pax off his knee, and taken Dora on to it.

“Oh, isn’t she!” said Nicholas, swaying his curly head from side to side as usual.

“She’s always good,” said Robin emphatically; “and so’s papa. But I’m always doing something I oughtn’t to,” he added, slowly. “But then, you know, I don’t pretend to obey Sarah. I don’t care a fig for Sarah; and I won’t obey any woman but mamma.”

“Who’s Sarah?” asked the grandfather.

“She’s our nurse,” said Robin, “and she tells—I mustn’t say what she tells—but it’s not the truth. She told one about *you* the other day,” he added.

“About me?” said the old man.

“She said you were our grandpapa. So then I knew she was telling *you know what*.”

“How did you know it wasn’t true?” the old man asked.

“Why, of course,” said Robin, “if you were our mamma’s father, you’d know her, and be very fond of her, and come and see her. And then you’d be our grandfather, too, and you’d have us to see you, and perhaps give us Christmas-boxes. I wish you were,” Robin added with a sigh. “It would be very nice.”

“Would *you* like it?” asked the old man of Dora.

And Dora, who was half asleep and very comfortable, put her little arms about his neck as she was wont to put them round the Captain’s, and said, “Very much.”

He put her down at last, very tenderly, almost unwillingly, and left the children alone. By-and-by he returned, dressed in the blue cloak, and took Dora up again.

“I will see you home,” he said.

The children had not been missed. The clock had only just struck nine when there came a knock on the door of the dining-room, where the Captain

and his wife still sat by the yule-log. She said “Come in,” wearily, thinking it was frumenty and the Christmas cakes.

But it was her father, with her child in her arms!

PEACE AND GOODWILL.

Lucy Jane Bull and her sisters were quite old enough to understand a good deal of grown-up conversation when they overheard it. Thus, when a friend of Mrs. Bull’s observed during an afternoon call that she believed that “officers’ wives were very dressy,” the young ladies were at once resolved to keep a sharp look-out for the Captain’s wife’s bonnet in church on Christmas Day.

The Bulls had just taken their seats when the Captain’s wife came in. They really would have hid their faces, and looked at the bonnet afterwards, but for the startling sight that met the gaze of the congregation. The old grandfather walked into church abreast of the Captain.

“They’ve met in the porch,” whispered Mr. Bull under the shelter of his hat.

“They can’t quarrel publicly in a place of worship,” said Mrs. Bull, turning pale.

“She’s gone into his seat,” cried Lucy Jane in a shrill whisper.

“And the children after her,” added the other sister, incautiously aloud.

There was now no doubt about the matter. The old man in his blue cloak stood for a few moments, politely disputing the question of precedence with his handsome son-in-law. Then the Captain bowed and passed in, and the old man followed him.

By the time that the service was ended everybody knew of the happy peacemaking, and was glad. One old friend after another came up with blessings and good wishes. This was a proper Christmas, indeed, they said. There was a general rejoicing.

But only the grandfather and his children knew that it was hatched from “The Peace-Egg.”

THE BROWNIES.

A LITTLE girl sat sewing and crying on a garden seat. She had fair floating hair, which the breeze blew into her eyes; and between the cloud of hair, and the mist of tears, she could not see her work very clearly. She neither tied up her locks, nor dried her eyes, however; for when one is miserable, one may as well be completely so.

"What is the matter?" said the Doctor, who was a friend of the Rector's, and came into the garden whenever he pleased.

The Doctor was a tall stout man, with hair as black as crows' feathers on the top, and gray underneath, and a bushy beard. When young, he had been slim and handsome, with wonderful eyes, which were wonderful still; but that was many years past. He had a great love for children, and this one was a particular friend of his.

"What is the matter?" said he.

"I'm in a row," murmured the young lady through her veil; and the needle went in damp, and came out with a jerk, which is apt to result in what ladies called "puckering."

"You are like London in a yellow fog," said the Doctor, throwing himself on to the grass, "and it is very depressing to my feelings. What is the row about, and how came you to get into it?"

"We're all in it," was the reply; and apparently the fog was thickening, for the voice grew less and less distinct—"the boys and everybody. It's all about forgetting, and not putting away, and leaving about, and borrowing, and breaking, and that sort of thing. I've had father's new pocket-handkerchiefs to hem, and I've been out climbing with the boys, and kept forgetting and forgetting, and mother says I always forget; and I can't help it. I forget to tidy his newspapers for him, and I forget to feed Puss, and I forgot these; besides, they're a great bore, and mother gave them to Nurse to do, and this one was lost, and we found it this morning tossing about in the toy-cupboard."

"It looks as if it had been taking violent exercise," said the Doctor. "But what have the boys to do with it?"

“Why, then there was a regular turn out of the toys,” she explained, “and they’re all in a regular mess. You know, we always go on till the last minute, and then things get crammed in anyhow. Mary and I did tidy them once or twice; but the boys never put anything away, you know, so what’s the good?”

“What, indeed!” said the Doctor. “And so you have complained of them?”

“Oh! no!” answered she. “We don’t get them into rows, unless they are very provoking; but some of the things were theirs, so everybody was sent for, and I was sent out to finish this, and they are all tidying. I don’t know when it will be done, for I have all this side to hem; and the soldier’s box is broken, and Noah is lost out of the Noah’s Ark, and so is one of the elephants and a guinea-pig, and so is the rocking-horse’s nose; and nobody knows what has become of Rutlandshire and the Wash, but they’re so small, I don’t wonder; only North America and Europe are gone too.”

The Doctor started up in affected horror. “Europe gone, did you say? Bless me! what will become of us!”

“Don’t!” said the young lady, kicking petulantly with her dangling feet, and trying not to laugh. “You know I mean the puzzles; and if they were yours, you wouldn’t like it.”

“I don’t half like it as it is,” said the Doctor. “I am seriously alarmed. An earthquake is one thing: you have a good shaking, and settle down again. But Europe gone—lost— Why, here comes Deordie, I declare, looking much more cheerful than we do; let us humbly hope that Europe has been found. At present I feel like Aladdin when his palace had been transported by the magician; I don’t know where I am.”

“You’re here, Doctor; aren’t you?” asked the slow curly-wigged brother, squatting himself on the grass.

“*Is* Europe found?” said the Doctor tragically.

“Yes,” laughed Deordie. “I found it.”

“You will be a great man,” said the Doctor. “And—it is only common charity to ask—how about North America?”

“Found too,” said Deordie. “But the Wash is completely lost.”

“And my six shirts in it!” said the Doctor. “I sent them last Saturday as ever was. What a world we live in! Any more news? Poor Tiny here has been crying her eyes out.”

“I’m so sorry, Tiny,” said the brother. “But don’t bother about it. It’s all square now, and we’re going to have a new shelf put up.”

“Have you found everything?” asked Tiny.

“Well, not the Wash, you know. And the elephant and the guinea-pig are gone for good; so the other elephant and the other guinea-pig must walk together as a pair now. Noah was among the soldiers, and we have put the cavalry into a night-light box. Europe and North America were behind the book-case; and, would you believe it? the rocking-horse’s nose has turned up in the nursery oven?”

“I can’t believe it,” said the Doctor. “The rocking-horse’s nose couldn’t turn up, it was the purest Grecian, modelled from the Elgin marbles. Perhaps it was the heat that did it, though. However, you seem to have got through your troubles very well, Master Deordie. I wish poor Tiny were at the end of her task.”

“So do I,” said Deordie ruefully. “But I tell you what I’ve been thinking, Doctor. Nurse is always knagging at us, and we’re always in rows of one sort or another, for doing this, and not doing that, and leaving our things about. But, you know, it’s a horrid shame, for there are plenty of servants, and I don’t see why we should be always bothering to do little things, and __”

“Oh! come to the point, please,” said the Doctor; “you do go round the square so, in telling your stories, Deordie. What have you been thinking of?”

“Well,” said Deordie, who was as good tempered as he was slow, “the other day Nurse shut me up in the back nursery for borrowing her scissors and losing them; but I’d got ‘Grimm’ inside one of my knickerbockers, so when she locked the door, I sat down to read. And I read the story of the Shoemaker and the little Elves who came and did his work for him before he got up; and I thought it would be so jolly if we had some little Elves to do things instead of us.”

“That’s what Tommy Trout said,” observed the Doctor.

“Who’s Tommy Trout?” asked Deordie.

“Don’t you know, Deor?” said Tiny. “It’s the good boy who pulled the cat out of the what’s-his-name.

‘Who pulled her out?
Little Tommy Trout.’

Is it the same Tommy Trout, Doctor? I never heard anything else about him except his pulling the cat out; and I can’t think how he did that.”

“Let down the bucket for her, of course,” said the Doctor. “But listen to me. If you will get that handkerchief done, and take it to your mother with a

kiss, and not keep me waiting, I'll have you all to tea, and tell you the story of Tommy Trout."

"This very night?" shouted Deordie.

"This very night."

"Every one of us?" inquired the young gentleman with rapturous incredulity.

"Every one of you.—Now Tiny, how about that work?"

"It's just done," said Tiny.—"Oh! Deordie, climb up behind, and hold back my hair, there's a darling, while I fasten off. Oh! Deor, you're pulling my hair out. Don't."

"I want to make a pig-tail," said Deor.

"You can't," said Tiny, with feminine contempt, "You can't plait. What's the good of asking boys to do anything? There! it's done at last. Now go and ask mother if we may go.—Will you let me come, doctor," she inquired, "if I do as you said?"

"To be sure I will," he answered. "Let me look at you. Your eyes are swollen with crying. How can you be such a silly little goose?"

"Did you never cry?" asked Tiny.

"When I was your age? Well, perhaps so."

"You've never cried since, surely," said Tiny.

The Doctor absolutely blushed.

"What do you think?" said he.

"Oh, of course not," she answered. "You've nothing to cry about. You're grown up, and you live all alone in a beautiful house, and you do as you like, and never get into rows, or have anybody but yourself to think about; and no nasty pocket-handkerchiefs to hem."

"Very nice; eh, Deordie?" said the Doctor.

"Awfully jolly," said Deordie.

"Nothing else to wish for, eh?"

"I should keep harriers, and not a poodle, if I were a man," said Deordie; "but I suppose you could, if you wanted to."

"Nothing to cry about, at any rate?"

"I should think not!" said Deordie.—"There's mother, though; let's go and ask her about the tea;" and off they ran.

The Doctor stretched his six feet of length upon the sward, dropped his gray head on a little heap of newly-mown grass, and looked up into the sky.

"Awfully jolly—no nasty pocket-handkerchiefs to hem," said he laughing to himself. "Nothing else to wish for; nothing to cry about."

Nevertheless, he lay still, staring at the sky, till the smile died away, and tears came into his eyes. Fortunately, no one was there to see.

What could this "awfully jolly" Doctor be thinking of to make him cry? He was thinking of a grave-stone in the church-yard close by, and of a story connected with this grave-stone which was known to everybody in the place who was old enough to remember it. This story has nothing to do with the present story, so it ought not to be told.

And yet it has to do with the Doctor, and is very short, so it shall be put in, after all.

THE STORY OF A GRAVE-STONE.

One early spring morning about twenty years before, a man, going to his work at sunrise through the church-yard, stopped by a flat stone which he had lately helped to lay down. The day before, a name had been cut on it, which he stayed to read; and below the name some one had scrawled a few words in pencil, which he read also—*Pitifully behold the sorrows of our hearts*. On the stone lay a pencil, and a few feet from it lay the Doctor, face downwards, as he had lain all night, with the hoar frost on his black hair.

Ah! these grave-stones (they were ugly things in those days; not the light, hopeful, pretty crosses we set up now) how they seem remorselessly to imprison and keep our dear dead friends away from us! And yet they do not lie with a feather's weight upon the souls that are gone, while God only knows how heavily they press upon the souls that are left behind. Did the spirit whose body was with the dead, stand that morning by the body whose spirit was with the dead and pity him? Let us only talk about what we know.

After this it was said that the Doctor had got a fever, and was dying, but he got better of it; and then that he was out of his mind, but he got better of that, and came out looking much as usual, except that his hair never seemed quite so black again, as if a little of that night's hoar frost still remained. And no further misfortune happened to him that I ever heard of; and as time went on he grew a beard, and got stout, and kept a German poodle, and gave tea parties to other people's children. As to the grave-stone story, whatever it was to him at the end of twenty years; it was a great convenience to his friends; for when he said anything they didn't agree with, or did anything they couldn't understand, or didn't say or do what was expected of him, what could be easier or more conclusive than to shake one's head and say,

"The fact is, our Doctor has been a little odd, *ever since*—!"

THE DOCTOR'S TEA PARTY.

THERE is one great advantage attendant upon invitations to tea with a doctor. No objections can be raised on the score of health. It is obvious that it must be fine enough to go out when the doctor asks you, and that his tea-cakes may be eaten with perfect impunity.

Those tea-cakes were always good; to-night they were utterly delicious; there was a perfect *abandon* of currants, and the amount of citron peel was enervating to behold. Then the housekeeper waited in awful splendor, and yet the Doctor's authority over her seemed as absolute as if he were an Eastern despot. Deordie must be excused for believing in the charms of living alone. It certainly has its advantages. The limited sphere of duty conduces to discipline in the household, demand does not exceed supply in the article of waiting, and there is not that general scrimmage of conflicting interests which besets a large family in the most favored circumstances. The housekeeper waits in black silk, and looks as if she had no meaner occupation than to sit in a rocking-chair, and dream of damson cheese.

Rustling, hospitable, and subservient, this one retired at last, and—

"Now," said the Doctor, "for the verandah; and to look at the moon."

The company adjourned with a rush, the rear being brought up by the poodle, who seemed quite used to the proceedings; and there under the verandah, framed with passion flowers and geraniums, the Doctor had gathered mats, rugs, cushions, and arm-chairs, for the party; while far up in the sky, a yellow-faced harvest moon looked down in awful benignity.

"Now!" said the Doctor. "Take your seats. Ladies first, and gentlemen afterwards. Mary and Tiny race for the American rocking-chair. Well done! Of course it will hold both. Now boys, shake down. No one is to sit on the stone, or put their feet on the grass; and when you're ready, I'll begin."

"We're ready," said the girls.

The boys shook down in a few minutes more, and the Doctor began the story of

"THE BROWNIES."

"BAIRNS are a burden," said the Tailor to himself as he sat at work. He lived in a village on some of the glorious moors of the north of England; and by bairns he meant children, as every Northman knows.

"Bairns are a burden," and he sighed.

“Bairns are a blessing,” said the old lady in the window. “It is the family motto. The Trouts have had large families and good luck for generations; that is, till your grandfather’s time. He had one only son. I married him. He was a good husband, but he had been a spoilt child. He had always been used to be waited upon, and he couldn’t fash to look after the farm when it was his own. We had six children. They are all dead but you, who were the youngest. You were bound to a tailor. When the farm came into your hands, your wife died, and you have never looked up since. The land is sold now, but not the house. No! no! you’re right enough there; but you’ve had your troubles, son Thomas, and the lads *are* idle!”

It was the Tailor’s mother who spoke. She was a very old woman, and helpless. She was not quite so bright in her intellect as she had been, and got muddled over things that had lately happened; but she had a clear memory for what was long past, and was very pertinacious in her opinions. She knew the private history of almost every family in the place, and who of the Trouts were buried under which old stones in the church-yard; and had more tales of ghosts, doubles, warnings, fairies, witches, hobgoblins, and such like, than even her grandchildren had ever come to the end of. Her hands trembled with age, and she regretted this for nothing more than for the danger it brought her into of spilling the salt. She was past housework, but all day she sat knitting hearth-rugs out of the bits and scraps of cloth that were shred in the tailoring. How far she believed in the wonder-tales she told, and the odd little charms she practised, no one exactly knew; but the older she grew, the stranger were the things she remembered, and the more testy she was if any one doubted their truth.

“Bairns are a blessing!” said she. “It is the family motto.”

“*Are they?*” said the Tailor, emphatically.

He had a high respect for his mother, and did not like to contradict her, but he held his own opinion, based upon personal experience; and not being a metaphysician, did not understand that it is safer to found opinions on principles than on experience, since experience may alter, but principles cannot.

“Look at Tommy,” he broke out suddenly. “That boy does nothing but whittle sticks from morning till night. I have almost to lug him out of bed o’ mornings. If I send him an errand, he loiters; I’d better have gone myself. If I set him to do anything, I have to tell him everything; I could sooner do it myself. And if he does work, it’s done so unwillingly, with such a poor grace; better, far better, to do it myself. What housework do the boys ever do but looking after the baby? And this afternoon she was asleep in the cradle,

and off they went, and when she awoke, *I* must leave my work to take her. *I* gave her her supper, and put her to bed. And what with what they want and I have to get, and what they take out to play with and lose, and what they bring in to play with and leave about, bairns give some trouble, Mother, and I've not an easy life of it. The pay is poor enough when one can get the work, and the work is hard enough when one has a clear day to do it in; but housekeeping and bairn-minding don't leave a man much time for his trade. No! no! Ma'am, the luck of the Trouts is gone and 'Bairns are a burden,' is the motto now. Though they are one's own," he muttered to himself, "and not bad ones and I did hope once would have been a blessing."

"There's Johnnie," murmured the old lady, dreamily. "He has a face like an apple."

"And is about as useful," said the Tailor. "He might have been different, but his brother leads him by the nose."

His brother led him in as the Tailor spoke, not literally by his snub, though, but by the hand. They were a handsome pair, this lazy couple. Johnnie especially had the largest and roundest of foreheads, the reddest of cheeks, the brightest of eyes, the quaintest and most twitchy of chins, and looked altogether like a gutta percha cherub in a chronic state of longitudinal squeeze. They were locked together by two grubby paws, and had each an armful of moss, which they deposited on the floor as they came in.

"I've swept this floor once to-day," said the father, "and I'm not going to do it again. Put that rubbish outside."

"Move it Johnnie!" said his brother, seating himself on a stool, and taking out his knife and a piece of wood, at which he cut and sliced; while the apple cheeked Johnnie stumbled and stamped over the moss, and scraped it out on to the door-step, leaving long trails of earth behind him, and then sat down also.

"And those chips the same," added the Tailor; "I will *not* clear up the litter you lads make."

"Pick 'em up, Johnnie," said Thomas Trout, junior, with an exasperated sigh; and the apple tumbled up, rolled after the flying chips, and tumbled down again.

"Is there any supper, Father?" asked Tommy.

"No, there is not, Sir, unless you know how to get it," said the Tailor; and taking his pipe, he went out of the house.

"Is there really nothing to eat Granny?" asked the boy.

"No, my bairn, only some bread for breakfast to-morrow."

“What makes Father so cross, Granny?”

“He’s wearied, and you don’t help him, my dear.”

“What could I do, Grandmother?”

“Many little things, if you tried,” said the old lady. “He spent half-an-hour to-day while you were on the moor, getting turf for the fire, and you could have got it just as well, and he been at his work.”

“He never told me,” said Tommy.

“You might help me a bit just now, if you would, my laddie,” said the old lady coaxingly; “these bits of cloth want tearing into lengths, and if you get ’em ready, I can go on knitting. There’ll be some food when this mat is done and sold.”

“I’ll try,” said Tommy, lounging up with desperate resignation. “Hold my knife, Johnnie. Father’s been cross, and everything has been miserable, ever since the farm was sold. I wish I were a big man, and could make a fortune.—Will that do, Granny?”

The old lady put down her knitting and looked. “My dear, that’s too short. Bless me! I gave the lad a piece to measure by.”

“I thought it was the same length. Oh, dear! I am so tired;” and he propped himself against the old lady’s chair.

“My dear! don’t lean so! you’ll tipple me over!” she shrieked.

“I beg your pardon, Grandmother. Will *that* do?”

“It’s that much too long.”

“Tear that bit off. Now it’s all right.”

“But, my dear, that wastes it. Now that bit is of no use. There goes my knitting, you awkward lad!”

“Johnnie, pick it up!—Oh! Grandmother, I *am* so hungry.”

The boy’s eyes filled with tears, and the old lady was melted in an instant.

“What can I do for you, my poor bairns?” said she. “There, never mind the scraps, Tommy.”

“Tell us a tale, Granny. If you told us a new one, I shouldn’t keep thinking of that bread in the cupboard.—Come Johnny, and sit against me. Now then!”

“I doubt if there’s one of my old-world cracks I haven’t told you,” said the old lady, “unless it’s a queer ghost story was told me years ago of that house in the hollow with the blocked-up windows.”

“Oh! not ghosts!” Tommy broke in; “we’ve had so many. I know it was a rattling, or a scratching, or a knocking, or a figure in white; and if it turns out a tombstone or a white petticoat, I hate it.”

“It was nothing of the sort as a tombstone,” said the old lady with dignity. “It’s a good half-mile from the church-yard. And as to white petticoats, there wasn’t a female in the house; he wouldn’t have one; and his victuals came in by the pantry window. But never mind! Though it’s as true as a sermon.”

Johnnie lifted his head from his brother’s knee.

“Let Granny tell what she likes, Tommy. It’s a new ghost, and I should like to know who he was, and why his victuals came in by the window.”

“I don’t like a story about victuals,” sulked Tommy. “It makes me think of the bread. O Granny dear! do tell us a fairy story. You never will tell us about the Fairies, and I know you know.”

“Hush! hush!” said the old lady. “There’s Miss Surbiton’s Love Letter, and her Dreadful End.”

“I know Miss Surbiton, Granny. I think she was a goose. Why won’t you tell us about the Fairies?”

“Hush! hush! my dears. There’s the Clerk and the Corpse-candles.”

“I know the Corpse-candles, Granny. Besides, they make Johnnie dream and he wakes me to keep him company. *Why* won’t you tell us about the Fairies?”

“My dear, they don’t like it,” said the old lady.

“O Granny dear, why don’t they? Do tell! I shouldn’t think of the bread a bit, if you told us about the Fairies. I know nothing about them.”

“He lived in this house long enough,” said the old lady. “But it’s not lucky to name him.”

“Oh, Granny, we are so hungry and miserable, what can it matter?”

“Well, that’s true enough,” she sighed. “Trouts’ luck is gone; it went with the Brownie, I believe.”

“Was that *he*, Granny?”

“Yes, my dear, he lived with the Trouts for several generations.”

“What was he like, Granny?”

“Like a little man, they say, my dear.”

“What did he do?”

“He came in before the family were up, and swept up the hearth, and lighted the fire, and set out the breakfast, and tidied the room, and did all sorts of house-work. But he never would be seen, and was off before they could catch him. But they could hear him laughing and playing about the house sometimes.”

“What a darling! Did they give him any wages, Granny?”

“No! my dear. He did it for love. They set a pancheon of clear water for him over night, and now and then a bowl of bread and milk, or cream. He liked that, for he was very dainty. Sometimes he left a bit of money in the water. Sometimes he weeded the garden or threshed the corn. He saved endless trouble, both to men and maids.”

“O Granny! why did he go?”

“The maids caught sight of him one night, my dear, and his coat was so ragged, that they got a new suit, and a linen shirt for him, and laid them by the bread and milk bowl. But when Brownie saw the things, he put them on, and dancing round the kitchen, sang,

‘What have we here? Hemten hamten!
Here will I never more tread nor stampen,’

and so danced through the door and never came back again.”

“O Grandmother! But why not? Didn’t he like the new clothes?”

“The Old Owl knows, my dear; I don’t.”

“Who’s the Old Owl, Granny?”

“I don’t exactly know, my dear. It’s what my mother used to say when we asked anything that puzzled her. It was said that the Old Owl was Nancy Besom, (a witch, my dear!) who took the shape of a bird, but couldn’t change her voice, and that that’s why the owl sits silent all day for fear she should betray herself by speaking, and has no singing voice like other birds. Many people used to go and consult the Old Owl at moon-rise, in my young days.”

“Did you ever go, Granny?”

“Once, very nearly, my dear.”

“Oh! tell us, Granny dear.—There are no Corpse-candles, Johnnie; it’s only moonlight,” he added consolingly, as Johnnie crept closer to his knee and pricked his little red ears.

“It was when your grandfather was courting me, my dears,” said the old lady, “and I couldn’t quite make up my mind. So I went to my mother, and

said, ‘He’s this on the one side, but then he’s that on the other, and so on. Shall I say yes or no?’ And my mother said, ‘The Old Owl knows,’ for she was fairly puzzled. So says I, ‘I’ll go and ask her to-night, as sure as the moon rises.’

“So at moon-rise I went, and there in the white light by the gate stood your grandfather. ‘What are you doing here at this time o’ night?’ says I. ‘Watching your window,’ says he. ‘What are *you* doing here at this time o’ night?’ ‘The Old Owl knows,’ said I, and burst out crying.”

“What for?” said Johnnie.

“I can’t rightly tell you, my dear,” said the old lady, “but it gave me such a turn to see him. And without more ado your grandfather kissed me. ‘How dare you?’ said I. ‘What do you mean?’ ‘The Old Owl knows,’ said he. So we never went.”

“How stupid!” said Tommy.

“Tell us more about Brownie, please,” said Johnnie. “Did he ever live with anybody else?”

“There are plenty of Brownies,” said the old lady, “or used to be in my mother’s young days. Some houses had several.”

“Oh! I wish ours would come back!” cried both the boys in chorus. “He’d —

“tidy the room,” said Johnnie;
“fetch the turf,” said Tommy;
“pick up the chips,” said Johnnie;
“sort your scraps,” said Tommy;
“and do everything. Oh! I wish he hadn’t gone away.”

“What’s that?” said the Tailor coming in at this moment.

“It’s the Brownie, Father,” said Tommy. “We are so sorry he went, and do so wish we had one.”

“What nonsense have you been telling them, Mother?” asked the Tailor.

“Heighty teighty,” said the old lady, bristling. “Nonsense, indeed! As good men as you, Son Thomas, would as soon have jumped off the crags, as spoken lightly of *them*, in my mother’s young days.”

“Well, well,” said the Tailor, “I beg their pardon. They never did aught for me, whatever they did for my forbears; but they’re as welcome to the old place as ever, if they choose to come. There’s plenty to do.”

“Would you mind our setting a pan of water, Father?” asked Tommy very gently. “There’s no bread and milk.”

“You may set what you like, my lad,” said the Tailor; “and I wish there were bread and milk for your sakes, Bairns. You should have it, had I got it. But go to bed now.”

They lugged out a pancheon, and filled it with more dexterity than usual, and then went off to bed, leaving the knife in one corner, the wood in another, and a few splashes of water in their track.

There was more room than comfort in the ruined old farm-house, and the two boys slept on a bed of cut heather, in what had been the old malt loft. Johnnie was soon in the land of dreams, growing rosier and rosier as he slept, a tumbled apple among the gray heather. But not so lazy Tommy. The idea of a domesticated Brownie had taken full possession of his mind; and whither Brownie had gone, where he might be found, and what would induce him to return, were mysteries he longed to solve. “There’s an owl living in the old shed by the mere,” he thought. “It may be the Old Owl herself, and she knows, Granny says. When father’s gone to bed, and the moon rises I’ll go.” Meanwhile he lay down.

* * * * * *

The moon rose like gold, and went up into the heavens like silver, flooding the moors with a pale ghostly light, taking the color out of the heather, and painting black shadows under the stone walls. Tommy opened his eyes, and ran to the window. “The moon has risen,” said he, and crept softly down the ladder, through the kitchen, where was the pan of water, but no Brownie, and so out on the moor. The air was fresh, not to say chilly; but it was a glorious night, though everything but the wind and Tommy seemed asleep. The stones, the walls, the gleaming lanes, were so intensely still; the church tower in the valley seemed awake and watching, but silent; the houses in the village round it all had their eyes shut, that is, their window blinds down; and it seemed to Tommy as if the very moors had drawn white sheets over them, and lay sleeping also.

“Hoot! hoot!” said a voice from the fir plantation behind him. Somebody else was awake, then. “It’s the Old Owl,” said Tommy; and there she came, swinging heavily across the moor with a flapping stately flight, and sailed into the shed by the mere. The old lady moved faster than she seemed to do, and though Tommy ran hard she was in the shed some time before him. When he got in, no bird was to be seen, but he heard a crunching sound from above, and looking up, there sat the Old Owl, pecking and tearing and

munching at some shapeless black object, and blinking at him—Tommy—with yellow eyes.

"Oh dear!" said Tommy, for he didn't much like it.

The Old Owl dropped the black mass on to the floor; and Tommy did not care somehow to examine it.

"Come up! come up!" said she, hoarsely.

She could speak, then! Beyond all doubt it was *the* Old Owl and none other. Tommy shuddered.

"Come up here! come up here!" said the Old Owl.

The Old Owl sat on a beam that ran across the shed. Tommy had often climbed up for fun; and he climbed up now, and sat face to face with her, and thought her eyes looked as if they were made of flame.

"Kiss my fluffy face," said the Owl.

Her eyes were going round like flaming catherine wheels, but there are certain requests which one has not the option of refusing. Tommy crept nearer, and put his lips to the round face out of which the eyes shone. Oh! it was so downy and warm, so soft, so indescribably soft. Tommy's lips sank into it, and couldn't get to the bottom. It was unfathomable feathers and fluffyness.

"Now, what do you want?" said the Owl.

"Please," said Tommy, who felt rather re-assured, "can you tell me where to find the Brownies, and how to get one to come and live with us?"

"Oohoo!" said the Owl, "that's it, is it? I know of three Brownies."

"Hurrah!" said Tommy. "Where do they live?"

"In your house," said the Owl.

Tommy was aghast.

"In our house!" he exclaimed. "Whereabouts? Let me rummage them out. Why do they do nothing?"

"One of them is too young," said the Owl.

"But why don't the others work?" asked Tommy.

"They are idle, they are idle," said the Old Owl, and she gave herself such a shake as she said it, that the fluff went flying through the shed, and Tommy nearly tumbled off the beam in his fright.

"Then we don't want them," said he. "What is the use of having Brownies if they do nothing to help us?"

"Perhaps they don't know how, as no one has told them," said the Owl.

“I wish you would tell me where to find them,” said Tommy; “I could tell them.”

“Could you?” said the Owl. “Oohoo! Oohoo!” and Tommy couldn’t tell whether she were hooting or laughing.

“Of course I could,” he said. “They might be up and sweep the house, and light the fire, and spread the table, and that sort of thing, before father came down. Besides, they could *see* what was wanted. The Brownies did all that in Granny’s mother’s young days. And then they could tidy the room, and fetch the turf, and pick up my chips, and sort Granny’s scraps. Oh! there’s lots to do.”

“So there is,” said the Owl. “Oohoo! Well, I can tell you where to find one of the Brownies; and if you find him, he will tell you where his brother is. But all this depends upon whether you feel equal to undertaking it, and whether you will follow my directions.”

“I am quite ready to go,” said Tommy, “and I will do as you shall tell me. I feel sure I could persuade them. If they only knew how every one would love them if they made themselves useful!”

“Oohoo! ohoo!” said the Owl. “Now pay attention. You must go to the north side of the mere when the moon is shining—(‘I know Brownies like water,’ muttered Tommy)—and turn yourself around three times, saying this charm:

> ‘Twist me and turn me, and show me the Elf—
> I looked in the water, and saw—’

When you have got so far, look into the water, and at the same moment you will see the Brownie, and think of a word that will fill up the couplet, and rhyme with the first line. If either you do not see the Brownie, or fail to think of the word, it will be of no use.”

“Is the Brownie a mermaid,” said Tommy, wriggling himself along the beam, “that he lives under water?”

“That depends on whether he has a fish’s tail,” said the Owl, “and this you can discover for yourself.”

“Well, the moon is shining, so I shall go,” said Tommy. “Good-bye, and thank you, Ma’am;” and he jumped down and went, saying to himself as he ran, “I believe he is a merman all the same, or else how could he live in the mere? I know more about Brownies than Granny does, and I shall tell her so;” for Tommy was somewhat opinionated, like other young people.

The moon shone very brightly on the centre of the mere. Tommy knew the place well for there was a fine echo there. Round the edge grew rushes and water plants, which cast a border of shadow. Tommy went to the north side, and turning himself three times, as the old Owl had told him, he repeated the charm—

> ‘Twist me, and turn me, and show me the Elf—
> I looked in the water, and saw—’

Now for it. He looked in, and saw—the reflection of his own face.

“Why, there’s no one but myself!” said Tommy. “And what can the word be? I must have done it wrong.”

“Wrong!” said the Echo.

Tommy was almost surprised to find the echo awake at this time of night.

“Hold your tongue!” said he. “Matters are provoking enough of themselves. Belf! Celf! Delf! Felf! Gelf! Helf! Jelf! What rubbish! There can’t be a word to fit it. And then to look for Brownie, and see nothing but myself!”

“Myself!” said the Echo.

“Will you be quiet?” said Tommy. “If you would tell one the word there would be some sense in your interference; but to roar ‘Myself!’ at one, which neither rhymes nor runs—it does rhyme though, as it happens,” he added; “and how very odd! it runs too—

> ‘Twist me, and turn me, and show me the Elf;
> I looked in the water, and saw myself,’

which I certainly did. What can it mean? The Old Owl knows, as Granny would say; so I shall go back and ask her.”

“Ask her!” said the Echo.

“Didn’t I say I should?” said Tommy. “How exasperating you are! It is very strange. *Myself* certainly does rhyme, and I wonder I did not think of it long ago.”

“Go,” said the Echo.

“Will you mind your own business, and go to sleep?” said Tommy. “I am going; I said I should.”

And back he went. There sat the Old Owl as before.

“Oohoo!” said she, as Tommy climbed up. “What did you see in the mere?”

“I saw nothing but myself,” said Tommy indignantly.

“And what did you expect to see?” asked the Owl.

“I expected to see a Brownie,” said Tommy; “you told me so.”

“And what are Brownies like, pray?” inquired the Owl.

“The one Granny knew was a useful little fellow, something like a little man,” said Tommy.

“Ah!” said the Owl, “but you know at present this one is an idle little fellow, something like a little man. Oohoo! oohoo! Are you quite sure you didn’t see him?”

“Quite,” answered Tommy sharply. “I saw no one but myself.”

“Hoot! toot! How touchy we are! And who are you, pray?”

“I am not a Brownie,” said Tommy.

“Don’t be too sure,” said the Owl. “Did you find out the word?”

“No,” said Tommy. “I could find no word with any meaning that would rhyme but ‘myself.’ ”

“Well, that runs and rhymes,” said the Owl. “What do you want? Where’s your brother now?”

“In bed in the malt-loft,” said Tommy.

“Then now all your questions are answered,” said the Owl, “and you know what wants doing, so go and do it. Good-night, or rather good-morning, for it is long past midnight;” and the old lady began to shake her feathers for a start.

“Don’t go yet, please,” said Tommy humbly. “I don’t understand it. You know I’m not a Brownie, am I?”

“Yes, you are,” said the Owl, “and a very idle one too. All children are Brownies.”

“But I couldn’t do work like a Brownie,” said Tommy.

“Why not?” inquired the Owl. “Couldn’t you sweep the floor, light the fire, spread the table, tidy the room, fetch the turf, pick up your own chips, and sort your grandmother’s scraps? You know ‘there’s lots to do.’ ”

“But I don’t think I should like it,” said Tommy. “I’d much rather have a Brownie to do it for me.”

“And what would you do meanwhile?” asked the Owl. “Be idle, I suppose; and what do you suppose is the use of a man’s having children if

they do nothing to help him? Ah! if they only knew how every one would love them if they made themselves useful!"

"But is it really and truly so?" asked Tommy, in a dismal voice. "Are there no Brownies but children?"

"No, there are not," said the owl. "And pray do you think that the Brownies, whoever they may be, come into a house to save trouble for the idle healthy little boys who live in it? Listen to me, Tommy," said the old lady, her eyes shooting rays of fire in the dark corner where she sat. "Listen to me, you are a clever boy, and can understand when one speaks; so I will tell you the whole history of the Brownies, as it has been handed down in our family from my grandmother's great-grandmother, who lived in the Druid's Oak, and was intimate with the fairies. And when I have done you shall tell me what you think they are, if they are not children. It's the opinion I have come to at any rate, and I don't think that wisdom died with our great-grandmothers."

"I should like to hear if you please," said Tommy.

The Old Owl shook out a tuft or two of fluff, and set her eyes a-going, and began:

"The Brownies, or as they are sometimes called, the Small Folk, the Little People, or the Good People, are a race of tiny beings who domesticate themselves in a house of which some grown-up human being pays the rent and taxes. They are like small editions of men and women, they are too small and fragile for heavy work; they have not the strength of a man, but are a thousand times more fresh and nimble. They can run and jump, and roll and tumble, with marvellous agility and endurance, and of many of the aches and pains which men and women groan under, they do not even know the names. They have no trade or profession, and as they live entirely upon other people, they know nothing of domestic cares; in fact, they know very little upon any subject, though they are often intelligent and highly inquisitive. They love dainties, play, and mischief. They are apt to be greatly beloved, and are themselves capriciously affectionate. They are little people, and can only do little things. When they are idle and mischievous, they are called Boggarts, and are a curse to the house they live in. When they are useful and considerate, they are Brownies, and are a much-coveted blessing. Sometimes the Blessed Brownies will take up their abode with some worthy couple, cheer them with their romp and merry laughter, tidy the house, find things that have been lost, and take little troubles out of hands full of great anxieties. Then in time these Little People are Brownies no longer. They grow up into men and women. They do not care so much for dainties, play,

or mischief. They cease to jump and tumble, and roll about the house. They know more, and laugh less. Then, when their heads begin to ache with anxiety, and they have to labor for their own living, and the great cares of life come on, other Brownies come and live with them, and take up their little cares, and supply their little comforts, and make the house merry once more."

"How nice!" said Tommy.

"Very nice," said the Old Owl. "But what"—and she shook herself more fiercely than ever, and glared so that Tommy expected nothing less than her eyes would set fire to her feathers and she would be burnt alive. "But what must I say of the Boggarts? Those idle urchins who eat the bread and milk, and don't do the work, who lie in bed without an ache or pain to excuse them, who untidy instead of tidying, cause work instead of doing it, and leave little cares to heap on big cares, till the old people who support them are worn out altogether."

"Don't!" said Tommy. "I can't bear it."

"I hope when Boggarts grow into men," said the Old Owl, "that their children will be Boggarts too, and then they'll know what it is!"

"Don't!" roared Tommy. "I won't be a Boggart. I'll be a Brownie."

"That's right," nodded the Old Owl. "I said you were a boy who could understand when one spoke. And remember that the Brownies never are seen at their work. They get up before the household, and get away before any one can see them. I can't tell you why. I don't think my grandmother's great-grandmother knew. Perhaps because all good deeds are better done in secret."

"Please," said Tommy, "I should like to go home now, and tell Johnnie. It's getting cold, and I am so tired!"

"Very true," said the Old Owl, "and then you will have to be up early to-morrow. I think I had better take you home."

"I know the way, thank you," said Tommy.

"I didn't say *shew* you the way, I said *take* you—carry you," said the Owl. "Lean against me."

"I'd rather not thank you," said Tommy.

"Lean against me," screamed the Owl. "Oohoo! how obstinate boys are to be sure!"

Tommy crept up, very unwillingly.

"Lean your full weight, and shut your eyes," said the Owl.

Tommy laid his head against the Old Owl's feathers, had a vague idea that she smelt of heather, and thought it must be from living on the moor, shut his eyes, and leant his full weight, expecting that he and the Owl would certainly fall off the beam together. Down—feathers—fluff—he sank and sank, could feel nothing solid, jumped up with a start to save himself, opened his eyes, and found that he was sitting among the heather in the malt-loft, with Johnny sleeping by his side.

"How quickly we came!" said he; "that is certainly a very clever Old Owl. I couldn't have counted ten whilst my eyes were shut. How very odd!"

But what was odder still was, that it was no longer moonlight but early dawn.

"Get up, Johnnie," said his brother, "I've got a story to tell you."

And while Johnnie sat up, and rubbed his eyes open, he related his adventures on the moor.

"Is all that true?" said Johnnie; "I mean, did it really happen?"

"Of course it did," said his brother; "don't you believe it?"

"Oh yes," said Johnny. "But I thought it was perhaps only a true story, like Granny's true stories. I believe all these, you know. But if you were there, you know, it is different—"

"I was there," said Tommy, "and it's all just as I tell you: and I tell you what, if we mean to do anything we must get up: though, oh dear! I should like to stay in bed. I say," he added, after a pause, "suppose we do. It can't matter being Boggarts for one night more. I mean to be a Brownie before I grow up, though. I couldn't stand boggarty children."

"I won't be a Boggart at all," said Johnnie, "it's horrid. But I don't see how we can be Brownies, for I'm afraid we can't do the things. I wish I were bigger!"

"I can do it well enough," said Tommy, following his brother's example and getting up. "Don't you suppose I can light a fire? Think of all the bonfires we have made! And I don't think I should mind having a regular good tidy-up either. It's that stupid putting-away-things-when-you've-done-with-them that I hate so!"

The Brownies crept softly down the ladder and into the kitchen. There was the blank hearth, the dirty floor, and all the odds and ends lying about, looking cheerless enough in the dim light, Tommy felt quite important as he looked round. There is no such cure for untidiness as clearing up after other people; one sees so clearly where the fault lies.

“Look at that door-step, Johnnie,” said the Brownie-elect, “what a mess you made of it! If you had lifted the moss carefully, instead of stamping and struggling with it, it would have saved us ten minutes’ work this morning.”

This wisdom could not be gainsaid, and Johnnie only looked meek and rueful.

“I am going to light the fire,” pursued his brother;—“the next turfs, you know *we* must get—you can tidy a bit. Look at the knife I gave you to hold last night, and that wood—that’s my fault though, and so are those scraps by Granny’s chair. What are you grubbing at that rat-hole for?”

Johnnie raised his head somewhat flushed and tumbled.

“What do you think I have found?” said he triumphantly. “Father’s measure that has been lost for a week!”

“Hurrah!” said Tommy, “put it by his things. That’s just a sort of thing for a Brownie to have done. What will he say? And I say, Johnnie, when you’ve tidied, just go and grub up a potato or two in the garden, and I’ll put them to roast for breakfast. I’m lighting such a bonfire!”

The fire was very successful. Johnnie went after the potatoes, and Tommy cleaned the door-step, swept the room, dusted the chairs and the old chest, and set out the table. There was no doubt he could be handy when he chose.

“I’ll tell you what I have thought of, if we have time,” said Johnnie, as he washed the potatoes in the water that had been set for Brownie. “We might run down to the South Pasture for some mushrooms. Father said the reason we found so few was that people go by sunrise for them to take to market. The sun’s only just rising, we should be sure to find some, and they would do for breakfast.”

“There’s plenty of time,” said Tommy; so they went. The dew lay heavy and thick upon the grass by the road side, and over the miles of network that the spiders had woven from blossom to blossom of the heather. The dew is the Sun’s breakfast; but he was barely up yet, and had not eaten it, and the world felt anything but warm. Nevertheless, it was so sweet and fresh as it is at no later hour of the day, and every sound was like the returning voice of a long absent friend. Down to the pastures, where was more network and more dew, but when one has nothing to speak of in the way of boots, the state of the ground is of the less consequence.

The Tailor had been right, there was no lack of mushrooms at this time of the morning. All over the pasture they stood, of all sizes, some like buttons, some like tables; and in the distance one or two ragged women, stopping over them with baskets, looked like huge fungi also.

“This is where the fairies feast,” said Tommy. “They had a large party last night. When they go, they take away the dishes and cups, for they are made of gold; but they leave their tables, and we eat them.”

“I wonder whether giants would like to eat our tables,” said Johnnie.

This was beyond Tommy’s capabilities of surmise; so they filled a handkerchief, and hurried back again for fear the Tailor should have come down-stairs.

They were depositing the last mushroom in a dish on the table, when his footsteps were heard descending.

“There he is!” exclaimed Tommy. “Remember, we mustn’t be caught. Run back to bed.”

Johnnie caught up the handkerchief, and smothering their laughter, the two scrambled back up the ladder, and dashed straight into the heather.

Meanwhile the poor Tailor came wearily down-stairs. Day after day, since his wife’s death, he had come down every morning to the same desolate sight—yesterday’s refuse and an empty hearth. This morning task of tidying was always a sad and ungrateful one to the widowed father. His awkward struggles with the house-work in which *she* had been so notable, chafed him. The dirty kitchen was dreary, the labor lonely, and it was an hour’s time lost to his trade. But life does not stand still while one is wishing, and so the Tailor did that for which there was neither remedy nor substitute; and came down this morning as other mornings to the pail and broom. When he came in he looked round, and started, and rubbed his eyes; looked round again, and rubbed them harder; then went up to the fire and held out his hand, (warm certainly)—then up to the table and smelt the mushrooms, (esculent fungi beyond a doubt) handled the loaf, stared at the open door and window, the swept floor, and the sunshine pouring in, and finally sat down in stunned admiration. Then he jumped up and ran to the foot of the stairs, shouting,—

“Mother! Mother! Trout’s luck has come again.” “And yet, no!” he thought, “the old lady’s asleep, it’s a shame to wake her, I’ll tell those idle rascally lads, they’ll be more pleased than they deserve. It was Tommy after all that set the water and caught him.” “Boys! boys!” he shouted at the foot of the ladder, “the Brownie has come!—and if he hasn’t found my measure!” he added on returning to the kitchen, “this is as good as a day’s work to me.”

There was great excitement in the small household that day. The boys kept their own counsel. The old Grandmother was triumphant, and tried not

to seem surprised. The Tailor made no such vain effort, and remained till bed-time in a state of fresh and unconcealed amazement.

"I've often heard of the Good People," he broke out towards the end of the evening. "And I've heard folk say they've known those that have seen them capering round the gray rocks on the moor at midnight: but this is wonderful! To come and do the work for a pan of cold water! Who could have believed it?"

"You might have believed it if you'd believed me, Son Thomas," said the old lady tossily. "I told you so. But young people always know better than their elders!"

"I didn't see him," said the Tailor, beginning his story afresh; "but I thought as I came in I heard a sort of laughing and rustling."

"My mother said they often heard him playing and laughing about the house," said the old lady. "I told you so."

"Well, he shan't want for a bowl of bread and milk to-morrow, anyhow," said the Tailor, "if I have to stick to Farmer Swede's waistcoat till midnight."

But the waistcoat was finished by bed-time, and the Tailor set the bread and milk himself, and went to rest.

"I say," said Tommy, when both the boys were in bed, "the Old Owl was right, and we must stick to it. But I'll tell you what I don't like, and that is, father thinking we're idle still. I wish he knew we were the Brownies."

"So do I," said Johnnie; and he sighed.

"I tell you what," said Tommy, with the decisiveness of elder brotherhood, "we'll keep quiet for a bit for fear we should leave off; but when we've gone on a good while, I shall tell him. It was only the Old Owl's grandmother's great-grandmother who said it was to be kept secret, and the Old Owl herself said grandmothers were not always in the right."

"No more they are," said Johnnie; "look at Granny about this."

"I know," said Tommy. "She's in a regular muddle."

"So she is," said Johnnie. "But that's rather fun, I think."

And they went to sleep.

Day after day went by, and still the Brownies "stuck to it," and did their work. It is no such very hard matter after all to get up early when one is young and light-hearted, and sleeps upon heather in a loft without window-blind, and with so many broken window-panes that the air comes freely in.

In old times the boys used to play at tents among the heather, while the Tailor did the house-work; now they came down and did it for him.

Size is not everything, even in this material existence. One has heard of dwarfs who were quite as clever, (not to say as powerful,) as giants, and I do not fancy that Fairy Godmothers are ever very large. It is wonderful what a comfort Brownies may be in the house that is fortunate enough to hold them! The Tailor's Brownies were the joy of his life; and day after day they seemed to grow more and more ingenious in finding little things to do for his good.

Now-a-days Granny never picked a scrap for herself. One day's shearings were all neatly arranged the next morning, and laid by her knitting-pins; and the Tailor's tape and shears were no more absent without leave.

One day a message came to him to offer him two or three days' tailoring in a farmhouse some miles up the valley. This was pleasant and advantageous sort of work; good food, sure pay, and a cheerful change; but he did not know how he could leave his family, unless, indeed, the Brownie might be relied upon to "keep the house together," as they say. The boys were sure that he would, and they promised to set his water, and to give as little trouble as possible; so, finally, the Tailor took up his shears and went up the valley, where the green banks sloped up into purple moor, or broke into sandy rocks, crowned with nodding oak fern. On to the prosperous old farm, where he spent a very pleasant time, sitting level with the window geraniums on a table set apart for him, stitching and gossiping, gossiping and stitching, and feeling secure of honest payment when his work was done. The mistress of the house was a kind good creature, and loved a chat; and though the Tailor kept his own secret as to the Brownies, he felt rather curious to know if the Good People had any hand in the comfort of this flourishing household, and watched his opportunity to make a few careless inquiries on the subject.

"Brownies?" laughed the dame. "Ay, Master, I have heard of them. When I was a girl, in service at the old hall, on Cowberry Edge, I heard a good deal of one they said had lived there in former times. He did housework as well as a woman, and a good deal quicker, they said. One night one of the young ladies (that were then, they're all dead now,) hid herself in a cupboard, to see what he was like."

"And what was he like?" inquired the Tailor, as composedly as he was able.

“A little fellow, they said;” answered the Farmer’s wife, knitting calmly on. “Like a dwarf, you know, with a largish head for his body. Not taller than—why, my Bill, or your eldest boy, perhaps. And he was dressed in rags, with an old cloak on, and stamping with passion at a cobweb he couldn’t get at with his broom. They’ve very uncertain tempers, they say. Tears one minute and laughing the next.”

“You never had one here, I suppose?” said the Tailor.

“Not we,” she answered; “and I think I’d rather not. They’re not canny after all; and my master and me have always been used to work, and we’ve sons, and daughters to help us, and that’s better than meddling with the Fairies, to my mind. No! no!” she added, laughing, “If we had had one you’d have heard of it, whoever didn’t, for I should have had some decent clothes made for him. I couldn’t stand rags and old cloaks, messing and moth-catching in my house.”

“They say it’s not lucky to give them clothes, though,” said the Tailor; “they don’t like it.”

“Tell me!” said the dame, “as if any one that liked a tidy room, wouldn’t like tidy clothes, if they could get them. No! no! when we have one, you shall take his measure, I promise you.”

And this was all the Tailor got out of her on the subject. When his work was finished, the Farmer paid him at once; and the good dame added half a cheese, and a bottle-green coat.

“That has been laid by for being too small for the master now he’s so stout,” she said; “but except for a stain or two it’s good enough, and will cut up like new for one of the lads.”

The Tailor thanked them, and said farewell, and went home. Down the valley, where the river, wandering between the green banks and the sandy rocks, was caught by giant mosses, and bands of fairy fern, and there choked and struggled, and at last barely escaped with an existence, and ran away in a diminished stream. On up the purple hills to the old ruined house. As he came in at the gate he was struck by some idea of change, and looking again, he saw that the garden had been weeded, and was comparatively tidy. The truth is, that Tommy and Johnnie had taken advantage of the Tailor’s absence to do some Brownie’s work in the daytime.

“It’s that Blessed Brownie!” said the Tailor. “Has he been as usual?” he asked, when he was in the house.

“To be sure,” said the old lady; “all has been well, Son Thomas.”

“I’ll tell you what it is,” said the Tailor, after a pause. “I’m a needy man, but I hope I’m not ungrateful. I can never repay the Brownie for what he has done for me and mine; but the mistress up yonder has given me a bottle-green coat that will cut up as good as new; and as sure as there’s a Brownie in this house, I’ll make him a suit of it.”

“You’ll *what*?” shrieked the old lady. “Son Thomas, Son Thomas, you’re mad! Do what you please for the Brownies, but never make them clothes.”

“There’s nothing they want more,” said the Tailor, “by all accounts. They’re all in rags, as well they may be, doing so much work.”

“If you make clothes for this Brownie, he’ll go for good,” said the Grandmother, in a voice of awful warning.

“Well, I don’t know,” said her son. “The mistress up at the farm is clever enough, I can tell you; and as she said to me, fancy any one that likes a tidy room, not liking a tidy coat!” For the Tailor, like most men, was apt to think well of the wisdom of woman-kind in other houses.

“Well, well,” said the old lady, “go your own way. I’m an old woman, and my time is not long. It doesn’t matter much to me. But it was new clothes that drove the Brownie out before, and Trout’s luck went with him.”

“I know, Mother,” said the Tailor, “and I’ve been thinking of it all the way home; and I can tell you why it was. Depend upon it, *the clothes didn’t fit*. But I’ll tell you what I mean to do. I shall measure them by Tommy—they say the Brownies are about his size—and if ever I turned out a well-made coat and waistcoat, they shall be his.”

“Please yourself,” said the old lady, and she would say no more.

“I think you’re quite right, Father,” said Tommy, “and if I can, I’ll help you to make them.”

Next day the father and son set to work, and Tommy contrived to make himself so useful, that the Tailor hardly knew how he got through so much work.

“It’s not like the same thing,” he broke out at last, “to have some one a bit helpful about you; both for the tailoring and for company’s sake. I’ve not done such a pleasant morning’s work since your poor mother died. I’ll tell you what it is, Tommy,” he added, “if you were always like this, I shouldn’t much care whether Brownie stayed or went. I’d give up his help to have yours.”

“I’ll be back directly,” said Tommy, who burst out of the room in search of his brother.

“I’ve come away,” he said squatting down, “because I can’t bear it. I very nearly let it all out, and I shall soon. I wish the things weren’t going to come to me,” he added, kicking a stone in front of him. “I wish he’d measured you, Johnnie.”

“I’m very glad he didn’t,” said Johnnie. “I wish he’d kept them himself.”

“Bottle-green, with brass buttons,” murmured Tommy, and therewith fell into a reverie.

The next night the suit was finished, and laid by the bread and milk.

“We shall see,” said the old lady, in a withering tone. There is not much real prophetic wisdom in this truism, but it sounds very awful, and the Tailor went to bed somewhat depressed.

Next morning the Brownies came down as usual.

“Don’t they look splendid?” said Tommy, feeling the cloth. “When we’ve tidied the place I shall put them on.”

But long before the place was tidy, he could wait no longer, and dressed up.

“Look at me!” he shouted; “bottle-green and brass buttons! Oh, Johnnie, I wish you had some.”

“It’s a good thing there are two Brownies,” said Johnnie, laughing, “and one of them in rags still. I shall do the work this morning.” And he went flourishing round with a broom, while Tommy jumped madly about in his new suit. “Hurrah!” he shouted, “I feel just like the Brownie. What was it Grannie said he sang when he got his clothes? Oh, I know—

> ‘What have we here? Hemten hamten,
> Here will I never more tread nor stampen.’ ”

And on he danced, regardless of the clouds of dust raised by Johnnie, as he drove the broom indiscriminately over the floor, to the tune of his own laughter.

It was laughter which roused the Tailor that morning, laughter coming through the floor from the kitchen below. He scrambled on his things and stole down stairs.

“It’s the Brownie,” he thought; “I must look, if it’s for the last time.”

At the door he paused and listened. The laughter was mixed with singing, and he heard the words—

"What have we here? Hemten hamten,
Here will I never more tread nor stampen."

He pushed in, and this was the sight that met his eyes.

The kitchen in its primeval condition of chaos, the untidy particulars of which were the less apparent, as everything was more or less obscured by the clouds of dust, where Johnnie reigned triumphant, like a witch with her broomstick; and, to crown all, Tommy capering and singing in the Brownie's bottle-green suit, brass buttons and all.

"What's this?" shouted the astonished Tailor, when he could find breath to speak.

"It's the Brownies," sang the boys; and on they danced, for they had worked themselves up into a state of excitement from which it was not easy to settle down.

"Where *is* Brownie?" shouted the father.

"He's here," said Tommy; "we are the Brownies."

"Can't you stop that fooling?" cried the Tailor, angrily. "This is past a joke. Where is the real Brownie, I say?"

"We are the only Brownies, really, father," said Tommy, coming to a full stop, and feeling strongly tempted to run down from laughing to crying. "Ask the Old Owl. It's true, really."

The Tailor saw the boy was in earnest, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"I suppose I'm getting old," he said; "I can't see daylight through this. If you are the Brownie, who has been tidying the kitchen lately?"

"We have," said they.

"But who found my measure?"

"I did," said Johnnie.

"And who sorts your grandmother's scraps?"

"We do," said they.

"And who sets breakfast, and puts my things in order?"

"We do," said they.

"But when do you do it?" asked the Tailor.

"Before you come down," said they.

"But I always have to call you," said the Tailor.

"We get back to bed again," said the boys.

“But how was it you never did it before!” asked the Tailor doubtfully.

“We were idle, we were idle,” said Tommy.

The Tailor’s voice rose to a pitch of desperation—

“But if you do the work,” he shouted, “*Where is the Brownie?*”

“Here!” cried the boys, “and we are very sorry we were Boggarts so long.”

With which the father and sons fell into each other’s arms and fairly wept.

* * * * * *

It will be believed that to explain all this to the Grandmother was not the work of a moment. She understood it all at last, however, and the Tailor could not restrain a little good-humored triumph on the subject. Before he went to work he settled her down in the window with her knitting, and kissed her.

“What do you think of it all, Mother?” he inquired.

“Bairns are a blessing,” said the old lady, tartly. “*I told you so.*”

“That’s not the end, is it?” asked one of the boys in a tone of dismay, for the Doctor had paused here.

“Yes it is,” said he.

“But couldn’t you make a little more end?” asked Deordie, “to tell us what became of them all?”

“I don’t see what there is to tell,” said the Doctor.

“Why, there’s whether they ever saw the Old Owl again, and whether Tommy and Johnnie went on being Brownies,” said the children.

The Doctor laughed.

“Well, be quiet for five minutes,” he said.

“We’ll be as quiet as mice,” said the children.

And as quiet as mice they were. Very like mice, indeed. Very like mice behind a wainscot at night, when you have just thrown something to frighten them away. Death-like stillness for a few seconds, and then all the rustling and scuffling you please. So the children sat holding their breath for a moment or two, and then shuffling feet and smothered bursts of laughter testified to their impatience, and to the difficulty of understanding the

process of story-making as displayed by the Doctor, who sat pulling his beard, and staring at his boots, as he made up “a little more end.”

“Well,” he said, sitting up suddenly, “the Brownies went on with their work in spite of the bottle-green suit, and Trout’s luck returned to the old house once more. Before long Tommy began to work for the farmers, and Baby grew up into a Brownie, and made (as girls are apt to make) the best house-sprite of all. For, in the Brownie habits of self-denial, thoughtfulness, consideration, and the art of little kindnesses, boys are, I am afraid, as a general rule, somewhat behindhand with their sisters. Whether this altogether proceeds from constitutional deficiency on these points in the masculine character, or is one result among many of the code of by-laws which obtains in men’s moral education from the cradle, is a question on which everybody has their own opinion. For the present the young gentlemen may appropriate whichever theory they prefer, and we will go back to the story. The Tailor lived to see his boy-Brownies become men, with all the cares of a prosperous farm on their hands, and his girl-Brownie carry her fairy talents into another home. For these Brownies—young ladies!—are much desired as wives, whereas a man might as well marry an old witch as a young Boggartess.”

“And about the Owl?” clamored the children, rather resentful of the Doctor’s pausing to take breath.

“Of course,” he continued, “the Tailor heard the whole story, and being both anxious to thank the Old Owl for her friendly offices, and also rather curious to see and hear her, he went with the boys one night at moon-rise to the shed by the mere. It was earlier in the evening than when Tommy went, for before daylight had vanished—and at the first appearance of the moon, the impatient Tailor was at the place. There they found the Owl, looking very solemn and stately on the beam. She was sitting among the shadows with her shoulders up, and she fixed her eyes so steadily on the Tailor, that he felt quite overpowered. He made her a civil bow, however, and said—

“I’m much obliged to you, Ma’am, for your good advice to my Tommy.”

The Owl blinked sharply, as if she grudged shutting her eyes for an instant, and then stared on, but not a word spoke she.

“I don’t mean to intrude, Ma’am,” said the Tailor; “but I was wishful to pay my respects and gratitude.”

Still the Owl gazed in determined silence.

“Don’t you remember me?” said Tommy pitifully. “I did everything you told me. Won’t you even say good-bye?” and he went up towards her.

The Owl's eyes contracted, she shuddered a few tufts of fluff into the shed, shook her wings, and shouting "Oohoo!" at the top of her voice, flew out upon the moor. The Tailor and his sons rushed out to watch her. They could see her clearly against the green twilight sky, flapping rapidly away with her round face to the pale moon. "Good-bye!" they shouted as she disappeared; first the departing owl, then a shadowy body with flapping sails, then two wings beating the same measured time, then two moving lines still to the old tune, then a stroke, a fancy, and then—the green sky and the pale moon, but the Old Owl was gone.

"Did she never come back?" asked Tiny in subdued tones, for the Doctor had paused again.

"No," said he; "at least not to the shed by the mere. Tommy saw many owls after this in the course of his life; but as none of them would speak, and as most of them were addicted to the unconventional customs of staring and winking, he could not distinguish his friend, if she were among them. And now I think that is all."

"Is that the very very end?" asked Tiny.

"The very very end," said the Doctor.

"I suppose there might be more and more ends," speculated Deordie —"about whether the Brownies had any children when they grew into farmers, and whether the children were Brownies, and whether *they* had other Brownies, and so on and on." And Deordie rocked himself among the geraniums, in the luxurious imagination of an endless fairy tale.

"You insatiable rascal!" said the Doctor. "Not another word. Jump up, for I'm going to see you home. I have to be off early to-morrow."

"Where?" said Deordie.

"Never mind. I shall be away all day, and I want to be at home in good time in the evening, for I mean to attack that crop of groundsel between the sweet-pea hedges. You know, no Brownies come to my homestead!"

And the Doctor's mouth twitched a little till he fixed it into a stiff smile.

The children tried hard to extract some more ends out of him on the way to the Rectory; but he declined to pursue the history of the Trout family through indefinite generations. It was decided on all hands, however, that Tommy Trout was evidently one and the same with Tommy Trout who pulled the cat out of the well, because "it was just a sort of thing for a Brownie to do, you know!" and that Johnnie Green (who, of course, was not Johnnie Trout,) was some unworthy village acquaintance, and "a thorough Boggart."

“Doctor!” said Tiny, as they stood by the garden-gate, “how long do you think gentlemen’s pocket-handkerchiefs take to wear out?”

“That, my dear Madam,” said the Doctor, “must depend, like other terrestrial matters, upon circumstances; whether the gentleman bought fine cambric, or coarse cotton with pink portraits of the reigning Sovereign, to commence with; whether he catches many colds, has his pocket picked, takes snuff, or allows his washerwoman to use washing powders. But why do you want to know?”

“I shan’t tell you that,” said Tiny, who was spoilt by the Doctor, and consequently tyrannized in proportion; “but I will tell you what I mean to do. I mean to tell Mother that when Father wants any more pocket handkerchiefs hemmed, she had better put them by the bath in the nursery, and perhaps some Brownie will come and do them.”

“Kiss my fluffy face!” said the Doctor in sepulchral tones.

“The owl is too high up,” said Tiny, tossing her head.

The Doctor lifted her four feet or so, obtained his kiss, and set her down again.

“You’re not fluffy at all,” said she in a tone of the utmost contempt; “you’re tickly and bristly. Puss is more fluffy, and Father is scrubby and scratchy, because he shaves.”

“And which of the three styles do you prefer?” said the Doctor.

“Not tickly and bristly,” said Tiny with firmness, and she strutted up the walk for a pace or two, and then turned round to laugh over her shoulder.

“Good-night!” shouted her victim, shaking his fist after her.

The other children took a noisy farewell, and they all raced into the house, to give joint versions of the fairy tale, first to the parents in the drawing-room, and then to nurse in the nursery.

The Doctor went home also, with his poodle at his heels, but not by the way he came. He went out of his way, which was odd; but then the Doctor was “a little odd,” and moreover this was always the end of his evening walk. Through the church-yard, where spreading cedars and stiff yews rose from the velvet grass, and where among tombstones and crosses of various devices lay one of older and uglier date, by which he stayed. It was framed by a border of the most brilliant flowers, and it would seem as if the Doctor must have been the gardener, for he picked off some dead ones, and put them absently in his pocket. Then he looked round, as if to see that he was alone. Not a soul was to be seen, and the moonlight and shadow lay quietly

side by side, as the dead do in their graves. The Doctor stooped down and took off his hat.

"Good-night, Marcia," he said, in a low quiet voice. "Good-night, my darling!" The dog licked his hand, but there was no voice to answer, nor any that regarded.

Poor foolish Doctor! Most foolish to speak to the departed with his face earthwards. But we are weak mortals, the best of us; and this man (one of the very best) raised his head at last, and went home like a lonely owl with his face to the moon and the sky.

A BORROWED BROWNIE.

"I CAN'T imagine," said the Rector, walking into the drawing-room the following afternoon; "I can't imagine where Tiny is. I want her to drive to the other end of the parish with me."

"There she comes," said his wife, looking out of the window, "by the garden-gate, with a great basket; what has she been after?"

The Rector went out to discover, and met his daughter looking decidedly earthy, and seemingly much exhausted by the weight of a basketful of groundsel plants.

"Where have you been?" said he.

"In the Doctor's garden," said Tiny triumphantly; "and look what I have done? I've weeded his sweet-peas, and brought away the groundsel; so when he gets home to-night he'll think a Brownie has been in the garden, for Mrs. Pickles has promised not to tell him."

"But look here!" said the Rector, affecting a great appearance of severity, "you're my Brownie, not his. Supposing Tommy Trout had gone and weeded Farmer Swede's garden, and brought back his weeds to go to seed on the Tailor's flower-beds, how do you think he would have liked it?"

Tiny looked rather crestfallen. When one has fairly carried through a splendid benevolence of this kind, it is trying to find oneself in the wrong. She crept up to the Rector, however, and put her golden head upon his arm.

"But, Father dear," she pleaded, "I didn't mean not to be your Brownie; only, you know, you had got five left at home, and it was only for a short time, and the Doctor hasn't any Brownie at all. Don't you pity him?"

And the Rector, who was old enough to remember that grave-stone story we wot of, hugged his Brownie in his arms, and answered—

"My Darling, I do pity him!"

THE LAND OF LOST TOYS.

AN EARTHQUAKE IN THE NURSERY.

It was certainly an aggravated offence. It is generally understood in families that "boys will be boys," but there is a limit to the forbearance implied in the extenuating axiom. Master Sam was condemned to the back nursery for the rest of the day.

He always had had the knack of breaking his own toys,—he not unfrequently broke other people's; but accidents will happen, and his twin sister and factotum, Dot, was long-suffering.

Dot was fat, resolute, hasty, and devotedly unselfish. When Sam scalped her new doll, and fastened the glossy black curls to a wigwam improvised with the curtains of the four-post bed in the best bedroom, Dot was sorely tried. As her eyes passed from the crownless doll on the floor to the floss-silk ringlets hanging from the bed-furniture, her round rosy face grew rounder and rosier, and tears burst from her eyes. But in a moment more she clenched her little fists, forced back the tears, and gave vent to her favorite saying, "I don't care."

That sentence was Dot's bane and antidote; it was her vice and her virtue. It was her standing consolation, and it brought her into all her scrapes. It was her one panacea for all the ups and downs of her life (and in the nursery where Sam developed his organ of destructiveness there were ups and downs not a few); and it was the form her naughtiness took when she was naughty.

"Don't care fell into a goose-pond, Miss Dot," said nurse, on one occasion of the kind.

"I don't care if he did," said Miss Dot; and as nurse knew no further feature of the goose-pond adventure which met this view of it, she closed the subject by putting Dot into the corner.

In the strength of *Don't care*, and her love for Sam, Dot bore much and long. Her dolls perished by ingenious but untimely deaths. Her toys were put to purposes for which they were never intended, and suffered accordingly.

But Sam was penitent, and Dot was heroic. Florinda's scalp was mended with a hot knitting-needle and a perpetual bonnet, and Dot rescued her paint-brushes from the glue-pot, and smelt her India-rubber as it boiled down in Sam's water-proof manufactory, with long-suffering forbearance.

There are, however, as we have said, limits to everything. An earthquake celebrated with the whole contents of the toy cupboard is not to be borne.

The matter was this. Early one morning Sam announced that he had a glorious project on hand. He was going to give a grand show and entertainment, far surpassing all the nursery imitations of circuses, conjurors, lectures on chemistry, and so forth, with which they had ever amused themselves. He refused to confide his plans to the faithful Dot; but he begged her to lend him all the toys she possessed, in return for which she was to be the sole spectator of the fun. He let out that the idea had suggested itself to him after the sight of a Diorama to which they had been taken, but he would not allow that it was anything of the same kind; in proof of which she was at liberty to keep back her paint-box. Dot tried hard to penetrate the secret, and to reserve some of her things from the general conscription. But Sam was obstinate. He would tell nothing, and he wanted everything. The dolls, the bricks (especially the bricks), the tea-things, the German farm, the Swiss cottages, the animals, and all the dolls' furniture. Dot gave them with a doubtful mind, and consoled herself as she watched Sam carrying pieces of board and a green table cover into the back nursery, with the prospect of a show. At last, Sam threw open the door and ushered her into the nursery rocking-chair.

The boy had certainly some constructive as well as destructive talent. Upon a sort of impromptu table covered with green cloth he had arranged all the toys in rough imitation of a town, with its streets and buildings. The relative proportion of the parts was certainly not good; but it was not Sam's fault that the doll's house and the German farm, his own brick buildings, and the Swiss cottages, were all on totally different scales of size. He had ingeniously put the larger things in the foreground, keeping the small farm-buildings from the German box at the far end of the streets, yet after all the perspective was extreme. The effect of three large horses from the toy stables in front, with the cows from the small Noah's Ark in the distance, was admirable; but the big dolls seated in an unroofed building, made with the wooden bricks on no architectural principle but that of a pound, and taking tea out of the new china tea-things, looked simply ridiculous.

Dot's eyes, however, saw no defects, and she clapped vehemently.

“Here, ladies and gentlemen,” said Sam, waving his hand politely towards the rocking-chair, “you see the great city of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal——”

At this display of geographical accuracy Dot fairly cheered, and rocked herself to and fro in unmitigated enjoyment.

“——as it appeared,” continued the showman, “on the morning of November 1st, 1755.”

Never having had occasion to apply Mangnall’s Questions to the exigencies of every-day life, this date in no way disturbed Dot’s comfort.

“In this house,” Sam proceeded, “a party of Portuguese ladies of rank may be seen taking tea together.”

“*Breakfast*, you mean,” said Dot; “you said it was in the morning, you know.”

“Well, they took tea to their breakfast,” said Sam. “Don’t interrupt me. You are the audience, and you mustn’t speak. Here you see the horses of the English ambassador out airing with his groom. There you see two peasants —no! they are *not* Noah and his wife, Dot, and if you go on talking I shall shut up. I say they are peasants peacefully driving cattle. At this moment a rumbling sound startles every one in the city”—here Sam rolled some croquet balls up and down in a box, but the dolls sat as quiet as before, and Dot alone was startled,—“this was succeeded by a slight shock”—here he shook the table, which upset some of the buildings belonging to the German farm.—“Some houses fell.”—Dot began to look anxious.—“This shock was followed by several others.”—“Take care,” she begged—“of increasing magnitude”—“Oh, Sam!” Dot shrieked, jumping up, “you’re breaking the china!”—“The largest buildings shook to their foundations,”—“Sam! Sam! the doll’s house is falling,” Dot cried, making wild efforts to save it: but Sam held her back with one arm, whilst with the other he began to pull at the boards which formed his table—“Suddenly the ground split and opened with a fearful yawn”—Dot’s shrieks shamed the impassive dolls, as Sam jerked out the boards by a dextrous movement, and doll’s house, brick buildings, the farm, the Swiss cottages, and the whole toy-stock of the nursery, sank together in ruins. Quite unabashed by the evident damage, Sam continued—“and in a moment the whole magnificent city of Lisbon was swallowed up. Dot! Dot! don’t be a muff! What’s the matter? It’s splendid fun. Things must be broken sometime, and I’m sure it was exactly like the real thing. Dot! why don’t you speak? Dot! my dear Dot! You don’t care, do you? I didn’t think you’d mind it so. It was such a splendid earthquake. Oh! try not to go on like that!”

But Dot's feelings were far beyond her own control, much more that of Master Sam, at this moment. She was gasping and choking, and when at last she found breath it was only to throw herself on her face upon the floor with bitter and uncontrollable sobbing.

It was certainly a mild punishment that condemned Master Sam to the back nursery for the rest of the day. It had, however, this additional severity, that during the afternoon Aunt Penelope was expected to arrive.

AUNT PENELOPE.

Aunt Penelope was one of those dear, good souls, who, single themselves, have, as real or adopted relatives, the interests of a dozen families, instead of one, at heart. There are few people whose youth has not owned the influence of at least one such friend. It may be a good habit, the first interest in some life-loved pursuit or favorite author, some pretty feminine art, or delicate womanly counsel enforced by those narratives of real life that are more interesting than any fiction: it may be only the periodical return of gifts and kindness, and the store of family histories that no one else can tell; but we all owe something to such an aunt or uncle—the fairy godmothers of real life.

The benefits which Sam and Dot reaped from Aunt Penelope's visits, may be summed up under the heads of presents and stories, with a general leaning to indulgence in the matters of punishment, lessons, and going to bed, which perhaps is natural to aunts and uncles who have no positive responsibilities in the young people's education, and are not the daily sufferers by the lack of due discipline.

Aunt Penelope's presents were lovely. Aunt Penelope's stories were charming. There was generally a moral wrapped up in them, like the motto in a cracker-bonbon; but it was quite in the inside, so to speak, and there was abundance of smart paper and sugar-plums.

All things considered, it was certainly most proper that the much-injured Dot should be dressed out in her best, and have access to dessert, the dining-room, and Aunt Penelope, whilst Sam was kept upstairs. And yet it was Dot who (her first burst of grief being over), fought stoutly for his pardon all the time she was being dressed, and was afterwards detected in the act of endeavoring to push fragments of raspberry tart through the nursery key-hole.

"You GOOD thing!" Sam emphatically exclaimed, as he heard her in fierce conflict on the other side of the door with the nurse who found her —"You GOOD thing! leave me alone, for I deserve it."

He really was very penitent. He was too fond of Dot not to regret the unexpected degree of distress he had caused her; and Dot made much of his penitence in her intercessions in the drawing-room.

"Sam is so very sorry," she said, "he says he knows he deserves it. I think he ought to come down. He is so *very* sorry!"

Aunt Penelope, as usual, took the lenient side, joining her entreaties to Dot's, and it ended in Master Sam's being hurriedly scrubbed and brushed, and shoved into his black velvet suit, and sent downstairs, rather red about the eyelids, and looking very sheepish.

"Oh, Dot!" he exclaimed, as soon as he could get her into a corner, "I am so very, very sorry! particularly about the tea-things."

"Never mind," said Dot, "I don't care; and I've asked for a story, and we're going into the library." As Dot said this, she jerked her head expressively in the direction of the sofa, where Aunt Penelope was just casting on stitches preparatory to beginning a pair of her famous ribbed socks for Papa, whilst she gave to Mamma's conversation that sympathy, which (like her knitting-needles) was always at the service of her large circle of friends. Dot anxiously watched the bow on the top of her cap as it danced and nodded with the force of Mamma's observations. At last it gave a little chorus of jerks, as one should say, "Certainly, undoubtedly." And then the story came to an end, and Dot, who had been slowly creeping nearer, fairly took Aunt Penelope by the hand, and carried her off, knitting and all, to the library.

"Now, please," said Dot, when she had struggled into a chair that was too tall for her.

"Stop a minute!" cried Sam, who was perched in the opposite one, "the horsehair tickles my legs."

"Put your pocket-handkerchief under them, as I do," said Dot. "*Now*, Aunt Penelope."

"No, wait," groaned Sam; "it isn't big enough; it only covers one leg."

Dot slid down again, and ran to Sam.

"Take my handkerchief for the other."

"But what will you do?" said Sam.

"Oh, I don't care," said Dot, scrambling back into her place. "Now, Aunty, please."

And Aunt Penelope began.

THE LAND OF LOST TOYS.

"I SUPPOSE people who have children transfer their childish follies and fancies to them, and become properly sedate and grown-up. Perhaps it is because I am an old maid, and have none, that some of my nursery whims stick to me, and I find myself liking things, and wanting things, quite out of keeping with my cap and time of life. For instance. Anything in the shape of a toy-shop (from a London bazaar to a village window, with Dutch dolls, leather balls, and wooden battle-dores) quite unnerves me, so to speak. When I see one of those boxes containing a jar, a churn, a kettle, a pan, a coffee-pot, a cauldron on three legs, and sundry dishes, all of the smoothest wood, and with the immemorial red flower on one side of each vessel, I fairly long for an excuse for playing with them, and for trying (positively for the last time) if the lids *do* come off, and whether the kettle will (literally, as well as metaphorically) hold water. Then if, by good or ill luck, there is a child flattening its little nose against the window with longing eyes, my purse is soon empty; and as it toddles off with a square parcel under one arm, and a lovely being in black ringlets and white tissue paper in the other, I wish that I were worthy of being asked to join the ensuing play. Don't suppose there is any generosity in this. I have only done what we are all glad to do. I have found an excuse for indulging a pet weakness. As I said, it is not merely the new and expensive toys that attract me; I think my weakest corner is where the penny boxes lie, the wooden tea-things (with the above-named flower in miniature), the soldiers on their lazy tongs, the nine-pins, and the tiny farm.

"I need hardly say that the toy booth in a village fair tries me very hard. It tried me in childhood, when I was often short of pence, and when 'the Feast' came once a year. It never tried me more than on one occasion, lately, when I was revisiting my old home.

"It was deep Midsummer, and the Feast. I had children with me of course (I find children, somehow, wherever I go), and when we got into the fair, there were children of people whom I had known as children, with just the same love for a monkey going up one side of a yellow stick and coming down the other, and just as strong heads for a giddy-go-round on a hot day and a diet of peppermint lozenges, as their fathers and mothers before them. There were the very same names—and here and there it seemed the very same faces—I knew so long ago. A few shillings were indeed well expended in brightening those familiar eyes: and then there were the children with me. . . . Besides, there really did seem to be an unusually nice assortment of things, and the man was very intelligent (in reference to his wares: . . . . Well, well! It was two o'clock P. M. when we went in at one end of that glittering avenue of drums, dolls, trumpets, accordions, work-boxes and

what not; but what o'clock it was when I came out at the other end, with a shilling and some coppers in my pocket, and was cheered, I can't say, though I should like to have been able to be accurate about the time, because of what followed.)

"I thought the best thing I could do was to get out of the fair at once, so I went up the village and struck off across some fields into a little wood that lay near. (A favorite walk in old times.) As I turned out of the booth, my foot struck against one of the yellow sticks of the climbing monkeys. The monkey was gone, and the stick broken. It set me thinking as I walked along.

"What an untold number of pretty and ingenious things one does (not wear out in honorable wear and tear, but) utterly lose, and wilfully destroy, in one's young days—things that would have given pleasure to so many more young eyes, if they had been kept a little longer—things that one would so value in later years, if some of them had survived the dissipating and destructive days of Nurserydom. I recalled a young lady I knew, whose room was adorned with knick-knacks of a kind I had often envied. They were not plaster figures, old china, wax-work flowers under a glass, or ordinary ornaments of any kind. They were her old toys. Perhaps she had not had many of them, and had been the more careful of those she had. She had certainly been very fond of them, and had kept more of them than any one I ever knew. A faded doll slept in its cradle at the foot of her bed. A wooden elephant stood on the dressing-table, and a poodle that had lost his bark put out a red-flannel tongue with quixotic violence at a windmill on the opposite corner of the mantelpiece. Everything had a story of its own. Indeed the whole room must have been redolent with the sweet story of childhood, of which the toys were the illustrations, or like a poem of which the toys were the verses. She used to have children to play with them sometimes, and this was a high honor. She is married now, and has children of her own, who on birthdays and holidays will forsake the newest of their own possessions to play with 'mamma's toys.'

"I was roused from these recollections by the pleasure of getting into the wood.

"If I have a stronger predilection than my love for toys, it is my love for woods, and, like the other, it dates from childhood. It was born and bred with me, and I fancy will stay with me till I die. The soothing scents of leaf mould, moss, and fern (not to speak of flowers)—the pale green veil in spring, the rich shade in summer, the rustle of the dry leaves in autumn, I suppose an old woman may enjoy all these, my dears, as well as you. But I

think I could make ‘fairy jam’ of hips and haws in acorn cups now, if any child would be condescending enough to play with me.

“*This* wood, too, had associations.

“I strolled on in leisurely enjoyment, and at last seated myself at the foot of a tree to rest. I was hot and tired; partly with the mid-day heat and the atmosphere of the fair, partly with the exertion of calculating change in the purchase of articles ranging in price from three farthings upwards. The tree under which I sat was an old friend. There was a hole at its base that I knew well. Two roots covered with exquisite moss ran out from each side, like the arms of a chair, and between them there accumulated year after year a rich, though tiny store of dark leaf-mould. We always used to say that fairies lived within, though I never saw anything go in myself but wood beetles. There was one going in at that moment.

“How little the wood was changed! I bent my head for a few seconds, and, closing my eyes, drank in the delicious and suggestive scents of earth and moss about the dear old tree. I had been so long parted from the place that I could hardly believe that I was in the old familiar spot. Surely it was only one of the many dreams in which I had played again beneath those trees! But when I reopened my eyes there was the same hole, and, oddly enough, the same beetle or one just like it. I had not noticed till that moment how much larger the hole was than it used to be in my young days.

“ ‘I suppose the rain and so forth wears them away in time,’ I said vaguely.

“ ‘Suppose it does,’ said the beetle politely; ‘will you walk in?’

“I don’t know why I was not so overpoweringly astonished as you would imagine. I think I was a good deal absorbed in considering the size of the hole, and the very foolish wish that seized me to do what I had often longed to do in childhood, and creep in. I *had* so much regard for propriety as to see that there was no one to witness the escapade. Then I tucked my skirts round me, put my spectacles into my pocket for fear they should get broken, and in I went.

“I must say one thing. A wood is charming enough (no one appreciates it more than myself), but, if you have never been there, you have no idea how much nicer it is inside than on the surface. Oh, the mosses—the gorgeous mosses! The fretted lichens! The fungi like flowers for beauty, and the flowers like nothing you have ever seen!

“Where the beetle went to I don’t know. I could stand up now quite well, and I wandered on till dusk in unwearied admiration. I was among some large beeches as it grew dark, and was beginning to wonder how I should

find my way (not that I had lost it, having none to lose), when suddenly lights burst from every tree, and the whole place was illuminated. The nearest approach to this scene that I ever witnessed above ground was in a wood near the Hague in Holland. There, what look like tiny glass tumblers holding floating wicks, are fastened to the trunks of the fine old trees, at intervals of sufficient distance to make the light and shade mysterious, and to give effect to the full blaze when you reach the spot where the hanging chains of lamps illuminate the 'Pavilion' and the open space where the band plays, and where the townsfolk assemble by hundreds to drink coffee and enjoy the music. I was the more reminded of the Dutch 'bosch' because, after wandering some time among the lighted trees, I heard distant sounds of music, and came at last upon a glade lit up in a similar manner, except that the whole effect was incomparably more brilliant.

"As I stood for a moment doubting whether I should proceed, and a good deal puzzled about the whole affair, I caught sight of a large spider crouched up in a corner with his stomach on the ground and his knees above his head, as some spiders do sit, and looking at me, as I fancied, through a pair of spectacles. (About the spectacles I do not feel sure. It may have been two of his bent legs in apparent connection with his prominent eyes.) I thought of the beetle, and said civilly, 'Can you tell me, sir, if this is Fairyland?' The spider took off his spectacles (or untucked his legs), and took a sideways run out of his corner.

" 'Well,' he said, 'it's a Providence. The fact is, it's the Land of Lost Toys. You haven't such a thing as a fly anywhere about you, have you?'

" 'No,' I said, 'I'm sorry to say I have not.' This was not strictly true, for I was not at all sorry; but I wished to be civil to the old gentleman, for he projected his eyes at me with such an intense (I had almost said greedy) gaze, that I felt quite frightened.

" 'How did you pass the sentries?' he inquired.

" 'I never saw any,' I answered.

" 'You couldn't have seen anything if you didn't see them,' he said; 'but perhaps you don't know. They're the glow-worms. Six to each tree, so they light the road, and challenge the passers-by. Why didn't they challenge you?'

" 'I don't know,' I began, 'unless the beetle——'

" 'I don't like beetles,' interrupted the spider, stretching each leg in turn by sticking it up above him, 'all shell and no flavor. You never tried walking on anything of that sort, did you?' and he pointed with one leg to a long thread that fastened a web above his head.

“ ‘Certainly not,’ said I.

“ ‘I’m afraid it wouldn’t bear you,’ he observed slowly.

“ ‘I’m quite sure it wouldn’t,’ I hastened to reply. ‘I wouldn’t try for worlds. It would spoil your pretty work in a moment. Good-evening.’

“And I hurried forward. Once I looked back, but the spider was not following me. He was in his hole again, on his stomach, with his knees above his head, and looking (apparently through his spectacles) down the road up which I came.

“I soon forgot him in the sight before me. I had reached the open place with the lights and the music; but how shall I describe the spectacle that I beheld?

“I have spoken of the effect of a toy-shop on my feelings. Now imagine a toy-fair, brighter and gayer than the brightest bazaar ever seen, held in an open glade, where forest-trees stood majestically behind the glittering stalls, and stretched their gigantic arms above our heads, brilliant with a thousand hanging lamps. At the moment of my entrance all was silent and quiet. The toys lay in their places looking so incredibly attractive that I reflected with disgust that all my ready cash, except one shilling and some coppers, had melted away amid the tawdry fascinations of a village booth. I was counting the coppers (sevenpence halfpenny), when all in a moment a dozen sixpenny fiddles leaped from their places and began to play, accordions of all sizes joined them, the drumsticks beat upon the drums, the penny trumpets sounded, and yellow flutes took up the melody on high notes, and bore it away through the trees. It was weird fairy-music but quite delightful. The nearest approach to it that I know of above ground is to hear a wild dreamy air very well whistled to a pianoforte accompaniment.

“When the music began, all the toys rose. The dolls jumped down and began to dance. The poodles barked, the pannier donkeys wagged their ears, the windmills turned, the puzzles put themselves together, the bricks built houses, the balls flew from side to side, the battle-doors and shuttle-cocks kept it up among themselves, and the skipping-ropes went round, the hoops ran off, and the sticks went after them, the cobbler’s wax at the tails of all the green frogs gave way, and they jumped at the same moment, whilst an old-fashioned go-cart ran madly about with nobody inside. It was most exhilarating.

“I soon became aware that the beetle was once more at my elbow.

“ ‘There are some beautiful toys here,’ I said.

“ ‘Well, yes,’ he replied, ‘and some odd-looking ones, too. You see, whatever has been really used by any child as a plaything gets a right to

come down here in the end; and there is some very queer company, I assure you. Look there.'

"I looked, and said, 'It seems to be a potato.'

" 'So it is,' said the beetle. 'It belonged to an Irish child in one of your great cities. But to whom the child belonged I don't know, and I don't think he knew himself. He lived in a corner of a dirty, over-crowded room, and into this corner, one day, the potato rolled. It was the only plaything he ever had. He stuck two cinders into it for eyes, scraped a nose and mouth, and loved it. He sat upon it during the day, for fear it should be taken from him, but in the dark he took it out and played with it. He was often hungry, but he never ate that potato. When he died it rolled out of the corner, and was swept into the ashes. Then it came down here.'

" 'What a sad story!' I exclaimed.

"The beetle seemed in no way affected.

" 'It is a curious thing,' he rambled on, 'that potato takes quite a good place among the toys. You see, rank and precedence down here is entirely a question of age; that is, of the length of time that any plaything has been in the possession of a child; and all kinds of ugly old things hold the first rank; whereas the most costly and beautiful works of art have often been smashed or lost, by the spoilt children of rich people, in two or three days. If you care for sad stories, there is another queer thing belonging to a child who died.'

"It appeared to be a large sheet of canvas with some strange kind of needlework upon it.

" 'It belonged to a little girl in a rich household,' the beetle continued; 'she was an invalid, and difficult to amuse. We have lots of her toys, and very pretty ones too. At last some one taught her to make caterpillars in wool-work. A bit of work was to be done in a certain stitch and then cut with scissors, which made it look like a hairy caterpillar. The child took to this, and cared for nothing else. Wool of every shade was procured for her, and she made caterpillars of all colors. Her only complaint was that they did not turn into butterflies. However, she was a sweet, gentle-tempered child, and she went on, hoping that they would do so, and making new ones. One day she was heard talking and laughing in her bed for joy. She said that all the caterpillars had become butterflies of many colors, and that the room was full of them. In that happy fancy she died.'

" 'And the caterpillars came down here?'

" 'Not for a long time,' said the beetle; 'her mother kept them while *she* lived, and then they were lost and came down. No toys come down here till they are broken or lost.'

“ ‘What are those sticks doing here?’ I asked.

“The music had ceased, and all the toys were lying quiet. Up in a corner leaned a large bundle of walking-sticks. They are often sold in toy-shops, but I wondered on what grounds they came here.

“ ‘Did you ever meet with a too benevolent old gentleman wondering where on earth his sticks go to?’ said the beetle. ‘Why do they lend them to their grandchildren? The young rogues use them as hobby-horses and lose them, and down they come, and the sentinels cannot stop them. The real hobby-horses won’t allow them to ride with them, however. There was a meeting on the subject. Every stick was put through an examination. ‘Where is your nose? Where is your mane? Where are your wheels?’ The last was a poser. Some of them had got noses, but none of them had got wheels. So they were not true hobby-horses. Something of the kind occurred with the elder whistles.’

“ ‘The what?’ I asked.

“ ‘Whistles that boys make of elder sticks with the pith scooped out,’ said the beetle. ‘The real instruments would not allow them to play with them. The elder-whistles said they would not have joined had they been asked. They were amateurs, and never played with professionals. So they have private concerts with the combs and curl-papers. But, bless you, toys of this kind are endless here! Teetotums made of old cotton reels, tea-sets of acorn cups, dinner-sets of old shells, monkeys made of bits of sponge, all sorts of things made of breastbones and merrythoughts, old packs of cards that are always building themselves into houses and getting knocked down when the band begins to play, feathers, rabbits’ tails——’

“ ‘Ah! I have heard about rabbits’ tails,’ I said.

“ ‘There they are,’ the beetle continued; ‘and when the band plays you will see how they skip and run. I don’t believe you would find out that they had no bodies, for my experience of a warren is, that when rabbits skip and run it is the tails chiefly that you do see. But of all the amateur toys the most successful are the boats. We have a lake for our craft, you know, and there’s quite a fleet of boats made out of old cork floats in fishing villages. Then, you see, the old bits of cork have really been to sea, and seen a good deal of service on the herring nets, and so they quite take the lead of the smart shop ships, that have never been beyond a pond or a tub of water. But that’s an exception. Amateur toys are mostly very dowdy. Look at that box.’

“I looked, thought I must have seen it before, and wondered why a very common-looking box without a lid should affect me so strangely, and why

my memory should seem struggling to bring it back out of the past. Suddenly it came to me—it was our old Toy Box.

"I had completely forgotten that nursery institution till recalled by the familiar aspect of the inside, which was papered with proof-sheets of some old novel on which black stars had been stamped by way of ornament. Dim memories of how these stars, and the angles of the box, and certain projecting nails interfered with the letter-press and defeated all attempts to trace the thread of the nameless narrative, stole back over my brain; and I seemed once more, with my head in the Toy Box, to beguile a wet afternoon by apoplectic endeavors to follow the fortunes of Sir Charles and Lady Belinda, as they took a favorable turn in the left-hand corner at the bottom of the trunk.

" 'What are you staring at?' said the beetle.

" 'It's my old Toy Box!' I exclaimed.

"The beetle rolled on to his back, and struggled helplessly with his legs: I turned him over. (Neither the first nor the last time of my showing that attention to beetles.)

" 'That's right,' he said, 'set me on my legs. What a turn you gave me! You don't mean to say you have any toys here? If you have, the sooner you make your way home the better.'

" 'Why?' I inquired.

" 'Well,' he said, 'there's a very strong feeling in the place. The toys think that they are ill-treated, and not taken care of by children in general. And there is some truth in it. Toys come down here by scores that have been broken the first day. And they are all quite resolved that if any of their old masters or mistresses come this way they shall be punished.'

" 'How will they be punished?' I inquired.

" 'Exactly as they did to their toys, their toys will do to them. All is perfectly fair and regular.'

" 'I don't know that I treated mine particularly badly,' I said; 'but I think I would rather go.'

" 'I think you'd better,' said the beetle. 'Good-evening!' and I saw him no more.

"I turned to go, but somehow I lost the road. At last, as I thought, I found it, and had gone a few steps when I came on a detachment of wooden soldiers, drawn up on their lazy tongs. I thought it better to wait till they got out of the way, so I turned back, and sat down in a corner in some alarm. As I did so, I heard a click, and the lid of a small box covered with mottled

paper burst open, and up jumped a figure in a blue striped shirt and a rabbit-skin beard, whose eyes were intently fixed on me. He was very like my old Jack-in-a-box. My back began to creep, and I wildly meditated escape, frantically trying at the same time to recall whether it were I or my brother who originated the idea of making a small bonfire of our own one 5th of November, and burning the old Jack-in-a-box for Guy Fawkes, till nothing was left of him but a twirling bit of red-hot wire and a strong smell of frizzled fur. At this moment he nodded to me and spoke.

" 'Oh! that's you, is it?' he said.

" 'No, it is not,' I answered, hastily; for I was quite demoralized by fear and the strangeness of the situation.

" 'Who is it, then?' he inquired.

" 'I'm sure I don't know,' I said; and really I was so confused that I hardly did.

" 'Well, *we* know,' said the Jack-in-a-box, 'and that's all that's needed. Now, my friends,' he continued, addressing the toys who had begun to crowd round us, 'whoever recognizes a mistress and remembers a grudge—the hour of our revenge has come. Can we any of us forget the treatment we received at her hands? No! When we think of the ingenious fancy, the patient skill, that went to our manufacture; that fitted the delicate joints and springs, laid on the paint and varnish, and gave back-hair combs, and ear-rings to our smallest dolls, we feel that we deserved more care than we received. When we reflect upon the kind friends who bought us with their money, and gave us away in the benevolence of their hearts, we know that for their sakes we ought to have been longer kept and better valued. And when we remember that the sole object of our own existence was to give pleasure and amusement to our possessors, we have no hesitation in believing that we deserved a handsomer return than to have had our springs broken, our paint dirtied, and our earthly careers so untimely shortened by wilful mischief or fickle neglect. My friends, the prisoner is at the bar.'

" 'I am not,' I said; for I was determined not to give in as long as resistance was possible. But as I said it I became aware, to my unutterable amazement, that I was inside the go-cart. How I got there is to this moment a mystery to me—but there I was.

"There was a great deal of excitement about the Jack-in-a-box's speech. It was evident that he was considered an orator, and, indeed, I have seen counsel in a real court look wonderfully like him. Meanwhile, my old toys appeared to be getting together. I had no idea that I had had so many. I had really been very fond of most of them, and my heart beat as the sight of

them recalled scenes long forgotten, and took me back to childhood and home. There were my little gardening tools, and my slate, and there was the big doll's bedstead, that had a real mattress, and real sheets and blankets, all marked with the letter D, and a workbasket made in the blind school, and a shilling School of Art paint box, and a wooden doll we used to call the Dowager, and innumerable other toys which I had forgotten till the sight of them recalled them to my memory, but which have again passed from my mind. Exactly opposite to me stood the Chinese mandarin, nodding as I had never seen him nod since the day when I finally stopped his performances by ill-directed efforts to discover how he did it.

"And what was that familiar figure among the rest, in a yellow silk dress and maroon velvet cloak and hood trimmed with black lace? How those clothes recalled the friends who gave them to me! And surely this was no other than my dear doll Rosa—the beloved companion of five years of my youth, whose hair I wore in a locket after I was grown up. No one could say I had ill-treated *her*. Indeed, she fixed her eyes on me with a most encouraging smile—but then she always smiled, her mouth was painted so.

" 'All whom it may concern, take notice,' shouted the Jack-in-a-box, at this point, 'that the rule of this honorable court is tit for tat.'

" 'Tit, tat, tumble two,' muttered the slate in a cracked voice. (How well I remembered the fall that cracked it, and the sly games of tit tat that varied the monotony of our long multiplication sums!)

" 'What are you talking about?' said the Jack-in-a-box, sharply; 'if you have grievances, state them, and you shall have satisfaction, as I told you before.'

" '——and five make nine,' added the slate promptly, 'and six are fifteen, and eight are twenty-seven—there we go again! I wonder why I never get up to the top of a line of figures right. It will never prove at this rate.'

" 'His mind is lost in calculations,' said the Jack-in-a-box, 'besides—between ourselves—he has been "cracky" for some time. Let some one else speak, and observe that no one is at liberty to pass a sentence on the prisoner heavier than what he has suffered from her. I reserve *my* judgment to the last.'

" 'I know what that will be,' thought I; 'oh dear! oh dear! that a respectable maiden lady should live to be burnt as a Guy Fawkes!'

" 'Let the prisoner drink a gallon of iced water at once, and then be left to die of thirst.'

“The horrible idea that the speaker might possibly have the power to enforce his sentence diverted my attention from the slate, and I looked round. In front of the Jack-in-a-box stood a tiny red flower-pot and saucer, in which was a miniature cactus. My thoughts flew back to a bazaar in London where, years ago, a stand of these fairy plants had excited my warmest longings, and where a benevolent old gentleman whom I had not seen before, and never saw again, bought this one and gave it to me. Vague memories of his directions for re-potting and tending it reproached me from the past. My mind misgave me that after all it had died a dusty death for lack of water. True, the cactus tribe being succulent plants do not demand much moisture, but I had reason to fear that, in this instance, the principle had been applied too far, and that after copious baths of cold spring water in the first days of its popularity it had eventually perished by drought. I suppose I looked guilty, for it nodded its prickly head towards me, and said, ‘Ah! you know me. You remember what I was, do you? Did you ever think of what I might have been? There was a fairy rose which came down here not long ago—a common rose enough, in a broken pot patched with string and white paint. It had lived in a street where it was the only pure beautiful thing your eyes could see. When the girl who kept it died there were eighteen roses upon it. She was eighteen years old, and they put the roses in the coffin with her when she was buried. That was worth living for. Who knows what I might have done? And what right had you to cut short a life that might have been useful?’

“Before I could think of a reply to these too just reproaches, the flower-pot enlarged, the plant shot up, putting forth new branches as it grew; then buds burst from the prickly limbs, and in a few moments there hung about it great drooping blossoms of lovely pink, with long white tassels in their throats. I had been gazing at it some time in silent and self-reproachful admiration when I became aware that the business of this strange court was proceeding, and that the other toys were pronouncing sentence against me.

“ ‘Tie a string round her neck and take her out bathing in the brooks,’ I heard an elderly voice say in severe tones. It was the Dowager Doll. She was inflexibly wooden, and had been in the family for more than one generation.

“ ‘It’s not fair,’ I exclaimed, ‘the string was only to keep you from being carried away by the stream. The current is strong, and the bank steep by the Hollow Oak Pool, and you had no arms or legs. You were old and ugly, but you would wash, and we loved you better than many waxen beauties.’

“ ‘Old and ugly!’ shrieked the Dowager. ‘Tear her wig off! Scrub the paint off her face! Flatten her nose on the pavement! Saw off her legs and

give her no crinoline! Take her out bathing, I say, and bring her home in a wheel-barrow with fern roots on the top of her.'

"I was about to protest again, when the paint-box came forward, and balancing itself in an artistic, undecided kind of way on two camel's-hair brushes which seemed to serve it for feet, addressed the Jack-in-a-box.

" 'Never dip your paint into the water. Never put your brush into your mouth——'

" 'That's not evidence,' said the Jack-in-a-box.

" 'Your notions are crude,' said the paint-box loftily; 'it's in print, and here, all of it, or words to that effect;' with which he touched the lid, as a gentleman might lay his hand upon his heart.

" 'It's not evidence,' repeated the Jack-in-a-box. 'Let us proceed.'

" 'Take her to pieces and see what she's made of, if you please,' tittered a pretty German toy that moved to a tinkling musical accompaniment. 'If her works are available after that it will be an era in natural science.'

"The idea tickled me, and I laughed.

" 'Hard-hearted wretch!' growled the Dowager Doll.

" 'Dip her in water and leave her to soak on a white soup plate,' said the paint-box; 'if that doesn't soften her feelings, deprive me of my medal from the School of Art.'

" 'Give her a stiff neck!' muttered the mandarin. 'Ching Fo! give her a stiff neck.'

" 'Knock her teeth out,' growled the rake in a scratchy voice; and then the tools joined in chorus.

" 'Take her out when its fine and leave her out when it's wet, and lose her in——'

" 'The coal hole,' said the spade.

" 'The hay field,' said the rake.

" 'The shrubbery,' said the hoe.

"This difference of opinion produced a quarrel, which in turn seemed to affect the general behavior of toys, for a disturbance arose which the Jack-in-a-box vainly endeavored to quell. A dozen voices shouted for a dozen different punishments and (happily for me) each toy insisted upon its own wrongs being the first to be avenged, and no one would hear of the claims of any one else being attended to for an instant. Terrible sentences were passed, which I either failed to hear through the clamor then, or have forgotten now. I have a vague idea that several voices cried that I was to be sent to wash in

somebody's pocket; that the work-basket wished to cram my mouth with unfinished needlework; and that through all the din the thick voice of my old leather ball monotonously repeated:

" 'Throw her into the dust-hole.'

"Suddenly a clear voice pierced the confusion, and Rosa tripped up.

" 'My dears,' she began, 'the only chance of restoring order is to observe method. Let us follow our usual rule of precedence. I claim the first turn as the prisoner's oldest toy.'

" 'That you are not, Miss,' snapped the dowager; 'I was in the family for fifty years.'

" 'In the family. Yes, ma'am; but you were never her doll in particular. I was her very own, and she kept me longer than any other plaything. My judgment must be first.'

" 'She is right,' said the Jack-in-a-box, 'and now let us get on. The prisoner is delivered unreservedly into the hands of our trusty and well-beloved Rosa—doll of the first class—for punishment according to the strict law of tit for tat.'

" 'I shall request the assistance of the pewter tea-things,' said Rosa, with her usual smile. 'And now, my love,' she added, turning to me, 'we will come and sit down.'

"Where the go-cart vanished to I cannot remember, nor how I got out of it; I only know that I suddenly found myself free, and walking away with my hand in Rosa's. I remember vacantly feeling the rough edge of the stitches on her flat kid fingers, and wondering what would come next.

" 'How very oddly you hold your feet, my dear,' she said; 'you stick out your toes in such an eccentric fashion, and you lean your legs as if they were table legs, instead of supporting yourself by my hand. Turn your heels well out, and bring your toes together. You may even let them fold over each other a little; it is considered to have a pretty effect among dolls.'

"Under one of the big trees Miss Rosa made me sit down, propping me against the trunk as if I should otherwise have fallen; and in a moment more a square box of pewter tea-things came tumbling up to our feet, where the lid burst open, and all the tea-things fell out in perfect order; the cups on the saucers, the lid on the teapot and so on.

" 'Take a little tea, my love?' said Miss Rosa pressing a pewter teacup to my lips.

"I made believe to drink, but was only conscious of inhaling a draught of air with a slight flavor of tin. In taking my second cup I was nearly choked

with the teaspoon, which got into my throat.

“ ‘What are you doing?’ roared the Jack-in-a-box at this moment; ‘you are not punishing her.’

“ ‘I am treating her as she treated me,’ answered Rosa, looking as severe as her smile would allow. ‘I believe that tit for tat is the rule, and that at present it is my turn.’

“ ‘It will be mine soon,’ growled the Jack-in-a-box, and I thought of the bonfire with a shudder. However, there was no knowing what might happen before his turn did come, and meanwhile I was in friendly hands. It was not the first time my dolly and I had set together under a tree, and, truth to say, I do not think she had any injuries to avenge.

“ ‘When your wig comes off,’ murmured Rosa, as she stole a pink kid arm tenderly round my neck, ‘I’ll make you a cap with blue and white rosettes, and pretend that you have had a fever.’

“I thanked her gratefully, and was glad to reflect that I was not yet in need of an attention which I distinctly remember having shown to her in the days of her dollhood. Presently she jumped up.

“ ‘I think you shall go to bed now, dear,’ she said, and, taking my hand once more, she led me to the big doll’s bedstead, which, with its pretty bedclothes and white dimity furniture, looked tempting enough to a sleeper of suitable size. It could not have supported one-quarter of my weight.

“ ‘I have not made you a night-dress, my love,’ Rosa continued; ‘I am not fond of my needle, you know. *You* were not fond of your needle, I think. I fear you must go to bed in your clothes, my dear.’

“ ‘You are very kind,’ I said, ‘but I am not tired, and—it would not bear my weight.’

“ ‘Pooh! pooh!’ said Rosa. ‘My love! I remember passing one Sunday in it with the rag-doll, and the Dowager, and the Punch and Judy (the amount of pillow their two noses took up I shall never forget!), and the old doll that had nothing on, because her clothes were in the dolls’ wash and did not get ironed on Saturday night, and the Highlander, whose things wouldn’t come off, and who slept in his kilt. Not bear you? Nonsense! You must go to bed, my dear. I’ve got other things to do, and I can’t leave you lying about.’

“ ‘The whole lot of you did not weigh one-quarter of what I do,’ I cried desperately. ‘I cannot, and will not get into that bed; I should break it all to pieces, and hurt myself into the bargain.’

“ ‘Well, if you will not go to bed, I must put you there,’ said Rosa, and without more ado, she snatched me up in her kid arms, and laid me down.

“Of course it was just as I expected. I had hardly touched the two little pillows (they had a meal-bag smell from being stuffed with bran), when the woodwork gave way with a crash, and I fell—fell—fell—

“Though I fully believed every bone in my body to be broken, it was really a relief to get to the ground. As soon as I could, I sat up, and felt myself all over. A little stiff, but, as it seemed, unhurt. Oddly enough, I found that I was back again under the tree; and more strange still, it was not the tree where I sat with Rosa, but the old oak-tree in the little wood. Was it all a dream? The toys had vanished, the lights were out, the mosses looked dull in the growing dusk, the evening was chilly, the hole no larger than it was thirty years ago, and when I felt in my pocket for my spectacles I found that they were on my nose.

“I have returned to the spot many times since, but I never could induce a beetle to enter into conversation on the subject, the hole remains obstinately impassable, and I have not been able to repeat my visit to the Land of Lost Toys.

“When I recall my many sins against the playthings of my childhood, I am constrained humbly to acknowledge that perhaps this is just as well.”

* * * * * *

SAM SETS UP SHOP.

“I think you might help me, Dot,” cried Sam in dismal and rather injured tones.

It was the morning following the day of the earthquake, and of Aunt Penelope’s arrival. Sam had his back to Dot, and his face to the fire, over which indeed he had bent for so long that he appeared to be half roasted.

“What do you want?” asked Dot, who was working at a doll’s night-dress that had for long been partly finished, and now seemed in a fair way to completion.

“It’s the glue-pot,” Sam continued. “It does take so long to boil. And I have been stirring at the glue with a stick for ever so long to get it to melt. It is very hot work. I wish you would take it for a bit. It’s as much for your good as for mine.”

“Is it?” said Dot.

“Yes it is, Miss,” cried Sam. “You must know I’ve got a splendid idea.”

“Not another earthquake, I hope?” said Dot, smiling.

“Now, Dot, that’s truly unkind of you. I thought it was to be forgotten.”

"So it is," said Dot, getting up. "I was only joking. What is the idea!"

"I don't think I shall tell you till I have finished my shop. I want to get to it now, and I wish you would take a turn at the glue-pot."

Sam was apt to want a change of occupation. Dot, on the other hand, was equally averse from leaving what she was about till it was finished, so they suited each other like Jack Sprat and his wife. It had been an effort to Dot to leave the night-dress which she had hoped to finish at a sitting; but when she was fairly set to work on the glue business she never moved till the glue was in working order, and her face as red as a ripe tomato.

By this time Sam had set up business in the window-seat, and was fastening a large paper inscription over his shop. It ran thus:—

MR. SAM,
Doll's Doctor and Toymender to Her Majesty,
the Queen, and all other Potentates.

"Splendid!" shouted Dot, who was serving up the glue as if it had been a kettle of soup, and who looked herself very like an overtoasted cook.

Sam took the glue, and began to bustle about.

"Now, Dot, get me all the broken toys, and we'll see what we can do. And here's a second splendid idea. Do you see that box? Into that we shall put all the toys that are quite spoiled and cannot possibly be mended. It is to be called the Hospital for Incurables. I've got a placard for that. At least it's not written yet, but here's the paper, and perhaps you would write it, Dot, for I am tired of writing and I want to begin the mending."

"For the future," he presently resumed, "when I want a doll to scalp or behead, I shall apply to the Hospital for Incurables, and the same with any other toy that I want to destroy. And you will see, my dear Dot, that I shall be quite a blessing to the nursery; for I shall attend the dolls gratis, and keep all the furniture in repair."

Sam really kept his word. He had a natural turn for mechanical work, and, backed by Dot's mechanical genius, he prolonged the days of the broken toys by skillful mending, and so acquired an interest in them which was still more favorable to their preservation. When his birthday came round, which was some months after these events, Dot (assisted by Mamma and Aunt Penelope), had prepared for him a surprise that was more than equal to any of his own "splendid ideas." The whole force of the toy cupboard was assembled on the nursery table, to present Sam with a fine box of joiner's tools as a reward for his services, Papa kindly acting as spokesman on the occasion.

And certain gaps in the china tea-set, some scars on the dolls' face, and a good many new legs, both amongst the furniture and the animals, are now the only remaining traces of Sam's earthquake.

THREE CHRISTMAS-TREES.

THIS is a story of Three Christmas-Trees. The first was a real one, but the child we are to speak of did not see it. He saw the other two, but they were not real; they only existed in his fancy. The plot of the story is very simple; and, as it has been described so early, it is easy for those who think it stupid to lay the book down in good time.

Probably every child who reads this has seen one Christmas-tree or more; but in the small town of a distant colony with which we have to do, this could not at one time have been said. Christmas-trees were then by no means so universal, even in England, as they now are, and in this little colonial town, they were unknown. Unknown that is, till the Governor's wife gave her great children's party. At which point we will begin the story.

The Governor had given a great many parties in his time. He had entertained big wigs and little wigs, the passing military and the local grandees. Everybody who had the remotest claim to attention had been attended to: the ladies had had their full share of balls and pleasure parties: only one class of the population had any complaint to prefer against his hospitality; but the class was a large one—it was the children. However, he was a bachelor, and knew little or nothing about little boys and girls: let us pity rather than blame him. At last he took to himself a wife; and among the many advantages of this important step, was a due recognition of the claims of these young citizens. It was towards happy Christmas-tide, that "the Governor's amiable and admired lady" (as she was styled in the local newspaper) sent out notes for his first children's party. At the top of the note paper was a very red robin, who carried a blue Christmas greeting in his mouth, and at the bottom—written with the A. D. C.'s best flourish—were the magic words, *A Christmas Tree*. In spite of the flourishes—partly perhaps, because of them—the A. D. C.'s handwriting, though handsome, was rather illegible. But for all this, most of the children invited contrived to read these words, and those who could not do so were not slow to learn the news by hearsay. There was to be a Christmas-Tree! It would be like a birthday party, with this above ordinary birthdays, that there were to be presents for every one.

One of the children invited lived in a little white house, with a spruce fir-tree before the door. The spruce fir did this good service to the little house, that it helped people to find their way to it; and it was by no means easy for a stranger to find his way to any given house in this little town, especially if the house were small and white, and stood in one of the back streets. For most of the houses were small, and most of them were painted white, and the back streets ran parallel with each other, and had no names, and were all so much alike that it was very confusing. For instance, if you had asked the way to Mr. So-and-So's, it is very probable that some friend would have directed you as follows: "Go straight forward and take the first turning to your left, and you will find that there are four streets, which run at right angles to the one you are in, and parallel with each other. Each of them has got a big pine in it—one of the old forest trees. Take the last street but one, and the fifth white house you come to is Mr. So-and-So's. He has green blinds and a colored servant." You would not always have got such clear directions as these, but with them you would probably have found the house at last, partly by accident, partly by the blinds and colored servant. Some of the neighbors affirmed that the little white house had a name; that all the houses and streets had names, only they were traditional and not recorded anywhere; that very few people knew them, and nobody made any use of them. The name of the little white house was said to be Trafalgar Villa, which seemed so inappropriate to the modest peaceful little home, that the man who lived in it tried to find out why it had been so called. He thought that his predecessor must have been in the navy, until he found that he had been the owner of what is called a "dry-goods store," which seems to mean a shop where things are sold which are not good to eat or drink—such as drapery. At last somebody said, that as there was a public-house called the "Duke of Wellington" at the corner of the street, there probably had been a nearer one called "The Nelson," which had been burnt down, and that the man who built "The Nelson" had built the house with a spruce fir before it, and that so the name had arisen. An explanation which was just so far probable, that public-houses and fires were of frequent occurrence in those parts.

But this had nothing to do with the story. Only we must say, as we said before, and as we should have said had we been living there then, the child we speak of lived in the little white house with one spruce fir just in front of it.

Of all the children who looked forward to the Christmas-tree, he looked forward to it the most intensely. He was an imaginative child, of a simple, happy nature, easy to please. His father was an Englishman, and in the long

winter evenings he would tell the child tales of the old country, to which his mother would listen also. Perhaps the parents enjoyed these stories the most. To the boy they were new, and consequently delightful, but to the parents they were old; and as regards some stories, that is better still.

"What kind of a bird is this on my letter?" asked the boy on the day which brought the Governor's lady's note of invitation. "And oh! what is a Christmas-tree?"

"The bird is an English robin," said his father. "It is quite another bird to that which is called a robin here: it is smaller and rounder; and has a redder breast and bright dark eyes, and lives and sings at home through the winter. A Christmas-tree is a fir-tree—just such a one as that outside the door—brought into the house and covered with lights and presents. Picture to yourself our fir-tree lighted up with tapers on all the branches, with dolls, and trumpets, and bonbons, and drums, and toys of all kinds hanging from it like fir-cones, and on the tip-top shoot a figure of a Christmas Angel in white, with a star upon its head."

"Fancy!" said the boy.

And fancy he did. Every day he looked at the spruce firs, and tried to imagine it laden with presents, and brilliant with tapers, and thought how wonderful must be that "old country"—*Home*, as it was called, even by those who had never seen it—where the robins were so very red, and where at Christmas the fir-trees were hung with toys instead of cones.

It was certainly a pity that, two days before the party, an original idea on the subject of snowmen struck one of the children who used to play together, with their sleds and snow-shoes, in the back streets. The idea was this: That instead of having a common-place snowman, whose legs were obliged to be mere stumps, for fear he should be top-heavy, and who could not walk, even with them; who, in fact, could do nothing but stand at the corner of the street, holding his impotent stick, and staring with his pebble eyes, till he was broken to pieces or ignominiously carried away by a thaw,—that, instead of this, they should have a real, live snowman, who should walk on competent legs, to the astonishment, and (happy thought!) perhaps to the alarm of the passers-by. This delightful novelty was to be accomplished by covering one of the boys of the party with snow till he looked as like a real snowman as circumstances would admit. At first everybody wanted to be the snowman, but, when it came to the point, it was found to be so much duller to stand still and be covered up than to run about and work, that no one was willing to act the part. At last it was undertaken by the little boy from the Fir House. He was somewhat small, but then he was so good-natured he would

always do as he was asked. So he stood manfully still, with his arms folded over a walking-stick upon his breast, while the others heaped the snow upon him. The plan was not so successful as they had hoped. The snow would not stick anywhere except on his shoulders, and when it got into his neck he cried with the cold; but they were so anxious to carry out their project, that they begged him to bear it "just a little longer:" and the urchin who had devised the original idea wiped the child's eyes with his handkerchief, and (with that hopefulness which is so easy over other people's matters) "dared say that when all the snow was on, he wouldn't feel it." However, he did feel it, and that so severely that the children were obliged to give up the game, and, taking the stick out of his stiff little arms, to lead him home.

It appears that it is with snowmen as with some other men in conspicuous positions. It is easier to find fault with them than to fill their place.

The end of this was a feverish cold, and, when the day of the party came, the ex-snowman was still in bed. It is due to the other children to say that they felt the disappointment as keenly as he did, and that it greatly damped the pleasure of the party for them to think that they had prevented his sharing in the treat. The most penitent of all was the deviser of the original idea. He had generously offered to stay at home with the little patient, which was as generously refused; but the next evening he was allowed to come and sit on the bed, and describe it all for the amusement of his friend. He was a quaint boy, this urchin, with a face as broad as an American Indian's, eyes as bright as a squirrel's, and all the mischief in life lurking about him, till you could see roguishness in the very folds of his hooded Indian winter coat of blue and scarlet. In his hand he brought the sick child's presents: a dray with two white horses, and little barrels that took off and on, and a driver, with wooden joints, a cloth coat, and everything, in fact, that was suitable to the driver of a brewer's dray, except that he had blue boots and earrings, and that his hair was painted in braids like a lady's, which is clearly the fault of the doll manufacturers, who will persist in making them all of the weaker sex.

"And what was the Christmas-tree like?" asked the invalid.

"Exactly like the fir outside your door," was the reply. "Just about that size, and planted in a pot covered with red cloth. It was kept in another room till after tea, and then when the door was opened it was like a street fire in the town at night—such a blaze of light—candles everywhere! And on all the branches the most beautiful presents. I got a drum and a penwiper."

"Was there an angel?" the child asked.

“Oh, yes!” the boy answered. “It was on the tip-top branch, and it was given to me, and I brought it for you, if you would like it; for, you know, I am so very, very sorry I thought of the snowman and made you ill, and I do love you, and beg you to forgive me.”

And the roguish face stooped over the pillow to be kissed; and out of a pocket in the hooded coat came forth the Christmas Angel. In the face it bore a strong family likeness to the drayman, but its feet were hidden in folds of snowy muslin, and on its head glittered a tinsel star.

“How lovely!” said the child. “Father told me about this. I like it best of all. And it is very kind of you, for it is not your fault that I caught cold. I should have liked it if we could have done it, but I think to enjoy being a snowman, one should be snow all through.”

They had tea together, and then the invalid was tucked up for the night. The dray was put away in the cupboard, but he took the angel to bed with him.

And so ended the first of the Three Christmas-Trees.

* * * * * *

Except for a warm glow from the wood fire in the stove, the room was dark; but about midnight it seemed to the child that a sudden blaze of light filled the chamber. At the same moment the window curtains were drawn aside, and he saw that the spruce fir had come close up to the panes, and was peeping in. Ah! how beautiful it looked! It had become a Christmas-tree. Lighted tapers shone from every familiar branch, toys of the most fascinating appearance hung like fruit, and on the tip-top shoot there stood the Christmas Angel. He tried to count the candles, but somehow it was impossible. When he looked at them they seemed to change places—to move—to become like the angel, and then to be candles again, whilst the flames nodded to each other and repeated the blue greeting of the robin, “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!” Then he tried to distinguish the presents, but, beautiful as the toys looked, he could not exactly discover what any of them were, or choose which he would like best. Only the Angel he could see clearly—so clearly! It was more beautiful than the doll under his pillow; it had a lovely face like his own mother’s, he thought, and on its head gleamed a star far brighter than tinsel. Its white robes waved with the flames of the tapers, and it stretched its arms towards him with a smile.

“I am to go and choose my present,” thought the child; and he called “Mother! mother dear! please open the window.”

But his mother did not answer. So he thought he must get up himself, and with an effort, he struggled out of bed.

But when he was on his feet, everything seemed changed! Only the fire-light shone upon the walls, and the curtains were once more firmly closed before the window. It had been a dream, but so vivid that in his feverish state he still thought it must be true, and dragged the curtains back to let in the glorious sight again. The fire-light shone upon a thick coating of frost upon the panes, but no further could he see, so with all his strength he pushed the window open and leaned out into the night.

The spruce fir stood in its old place; but it looked very beautiful in its Christmas dress. Beneath it lay a carpet of pure white. The snow was clustered in exquisite shapes upon its plumy branches; wrapping the tree top with its little cross shots, as a white robe might wrap a figure with outstretched arms.

There were no tapers to be seen, but northern lights shot up into the dark blue sky, and just over the fir-tree shone a bright, bright star.

"Jupiter looks well to-night," said the old Professor in the town observatory, as he fixed his telescope; but to the child it seemed as the star of the Christmas Angel.

His mother had really heard him call, and now came and put him back to bed again. And so ended the second of the Three Christmas-Trees.

* * * * * *

It was enough to have killed him, all his friends said; but it did not. He lived to be a man, and—what is rarer—to keep the faith, the simplicity, the tender-heartedness, the vivid fancy of his childhood. He lived to see many Christmas-Trees "at home," in that old country where the robins are red-breasts, and sing in winter. There a heart as good and gentle as his own became one with his; and once he brought his young wife across the sea to visit the place where he was born. They stood near the little white house, and he told her the story of the Christmas-trees.

"This was when I was a child," he added.

"But that you are still," said she; and she plucked a bit of the fir-tree and kissed it, and carried it away.

He lived to tell the story to his children, and even to his grandchildren; but he never was able to decide which of the two was the more beautiful—the Christmas-Tree of his dream, or the Spruce Fir as it stood in the loveliness of that winter night.

This is told, not that it has anything to do with any of the Three Christmas-Trees, but to show that the story is a happy one, as is right and proper; that the hero lived, and married, and had children, and was as prosperous as good people, in books, should always be.

Of course he died at last. The best and happiest of men must die; and it is only because some stories stop short in their history, that every hero is not duly buried before we lay down the book.

When death came for our hero he was an old man. The beloved wife, some of his children, and many of his friends had died before him, and of those whom he had loved there were fewer to leave than to rejoin. He had had a short illness, with little pain, and was now lying on his death-bed in one of the big towns in the North of England. His youngest son, a clergyman, was with him, and one or two others of his children, and by the fire sat the doctor.

The doctor had been sitting by the patient, but now that he could do no more for him he had moved to the fire; and they had taken the ghastly, half-emptied medicine bottles from the table by the bedside, and had spread it with a fair linen cloth, and had set out the silver vessels of the Supper of the Lord.

The old man had been "wandering" somewhat during the day. He had talked much of going home to the old country, and with the wide range of dying thoughts he had seemed to mingle memories of childhood with his hopes of Paradise. At intervals he was clear and collected—one of those moments had been chosen for his last sacrament—and he had fallen asleep with the blessing in his ears.

He slept so long and so peacefully that the son almost began to hope there might be a change, and looked towards the doctor, who still sat by the fire with his right leg crossed over his left. The doctor's eyes were also on the bed, but at that moment he drew out his watch and looked at it with an air of professional conviction, which said, "It's only a question of time." Then he crossed his left leg over his right, and turned to the fire again. Before the right leg should be tired, all would be over. The son saw it as clearly as if it had been spoken, and he too turned away and sighed.

As they sat, the bells of a church in the town began to chime for midnight service, for it was Christmas Eve, but they did not wake the dying man. He slept on and on.

The doctor dozed. The son read in the Prayer Book on the table, and one of his sisters read with him. Another, from grief and weariness, slept with her head upon his shoulder. Except for a warm glow from the fire, the room

was dark. Suddenly the old man sat up in bed, and, in a strong voice, cried with inexpressible enthusiasm.

"*How beautiful!*"

The son held back his sisters, and asked quietly,

"*What*, my dear father?"

"The Christmas-Tree!" he said, in a low, eager voice. "Draw back the curtains."

They were drawn back; but nothing could be seen, and still the old man gazed as if in ecstacy.

"Light!" he murmured. "The Angel! the Star!"

Again there was silence; and then he stretched forth his hands, and cried passionately,

"The Angel is beckoning to me! Mother! mother dear! Please open the window."

The sash was thrown open, and all eyes turned involuntarily where those of the dying man were gazing. There was no Christmas-Tree—no tree at all. But over the housetops the morning star looked pure and pale in the dawn of Christmas Day. For the night was past, and above the distant hum of the streets the clear voices of some waits made the words of an old carol heard —words dearer for their association than their poetry—

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around."

When the window was opened, the soul passed; and when they looked back to the bed the old man had lain down again, and like a child, was smiling in his sleep—his last sleep.

And this was the Third Christmas-Tree.

AN IDYL OF THE WOOD.

"TELL us a story," said the children, "a sad one, if you please, and a little true. But, above all, let it end badly, for we are tired of people who live happily ever after."

"I heard one lately," said the old man who lived in the wood; "it is founded on fact, and it is a sad one also; but whether it ends badly or no I cannot pretend to say. That is a matter of taste: what is a bad ending?"

"A story ends badly," said the children with authority, "when people die, and nobody marries anybody else, especially if it is a prince and princess."

"A most lucid explanation," said the old man. "I think my story will do, for the principal character dies, and there is no wedding."

"Tell it, tell it!" cried his hearers, "and tell us also where you got it from."

"Who knows the riches of a wood in summer?" said the old man. "In summer, do I say? In spring, in autumn, or in winter either. Who knows them? You, my children? Well, well. Better than some of your elders, perchance. You know the wood where I live; the hollow tree that will hold five children, and Queen Mab knows how many fairies. (What a castle it makes! And if it had but another floor put into it, with a sloping ladder—like one of the round towers of Ireland—what a house for children to live in! With no room for lesson-books, grown-up people, or beds!)

"You know the way to the hazel copse, and the place where the wild strawberries grow. You know where the wren sits on her eggs, and, like good children, pass by with soft steps and hushed voices, that you may not disturb that little mother. You know (for I have shown you) where the rare fern grows—a habitat happily yet unnoted in scientific pages. *We* never add its lovely fronds to our nosegays, and if we move a root it is but to plant it in another part of the wood, with as much mystery and circumspection as if we were performing some solemn druidical rite. It is to us as a king in hiding, and the places of its abode we keep faithfully secret. It will be thus held sacred by us until, with all the seeds its untouched fronds have scattered, and all the off-shoots we have propagated, it shall have become as plentiful as Heaven intends all beautiful things to be. Every one is not so scrupulous.

There are certain ladies and gentlemen who picnic near my cottage in the hot weather, and who tell each other that they love a wood. Most of these good people have nevertheless neither eyes nor ears for what goes on around them, except that they hear each other, and see the cold collation. They will picnic there summer after summer, and not know whether they sit under oaks or ashes, beeches or elms. All birds sing for them the same song. Tell *them* that such a plant is rare in the neighborhood, that there are but few specimens of it, and it will not long be their fault if there are any. Does any one direct them to it, they tear it ruthlessly up, and carry it away. If by any chance a root is left, it is left so dragged and pulled and denuded of earth, that there is small chance that it will survive. Probably, also, the ravished clump dies in the garden or pot to which it is transplanted, either from neglect, or from ignorance of the conditions essential to its life; and the rare plant becomes yet rarer. Oh! without doubt they love a wood. It gives more shade than the largest umbrella, and is cheaper for summer entertainment than a tent: there you get canopy and carpet, fuel and water, shade and song, and beauty—all gratis; and these are not small matters when one has invited a large party of one's acquaintance. There are insects, it is true, which somewhat disturb our friends; and as they do not know which sting, and which are harmless, they kill all that come within their reach, as a safe general principle. The town boys, too! They know the wood—that is to say, they know where the wild fruits grow, and how to chase the squirrel, and rob the bird's nests, and snare the birds. Well, well, my children; to know and love a wood truly, it may be that one must live in it as I have done; and then a lifetime will scarcely reveal all its beauties, or exhaust its lessons. But even then, one must have eyes that see, and ears that hear, or one misses a good deal. It was in the wood that I heard this story that I shall tell you."

"How did you hear it?" asked the children.

"A thrush sang it to me one night."

"One night?" said the children. "Then you mean a nightingale."

"I mean a thrush," said the old man. "Do I not know the note of one bird from another? I tell you that pine tree by my cottage has a legend of its own, and the topmost branch is haunted. Must all legends be above the loves and sorrows of our self-satisfied race alone?"

"But did you really and truly hear it?" they asked.

"I heard it," said the old man. "But, as I tell you, one hears and one hears. I don't say that everybody would have heard it, merely by sleeping in my chamber; but, for the benefit of the least imaginative, I will assure you that it is founded on fact."

“Begin! begin!” shouted the children.

“Once upon a time,” said the old man, “there was a young thrush, who was born in that beautiful dingle where we last planted the —— fern. His home-nest was close to the ground, but the lower one is, the less fear of falling; and in woods, the elevation at which you sleep is a matter of taste, and not of expense or gentility. He awoke to life when the wood was dressed in the pale fresh green of early summer; and believing, like other folk, that, his own home was at least the principal part of the world, earth seemed to him so happy and so beautiful an abode, that his heart felt ready to burst with joy. The ecstacy was almost pain, till wings and a voice came to him. Then, one day, when, after a gray morning, the sun came out at noon, drawing the scent from the old pine that looks in at my bedroom window, his joy burst forth, after long silence, into song, and flying upwards he sat on the topmost branch of the pine and sang as loud as he could sing to the sun and the blue sky.

“ ‘Joy! joy!’ he sang. ‘Fresh water and green woods, ambrosial sunshine and sun-flecked shade, chattering brooks and rustling leaves, glade, and sward, and dell. Lichens and cool mosses, feathered ferns and flowers. Green leaves! Green leaves! Summer! summer! summer!’

“It was monotonous, but every word came from the singer’s heart, which is not always the case. Thenceforward, though he slept near the ground, he went up every day to this pine, as to some sacred high place, and sang the same song, of which neither he nor I were ever weary.

“Let one be ever so inoffensive, however, one is not long left in peace in this world, even in a wood. The thrush sang too loudly of his simple happiness, and some boys from the town heard him and snared him, and took him away in a dirty cloth cap, where he was nearly smothered. The world is certainly not exclusively composed of sunshine, and green woods, and odorous pines. He became almost senseless during the hot dusty walk that led to the town. It was a seaport town, about two miles from the wood, a town of narrow, steep streets, picturesque old houses, and odors compounded of tar, dead fish, and many other scents less agreeable than forest perfumes. The thrush was put into a small wicker-cage in an upper room, in one of the narrowest and steepest of the streets.

“ ‘I shall die to-night,’ he piped. But he did not. He lived that night, and for several nights and days following. The boys took small care of him, however. He was often left without food, without water, and always with too little air. Two or three times they tried to sell him, but he was not bought, for no one could hear him sing. One day he was hung outside the window, and

partly owing to the sun and fresh air, and partly because a woman was singing in the street, he began to carol his old song.

"The woman was a street singer. She was even paler, thinner, and more destitute-looking than such women usually are. In some past time there had been beauty and feeling in her face, but the traces of both were well-nigh gone. An indifference almost amounting to vacancy was there now, and, except that she sang, you might almost have fancied her a corpse. In her voice also there had once been beauty and feeling, and here again the traces were small indeed. From time to time, she was stopped by fits of coughing, when an ill-favored hunchback, who accompanied her on a tambourine, swore and scowled at her. She sang a song of sentiment, with a refrain about

'Love and truth,
And joys of youth—'

on which the melody dwelt and quavered as if in mockery. As she sang a sailor came down the street. His collar was very large, his trousers were very wide, his hat hung on the back of his head more as an ornament than for shelter; and he had one of the roughest faces and the gentlest hearts that ever went together since Beauty was entertained by the Beast. His hands were in his pockets, where he could feel one shilling and a penny, all the spare cash that remained to him after a friendly stroll through the town. When he saw the street singer, he stopped, pulled off his hat, and scratched his head, as was his custom when he was puzzled or interested.

" 'It's no good keeping an odd penny,' he said to himself; 'poor thing, she looks bad enough!' And, bringing the penny to the surface out of the depths of his pocket, he gave it to the woman. The hunchback came forward to take it, but the sailor passed him with a shove of his elbow, and gave it to the singer, who handed it over to her companion without moving a feature, and went on with her song.

" 'I'd like to break every bone in your ugly body,' muttered the sailor, with a glance at the hunchback, who scowled in return.

" 'I shall die of this close street, and of all I have suffered,' thought the thrush.

" 'Green leaves! green leaves!' he sang, for it was the only song he knew.

" 'My voice is gone,' thought the hunchback's companion. 'He'll beat me again to-night; but it can't last long:

"Love and truth,
And joys of youth—" '

she sang, for that was all the song she had learned; and it was not her fault that it was inappropriate.

"But the ballad singer's captivity was nearly at an end. When the hunchback left her that evening to spend the sailor's penny with the few others which she had earned, he swore that when he came back he would make her sing louder than she had done all day. Her face showed no emotion, less than it did when he saw it hours after, when beauty and feeling seemed to have returned to it in the peace of death, when he came back and found the cage empty, and that the long prisoned spirit had flown away to seek the face of love and truth indeed."

"But how about the thrush?"

"The sailor had scarcely swallowed the wrath which the hunchback had stirred in him, when his ear was caught by the song of the thrush above him.

" 'You sing uncommon well, pretty one,' he said, stopping and putting his hat even farther back than usual to look up. He was one of those good people who stop a dozen times in one street, and look at everything as they go along; whereby you may see three times as much of life as other folk, but it is a terrible temptation to spend money. It was so in this instance. The sailor looked till his kindly eyes perceived that the bird was ill-cared for.

" 'It should have a bit of sod, it *should*,' he said, emphatically, taking his hat off, and scratching his head again; 'and there's not a crumb of food on board. Maybe, they don't understand the ways of birds here. It would be a good turn to mention it.'

"With this charitable intention he entered the house, and when he left it, his pocket was empty, and the thrush was carried tenderly in his handkerchief.

" 'The canary died last voyage,' he muttered apologetically to himself, 'and the money always does go somehow or other.'

"The sailor's hands were about three times as large and coarse as those of the boy who had carried the thrush before, but they seemed to him three times more light and tender—they were handy and kind, and this goes farther than taper fingers.

"The thrush's new home was not in the narrow streets. It was in a small cottage in a small garden at the back of the town. The canary's old cage was comparatively roomy, and food, water, and fresh turf were regularly supplied to him. He could see green leaves too. There was an apple tree in

the garden, and two geraniums, a fuchsia, and a tea-rose in the window. Near the tea-rose an old woman sat in the sunshine. She was the sailor's mother, and looked very like a tidily kept window plant herself. She had a little money of her own, which gave her a certain dignity, and her son was very good to her; and so she dwelt in considerable comfort, dividing her time chiefly between reading in the big Bible, knitting socks for Jack, and raising cuttings in bottles of water. She had heard of hothouses and forcing frames, but she did not think much of them. She believed a bottle of water to be the most natural, because it was the oldest method she knew of, and she thought no good came of new-fangled ways, and trying to outdo Nature.

" 'Slow and sure is best,' she said, and stuck to her own system.

" 'What's that, my dear?' she asked, when the sailor came in and held up the handkerchief. He told her.

" 'You're always a-laying out your money on something or other,' said the old lady, who took the privilege of her years to be a little testy. 'What did you give for *that*?'

" 'A shilling, ma'am.'

" 'Tst! tst! tst!' said the old lady, disapprovingly.

" 'Now, mother, don't shake that cap of yours off your head,' said the sailor. 'What's a shilling? If I hadn't spent it, I should have changed it; and once change a shilling, and it all dribbles away in coppers, and you get nothing for it. But spend it in a lump, and you get something you want. That's what I say.'

" '*I* want no more pets,' said the old lady stiffly.

" 'Well, you won't be troubled with this one long,' said her son; 'it'll go with me, and that's soon enough.'

"Any allusion to his departure always melted the old lady, as Jack well knew. She became tearful, and begged him to leave the thrush with her.

" 'You know, my dear, I've always looked to your live things as if they were Christians; and loved them too (unless it was that monkey that I never *could* do with!) Leave it with me, my dear. I'd never bother myself with a bird on board ship, if I was you.'

" 'That's because you've got a handsome son of your own, old lady,' chuckled the sailor; 'I've neither chick nor child, ma'am, remember, and a man must have something to look to. The bird'll go with me.'

"And so it came to pass that just when the thrush was becoming domesticated, and almost happy at the cottage, that one morning the sailor brought him fresh turf and groundsel, besides his meal-cake, and took the

cage down. And the old woman kissed the wires, and bade the bird good-bye, and prayed Heaven to bring him safe home again; and they went their way.

"The forecastle of a steamship (even of a big one) is a poor exchange for a snug cottage to any one but a sailor. To Jack, the ship was home. *He* had never lived in a wood, and carrolled in tree-tops. He preferred blue to green, and pine masts to pine trees; and he smoked his pipe very comfortably in the forecastle, whilst the ship rolled to and fro, and swung the bird's cage above his head. To the thrush it was only an imprisonment that grew worse as time went on. Each succeeding day made him pine more bitterly for his native woods—the fresh air and green leaves, and the rest and quiet, and sweet perfumes, and pleasant sounds of country life. His turf dried up, his groundsel withered, and no more could be got. He longed even to be back with the old woman—to see the apple tree, and the window plants, and be still. The shudder of the screw, the blasts of hot air from the engine and cook's galley, the ceaseless jangling, clanging, pumping noises, and all the indescribable smells which haunt a steamship, became more wearisome day by day. Even when the cage was hung outside, the sea breeze seemed to mock him with its freshness. The rich blue of the waters gave him no pleasure, his eyes failed with looking for green, the bitter, salt spray vexed him, and the wind often chilled him to the bone, whilst the sun shone, and icebergs gleamed upon the horizon.

"The sailor had been so kind a master, that the thrush had become deeply attached to him, as birds will; and while at the cottage he had scarcely fretted after his beloved wood. But with every hour of the voyage, home sickness came more strongly upon him, and his heart went back to the nest, and the pine-top, and the old home. When one sleeps soundly, it is seldom that one remembers one's dreams; but when one is apt to be roused by an unexpected lurch of the ship, by the moan of a fog-whistle, or the scream of an engine, one becomes a light sleeper, and the visions of the night have a strange reality, and are easily recalled. And now the thrush always dreamt of home.

"One day he was hung outside. It was not a very fine day, but he looked drooping, and the pitying sailor brought him out, to get some air. His heart was sore with home sickness, and he watched the sea-birds skimming up and down with envious eyes. It seemed all very well for poor men, who hadn't so much as a wing to carry them over the water, to build lumbering sea-nests, with bodies to float in the water like fish, and wings of canvas to carry them along, and to help it out with noisy steam-engines—and to endure it all. But for him, who could fly over a hundred tree-tops before a

man could climb to one, it was hard to swing outside a ship, and to watch other birds use their wings, when his, which quivered to fly homewards, could only flutter against the bars. As he thought, a roll of the ship threw him forward, the wind shook the wires of the cage, and loosened the fastening; and, when the vessel righted, the cage-door swung slowly open.

"At this moment, a ray of sunshine streaked the deep blue water, and a gleaming sea-bird, which had been sitting like a tuft of foam upon a wave, rose with outstretched pinions, and soared away. It was too much. With one shrill pipe of hope, the thrush fluttered from his cage, spread his wings, and followed him.

"When the sailor found that the wind was getting up, he came to take the cage down, and then his grief was sore indeed.

" 'The canary died last voyage,' he said sadly. 'The cage was bought on a Friday, and I knew ill luck would come of it. I said so to mother; but the old lady says there's no such thing as luck, and she's Bible-learned, if ever a woman was. "That's very true," says I, "but if I'd the money for another cage, I wouldn't use this;" and I never will again. Poor bird! it was a sweet singer.' And he turned his face aside.

" 'It may have the sense to come back,' said one of the crew. The sailor scratched his head, and shook it sadly.

" 'Noah's bird came back to him, when she found no rest,' he said, 'but I don't think mine will, Tom.'

"He was right. The thrush returned no more. He did not know how wide was the difference between his own strength and that of the bird he followed. The sea-fowl cut the air with wings of tenfold power; he swooped up and down, he stooped to fish, he rested on the ridges of the dancing waves, and then, with one steady flight, he disappeared, and the thrush was left alone. Other birds passed him, and flew about him, and fished, and rocked upon the waters near him, but he held steadily on. Ships passed him also, but too far away for him to rest upon; whales spouted in the distance, and strange fowl screamed; but not a familiar object broke the expanse of the cold sea. He did not know what course he was taking. He hoped against hope that he was going home. Although he was more faint and weary than he had ever yet been, he felt no pain. The intensity of his hope to reach the old wood made everything seem light; even at the last, when his wings were almost powerless, he believed that they would bear him home, and was happy. Already he seemed to rest upon the trees, the waters sounded in his ears like the rustling of leaves, and the familiar scent of the pine tree seemed to him to come upon the breeze.

“In this he was not wrong. A country of pine woods was near; and land was in sight, though too far away for him to reach it now. Not home, but yet a land of wondrous summer beauty: of woods, and flowers, and sun-flecked leaves—of sunshine more glowing than he had ever known—of larger ferns, and deeper mosses, and clearer skies—a land of balmy summer nights, where the stars shine brighter than with us, and where fireflies appear and vanish, like stars of a lower firmament, amid the trees. As the sun broke out, the scent of pines came strong upon the land breeze. A strange land, but the thrush thought it was his own.

“ ‘I smell woods,’ he chirped faintly; ‘I see the sun. This is home!’

“All round him, the noisy crest of the fresh waves seemed to carol the song he could no longer sing—‘Home, home! fresh water and green woods, ambrosial sunshine and sun-flecked shade, chattering brooks and rustling leaves, glade and sward and dell, lichens and cool mosses, feathered ferns and flowers. Green leaves! green leaves! Summer! summer! summer!’

“The slackened wings dropped, the dying eyes looked landward, and then closed. But even as he fell, he believed himself sinking to rest on Mother Earth’s kindly bosom, and he did not know it, when the cold waves buried him at sea.”

“Oh, then, he *did* die!” cried the children, who thought they were tired of stories that end happily, yet, when they heard it, liked a sad ending no better than other children do (in which, by-the-by, we hold them to be in the right, and can hardly forgive ourselves for chronicling this “ower true tale”).

“Yes,” said the old man, “he died; but it is said that the sweet dingle which was his home—forsaken by the nightingale—is regarded by birds as men regard a haunted house; for that at still summer midnight, when the other thrushes sleep, a shadowy form, more like a skeleton leaf than a living bird, swings upon the tall tree-tops where he sat of old, and, rapt in a happy ecstacy, sings a song more sweet and joyous than thrush ever sang by day.”

“Have you heard it?” asked the children.

The old man nodded. But not another word would he say. The children, however, forthwith began to lay plans for getting into the wood some midsummer night, to test with their own ears the truth of his story, and to hear the spectre thrush’s song. Whether the authorities permitted the expedition, and if not, whether the young people baffled their vigilance—whether they heard the song, and if so, whether they understood it—we are not empowered to tell here.

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS.

A FANTASIA.

It was Christmas Eve in an old-fashioned country-house, where Christmas was being kept with old-fashioned form and custom. It was getting late. The candles swaggered in their sockets, and the yule-log glowed steadily like a red-hot coal.

"The fire has reached his heart," said the tutor: "he is warm all through. How red he is! He shines with heat and hospitality like some warm-hearted old gentleman when a convivial evening is pretty far advanced. To-morrow he will be as cold and grey as the morning after a festival, when the glasses are being washed up, and the host is calculating his expenses. Yes! you know it is so;" and the tutor nodded to the yule-log as he spoke; and the log flared and crackled in return, till the tutor's face shone like his own. He had no other means of reply.

The tutor was grotesque-looking at any time. He was lank and meagre, with a long body and limbs, and high shoulders. His face was smooth-shaven, and his skin like old parchment stretched over high cheek-bones and lantern jaws; but in their hollow sockets his eyes gleamed with the changeful lustre of two precious gems. In the ruddy firelight they were like rubies, and when he drew back into the shade they glared green like the eyes of a cat. It must not be inferred from the tutor's presence this evening that there were no Christmas holidays in this house. They had begun some days before; and if the tutor had had a home to go to, it is to be presumed that he would have gone.

As the candles got lower, and the log flared less often, weird lights and shades, such as haunt the twilight, crept about the room. The tutor's shadow, longer, lanker, and more grotesque than himself, mopped and mowed upon the wall beside him. The snapdragon burnt blue, and as the raisin-hunters stirred the flaming spirit, the ghastly light made the tutor look so hideous that the widow's little boy was on the eve of howling, and spilled the raisins he had just secured. (He did not like putting his fingers into the flames, but

he hovered near the more adventurous school-boys, and collected the raisins that were scattered on the table by the hasty *grabs* of braver hands.)

The widow was a relative of the house. She had married a Mr. Jones, and having been during his life his devoted slave, had on his death transferred her allegiance to his son. The late Mr. Jones was a small man with a strong temper, a large appetite, and a taste for drawing-room theatricals. So Mrs. Jones had called her son Macready; "for," she said, "his poor papa would have made a fortune on the stage, and I wish to commemorate his talents. Besides, Macready sounds better with Jones than a commoner Christian name would do."

But his cousins called him MacGreedy.

"The apples of the enchanted garden were guarded by dragons. Many knights went after them. One wished for the apples, but he did not like to fight the dragons."

It was the tutor who spoke from the dark corner by the fireplace. His eyes shone like a cat's, and MacGreedy felt like a half-scared mouse, and made up his mind to cry. He put his right fist into one eye, and had just taken it out, and was about to put his left fist into the other, when he saw that the tutor was no longer looking at him. So he made up his mind to go on with the raisins, for one can have a peevish cry at any time, but plums are not scattered broadcast every day. Several times he had tried to pocket them, but just at the moment the tutor was sure to look at him, and in his fright he dropped the raisins, and never could find them again. So this time he resolved to eat them then and there. He had just put one into his mouth when the tutor leaned forward, and his eyes, glowing in the fire-light, met MacGreedy's, who had not even the presence of mind to shut his mouth, but remained spellbound, with a raisin in his cheek.

Flicker, flack! The school-boys stirred up snapdragon again, and with the blue light upon his features the tutor made so horrible a grimace that MacGreedy swallowed the raisin with a start. He had bolted it whole, and it might have been a bread pill for any enjoyment he had of the flavor. But the tutor laughed aloud. He certainly was an alarming object, pulling those grimaces in the blue brandy glare; and unpleasantly like a picture of Bogy himself with horns and a tail, in a juvenile volume upstairs. True, there were no horns to speak of among the tutor's grizzled curls, and his coat seemed to fit as well as most people's on his long back, so that unless he put his tail in his pocket, it is difficult to see how he could have had one. But then (as Miss Letitia said) "With dress one can do anything and hide anything." And on dress Miss Letitia's opinion was final.

Miss Letitia was a cousin. She was dark, high-colored, glossy-haired, stout, and showy. She was as neat as a new pin, and had a will of her own. Her hair was firmly fixed by bandoline, her garibaldis by an arrangement which failed when applied to those of the widow, and her opinions by the simple process of looking at everything from one point of view. Her *forte* was dress and general ornamentation; not that Miss Letitia was extravagant—far from it. If one may use the expression, she utilized for ornament a hundred bits and scraps that most people would have wasted. But, like other artists, she saw everything through the medium of her own art. She looked at birds with an eye to hats, and at flowers with reference to evening parties. At picture exhibitions and concerts she carried away jacket patterns and bonnets in her head, as other people make mental notes of an aerial effect, or a bit of fine instrumentation. An enthusiastic horticulturist once sent Miss Letitia a cut specimen of a new flower. It was a lovely spray from a lately-imported shrub. A botanist would have pressed it—an artist must have taken its portrait—a poet might have written a sonnet in praise of its beauty. Miss Letitia twisted a piece of wire round its stem, and fastened it on to her black lace bonnet. It came on the day of a review, when Miss Letitia had to appear in a carriage, and it was quite a success. As she said to the widow, "It was so natural that no one could doubt its being Parisian."

"What a strange fellow that tutor is!" said the visitor. He spoke to the daughter of the house, a girl with a face like a summer's day, and hair like a ripe corn-field rippling in the sun. He was a fine young man, and had a youth's taste for the sports and amusements of his age. But lately he had changed. He seemed to himself to be living in a higher, nobler atmosphere than hitherto. He had discovered that he was poetical—he might prove to be a genius. He certainly was eloquent, he could talk for hours and did so—to the young lady with the sunshiny face. They spoke on the highest subjects, and what a listener she was! So intelligent and appreciative, and with such an exquisite *pose* of the head—it must inspire a block of wood merely to see such a creature in a listening attitude. As to our young friend, he poured forth volumes; he was really clever, and for her he became eloquent. To-night he spoke of Christmas, of time-honored custom and old association; and what he said would have made a Christmas article for a magazine of the first class. He poured scorn on the cold nature that could not, and the affectation that would not, appreciate the domestic festivities of this sacred season.

What, he asked, could be more delightful, more perfect, than such a gathering as this, of the family circle round the Christmas hearth? He spoke with feeling, and it may be said with disinterested feeling, for he had not

joined his family circle himself this Christmas, and there was a vacant place by the hearth of his own home.

"He is strange," said the young lady (she spoke of the tutor in answer to the above remark); "but I am very fond of him. He has been with us so long he is like one of the family; though we know as little of his history as we did on the day he came."

"He looks clever," said the visitor. (Perhaps that is the least one can say for a fellow-creature who shows a great deal of bare skull, and is not otherwise good-looking.)

"He is clever," she answered, "wonderfully clever; so clever and so odd that sometimes I fancy he is hardly 'canny.' There is something almost supernatural about his acuteness and his ingenuity, but they are so kindly used; I wonder he has not brought out any playthings for us to-night."

"Playthings?" inquired the young man.

"Yes; on birthdays or festivals like this he generally brings something out of those huge pockets of his. He has been all over the world, and he produces Indian puzzles, Japanese flower-buds that bloom in hot water, and German toys with complicated machinery, which I suspect him of manufacturing himself. I call him God-papa Drosselmayer, after that delightful old fellow in Hoffman's tale of the Nut Cracker."

"What's that about crackers?" inquired the tutor, sharply, his eyes changing color like a fire opal.

"I am talking of *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*," laughed the young lady. "Crackers do not belong to Christmas; fireworks come on the fifth of November."

"Tut, tut!" said the tutor; "I always tell your ladyship that you are still a tom-boy at heart, as when I first came, and you climbed trees and pelted myself and my young students with horse-chestnuts. You think of crackers to explode at the heels of timorous old gentlemen in a November fog; but I mean bonbon crackers, colored crackers, dainty crackers—crackers for young people with mottoes of sentiment"—(here the tutor shrugged his high shoulders an inch or two higher, and turned the palms of his hands outwards with a glance indescribably comical)—"crackers with paper prodigies, crackers with sweetmeats—*such* sweetmeats!" He smacked his lips with a grotesque contortion, and looked at Master MacGreedy, who choked himself with his last raisin, and forthwith burst into tears.

The widow tried in vain to soothe him with caresses, he only stamped and howled the more. But Miss Letitia gave him some smart smacks on the shoulders to cure his choking fit, and as she kept up the treatment with vigor

the young gentleman was obliged to stop and assure her that the raisin had "gone the right way" at last. "If he were my child," Miss Letitia had been known to observe, with that confidence which characterises the theories of those who are not parents, "I would &c. &c. &c.;" in fact, Miss Letitia thought she would have made a different boy of him—as, indeed, I believe she would.

"Are crackers all that you have for us, sir?" asked one of the two schoolboys, as they hung over the tutor's chair. They were twins, grand boys, with broad, good-humored faces, and curly wigs, as like as two puppy dogs of the same breed. They were only known apart by their intimate friends, and were always together, romping, laughing, snarling, squabbling, huffing and helping each other against the world. Each of them owned a wiry terrier, and in their relations to each other the two dogs (who were marvellously alike) closely followed the example of their masters.

"Do you not care for crackers, Jim?" asked the tutor.

"Not much, sir. They do for girls: but, as you know, I care for nothing but military matters. Do you remember that beautiful toy of yours—'The Besieged City?' Ah! I liked that. Look out, Tom! you're shoving my arm. Can't you stand straight, man?"

"R-r-r-r—r-r, snap!"

Tom's dog was resenting contact with Jim's dog on the hearthrug. There was a hustle among the four, and then they subsided.

"The Besieged City was all very well for you, Jim," said Tom, who meant to be a sailor; "but please to remember that it admitted of no attack from the sea; and what was there for me to do? Ah, sir! you are so clever, I often think you could help me to make a swing with ladders instead of single ropes, so that I could run up and down the rigging whilst it was in full go."

"That would be something like your fir-tree prank, Tom," said his sister. "Can you believe," she added, turning to the visitor, "that Tom lopped the branches of a tall young fir-tree all the way up, leaving little bits for foothold, and then climbed up it one day in an awful storm of wind, and clung on at the top, rocking backwards and forwards? And when papa sent word for him to come down, he said parental authority was superseded at sea by the rules of the service. It was a dreadful storm, and the tree snapped very soon after he got safe to the ground."

"Storm!" sneered Tom, "a capful of wind. Well, it did blow half a gale at the last. But oh! it was glorious!"

"Let us see what we can make of the crackers," said the tutor—and he pulled some out of his pocket. They were put in a dish upon the table, for the

company to choose from; and the terriers jumped and snapped, and tumbled over each other, for they thought that the plate contained eatables. Animated by the same idea, but with quieter steps, Master MacGreedy also approached the table.

"The dogs are noisy," said the tutor, "too noisy. We must have quiet—peace and quiet." His lean hand was once more in his pocket, and he pulled out a box, from which he took some powder, which he scattered on the burning log. A slight smoke now rose from the hot embers, and floated into the room. Was the powder one of those strange compounds that act upon the brain? Was it a magician's powder? Who knows? With it came a sweet, subtile fragrance. It is strange—every one fancied he had smelt it before, and all were absorbed in wondering what it was, and where they had met with it. Even the dogs sat on their haunches with their noses up, sniffing in a speculative manner.

"It's not lavender," said the grandmother slowly, "and it's not rosemary. There is a something of tansy in it (and a very fine tonic flavor too, my dears, though it's *not* in fashion now). Depend upon it, it's a potpourri, and from an excellent receipt, sir"—and the old lady bowed courteously towards the tutor. "My mother made the best potpourri in the county, and it was very much like this. Not quite, perhaps, but much the same, much the same."

The grandmother was a fine old gentlewoman "of the old school," as the phrase is. She was very stately and gracious in her manners, daintily neat in her person, and much attached to the old parson of the parish, who now sat near her chair. All her life she had been very proud of her fine stock of fair linen, both household and personal; and for many years past had kept her own grave-clothes ready in a drawer. They were bleached as white as snow, and lay amongst bags of dry lavender and potpourri. Many times had it seemed likely that they would be needed, for the old lady had had severe illnesses of late, when the good parson sat by her bedside, and read to her of the coming of the Bridegroom, and of that "fine linen, clean and white," which is "the righteousness of the saints." It was of that drawer, with its lavender and potpourri bags, that the scented smoke had reminded her.

"It has rather an overpowering odor," said the old parson, "it is suggestive of incense. I am sure I once smelt something like it in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. It is very delicious."

The parson's long residence in his parish had been marked by one great holiday. With the savings of many years he had performed a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and it was rather a joke against him that he illustrated a large

variety of subjects by the reference to his favorite topic, the holiday of his life.

"It smells of gunpowder," said Jim, decidedly, "and something else. I can't tell what."

"Something one smells in a seaport town," said Tom.

"Can't be very delicious then," Jim retorted.

"It's not *quite* the same," piped the widow; "but it reminds me very much of an old bottle of attar of roses that was given to me when I was at school, with a copy of verses, by a young gentleman who was brother to one of the pupils. I remember Mr. Jones was quite annoyed when he found it in an old box, where I am sure I had not touched it for ten years or more; and I never spoke to him but once, on Examination Day (the young gentleman, I mean). And it's like—yes, it's certainly like a hair-wash Mr. Jones used to use. I've forgotten what it was called, but I know it cost fifteen shillings a bottle; and Macready threw one over a few weeks before his dear papa's death, and annoyed him extremely."

Whilst the company were thus engaged, Master MacGreedy took advantage of the general abstraction to secure half a dozen crackers to his own share; he retired to a corner with them, where he meant to pick them quietly to pieces by himself. He wanted the gay paper, and the motto, and the sweetmeats; but he did not like the report of the cracker. And then what he did want, he wanted all to himself.

"Give us a cracker," said Master Jim, dreamily.

The dogs, after a few dissatisfied snorts, had dropped from their sitting posture, and were lying close together on the rug, dreaming, and uttering short commenting barks and whines at intervals. The twins were now reposing lazily at the tutor's feet, and did not feel disposed to exert themselves even so far as to fetch their own bonbons.

"There's one," said the tutor, taking a fresh cracker from his pocket. One end of it was of red and gold paper, the other of transparent green stuff with silver lines. The boys pulled it.

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The report was louder than Jim had expected.

"The firing has begun," he murmured, involuntarily; "steady, steady!" these last words were to his horse, who seemed to be moving under him, not from fear, but from impatience.

What had been the red and gold paper of the cracker was now the scarlet and gold lace of his own cavalry uniform. He knocked a speck from his sleeve, and scanned the distant ridge, from which a thin line of smoke floated solemnly away, with keen, impatient eyes. Were they to stand inactive all the day?

Presently the horse erects his head. His eyes sparkle—he pricks his sensitive ears—his nostrils quiver with a strange delight. It is the trumpet! Fan farrâ! Fan farrâ! The brazen voice speaks—the horses move—the plumes wave—the helmets shine. On a summer's day they ride slowly, gracefully, calmly down a slope, to Death or Glory. Fan farrâ! Fan farrâ! Fan farrâ!

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Of all this Master Tom knew nothing. The report of the cracker seemed to him only an echo in his brain of a sound that had been in his ears for thirty-six weary hours. The noise of a heavy sea beating against the ship's side in a gale. It was over now, and he was keeping the midnight watch on deck, gazing upon the liquid green of the waves, which heaving and seething after storm, were lit with phosphoric light, and as the ship held steadily on her course, poured past at the rate of twelve knots an hour in a silvery stream. Faster than any ship can sail his thoughts travelled home, and as old times came back to him, he hardly knew whether what he looked at was the phosphor-lighted sea, or green gelatine paper barred with silver. And did the tutor speak? Or was it the voice of some sea monster sounding in his ears?

"The spirits of the storm have gone below to make their report. The treasure gained from sunk vessels has been reckoned, and the sea is illuminated in honor of the spoil."

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The visitor now took a cracker and held it to the young lady. Her end was of white paper with a raised pattern; his of dark-blue gelatine with gold stars. It snapped, the bonbon dropped between them, and the young man got the motto. It was a very bald one—

"My heart is thine.
Wilt thou be mine?"

He was ashamed to show it to her. What could be more meagre? One could write a hundred better couplets "standing on one leg," as the saying is. He

was trying to improvise just one for the occasion, when he became aware that the blue sky over his head was dark with the shades of night, and lighted with stars. A brook rippled near with a soothing monotony. The evening wind sighed through the trees, and wafted the fragrance of the sweet bay-leaved willow towards him, and blew a stray lock of hair against his face. Yes! *She* also was there, walking beside him, under the scented willow bushes. Where, why, and whither he did not ask to know. She was with him —with him; and he seemed to tread on the summer air. He had no doubt as to the nature of his own feelings for her, and here was such an opportunity for declaring them as might never occur again. Surely now, if ever, he would be eloquent! Thoughts of poetry clothed in words of fire must spring unbidden to his lips at such a moment. And yet somehow he could not find a single word to say. He beat his brains, but not an idea would come forth. Only that idiotic cracker motto, which haunted him with its meagre couplet.

"My heart is thine,
Wilt thou be mine?"

Meanwhile they wandered on. The precious time was passing. He must at least make a beginning.

"What a fine night it is!" he observed. But, oh dear! That was a thousand times balder and more meagre than the cracker motto; and not another word could he find to say. At this moment the awkward silence was broken by a voice from a neighboring copse. It was a nightingale singing to his mate. There was no lack of eloquence, and of melodious eloquence, there. The song was as plaintive as old memories, and as full of tenderness as the eyes of the young girl were full of tears. They were standing still now, and with her graceful head bent she was listening to the bird. He stooped his head near hers, and spoke with a simple natural outburst almost involuntary.

"Do you ever think of old times? Do you remember the old house, and the fun we used to have? and the tutor whom you pelted with horse-chestnuts when you were a little girl? And those cracker bonbons, and the motto *we* drew—

'My heart is thine.
Wilt thou be mine?' "

She smiled, and lifted her eyes ("blue as the sky, and bright as the stars," he thought) to his, and answered "Yes."

Then the bonbon motto was avenged, and there was silence. Eloquent, perfect, complete, beautiful silence! Only the wind sighed through the fragrant willows, the stream rippled, the stars shone and in the neighboring copse the nightingale sang, and sang, and sang.

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When the white end of the cracker came into the young lady's hand, she was full of admiration for the fine raised pattern. As she held it between her fingers it suddenly struck her that she had discovered what the tutor's fragrant smoke smelt like. It was like the scent of orange-flowers, and had certainly a soporific effect upon the senses. She felt very sleepy, and as she stroked the shiny surface of the cracker she found herself thinking it was very soft for paper, and then rousing herself with a start, and wondering at her own folly in speaking thus of the white silk in which she was dressed, and of which she was holding up the skirt between her finger and thumb, as if she were dancing a minuet.

"It's grandmamma's egg-shell brocade!" she cried. "Oh, Grandmamma! Have you given it to me? That lovely old thing! But I thought it was the family wedding-dress, and that I was not to have it till I was a bride."

"And so you are, my dear. And a fairer bride the sun never shone on," sobbed the old lady, who was kissing and blessing her, and wishing her, in the words of the old formula—

"Health to wear it,
Strength to tear it,
And money to buy another."

"There is no hope for the last two things, you know," said the young girl; "for I am sure that the flag that braved a thousand years was not half so strong as your brocade; and as to buying another, there are none to be bought in these degenerate days."

The old lady's reply was probably very gracious, for she liked to be complimented on the virtues of old things in general, and of her egg-shell brocade in particular. But of what she said her granddaughter heard nothing. With the strange irregularity of dreams, she found herself, she knew not how, in the old church. It was true. She was a bride, standing there with old friends and old associations thick around her, on the threshold of a new life. The sun shone through the stained glass of the windows, and illuminated the brocade, whose old-fashioned stiffness so became her childish beauty, and

flung a thousand new tints over her sunny hair, and drew so powerful a fragrance from the orange blossom with which it was twined, that it was almost overpowering. Yes! It was too sweet—too strong. She certainly would not be able to bear it much longer without losing her senses. And the service was going on. A question had been asked of her, and she must reply. She made a strong effort, and said "Yes," simply and very earnestly, for it was what she meant. But she had no sooner said it than she became uneasily conscious that she had not used the right word. Some one laughed. It was the tutor, and his voice jarred and disturbed the dream, as a stone troubles the surface of still water. The vision trembled, and then broke, and the young lady found herself still sitting by the table and fingering the cracker paper, whilst the tutor chuckled and rubbed his hands by the fire, and his shadow scrambled on the wall like an ape upon a tree. But her "Yes" had passed into the young man's dream without disturbing it, and he dreamt on.

* * * * * *

It was a cracker like the preceding one that the grandmother and the parson pulled together. The old lady had insisted upon it. The good rector had shown a tendency to low spirits this evening, and a wish to withdraw early. But the old lady did not approve of people "shirking" (as boys say) either their duties or their pleasures; and to keep a "merry Christmas" in a family circle that has been spared to meet in health and happiness, seemed to her to be both the one and the other.

It was his sermon for next day which weighed on the parson's mind. Not that he was behindhand with that part of his duties. He was far too methodical in his habits for that, and it had been written before the bustle of Christmas week began. But after preaching Christmas sermons from the same pulpit for thirty-five years, he felt keenly how difficult it is to awaken due interest in subjects that are so familiar, and to give due force to lessons so often repeated. So he wanted a quiet hour in his own study before he went to rest, with the sermon that did not satisfy him, and the subject that should be so heart-stirring and ever new—the Story of Bethlehem.

He consented, however, to pull one cracker with the grandmother, though he feared the noise might startle her nerves, and said so.

"Nerves were not invented in my young days," said the old lady, firmly; and she took her part in the ensuing explosion without so much as a wink.

As the crackers snapped, it seemed to the parson as if the fragrant smoke from the yule-log were growing denser in the room. Through the mist from time to time the face of the tutor loomed large, and then disappeared. At last

the clouds rolled away, and the parson breathed clear air. Clear, yes, and how clear! This brilliant freshness, these intense lights and shadows, this mildness and purity in the night air——

"It is not England," he muttered, "it is the East. I have felt no air like this since I breathed the air of Palestine."

Over his head, through immeasurable distances, the dark-blue space was lighted by the great multitude of the stars, whose glittering ranks have in that atmosphere a distinctness and a glory unseen with us. Perhaps no scene of beauty in the visible creation has proved a more hackneyed theme for the poet and the philosopher than a starry night. But not all the superabundance of simile and moral illustration with which the subject has been loaded can rob the beholder of the freshness of its grandeur or the force of its teaching; that noblest and most majestic vision of the handiwork of God on which the eye of man is here permitted to rest.

As the parson gazed he became conscious that he was not alone. Other eyes beside his were watching the skies to-night. Dark, profound, patient, eastern eyes, used from the cradle to the grave to watch and wait. The eyes of star-gazers and dream-interpreters; men who believed the fate of empires to be written in shining characters on the face of heaven, as the "Mene, Mene," was written in fire on the walls of the Babylonian palace. The old parson was one of the many men of real learning and wide reading who pursue their studies in the quiet country parishes of England, and it was with the keen interest of intelligence that he watched the group of figures that lay near him.

"Is this a vision of the past?" he asked himself. "There can be no doubt as to these men. They are star-gazers, magi, and, from their dress and bearing, men of high rank; perhaps 'teachers of a higher wisdom' in one of the purest philosophies of the old heathen world. When one thinks," he pursued, "of the intense interest, the eager excitement which the student of history finds in the narrative of the past as unfolded in dusty records written by the hand of man, one may realize how absorbing must have been that science which professed to unveil the future, and to display to the eyes of the wise the fate of dynasties written with the finger of God amid the stars."

The dark-robed figures were so still that they might almost have been carved in stone. The air seemed to grow purer and purer; the stars shone brighter and brighter; suspended in ether the planets seemed to hang like lamps. Now a shooting meteor passed athwart the sky, and vanished behind the hill. But not for this did the watchers move; in silence they watched on —till, on a sudden, how and whence the parson knew not, across the shining

ranks of that immeasurable host, whose names and number are known to God alone, there passed in slow but obvious motion one brilliant solitary star—a star of such surpassing brightness that he involuntarily joined in the wild cry of joy and greeting with which the Men of the East now prostrated themselves with their faces to the earth.

He could not understand the language in which, with noisy clamor and gesticulation, they broke their former profound and patient silence, and greeted the portent for which they had watched. But he knew now that these were the Wise Men of the Epiphany, and that this was the Star of Bethlehem. In his ears rang the energetic simplicity of the Gospel narrative, "When they saw the Star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

With exceeding great joy! Ah! happy magi, who (more blest than Balaam the son of Beor), were faithful to the dim light vouchsafed to you; the Gentile church may well be proud of your memory. Ye travelled long and far to bring royal offerings to the King of the Jews, with a faith not found in Israel. Ye saw him whom prophets and kings had desired to see, and were glad. Wise men indeed, and wise with the highest wisdom, in that ye suffered yourselves to be taught of God.

Then the parson prayed that if this were indeed a dream he might dream on; might pass, if only in a vision, over the hill, following the footsteps of the magi, whilst the Star went before them, till he should see it rest above that city, which, little indeed among the thousands of Judah, was yet the birthplace of the Lord's Christ.

"Ah!" he almost sobbed, "let me follow! On my knees let me follow into the house and see the Holy Child. In the eyes of how many babies I have seen mind and thought far beyond their powers of communication, every mother knows. But if at times, with a sort of awe, one sees the immortal soul shining through the prison-bars of helpless infancy, what, oh! what must it be to behold the Godhead veiled in flesh through the face of a little child!"

The parson stretched out his arms, but even with the passion of his words the vision began to break. He dared not move for fear it should utterly fade, and as he lay still and silent, the wise men roused their followers, and led by the Star, the train passed solemnly over the distant hills.

Then the clear night became clouded with fragrant vapor, and with a sigh the parson awoke.

* * * * * *

When the cracker snapped and the white end was left in the grandmother's hand, she was astonished to perceive (as she thought) that the white lace veil which she had worn over her wedding bonnet was still in her possession, and that she was turning it over in her fingers. "I fancied I gave it to Jemima when her first baby was born," she muttered dreamily. It was darned and yellow, but it carried her back all the same, and recalled happy hours with wonderful vividness. She remembered the post-chaise and the postillion. "He was such a pert little fellow, and how we laughed at him! He must be either dead or a very shaky old man by now," said the old lady. She seemed to smell the scent of meadow-sweet that was so powerful in a lane through which they drove; and how clearly she could see the clean little country inn where they spent the honeymoon! She seemed to be there now, taking off her bonnet and shawl, in the quaint clean chamber, with the heavy oak rafters, and the jasmine coming in at the window, and glancing with pardonable pride at the fair face reflected in the mirror. But as she laid her things on the patchwork coverlet, it seemed to her that the lace veil became fine white linen, and was folded about a figure that lay in the bed; and when she looked round the room again everything was draped in white—white blinds hung before the windows, and even the old oak chest and the press were covered with clean white cloths, after the decent custom of the country; whilst from the church tower without the passing bell tolled slowly. She had not seen the face of the corpse, and a strange anxiety came over her to count the strokes of the bell, which tell if it is a man, woman, or child who has passed away. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven! No more. It was a woman, and when she looked on the face of the dead she saw her own. But even as she looked the fair linen of the grave clothes became the buoyant drapery of another figure, in whose face she found a strange recognition of the lineaments of the dead, with all the loveliness of the bride. But ah! more, much more! On that face there was a beauty not doomed to wither, before those happy eyes lay a future unshadowed by the imperfections of earthly prospects, and the folds of that robe were white as no fuller on earth can white them. The window curtain parted, the jasmine flowers bowed their heads, the spirit passed from the chamber of death, and the old lady's dream was ended.

* * * * * *

Miss Letitia had shared a cracker with the widow. The widow squeaked when the cracker went off, and then insisted upon giving up the smart paper and everything to Miss Letitia. She had always given up everything to Mr. Jones, she did so now to Master MacGreedy, and was quite unaccustomed to

keep anything for her own share. She did not give this explanation herself, but so it was.

The cracker that thus fell into the hands of Miss Letitia was one of those new-fashioned ones that have a paper pattern of some article of dress wrapped up in them instead of a bonbon. This one was a paper bonnet made in the latest *mode*—of green tissue paper; and Miss Letitia stuck it on the top of her chignon with an air that the widow envied from the bottom of her heart. She had not the gift of "carrying off" her clothes. But to the tutor, on the contrary, it seemed to afford the most extreme amusement; and as Miss Letitia bowed gracefully hither and thither in the energy of her conversation with the widow, the green paper fluttering with each emphasis, he fairly shook with delight, his shadow dancing like a maniac beside him. He had scattered some more powder on the coals, and it may have been that the smoke got into her eyes, and confused her ideas of color, but Miss Letitia was struck with a fervid and otherwise unaccountable admiration for the paper ends of the cracker, which were most unusually ugly. One was of a sallowish salmon-color, and transparent, the other was of brick-red paper with a fringe. As Miss Letitia turned them over, she saw, to her unspeakable delight, that there were several yards of each material, and her peculiar genius instantly seized upon the fact that in the present rage for double skirts there might be enough of the two kinds to combine into a fashionable dress.

It had never struck her before that a dirty salmon went well with brick red. "They blend so becomingly, my dear," she murmured; "and I think the under skirt will sit well, it is so stiff."

The widow did not reply. The fumes of the tutor's compound made her sleepy, and though she nodded to Miss Letitia's observations, it was less from appreciation of their force, than from inability to hold up her head. She was dreaming uneasy, horrible dreams, like nightmares; in which from time to time there mingled expressions of doubt and dissatisfaction which fell from Miss Letitia's lips. "Just half a yard short—no gores—false hem" (and the melancholy reflection that) "flounces take so much stuff." Then the tutor's face kept appearing and vanishing with horrible grimaces through the mist. At last the widow fell fairly asleep, and dreamed that she was married to the Blue Beard of nursery annals, and that on his return from his memorable journey he had caught her in the act of displaying the mysterious cupboard to Miss Letitia. As he waved his scimitar over her head, he seemed unaccountably to assume the form and features of the tutor. In her agitation the poor woman could think of no plea against his severity, except that the cupboard was already crammed with the corpses of his previous wives, and

that there was no room for her. She was pleading this argument when Miss Letitia's voice broke in upon her dream with decisive accent:

"There's enough for two bodies."

The widow shrieked and awoke.

"High and low," explained Miss Letitia. "My dear, what *are* you screaming about?"

"I am very sorry indeed," said the widow; "I beg your pardon, I am sure, a thousand times. But since Mr. Jones's death I have been so nervous, and I had such a horrible dream. And, oh dear! oh dear!" she added, "what is the matter with my precious child? Macready, love, come to your mamma, my pretty lamb."

Ugh! ugh! There were groans from the corner where Master MacGreedy sat on his crackers as if they were eggs, and he hatching them. He had only touched one, as yet, of the stock he had secured. He had picked it to pieces, had avoided the snap, and had found a large comfit like an egg with a rough shell inside. Every one knows that the goodies in crackers are not of a very superior quality. There is a large amount of white lead in the outside thinly disguised by a shabby flavor of sugar. But that outside once disposed of, there lies an almond at the core. Now an almond is a very delicious thing in itself, and doubly nice when it takes the taste of white paint and chalk out of one's mouth. But in spite of all the white lead and sugar and chalk through which he had sucked his way, MacGreedy could not come to the almond. A dozen times had he been on the point of spitting out the delusive sweetmeat; but just as he thought of it he was sure to feel a bit of hard rough edge, and thinking he had gained the kernel at last, he held valiantly on. It only proved to be a rough bit of sugar, however, and still the interminable coating melted copiously in his mouth; and still the clean, fragrant almond evaded his hopes. At last with a groan he spat the seemingly undiminished bonbon on to the floor, and turned as white and trembling as an arrow-root blancmange.

In obedience to the widow's entreaties the tutor opened a window, and tried to carry MacGreedy to the air; but that young gentleman utterly refused to allow the tutor to approach him, and was borne howling to bed by his mamma.

With the fresh air the fumes of the fragrant smoke dispersed, and the company roused themselves.

"Rather oppressive, eh?" said the master of the house, who had had his dream too, with which we have no concern.

The dogs had had theirs also, and had testified to the same in their sleep by low growls and whines. Now they shook themselves, and rubbed against

each other, growling in a warlike manner through their teeth, and wagging peaceably with their little stumpy tails.

The twins shook themselves, and fell to squabbling as to whether they had been to sleep or no; and, if either, which of them had given way to that weakness.

Miss Letitia took the paper bonnet from her head with a nervous laugh, and after looking regretfully at the cracker papers put them in her pocket.

The parson went home through the frosty night. In the village street he heard a boy's voice singing two lines of the Christmas hymn—

> "Trace we the Babe Who hath redeemed our loss
> From the poor Manger to the bitter Cross;"

and his eyes filled with tears.

The old lady went to bed and slept in peace.

"In all the thirty-five years we have been privileged to hear you, sir," she told the rector next day after service, "I never heard such a Christmas sermon before."

The visitor carefully preserved the blue paper and the cracker motto. He came down early next morning to find the white half to put with them. He did not find it, for the young lady had taken it the night before.

The tutor had been in the room before him, wandering round the scene of the evening's festivities.

The yule-log lay black and cold upon the hearth, and the tutor nodded to it. "I told you how it would be," he said; "but never mind, you have had your day, and a merry one too." In the corner lay the heap of crackers which Master MacGreedy had been too ill to remember when he retired. The tutor pocketed them with a grim smile.

As to the comfit, it was eaten by one of the dogs, who had come down earliest of all. He swallowed it whole, so whether it contained an almond or not, remains a mystery to the present time.

AMELIA AND THE DWARFS.

My godmother's grandmother knew a good deal about the fairies. *Her* grandmother had seen a fairy rade on a Rodmas Eve, and she herself could remember a copper vessel of a queer shape which had been left by the elves on some occasion at an old farm-house among the hills. The following story came from her, and where she got it I do not know. She used to say it was a pleasant tale, with a good moral in the inside of it. My godmother often observed that a tale without a moral was like a nut without a kernel, not worth the cracking. (We called fireside stories "cracks" in our part of the country.) This is the tale.

AMELIA.

A couple of gentlefolk once lived in a certain part of England. (My godmother never would tell the name either of the place or the people, even if she knew it. She said one ought not to expose one's neighbors' failings more than there was a due occasion for.) They had an only child, a daughter, whose name was Amelia. They were an easy-going, good-humored couple; "rather soft," my godmother said, but she was apt to think anybody "soft" who came from the southern shires, as these people did. Amelia, who had been born farther north, was by no means so. She had a strong, resolute will, and a clever head of her own, though she was but a child. She had a way of her own too, and had it very completely. Perhaps because she was an only child, or perhaps because they were so easy going, her parents spoiled her. She was, beyond question, the most tiresome little girl in that or any other neighborhood. From her baby days her father and mother had taken every opportunity of showing her to their friends, and there was not a friend who did not dread the infliction. When the good lady visited her acquaintances, she always took Amelia with her, and if the acquaintances were fortunate enough to see from the windows who was coming, they used to snatch up any delicate knick-knacks, or brittle ornaments lying about, and put them away, crying, "What is to be done? Here comes Amelia!"

When Amelia came in, she would stand and survey the room, whilst her mother saluted her acquaintances; and if anything struck her fancy, she would interrupt the greetings to draw her mother's attention to it, with a

twitch of her shawl, “Oh, look, mamma, at that funny bird in the glass case!” or perhaps, “Mamma, mamma! There’s a new carpet since we were here last;” for, as her mother said, she was “a very observing child.”

Then she would wander round the room, examining and fingering everything, and occasionally coming back with something in her hand to tread on her mother’s dress, and break in upon the ladies’ conversation with —“Mamma, mamma! What’s the good of keeping this old basin! It’s been broken and mended, and some of the pieces are quite loose now. I can feel them:” or—addressing the lady of the house—“That’s not a real ottoman in the corner. It’s a box covered with chintz. I know, for I’ve looked.”

Then her mamma would say, reprovingly, “My *dear* Amelia!”

And perhaps the lady of the house would beg, “Don’t play with that old china, my love; for though it is mended, it is very valuable;” and her mother would add, “My dear Amelia, you must not.”

Sometimes the good lady said, “You *must* not.” Sometimes she tried —“You must *not*.” When both these failed, and Amelia was balancing the china bowl on her finger ends, her mamma would get flurried, and when Amelia flurried her, she always rolled her r’s, and emphasized her words, so that it sounded thus:

“My dear-r-r-r-Ramelia! YOU MUST NOT.”

At which Amelia would not so much as look round, till perhaps the bowl slipped from her fingers, and was smashed into unmendable fragments. Then her mamma would exclaim, “Oh, dear-r-r-r, oh, dear-r-r-r-Ramelia!” and the lady of the house would try to look as if it did not matter, and when Amelia and her mother departed, would pick up the bits, and pour out her complaints to her lady friends, most of whom had suffered many such damages at the hands of this “very observing child.”

When the good couple received their friends at home, there was no escaping from Amelia. If it was a dinner party, she came in with the dessert, or perhaps sooner. She would take up her position near some one, generally the person most deeply engaged in conversation, and either lean heavily against him or her, or climb on to his or her knee, without being invited. She would break in upon the most interesting discussion with her own little childish affairs, in the following style—

“I’ve been out to-day. I walked to the town. I jumped across three brooks. Can you jump? Papa gave me sixpence to-day. I am saving up my money to be rich. You may cut me an orange; no, I’ll take it to Mr. Brown, he peels it with a spoon and turns the skin back. Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown!

Don't talk to mamma, but peel me an orange, please. Mr. Brown! I'm playing with your finger-glass."

And when the finger-glass full of cold water had been upset on to Mr. Brown's shirt-front, Amelia's mamma would cry—"Oh dear, oh dear-r-Ramelia!" and carry her off with the ladies to the drawing-room.

Here she would scramble on to the ladies' knees, or trample out the gathers of their dresses, and fidget with their ornaments, startling some luckless lady by the announcement, "I've got your bracelet undone at last!" who would find one of the divisions broken open by force, Amelia not understanding the working of a clasp.

Or perhaps two young lady friends would get into a quiet corner for a chat. The observing child was sure to spy them, and run on to them, crushing their flowers and ribbons, and crying—"You two want to talk secrets, I know. I can hear what you say. I'm going to listen, I am. And I shall tell, too." When perhaps a knock at the door announced the nurse to take Miss Amelia to bed, and spread a general rapture of relief.

Then Amelia would run to trample and worry her mother, and after much teasing, and clinging, and complaining, the nurse would be dismissed, and the fond mamma would turn to the lady next to her, and say with a smile —"I suppose I must let her stay up a little. It is such a treat to her, poor child!"

But it was no treat to the visitors.

Besides tormenting her fellow-creatures, Amelia had a trick of teasing animals. She was really fond of dogs, but she was still fonder of doing what she was wanted not to do, and of worrying everything and everybody about her. So she used to tread on the tips of their tails, and pretend to give them biscuit, and then hit them on the nose, besides pulling at those few, long, sensitive hairs which thin-skinned dogs wear on the upper lip.

Now Amelia's mother's acquaintances were so very well-bred and amiable, that they never spoke their minds to either the mother or the daughter about what they endured from the latter's rudeness, wilfulness, and powers of destruction. But this was not the case with the dogs, and they expressed their sentiments by many a growl and snap. At last one day Amelia was tormenting a snow-white bull-dog (who was certainly as well-bred and as amiable as any living creature in the kingdom), and she did not see that even his patience was becoming worn out. His pink nose became crimson with increased irritation, his upper lip twitched over his teeth, behind which he was rolling as many warning Rs as Amelia's mother herself. She finally held out a bun towards him, and just as he was about to

take it, she snatched it away and kicked him instead. This fairly exasperated the bull-dog, and as Amelia would not let him bite the bun, he bit Amelia's leg.

Her mamma was so distressed that she fell into hysterics, and hardly knew what she was saying. She said the bull-dog must be shot for fear he should go mad, and Amelia's wound must be done with a red-hot poker for fear *she* should go mad (with hydrophobia). And as of course she couldn't bear the pain of this, she must have chloroform, and she would most probably die of that; for as one in several thousands dies annually under chloroform, it was evident that her chance of life was very small indeed. So, as the poor lady said, "Whether we shoot Amelia and burn the bull-dog—at least I mean shoot the bull-dog and burn Amelia with a red-hot poker—or leave it alone; and whether Amelia or the bull-dog has chloroform or bears it without—it seems to be death or madness everyway!"

And as the doctor did not come fast enough, she ran out without her bonnet to meet him, and Amelia's papa, who was very much distressed too, ran after her with her bonnet. Meanwhile the doctor came in by another way, found Amelia sitting on the dining-room floor with the bull-dog, and crying bitterly. She was telling him that they wanted to shoot him, but that they should not, for it was all her fault and not his. But she did not tell him that she was to be burnt with a red-hot poker, for she thought it might hurt his feelings. And then she wept afresh, and kissed the bull-dog, and the bull-dog kissed her with his red tongue, and rubbed his pink nose against her, and beat his own tail much harder on the floor than Amelia had ever hit it. She said the same things to the doctor, but she told him also that she was willing to be burnt without chloroform if it must be done, and if they would spare the bull-dog. And though she looked very white, she meant what she said.

But the doctor looked at her leg, and found it was only a snap, and not a deep wound; and then he looked at the bull-dog, and saw that so far from looking mad, he looked a great deal more sensible than anybody in the house. So he only washed Amelia's leg and bound it up, and she was not burnt with the poker, neither did she get hydrophobia; but she had got a good lesson on manners, and thenceforward she always behaved with the utmost propriety to animals, though she tormented her mother's friends as much as ever.

Now although Amelia's mamma's acquaintances were too polite to complain before her face, they made up for it by what they said behind her back. In allusion to the poor lady's ineffectual remonstrances, one gentleman said that the more mischief Amelia did, the dearer she seemed to grow to her mother. And somebody else replied that however dear she might be as a

daughter, she was certainly a very *dear* friend, and proposed that they should send in a bill for all the damage she had done in the course of the year, as a round robin to her parents at Christmas. From which it may be seen that Amelia was not popular with her parents' friends, as (to do grown-up people justice) good children almost invariably are.

If she was not a favorite in the drawing-room, she was still less so in the nursery, where, besides all the hardships naturally belonging to attendance on a spoilt-child, the poor nurse was kept, as she said, "on the continual go" by Amelia's reckless destruction of her clothes. It was not fair wear and tear, it was not an occasional fall in the mire, or an accidental rent or two during a game at "Hunt the Hare," but it was constant wilful destruction, which nurse had to repair as best she might. No entreaties would induce Amelia to "take care" of anything. She walked obstinately on the muddy side of the road when nurse pointed out the clean parts, kicking up the dirt with her feet; if she climbed a wall she never tried to free her dress if it had caught; on she rushed, and half a skirt might be left behind for any care she had in the matter. "They must be mended," or, "They must be washed," was all she thought about it.

"You seem to think things clean and mend themselves, Miss Amelia," said poor nurse one day.

"No, I don't," said Amelia, rudely. "I think you do them; what are you here for?"

But though she spoke in this insolent and unladylike fashion, Amelia really did not realize what the tasks were which her carelessness imposed on other people. When every hour of nurse's day had been spent in struggling to keep her wilful young lady regularly fed, decently dressed, and moderately well-behaved (except, indeed, those hours when her mother was fighting the same battle downstairs); and when at last, after the hardest struggle of all, she had been got to bed not more than two hours later than her appointed time, even then there was no rest for nurse. Amelia's mamma could at last lean back in her chair and have a quiet chat with her husband, which was not broken in upon every two minutes, and Amelia herself was asleep; but nurse must sit up for hours wearing out her eyes by the light of a tallow candle, in fine-darning great, jagged and most unnecessary holes in Amelia's muslin dresses. Or perhaps she had to wash and iron clothes for Amelia's wear next day. For sometimes she was so very destructive, that towards the end of the week she had used up all her clothes and had no clean ones to fall back upon.

Amelia's meals were another source of trouble. She would not wear a pinafore; if it had been put on, she would burst the strings, and perhaps in throwing it away knock her plate of mutton broth over the tablecloth and her own dress. Then she fancied first one thing and then another; she did not like this or that; she wanted a bit cut here and there. Her mamma used to begin by saying, "My dear-r-Ramelia, you must not be so wasteful," and she used to end by saying, "The dear child has positively no appetite;" which seemed to be a good reason for not wasting any more food upon her; but with Amelia's mamma it only meant that she might try a little cutlet and tomato sauce when she had half finished her roast beef, and that most of the cutlet and all the mashed potato might be exchanged for plum tart and custard; and that when she had spooned up the custard and played with the paste, and put the plum stones on the tablecloth, she might be tempted with a little Stilton cheese and celery, and exchange that for anything that caught her fancy in the dessert dishes.

The nurse used to say, "Many a poor child would thank God for what you waste every meal time, Miss Amelia," and to quote a certain good old saying, "Waste not want not." But Amelia's mamma allowed her to send away on her plates what would have fed another child, day after day.

UNDER THE HAYCOCKS.

It was summer, and haytime. Amelia had been constantly in the hayfield, and the haymakers had constantly wished that she had been anywhere else. She mislaid the rakes, nearly killed herself and several other persons with a fork, and overturned one haycock after another as fast as they were made. At tea time it was hoped that she would depart, but she teased her mamma to have the tea brought into the field, and her mamma said, "The poor child must have a treat sometimes," and so it was brought out.

After this she fell off the haycart, and was a good deal shaken, but not hurt. So she was taken indoors, and the haymakers worked hard and cleared the field, all but a few cocks which were left till the morning.

The sun set, the dew fell, the moon rose. It was a lovely night. Amelia peeped from behind the blinds of the drawing-room windows, and saw four haycocks, each with a deep shadow reposing at its side. The rest of the field was swept clean, and looked pale in the moonshine. It was a lovely night.

"I want to go out," said Amelia. "They will take away those cocks before I can get at them in the morning, and there will be no more jumping and tumbling. I shall go out and have some fun now."

“My dear Amelia, you must not,” said her mamma; and her papa added, “I won’t hear of it.” So Amelia went upstairs to grumble to nurse; but nurse only said, “Now, my dear Miss Amelia, do go quietly to bed, like a dear love. The field is all wet with dew. Besides, it’s a moonlight night, and who knows what’s abroad? You might see the fairies—bless us and sain us!—and what not. There’s been a magpie hopping up and down near the house all day, and that’s a sign of ill-luck.”

“I don’t care for magpies,” said Amelia; “I threw a stone at that one to-day.”

And she left the nursery, and swung downstairs on the rail of the banisters. But she did not go into the drawing-room; she opened the front door and went out into the moonshine.

It was a lovely night. But there was something strange about it. Everything looked asleep, and yet seemed not only awake but watching. There was not a sound, and yet the air seemed full of half sounds. The child was quite alone, and yet at every step she fancied some one behind her, on one side of her, somewhere, and found it only a rustling leaf or a passing shadow. She was soon in the hayfield, where it was just the same; so that when she fancied that something green was moving near the first haycock she thought very little of it, till, coming closer, she plainly perceived by the moonlight a tiny man dressed in green, with a tall, pointed hat, and very, very long tips to his shoes, tying his shoestring with his foot on a stubble stalk. He had the most wizened of faces, and when he got angry with his shoe, he pulled so wry a grimace that it was quite laughable. At last he stood up, stepping carefully over the stubble, went up to the first haycock, and drawing out a hollow grass stalk blew upon it till his cheeks were puffed like footballs. And yet there was no sound, only a half-sound, as of a horn blown in the far distance, or in a dream. Presently the point of a tall hat, and finally just such another little weazened face poked out through the side of the haycock.

“Can we hold revel here to-night?” asked the little green man.

“That indeed you cannot,” answered the other; “we have hardly room to turn round as it is, with all Amelia’s dirty frocks.”

“Ah, bah!” said the dwarf; and he walked on to the next haycock, Amelia cautiously following.

Here he blew again, and a head was put out as before; on which he said —

“Can we hold revel here to-night?”

“How is it possible?” was the reply, “when there is not a place where one can so much as set down an acorn cup, for Amelia’s broken victuals.”

“Fie! fie!” said the dwarf, and went on to the third, where all happened as before; and he asked the old question—

“Can we hold revel here to-night?”

“Can you dance on glass and crockery shreds?” inquired the other. “Amelia’s broken gimcracks are everywhere.”

“Pshaw!” snorted the dwarf, frowning terribly; and when he came to the fourth haycock he blew such an angry blast that the grass stalk split into seven pieces. But he met with no better success than before. Only the point of a hat came through the hay, and a feeble voice piped in tones of depression—“The broken threads would entangle our feet. It’s all Amelia’s fault. If we could only get hold of her!”

“If she’s wise, she’ll keep as far from these haycocks as she can,” snarled the dwarf, angrily; and he shook his fist as much as to say, “If she did come, I should not receive her very pleasantly.”

Now with Amelia, to hear that she had better not do something, was to make her wish at once to do it; and as she was not at all wanting in courage, she pulled the dwarf’s little cloak, just as she would have twitched her mother’s shawl, and said (with that sort of snarly whine in which spoilt children generally speak), “Why shouldn’t I come to the haycocks if I want to? They belong to my papa, and I shall come if I like. But you have no business here.”

“Nightshade and hemlock!” ejaculated the little man, “you are not lacking in impudence. Perhaps your Sauciness is not quite aware how things are distributed in this world?” saying which he lifted his pointed shoes and began to dance and sing—

“All under the sun belongs to men,
And all under the moon to the fairies.
So, so, so! Ho, ho, ho!
All under the moon to the fairies.”

As he sang “Ho, ho, ho!” the little man turned head over heels; and though by this time Amelia would gladly have got away, she could not, for the dwarf seemed to dance and tumble round her, and always to cut off the chance of escape; whilst numberless voices from all around seemed to join in the chorus, with—

"So, so, so! Ho, ho, ho!
All under the moon to the fairies."

"And now," said the little man, "to work! And you have plenty of work before you, so trip on, to the first haycock."

"I shan't!" said Amelia.

"On with you!" repeated the dwarf.

"I won't!" said Amelia.

But the little man, who was behind her, pinched her funny-bone with his lean fingers, and, as everybody knows, that is agony; so Amelia ran on, and tried to get away. But when she went too fast, the dwarf trod on her heels with his long-pointed shoe, and if she did not go fast enough, he pinched her funny-bone. So for once in her life she was obliged to do as she was told. As they ran, tall hats and wizened faces were popped out on all sides of the haycocks, like blanched almonds on a tipsy cake; and whenever the dwarf pinched Amelia, or trod on her heels, they cried "Ho, ho, ho!" with such horrible contortions as they laughed, that it was hideous to behold.

"Here is Amelia!" shouted the dwarf when they reached the first haycock.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed all the others, as they poked out here and there from the hay.

"Bring a stock," said the dwarf; on which the hay was lifted, and out ran six or seven dwarfs, carrying what seemed to Amelia to be a little girl like herself. And when she looked closer, to her horror and surprise the figure was exactly like her—it was her own face, clothes, and everything.

"Shall we kick it into the house?" asked the goblins.

"No," said the dwarf; "lay it down by the haycock. The father and mother are coming to seek her now."

When Amelia heard this she began to shriek for help; but she was pushed into the haycock, where her loudest cries sounded like the chirruping of a grasshopper.

It was really a fine sight to see the inside of the cock.

Farmers do not like to see flowers in a hayfield, but the fairies do. They had arranged all the buttercups, &c., in patterns on the haywalls; bunches of meadow-sweet swung from the roof like censers, and perfumed the air; and the ox-eye daisies which formed the ceiling gave a light like stars. But Amelia cared for none of this. She only struggled to peep through the hay, and she did see her father and mother and nurse come down the lawn,

followed by the other servants, looking for her. When they saw the stock they ran to raise it with exclamations of pity and surprise. The stock moaned faintly, and Amelia's mamma wept, and Amelia herself shouted with all her might.

"What's that?" said her mamma. (It is not easy to deceive a mother.)

"Only the grasshoppers, my dear," said papa. "Let us get the poor child home."

The stock moaned again, and the mother said, "Oh dear! oh dear-r-Ramelia!" and followed in tears.

"Rub her eyes," said the dwarf; on which Amelia's eyes were rubbed with some ointment, and when she took a last peep, she could see that the stock was nothing but a hairy imp with a face like the oldest and most grotesque of apes.

"——and send her below;" said the dwarf. On which the field opened, and Amelia was pushed underground.

She found herself on a sort of open heath, where no houses were to be seen. Of course there was no moonshine, and yet it was neither daylight nor dark. There was as the light of early dawn, and every sound was at once clear and dreamy, like the first sounds of the day coming through the fresh air before sunrise. Beautiful flowers crept over the heath, whose tints were constantly changing in the subdued light; and as the hues changed and blended, the flowers gave forth different perfumes. All would have been charming but that at every few paces the paths were blocked by large clothes-baskets full of dirty frocks. And the frocks were Amelia's. Torn, draggled, wet, covered with sand, mud, and dirt of all kinds, Amelia recognized them.

"You've got to wash them all," said the dwarf, who was behind her as usual; "that's what you've come down for—not because your society is particularly pleasant. So the sooner you begin the better."

"I can't," said Amelia (she had already learnt that "I won't" is not an answer for every one); "send them up to nurse, and she'll do them. It is her business."

"What nurse can do she has done, and now it's time for you to begin," said the dwarf. "Sooner or later the mischief done by spoilt children's wilful disobedience comes back on their own hands. Up to a certain point we help them, for we love children, and we are wilful ourselves. But there are limits to everything. If you can't wash your dirty frocks, it is time you learnt to do so, if only that you may know what the trouble is you impose on other people. *She* will teach you."

The dwarf kicked out his foot in front of him, and pointed with his long toe to a woman who sat by a fire made upon the heath, where a pot was suspended from crossed poles. It was like a bit of a gipsy encampment, and the woman seemed to be a real woman, not a fairy—which was the case, as Amelia afterwards found. She had lived underground for many years, and was the dwarfs' servant.

And this was how it came about that Amelia had to wash her dirty frocks. Let any little girl try to wash one of her dresses; not to half wash it, not to leave it stained with dirty water, but to wash it quite clean. Let her then try to starch and iron it—in short, to make it look as if it had come from the laundress—and she will have some idea of what poor Amelia had to learn to do. There was no help for it. When she was working she very seldom saw the dwarfs; but if she were idle or stubborn, or had any hopes of getting away, one was sure to start up at her elbow and pinch her funny-bone, or poke her in the ribs, till she did her best. Her back ached with stooping over the wash-tub; her hands and arms grew wrinkled with soaking in hot soapsuds, and sore with rubbing. Whatever she did not know how to do, the woman of the heath taught her. At first, whilst Amelia was sulky, the woman of the heath was sharp and cross; but when Amelia became willing and obedient, she was good-natured, and even helped her.

The first time that Amelia felt hungry she asked for some food.

"By all means," said one of the dwarfs; "there is plenty down here which belongs to you;" and he led her away till they came to a place like the first, except that it was covered with plates of broken meats; all the bits of good meat, pie, pudding, bread and butter, &c., that Amelia had wasted beforetime.

"I can't eat cold scraps like these," said Amelia turning away.

"Then what did you ask for food for before you were hungry?" screamed the dwarf, and he pinched her and sent her about her business.

After a while she became so famished that she was glad to beg humbly to be allowed to go for food; and she ate a cold chop and the remains of a rice pudding with thankfulness. How delicious they tasted! She was surprised herself at the good things she had rejected. After a time she fancied she would like to warm up some of the cold meat in a pan, which the woman of the heath used to cook her own dinner in, and she asked for leave to do so.

"You may do anything you like to make yourself comfortable, if you do it yourself," said she; and Amelia, who had been watching her for many times, became quite expert in cooking up the scraps.

As there was no real daylight underground, so also there was no night. When the old woman was tired she lay down and had a nap, and when she thought that Amelia had earned a rest, she allowed her to do the same. It was never cold, and it never rained, so they slept on the heath among the flowers.

They say that "It's a long lane that has no turning," and the hardest tasks come to an end some time, and Amelia's dresses were clean at last; but then a more wearisome work was before her. They had to be mended. Amelia looked at the jagged rents made by the hedges, the great gaping holes in front where she had put her foot through; the torn tucks and gathers. First she wept, then she bitterly regretted that she had so often refused to do her sewing at home that she was very awkward with her needle. Whether she ever would have got through this task alone is doubtful, but she had by this time become so well-behaved and willing that the old woman was kind to her, and, pitying her blundering attempts, she helped her a great deal; whilst Amelia would cook the old woman's victuals, or repeat stories and pieces of poetry to amuse her.

"How glad I am that I ever learnt anything?" thought the poor child; "everything one learns seems to come useful some time."

At last the dresses were finished.

"Do you think I shall be allowed to go home now?" Amelia asked of the woman of the heath.

"Not yet," said she; "you have got to mend the broken gimcracks next."

"But when I have done all my tasks," Amelia said; "will they let me go then?"

"That depends," said the woman, and she sat silent over the fire; but Amelia wept so bitterly, that she pitied her and said—"Only dry your eyes, for the fairies hate tears, and I will tell you all I know and do the best for you I can. You see, when you first came you were—excuse me!—such an unlicked cub; such a peevish, selfish, wilful, useless, and ill-mannered little miss, that neither the fairies nor anybody else were likely to keep you any longer than necessary. But now you are such a willing, handy, and civil little thing, and so pretty and graceful withal, and I think it is very likely that they will want to keep you altogether. I think you had better make up your mind to it. They are kindly little folk, and will make a pet of you in the end."

"Oh, no, no!" moaned poor Amelia; "I want to be with my mother, my poor dear mother! I want to make up for being a bad child so long. Besides, surely that 'stock,' as they called her, will want to come back to her own people."

“As to that,” said the woman, “after a time the stock will affect mortal illness, and will then take possession of the first black cat she sees, and in that shape leave the house, and come home. But the figure that is like you will remain lifeless in the bed, and will be duly buried. Then your people, believing you to be dead, will never look for you, and you will always remain here. However, as this distresses you so, I will give you some advice. Can you dance?”

“Yes,” said Amelia; “I did attend pretty well to my dancing lessons. I was considered rather clever about it.”

“At any spare moments you find,” continued the woman, “dance, dance all your dances, and as well as you can. The dwarfs love dancing.”

“And then?” said Amelia.

“Then, perhaps some night they will take you up to dance with them in the meadows above ground.”

“But I could not get away. They would tread on my heels—oh! I could never escape them.”

“I know that,” said the woman; “your only chance is this. If ever, when dancing in the meadows, you can find a four-leaved clover, hold it in your hand and wish to be at home. Then no one can stop you. Meanwhile I advise you to seem happy, and they may think you are content, and have forgotten the world. And dance, above all, dance!”

And Amelia, not to be behindhand, began then and there to dance some pretty figures on the heath. As she was dancing the dwarf came by.

“Ho, ho!” said he, “you can dance, can you?”

“When I am happy, I can,” said Amelia, performing several graceful movements as she spoke.

“What are you pleased about now?” snapped the dwarf, suspiciously.

“Have I not reason?” said Amelia. “The dresses are washed and mended.”

“Then up with them!” returned the dwarf. On which half a dozen elves popped the whole lot into a big basket and kicked them up into the world, where they found their way to the right wardrobes somehow.

As the woman of the heath had said, Amelia was soon set to a new task. When she bade the old woman farewell, she asked if she could do nothing for her if ever she got at liberty herself.

“Can I do nothing to get you back to your old home?” Amelia cried, for she thought of others now as well as herself.

“No, thank you,” returned the old woman; “I am used to this, and do not care to return. I have been here a long time—how long I do not know; for as there is neither daylight nor dark we have no measure of time—long, I am sure, very long. The light and noise up yonder would now be too much for me. But I wish you well, and, above all, remember to dance!”

The new scene of Amelia’s labors was a more rocky part of the heath, where grey granite boulders served for seats and tables, and sometimes for workshops and anvils, as in one place, where a grotesque and grimy old dwarf sat forging rivets to mend china and glass. A fire in a hollow of the boulder served for a forge, and on the flatter part was his anvil. The rocks were covered in all directions with the knick-knacks, ornaments, &c., that Amelia had at various times destroyed.

“If you please, sir,” she said to the dwarf, “I am Amelia.”

The dwarf left off blowing at his forge and looked at her.

“Then I wonder you’re not ashamed of yourself,” said he.

“I am ashamed of myself,” said poor Amelia, “very much ashamed. I should like to mend these things if I can.”

“Well, you can’t say more than that,” said the dwarf, in a mollified tone, for he was a kindly little creature; “bring that china bowl here, and I’ll show you how to set to work.”

Poor Amelia did not get on very fast, but she tried her best. As to the dwarf, it was truly wonderful to see how he worked. Things seemed to mend themselves at his touch, and he was so proud of his skill, and so particular, that he generally did over again the things which Amelia had done after her fashion. The first time he gave her a few minutes in which to rest and amuse herself, she held out her little skirt, and began one of her prettiest dances.

“Rivets and trivets!” shrieked the little man, “How you dance! It is charming! I say it is charming! On with you! Fa, la fa! La, fa la! It gives me the fidgets in my shoe points to see you!” and forthwith down he jumped, and began capering about.

“I am a good dancer myself,” said the little man, “Do you know the ‘Hop, Skip, and Jump’ dance?”

“I do not think I do,” said Amelia.

“It is much admired,” said the dwarf, “when I dance it;” and he thereupon tucked up the little leathern apron in which he worked, and performed some curious antics on one leg.

“That is the Hop,” he observed, pausing for a moment.

“The Skip is thus. You throw out your left leg as high and as far as you can, and as you drop on the toe of your left foot you fling out the right leg in the same manner, and so on. This is the Jump,” with which he turned a somersault and disappeared from view. When Amelia next saw him he was sitting cross-legged on his boulder.

“Good, wasn’t it?” he said.

“Wonderful!” Amelia replied.

“Now it’s your turn again,” said the dwarf.

But Amelia cunningly replied—“I’m afraid I must go on with my work.”

“Pshaw!” said the little tinker. “Give me your work. I can do more in a minute than you in a month, and better to boot. Now dance again.”

“Do you know this?” said Amelia, and she danced a few paces of a polka mazurka.

“Admirable!” cried the little man. “Stay”—and he drew an old violin from behind the rock; “now dance again, and mark the time well, so that I may catch the measure, and then I will accompany you.”

Which accordingly he did, improvising a very spirited tune, which had, however, the peculiar subdued and weird effect of all the other sounds in this strange region.

“The fiddle came from up yonder,” said the little man. “It was smashed to atoms in the world and thrown away. But ho, ho, ho! There is nothing that I cannot mend, and a mended fiddle is an amended fiddle. It improves the tone. Now teach me that dance, and I will patch up all the rest of the gimcracks. Is it a bargain?”

“By all means,” said Amelia; and she began to explain the dance to the best of her ability.

“Charming! charming!” cried the dwarf. “We have no such dance ourselves. We only dance hand in hand, and round and round, when we dance together. Now I will learn the step, and then I will put my arm round your waist and dance with you.”

Amelia looked at the dwarf. He was very smutty, and old, and weazened. Truly, a queer partner! But “handsome is that handsome does;” and he had done her a good turn. So when he had learnt the step, he put his arm round Amelia’s waist, and they danced together. His shoe points were very much in the way, but otherwise he danced very well.

Then he set to work on the broken ornaments, and they were all very soon “as good as new.” But they were not kicked up into the world, for, as the dwarfs said, they would be sure to break on the road. So they kept them

and used them; and I fear that no benefit came from the little tinker's skill to Amelia's mamma's acquaintance in this matter.

"Have I any other tasks?" Amelia inquired.

"One more," said the dwarfs; and she was led farther on to a smooth mossy green, thickly covered with what looked like bits of broken thread. One would think it had been a milliner's work-room from the first invention of needles and thread.

"What are these?" Amelia asked.

"They are the broken threads of all the conversations you have interrupted," was the reply; "and pretty dangerous work it is to dance here now, with threads getting round one's shoe points. Dance a hornpipe in a herring-net, and you'll know what it is!"

Amelia began to pick up the threads, but it was tedious work. She had cleared a yard or two, and her back was aching terribly, when she heard the fiddle and the mazurka behind her; and looking round she saw the old dwarf, who was playing away, and making the most hideous grimaces as his chin pressed the violin.

"Dance, my lady, dance!" he shouted.

"I do not think I can," said Amelia; "I am so weary with stooping over my work."

"Then rest a few minutes," he answered, "and I will play you a jig. A jig is a beautiful dance, such life, such spirit! So!"

And he played faster and faster, his arm, his face, his fiddle-bow all seemed working together; and as he played, the threads danced themselves into three heaps.

"That is not bad, is it?" said the dwarf; "and now for our own dance," and he played the mazurka. "Get the measure well into your head. Lâ, la fa lâ! Lâ, la fa lâ! So!"

And throwing away his fiddle, he caught Amelia round the waist, and they danced as before. After which, she had no difficulty in putting the three heaps of thread into a basket.

"Where are these to be kicked to?" asked the young goblins.

"To the four winds of heaven," said the old dwarf. "There are very few drawing-room conversations worth putting together a second time. They are not like old china bowls."

BY MOONLIGHT.

THUS Amelia's tasks were ended; but not a word was said of her return home. The dwarfs were now very kind, and made so much of her that it was evident that they meant her to remain with them. Amelia often cooked for them, and she danced and played with them, and never showed a sign of discontent; but her heart ached for home, and when she was alone she would bury her face in the flowers and cry for her mother.

One day she overheard the dwarfs in consultation.

"The moon is full to-morrow," said one—("Then I have been a month down here," thought Amelia; "it was full moon that night")—"shall we dance in the Mary Meads?"

"By all means," said the old tinker dwarf; "and we will take Amelia, and dance my dance."

"Is it safe?" said another.

"Look how content she is," said the old dwarf; "and, oh! how she dances; my feet tickle at the bare thought."

"The ordinary run of mortals do not see us," continued the objector; "but she is visible to any one. And there are men and women who wander in the moonlight, and the Mary Meads are near her old home."

"I will make her a hat of touchwood," said the old dwarf, "so that even if she is seen it will look like a will-o'-the-wisp bobbing up and down. If she does not come, I will not. I must dance my dance. You do not know what it is! We two alone move together with a grace which even here is remarkable. But when I think that up yonder we shall have attendant shadows echoing our movements, I long for the moment to arrive."

"So be it," said the others; and Amelia wore the touchwood hat, and went up with them to the Mary Meads.

Amelia and the dwarf danced the mazurka, and their shadows, now as short as themselves, then long and gigantic, danced beside them. As the moon went down, and the shadows lengthened, the dwarf was in raptures.

"When one sees how colossal one's very shadow is," he remarked, "one knows one's true worth. You also have a good shadow. We are partners in the dance, and I think we will be partners for life. But I have not fully considered the matter, so this is not to be regarded as a formal proposal." And he continued to dance, singing, "Lâ, la, fa, lâ, lâ, la, fa, lâ." It was highly admired.

The Mary Meads lay a little below the house where Amelia's parents lived, and once during the night her father, who was watching by the sick bed of the stock, looked out of the window.

“How lovely the moonlight is!” he murmured; “but, dear me! there is a will-o’-the-wisp yonder. I had no idea the Mary Meads were so damp.” Then he pulled the blind down and went back into the room.

As for poor Amelia, she found no four-leaved clover, and at cockcrow they all went underground.

“We will dance on Hunch Hill to-morrow,” said the dwarfs.

All went as before; not a clover plant of any kind did Amelia see, and at cockcrow the revel broke up.

On the following night they danced in the hayfield. The old stubble was now almost hidden by green clover. There was a grand fairy dance—a round dance, which does not mean, as with us, a dance for two partners, but a dance where all join hands and dance round and round in a circle with appropriate antics. Round they went, faster and faster, the pointed shoes now meeting in the centre like the spokes of a wheel now kicked out behind like spikes, and then scamper, caper, hurry! They seemed to fly, when suddenly the ring broke at one corner, and nothing being stronger than its weakest point, the whole circle were sent flying over the field.

“Ho, ho, ho!” laughed the dwarfs, for they are good-humored little folk, and do not mind a tumble.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Amelia, for she had fallen with her fingers on a four-leaved clover.

She put it behind her back, for the old tinker dwarf was coming up to her, wiping the mud from his face with his leathern apron.

“Now for our dance!” he shrieked. “And I have made up my mind—partners now and partners always. You are incomparable. For three hundred years I have not met with your equal.”

But Amelia held the four-leaved clover above her head, and cried from her very heart—“I want to go home!”

The dwarf gave a hideous yell of disappointment, and at this instant the stock came stumbling head over heels into the midst, crying—“Oh! the pills, the powders, and the draughts! oh, the lotions and embrocations! oh, the blisters, the poultices, and the plasters! men may well be so short-lived!”

And Amelia found herself in bed in her own home.

AT HOME AGAIN.

By the side of Amelia’s bed stood a little table, on which were so many big bottles of medicine, that Amelia smiled to think of all the stock must

have had to swallow during the month past. There was an open Bible on it too, in which Amelia's mother was reading, whilst tears trickled slowly down her pale cheeks. The poor lady looked so thin and ill, so worn with sorrow and watching, that Amelia's heart smote her, as if some one had given her a sharp blow.

"Mamma, mamma! Mother, my dear, dear, mother!"

The tender, humble, loving tone of voice was so unlike Amelia's old imperious snarl, that her mother hardly recognized it; and when she saw Amelia's eyes full of intelligence instead of the delirium of fever, and that (though older and thinner and rather pale) she looked wonderfully well, the poor worn-out lady could hardly restrain herself from falling into hysterics for very joy.

"Dear mamma, I want to tell you all about it," said Amelia, kissing the kind hand that stroked her brow.

But it appeared that the doctor had forbidden conversation; and though Amelia knew it would do her no harm, she yielded to her mother's wish and lay still and silent.

"Now, my love, it is time to take your medicine."

But Amelia pleaded—"Oh, mamma, indeed I don't want any medicine. I am quite well, and would like to get up."

"Ah, my dear child!" cried her mother, "what I have suffered in inducing you to take your medicine, and yet see what good it has done you."

"I hope you will never suffer any more from my wilfulness," said Amelia; and she swallowed two tablespoonfuls of a mixture labelled, "To be well shaken before taken," without even a wry face.

Presently the doctor came.

"You're not so very angry at the sight of me to-day my little lady, eh?" he said.

"I have not seen you for a long time," said Amelia; "but I know you have been here, attending a stock who looked like me. If your eyes had been touched with fairy ointment, however, you would have been aware that it was a fairy imp, and a very ugly one, covered with hair. I have been living in terror lest it should go back underground in the shape of a black cat. However, thanks to the four-leaved clover, and the old woman of the heath, I am at home again."

On hearing this rhodomontade, Amelia's mother burst into tears, for she thought the poor child was still raving with fever. But the doctor smiled pleasantly, and said—"Ay, ay, to be sure," with a little nod, as one should

say, “We know all about it;” and laid two fingers in a casual manner on Amelia’s wrist.

“But she is wonderfully better, madam,” he said afterwards to her mamma; “the brain has been severely tried, but she is marvellously improved: in fact, it is an effort of nature, a most favorable effort, and we can but assist the rally; we will change the medicine.” Which he did, and very wisely assisted nature with a bottle of pure water flavored with tincture of roses.

“And it was so very kind of him to give me his directions in poetry,” said Amelia’s mamma; “for I told him my memory, which is never good, seemed going completely, from anxiety, and if I had done anything wrong just now, I should never had forgiven myself. And I always found poetry easier to remember than prose,”—which puzzled everybody, the doctor included, till it appeared that she had ingeniously discovered a rhyme in his orders

‘To be kept cool and quiet,
With light nourishing diet.’

Under which treatment Amelia was soon pronounced to be well.

She made another attempt to relate her adventures, but she found that not even the nurse would believe in them.

“Why you told me yourself I might meet with the fairies,” said Amelia, reproachfully.

“So I did, my dear,” nurse replied, “and they say that it’s that put it into your head. And I’m sure what you say about the dwarfs and all is as good as a printed book, though you can’t think that ever I would have let any dirty clothes store up like that, let alone your frocks, my dear. But for pity sake, Miss Amelia, don’t go on about it to your mother, for she thinks you’ll never get your senses right again, and she has fretted enough about you, poor lady; and nursed you night and day till she is nigh worn out. And anybody can see you’ve been ill, miss, you’ve grown so, and look paler and older like. Well, to be sure, as you say, if you’d been washing and working for a month in a place without a bit of sun, or a bed to lie on, and scraps to eat, it would be enough to do it; and many’s the poor child that has to, and gets worn and old before her time. But, my dear, whatever you think, give in to your mother; you’ll never repent giving in to your mother, my dear, the longest day you live.”

So Amelia kept her own counsel. But she had one confidant.

When her parents brought the stock home on the night of Amelia's visit to the haycocks, the bull-dog's conduct had been most strange. His usual good-humor appeared to have been exchanged for incomprehensible fury, and he was with difficulty prevented from flying at the stock, who on her part showed an anger and dislike fully equal to his.

Finally the bull-dog had been confined in the stable, where he remained the whole month, uttering from time to time such howls, with his snub nose in the air, that poor nurse quite gave up hope of Amelia's recovery.

"For indeed, my dear, they do say that a howling dog is a sign of death, and it was more than I could abear."

But the day after Amelia's return, as nurse was leaving the room with a tray which had carried some of the light nourishing diet ordered by the doctor, she was knocked down, tray and all, by the bull-dog, who came tearing into the room, dragging a chain and dirty rope after him, and nearly choked by the desperate efforts which had finally effected his escape from the stable. And he jumped straight on the end of Amelia's bed, where he lay, *thudding* with his tail, and giving short whines of ecstacy. And as Amelia begged that he might be left, and as it was evident that he would bite any one who tried to take him away, he became established as chief nurse. When Amelia's meals were brought to the bedside on a tray, he kept a fixed eye on the plates, as if to see if her appetite were improving. And he would even take a snack himself, with an air of great affability.

And when Amelia told him her story, she could see by his eyes, and his nose, and his ears, and his tail, and the way he growled whenever the stock was mentioned, that he knew all about it. As, on the other hand, he had no difficulty in conveying to her by sympathetic whines the sentiment "Of course I would have helped you if I could; but they tied me up, and this disgusting old rope has taken me a month to worry through."

So, in spite of the past, Amelia grew up good and gentle, unselfish and considerate for others. She was unusually clever, as those who have been with the "Little People" are said always to be.

And she became so popular with her mother's acquaintances that they said—"We will no longer call her Amelia, for it was a name we learnt to dislike, but we will call her Amy, that is to say, 'Beloved.' "

* * * * * *

"And did my godmother's grandmother believe that Amelia had really been with the fairies, or did she think it was all fever ravings?"

“That, indeed, she never said, but she always observed that it was a pleasant tale with a good moral, which was surely enough for anybody.”

THE END.

Transcriber’s Notes:

Archaic spellings and hyphenation have been retained. Inconsistencies in spelling and hyphenation have been retained. A few obvious typesetting and punctuation errors have been corrected without note.

[The end of *Lob Lie-by-the-Fire, The Brownies and Other Tales* by Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing]