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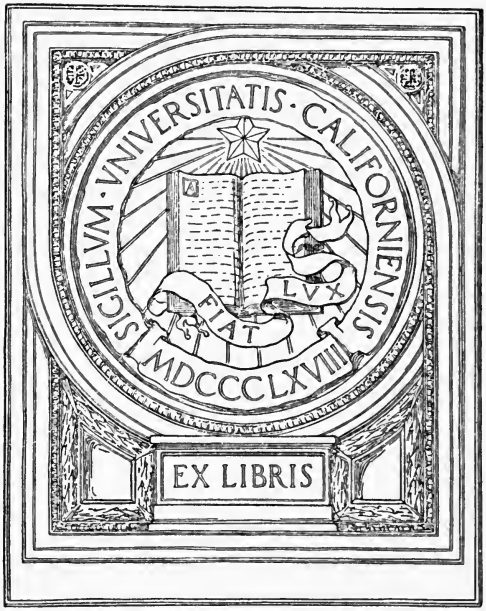


The Confessions of a Daddy

"There . . . was Teddy Lawrence with his eyes glued on to his bobber"

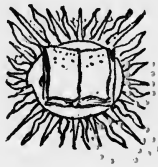
The Confessions of a Daddy

By

Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "The Incubator Baby," "Pigs is Pigs," etc.

With illustrations by
Fanny Y. Cory



New York
The Century Co.
1907

Published May, 1907

THE DE VINNE PRESS

TO
ELSIE McCOLM BUTLER
A VERY GOOD CHILD
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED BY
HER FATHER

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I

OUR NEIGHBORS' BABIES

I GUESS we folks that live up at our end of town think we are about as good as anybody in Colorado, and mebby a little better. We get along together as pleasant as you please, and we are a sort of colony, as you might say, all by ourselves.

Me and Marthy make especial good

neighbors. We don't have no fights with the other folks in our end of town, and in them days the neighbors had n't any reason to fight with us, for we did n't keep a dog, and we had n't no children. I take notice that it is other folks' dogs and children that make most of the bad feelin's between neighbors. Of course we had mosquitos, but Providence gives everybody something to practise up their patience, and when me and Marthy sat out on our porch and heard other people's children frettin' because the mosquitos was bad, we just sat there behind our screened porch and thanked our stars that we did n't have

no children to leave our screen doors open.

It was n't but right that me and Marthy should act accordingly. I don't mean that we were uppish about it, but we did feel that we could live a little better than our neighbors that had all the expense of children, and if our house was fixed up a little better, and we was able to go off three or four weeks in the summer to the mountains, when all the rest stayed right at home, we had a right to feel pleased about it. Lots of times we had things our neighbors could n't afford, and then the little woman would say to me: "Hiram, you don't

know how thankful I am that we ain't got any children," and I agreed with her every time, and did it hearty, too.

'T was n't that we hated children. Far from it. We just thought that when we saw all the extra worry and trouble and expense that other people's children brought about, we were right satisfied to live the way we had lived the five years since we was married—our neighbors still called us the "Bride and Groom." Nor I can't say that we were happier than the other folks in our end of town, but we was more care-free. We lived more joyous, as you might say.

One night when I come home from

the store Marthy met me at the corner, and when I had tucked her arm under mine, I asked her what was the news. Bobby Jones had cut his finger bad; Stell Marks had took the measles; little Tot Hemingway had run off, and her ma had gone near crazy until the kid was found again; the Wallaces was n't goin' to take no vacation this year at all because Fred was to go off to school in the fall, and they could n't afford both. It was the usual lot of news of children bein' trouble and expense.

I was feelin' fine, the next day bein' a holiday, and Marthy, with the slick way women has, sprung a favor on me

just when she set the broiled steak on the table. Extry thick, and burnt brown—that 's my favorite steak—and whenever I see it that way my mouth waters, and I look out for a favor to be asked.

"Hiram," she says, quite as if she was openin' up a usual bit of talk, "did you take notice of Mrs. Hemingway's silk dress last Sunday?"

"Why no, Marthy," I says, "I did n't. Was it new?"

"New!" she laughed. "The idee! That 's just what it was n't. I believe she has had that same silk ever since we have lived in this end of town, and no one knows how much

longer. It 's a shame. She puts every cent she can dig up on those children of hers, and has hardly a decent thing of her own. I feel right sorry for her."

"I feel sorry for Hemingway," says I. "The old boy is workin' himself to death. He never gits home until supper is all over, and he told me just now that he felt it his bounden duty to work to-morrow. I tell you, Marthy, children is an expensive luxury!"

"That 's just what they are," she agreed. "If it was n't for their children, the Hemingways could live every bit as good as we do, and he would n't have to work of nights, poor

fellow. But, Hiram," she says, as if the idee had just hit her, "do you recall to mind when this end of town has seen a new silk dress?"

"Why, no—no," I said; "when was it?"

"Years ago!" says the little woman. "I was figgerin' it up to-day, and it was full two years ago. Ain't it awful?"

"Downright scandalous!" I says. "And just on account of those children, too!"

Marthy looked down at her plate, innocent as you please.

"I 'm glad we ain't got any children, Hiram," she says, full of mischief.

That tickled me. I was tickled to see how she was tickled to think she had trapped me.

"I guess it 's our bounden duty to hold up the honor of our end of town by showin' it a new silk dress," I says, and the next thing I knew I was fightin' to keep her from chokin' me to death.

All that evening Marthy was unusual quiet and right happy, too. As she sat on the porch her eyes would wander off over-the-hills-and-faraway, and I knew she was lost in joyous tanglements of bias and gores and plaits, where a man can't foller if he wants to. But when we went inside and had the blinds pulled down she

put her arms around my neck again and gave me another choke.

"Dear, dear old Hiram!" she says, and her eyes was tear-wet. "Just think! A new silk dress!" And just then there came into the room the noise of the Marks child—the one with the measles—whimpering.

"Ain't you glad," says the little woman, "that we have n't any children to spoil all our fun, and bother us?" and when I looked down into that happy little face of hers, I was glad, and no mistake.

The next day was a beauty. It came in like a glory, and we was up almost as soon as the sun was; for we

had figgered on one of our regular old-time jolly days by ourselves on the hills—one of the kind that made our end of town call us the "Bride and Groom." It was our plan to take a good lunch, and just wander. Marthy was to take a book, and I was to take my fishin' tackle, and beyond that was whatever happy thing that turned up.

"If we had children," she said, "we could n't go off on these long tramps by ourselves."

We got away while the neighbors in our end of town were still at breakfast, and as we passed the Wallace's place we ran up to holler good-by

through the window at them, and there was the youngest Wallace foolin' on the floor with her stockings not on yet, and breakfast half over. Marthy stopped long enough to have a good, long look at the child.

"If all the children was like Daisy Wallace," she says, "they would n't be so bad. She is the dearest thing I ever did see. She 's got the cutest way of kissin' a person on the eyelids."

"She looks to be just as lazy in the dressin' act as the rest," I remarked, and I was surprised, the way Marthy turned on me.

"Why, Hiram Smith!" she cried; "did n't *you* ever dawdle over your

"The youngest Wallace foolin' on the floor with her stockings not on yet"

dressin'? When I was a girl I got lots of fun out of being late to breakfast. What difference does it make, anyway, when she is perfectly lovely all the rest of the time? I simply love that child. I wonder," she said, sort of wistful, "if they would let us take her with us to-day. She would enjoy it so."

"Foolishness," I said. "We don't want to pull a kid along with us all day; and anyhow, they are going to take her to the photographer's to-day to have her picture took."

We went out around town, and up the hill road. The morning air was great, and nobody on the road at all,

so far as we could see, and we stepped out brisk and lively.

"Seems good to git away from the baby district, don't it?" I says, as we was walkin' up the road. "We're like Mister and Missus Robinson Crusoe," and at the very next turn we most fell over Bobby Jones and his everlastin' chum, Rex, which is the most no-account dog on earth.

"Where y' goin'?" he asks.

"Nowheres particular," says Marthy. "Just walkin' out to git the air."

"So 'm I," says he, and then he says, sort of bluffin', "I ain't lost."

"Yes you are, Bobby," I says, se-

vere as I could, "and if you know what 's good for a kid about your size you 'd better turn right 'round and scoot for home."

He looked at me as if he would like to know who I was, to be bossin' him.

"Ho!" he says, "You ain't my pa. I don't have to do what you say! I won't go home for you!"

Marthy was bendin' over him in a second.

"Bobby," she says, coaxing-like, "do you know what your folks is going to have for dinner?"

"No 'm," he says, as polite as you please.

"I do," says the little woman. "Ice-cream. And if you git lost you won't git home in time to git any."

Bobby looked up the road where he had n't explored yet, and then looked back the way he 'd come, and then he smiled at Marthy and took off his cap to her.

"Thank you, Missus Smith," he says.

Marthy laughed as happy as a girl, and kissed him right on his dusty face. She put her arms around him, even, and acted like she had never seen a freckled boy before.

"Nice boy," I remarked, when

"'Ho!' he says, 'You ain't my pa!'"

Bobby had gone down the road toward town.

"Nice!" says the little woman. "Nice! Is that all you can scrape up to say? Why, there ain't a dearer child in our end of town than what Bobby is. He 's my sweetheart when you ain't at home. Hiram," she says, looking back at him as he paddled along kicking up the dust with his bare toes, "I wonder if we dare take him with us?"

"What about his ice-cream?" I says. "What about having a kid dragging after us all day?" So we went on, but I seen she felt a little

mite lonely-like, as you might say. Which was queer.

By ten o'clock we had got far enough from town, and we pushed through a field that was all covered with flowers, and over to where the brook was, with the tangle of trees and brush hiding it, and when I pushed apart the brush to go through, I stopped and motioned for Marthy to come quiet and look.

There, sittin' on a tree trunk, as quiet as you please, was Teddy Lawrence, with his eyes glued on to his bobber, and thinkin' of nothing in the world but fish. I 'm a right hearty fisher myself, and it done my heart

good to see the strictly-business way that kid had. Marthy moved a little, and I put my hand on her to make her keep still.

The boy lifted up his pole and looked at the bait like a regular old hand. He dug a fresh, fat worm out of his can, and fixed it, and then I fairly held my breath. Would he do it? No! .But, hold on—yes! He leaned over and spit on the bait to bring luck, just as natural as life! Say, was n't that real boy for you? I let the brush come together real quiet, and me and Marthy slipped away.

Well, sir, my five-dollar pole and my two-dollar reel, made me feel sick.

What did I know about fishing, anyhow? I felt right there what was the truth, that all my fishing amounted to was, that I was tryin' to bring back the joys I used to have when I was a kid, settin' on a log, happy and lonesome, watchin' my bottle-cork joggle on the ripples. What was the use? A feller can't go back to them days. There ain't nothing to do about it. Unless, of course, he can sort of go forward to them in—well, a feller could sort of live them days over agin in a boy of his own.

"Wallace don't deserve that boy," I says, sort of mad about I don't know what. "What sort of a dad is that old

"She was like a butterfly in amongst the butterflies"

book-worm of a Wallace for a boy that likes to fish like Ted does? I 'll bet Wallace never had a fish pole in his hands since the day he was born. Now, if I had a boy like that I could show him a thing or two about fishing. If I had a boy like that—"

"Look there!" says Marthy, sudden. "Did you ever see anything sweeter than what that is?"

Over on the other end of the field Ted's sister was strayin' around in the flowers, her face all rosy with the fresh air. She was like a butterfly in amongst the butterflies, a mighty pretty girl, and just the age when a mother loves a girl best and when a

mother takes the most care of 'em. I like pretty things as well as the next man does, and I 'll say right here that there was something about that girl that made me feel like I 'd like to own her—just like I feel about a real pretty rose, sort of covet to keep it just as it is forever, and take care that it don't git spoiled any way.

"I guess Mrs. Wallace don't rightly appreciate May," says Marthy, thoughtful-like. "I thinks she makes her study too much. When I was May's age I had plenty of chances to git the fresh air, and you 'd never see me takin' up music-lessons in the summer. I spent my time feedin' the

chickens and runnin' about the farm, and enjoyin' life. It ain't right, the way girls is forced in their studies nowadays. If I had a girl like that—"

"If you had, what 'd you do?" I asks, kindly enough, but the little woman only laughed. Mebby her laugh was a bit reckless, as you might say.

"What 's the use thinkin' what I 'd do?" she says, turnin' round to go. There did n't seem to be nothing special for me to say right then, so I just put my arm around her, and we went on.

We was plumb tired out when we got home, and mebby that is why we

was more than usual quiet at dinner. I sure was n't cross, but somehow our day had n't panned out as satisfactory as we 'd thought it would, and mebby the cryin' of the Wilkins' new baby got on my nerves, we being tired. I was glad when dinner was over and we could take our chairs and go out on the porch.

It was a fine night—still, and ca'm as you please. The only noise, not countin' the cryin' of the Wilkins' kid, was the sounds of the laughin' and chatter of the children in our end of town. But I was lonesome. I can't speak for the little woman, how she

felt, but *I* felt lonesome—and her right there beside me, too.

Across the street we could see the two Hemingway children, who had coaxed an extra half hour to wait for their father to come home before they went to bed. They had their heads bent over a tumbler that they had caught two fireflies in, and on the porch Mrs. Hemingway was rockin' the sleepy baby.

Then we heard Hemingway's whistle—he can't whistle, but he likes to—and the two children dropped the tumbler, and run to the gate, and then there was a rush, and a mingling up of

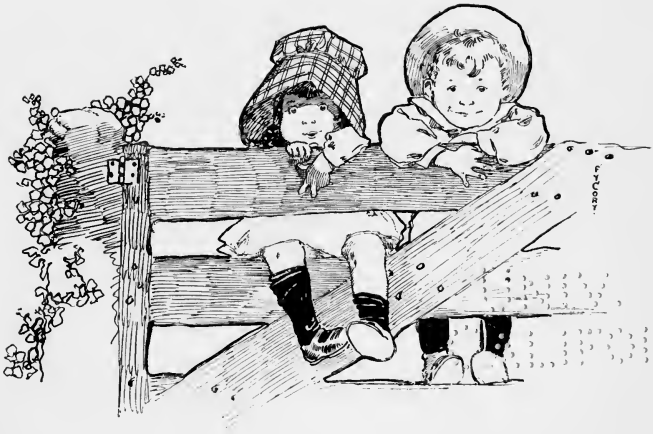
Hemingway kids and father, and the sleepy baby slid down from its ma's lap and stood, unsteady but tryin' to git in the kissing, with its arms held out. Happy?

I turned to the little woman, and I looked straight at her. Somehow I knew that now, if ever, was a time for me to do some cheering-up.

"Well, little woman," I says, cheerful-like, "*we* don't need a lot of kids to bolster up our love, do we?"

She gave my hand a soft squeeze in reply.

"And about that gown—that silk gown," I says, gaily. "Have you decided what color it is to be yet?



"The two children . . . . run to the gate"

Won't you be fine! When I think how fine you 'll look, I 'm glad we have n't no children to—"

Just then them Hemingways went inside, and our whole end of town was quiet, and lonesome.

Marthy did n't answer, and when I lifted up her face to kiss her, what d' you think? She was cryin'!

II

WHEN SHE CAME

AFORE the kid come, me and Marthy used to sit up nights tellin' each other how much we 'd like it if she turned out to be a boy. I said everything that I knowed that was nice about boys, and drawed on my imagination for what I did n't know, and Marthy spoke the same; so I convinced Marthy, thorough, that I would be terrible disappointed if it

was n't a boy, and she did n't leave me no doubts about her hankerin' for a baby of the male sect.

Course we was both tryin' to square ourselves in case it *should* be a boy. Come to find out, we was both of us tickled to death that it was a girl.

We 'd talked over boys' names by the bushel without ever coming to a dead-set choice, but we most always squeezed in somewhere, sort of apologetic, a remark that if it *should* happen to be a girl we 'd have to call it Edith L., after its grandmother. Somehow, as I look back on it, it seems as if I 'd never thought of that kid, at any time, except as Edith L. Curious

how folks will try to fool theirselves that way.

When it come to the auspicious occasion we had Doc Wolfert in, because he was the only doc in our end of town. He certainly was a quaint old bone-setter. Some said he took morphine on the sly, and some said it was just his natural manner, but he was the shiftiest-eyed medic you ever saw. No man livin' ever got him to say plain yes or no. He 'd walk all 'round them little words, like he was afraid of steppin' on them, and his gab was full of perhapses and possiblys, and similar slick side-trackers of knowledge.

I had figgered that when the aforesaid auspicious occasion turned up I 'd clean out to the woods until things got so I 'd be useful as well as ornamental; but when it come to a show-down, I could n't. Farthest away I could git was the front porch. I done my good twenty miles on the porch that day, I 'll bet, and whenever I 've had a trial and tribulation time since then, I can hear the sixth board from the south end of that porch squeak.

I was walkin' on the level, but my spirits was climbin' hills and coastin' into valleys. First minute I would be stickin' out my chest and thinkin' how

all-fired grand it would be to be a daddy, and the next minute I 'd cave in like a frost-bitten squash and wonder how in creation I 'd ever drag along as a widow-man. One minute I 'd see myself sky-hootin' round with a fine kid on my arm, and the next I 'd see myself alone, with Marthy gone. I 've got the reputation around here of being a humorist man, but I did n't say no funny sayings to myself that day, that I can remember. I had fever, and cold sweats, and double contraction of the heart, and whenever I thought of Marthy, I could n't think of a decent thing that I 'd ever done to her. I felt I was an ornery, low-

down critter—which I ain't—and I saw Marthy as a spotless angel—which she ain't neither. She 's woman and earthly all through, and mighty good earth at that. Marthy never knew what a good chance she lost of being considered a perfectionated saint, but she missed the chance.

Just about when I 'd given up all hopes of ever seein' Marthy alive again, Mrs. Murphy, (who we 'd got in to sort of give the kid its first toilet, it not being expected to be far enough advanced to do much primping on its own account right at first) come to the door like a blessed ray of sunshine, and percolated out a smile at me.

Loony as I was, I had sense enough left to know that she was n't smilin' at me for flirtation, nor because she had a smile that she did n't know what to do with and so was passing it out to me, like a hand-out, just to git rid of it. I connected that smile with other things. I knowed she was smiling me back from a desolate widow-hood, or widow-man-hood, or whatever the right word is. I know the right word, but it 's got mislaid. Thank the stars I ain't ever had no use for it, and I hope never to have. But I guess every man feels like I did when I was walkin' that porch. When they shut the door on him, and turn him out, and

tell him they will call him when they want him, he 's a widow-man right from that moment and feels so. And when they call him in and say all 's doin' as well as could be expected under the circumstances, right then he feels like his wife had rose from the dead, and he becomes a married man again. I felt so, anyhow, and I don't know as I 'm a specially fancy feeler. I don't look it.

Right then I was boosted, like I tell you, from a deep black hole to a high and airy location, and by a plain-faced, baggy Irish lady that did washing by the day at fifty cents a day, and you furnished the soap. She 's been

my friend ever since, and always will be.

As I passed in, feelin' more like war-whoopin' than like walkin' soft, she whispered three words at me that finished me up.

"It 's a girl," says she. "Walk light, and stay where you are, and when you can come in and see the girl, I 'll bring her out and show her to you."

I was clean idiotic with satisfaction. I sat down on the edge of a chair and twirled my hat until I could n't sit still, and then got up and edged round the room lookin' at the pictures on the wall, for all the world like I was a

"Edith L."

visitor. I 'd got half-way through lookin' at the things on the what-not, and was castin' my eye round for the photygraft album, when Mrs. Murphy stuck her blessed face into the parlor.

" 'Sh-h!" says she, "make no noise, and control your feelin's, and you can come in for a quarter of a second and see your daughter."

I was so proud I had cold chills, and I walked like a clothes-horse on castors.

I looked for Marthy first, and I see she was a-sleepin' beautiful, and then Mrs. Murphy pulled down the covers and showed me Edith L.

I took her all in at a glance, and I

formed my own opinion right there. I was like a rubber balloon when you stick a pin in it, but I did n't collapse with a bang, I just caved in gradual. I went out of the room, and out of the house, and sat down on the porch-step and blubbered. They never missed me.

When I think back on that day it makes me laugh, but I was sure a rank amateur in the baby business, and I did n't know no better then. Right now I 'd put up every cent I 've got that you could n't find a finer girl in the state than what Edith L. is, and I 've learned since that she was what you might call an A-1 baby right from the start, but it did n't look that way

to me. She was the first of that age I 'd ever been introduced to, and she looked different than what I 'd figgered on. I 'd seen plenty of brand new colts, and they run largely to legs, but you 'd know them for horse-critters right off; and I 've seen brand-new puppies, and their eyes ain't open, but you 'd know them immediate for dogs; but that kid did n't look any more like what I 'd calculated Edith L. would look like, than a cucumber looks like a water-melon. My heart was plumb broke. I was scairt when I thought what would happen to Marthy when she saw that wrinkled, red little thing.

I knew we 'd have to keep it, but I did n't see how we could bear the shame. I made up my mind in a minute that we 'd sell off the place and move up into the mountains—just me and Marthy and the girl. I did n't think of her as Edith L. any more. It would n't do to insult mother by givin' her name to that baby.

I figgered it all out how I 'd act better to Marthy than ever, to make up for the trial that girl would be, and how I 'd do all in man's power to keep the girl from knowin' how handicapped she was by her looks.

Just then Brink Tuomy passed by, and he says:

"How 's things comin' along?"

The boys had all been mighty interested in this baby business, and I knew he 'd trot off and tell them, so I says, sad enough:

"It 's a girl."

Brink seen I was n't very jubilant, so he says:

"You don't seem very stuck up about it. But girls ain't so bad—when you git used to them. Lady all right?"

"Yes," I says, "she 's O. K."

Brink hung round a minute or two, waitin' for further orders, and none comin', he says, hesitatin':

"So long!"

I let him go and was glad he went.

I looked out across the river, and calculated how I could fix it so Mrs. Murphy would n't say nothin' outside about that poor kid of mine, and how to keep the kid hid until me and Marthy could take her and skin out for the mountains.

Mrs. Murphy was a terrible chatty lady—sort of perpetual phonygraft, and wholesale and retail news agency. I guessed the best I could do was to lock her in the cellar and then herd all comers away from the house.

Doc Wolfert did n't bother me any. I knowed *he* would n't give me away.

If anybody could so much as git him to admit that there was a baby born at my house they would be lucky. Just as a sample of what Doc was like, take the case of Sandy Sam, who fell down the mine shaft and was brought up in the bucket, as dead as Adam. Doc was on the ground as soon as they brought Sandy up, and one of the boys that come late asked Doc what caused the crowd to congregate.

"Well," says Doc, lookin' off at an angle into the air, "it looks like Sandy Sam, or some other feller, fell down the mine shaft."

"Poor old Sam," says the feller, "killed him, did n't it?"

Doc looked at the sky and considered.

"It 's a remarkable deep shaft," he says at last; "remarkable deep."

"Thunder!" says the feller. "I know it 's a deep shaft. What I asked you is if Sam 's dead. Is he?"

Doc went off into a dream, and when he come to, he looks at the feller.

"Oh!" he says, absent like. "Is Sam dead? Perhaps! Perhaps he is. I should n't like to say. But," he ended up, sort of pullin' hisself together at the finish, "I would n't like to express an opinion, but I guess the boys think he is. They are goin' to bury him."

So I was n't afraid of Doc Wolfert blabbin'. I knowed the worst, and, like everybody else, I wanted somebody to tell me it was n't so bad as I thought.

I nailed Doc as he come out. I backed him up against a porch pillar and conversed with him right there. I wanted to know just how bad it was. I wanted to know what hope there was, if any.

"Doc," I said—and I was blessed glad I had a beard so he could n't see the quivers in my chin—"she 's terrible undersized, ain't she?"

"Hum!" says Doc. "You might call her small or you might n't. I 've

seen 'em bigger, and I 've seen 'em smaller. I 've seen 'em all sizes."

I could n't see much help in that.

"Doc," I said, tremblin', "she won't always be so—so dwarfed like, will she? She 'll grow—some?"

"Probably," says Doc. "I 'd hate to say she would n't."

I groaned. I had to.

"Ain't her head a little off shape, Doc?" I stammered out. I guess the shape of the head had worried me most of all. It was n't just what I 'd known good heads to be.

"You think so?" asked Doc, absent like.

"Don't you?" I went back at him.

"Tell me straight. I can stand the worst."

"Hum!" he says. "Heads differ. I 've got to go—"

"No you don't!" I says, backing him up against the post; "not till you tell me. Her legs, now. Think they will ever straighten out? Think she 'll ever git over that red, scalded look? Think she 'll ever be able to talk, Doc?"

Doc looked anxious toward the road.

"Don't worry," he says. "Don't fret. Keep cool and ca'm."

"Yes," I says, scornful like. "Me keep cool! Don't you know I 'm that

poor little, bent-up kid's daddy? Don't you know I looked forward to callin' her Edith L.? Don't you know—? Doc," I says, strong and forcible, "money ain't no object in a case like this. Tell me this: Shall I git a specialist? Would it do any good to send to Denver and git a specialist, or Chicago, or New York?"

Doc looked interested at the horizon.

"Why, no," he says, "no! I don't see that it would."

I 'll bet that that was the first time Doc ever said "No" straight out. It settled me. I let go of his arm and sat right down. If Doc Wolfert spoke

up and said "No" I knew there was n't nothing to be done.

I sat there probably about a thousand years, if you count by feelin's. I had a wish to go in and see the kid, and then, again, I hated to. I hated for Mrs. Murphy to look at me; I felt I 'd blubber, and I was ashamed; but I knew I 'd ought to be there to take Marthy's hand when she woke up, and to lie to her about it not bein' so bad as she would think.

That made me pull myself together. I made up my mind that I 'd be a man, anyway. I had Marthy to think of, and a man ain't made to be blubberin' around when his women

need help. I swallowed down the chunk of my neck that had got stuck in my throat, and swiped my eyes, and stood on my legs. When I turned, Mrs. Murphy was in the door.

"Well," she says, "you don't take much interest, I must say. Here you sit enjoyin' the landscape, and your daughter askin' where her father has gone to, and is she an orphan or what. Come in," she says, "or she 'll be comin' out."

I walked in.

I stopped a bit by the bedroom door to git up my courage, and then I walked into the room.

Marthy had her eyes open, and they

looked up at me with a smile in them, and then looked down again at the bunch on her arm under the quilt.

"Come and see her," she says, feeble but proud. "Come and see your daughter, Edith L."

She slid down the covers so I could see her, and I looked at that kid with a sick grin.

"Ain't she lovely?" she says.

"Sure!" I says, lying bravely.

"Don't talk," says Mrs. Murphy, speakin' to Marthy, "or the session is ended."

"Just one word," I says. "Marthy, are you satisfied with her—with the kid?"

"She 's perfect!" she says, "perfect and lovely."

"All right," I says, "then I don't mind."

Marthy smiled, sort of weak.

"You will joke," she says.

"Joke!" says Mrs. Murphy, indignant; "insult, I call it. Did you ever see a finer baby?"

I looked to see if she winked. She did n't.

"How so?" I asked, my voice all of a tremble.

"How so?" she asks; "No 'how so' at all. She weighs ten pounds, and she 's sound in wind and limb," she

says, "and look at the grand shape of her head! She 'll be a college professoress at least, or maybe in Congress before her pa. It 's a grand baby she is!"

"Ten pounds!" I says; "ain't that some dwarfish?"

"Hear the man!" she says. "I don't believe he knows a fine baby when he sees one."

"Do you mean that, Mrs. Murphy?" I asked, every bit of blood in me goin' on the jump.

"Mean it?" she says; "I 've had six of my own, and not one of them could hold a candle to this one."

"Marthy!" I says. "Is it so?"

"Mrs. Murphy has fine children," she says; "but my little girl, I think, is finer."

"How 's her head?" I asked.

"Perfect," she says.

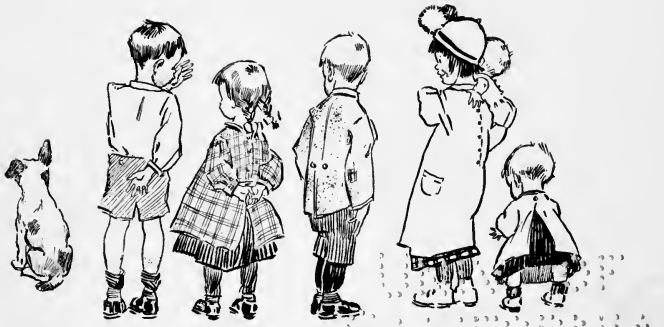
"And her color?"

"So healthy," she says.

"And her legs?"

"So straight and strong," she says.

I took hold of her hand and squeezed it good, and then I went to the window and looked out, and I saw all the boys lined up along the fence waitin' for me to come out and let them know that what I 'd told Brink Tuomy was so.



Mrs. Murphy's children

Proud? I was so proud I felt like givin' Mrs. Murphy a million dollars.

"Dang it!" I yelped. "Let her dad have another good look at Edith L."

III

THE DAY OF THE SPANK

NOW, you just take a good look at this here right fist of mine. Looks like a ham, don't it? And see all them callouses on the pa'm. Ain't that a tool fit to break rock with? And what 'd you say if I told you I used that once to hit that little, tender kid of mine? Actually hit her! What you say to that? I

won't forgit that night soon, I tell you!

Just figger to yourself that it 's sundown, and the blinds pulled down in the room where Deedee's cot was standin' like a little iron-barred cage. We got into the way of callin' the kid Deedee, that bein' what she called herself. There was all the signs that Deedee was goin' to sleep, and the plainest sign was Deedee herself, standin' up in her crib, wide awake, holdin' on to the foot of the crib, trampin' the sheets into a tangle of white underbrush, as you might say, and no more asleep than you are. The

way Deedee went to sleep was like the death of an alligator—it was a long and strenuous affair.

Marthy stood lookin' at Deedee with reproaches in her eyes. We had a sort of tradition in the family that Deedee had to go to sleep quick and quiet, without any nonsense. Every night, when Marthy put the little white rascal in the crib, she had hopes that the tradition would come true, and every night it did n't. The go-to-sleep hour was the time Deedee seemed to pick out to have an hour of especial lively fun, and for weeks she had been breakin' the laws, and walkin' all over the rules with her pink

feet. She did not see, comin' up over the horizon, and gittin' nearer every day, the stern and horrid Spank!

We had got together in a sort of family conclave and decided that Deedee was about old enough to be punished by layin' on of hands. We decided it one time when Deedee was out of the room, and we had been right stern about it. We could be stern about Deedee when she was n't in sight. When she come smilin' and singin' along we generally had to quit bein' stern, and kiss her.

Deedee was twenty-two months old, and she was ninety-eight per cent. pure sweetness. Some of the

women in our end of town said her short, curly hair was tow-colored, but it was n't so—they was just envious of us. And one and all said her eyes was like round little bits of blue sky. It was clear enough that she had inherited her sweetness from Marthy; and some said it was equal clear that the two per cent. of unadulterated stubbornness come from me. I said so myself, but I did n't believe it.

Deedee was gittin' to be a regular person. She could tell what she wanted, and once in a while we could understand what it was. It was full time, everybody said, that her education had ought to begin. If she was

goin' to grow up into a fine, sincere woman like Marthy, she must have the right kind of start. Just the night before the day of the Spank, Marthy had begun to teach her her religious education. Standin' up at Marthy's knee—for Deedee would not kneel to God or man—she had repeated:—

"Nowee-laimee-downee-seep,
Padee-O-so-tee."

Anybody had ought to know that was:—

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

It was a fine success for a first start,

only she did n't do what she said she was goin' to do and "lay me down to sleep." Instead of that she stood up in her crib for about an hour, callin' for "Mamie," the meanin' of which was that she wanted to be rocked and have Marthy sing "Mary had a little lamb," to her.

The day of the Spank had a bad openin'. When Deedee woke up, along about five o'clock A.M., it was rainin' pitchforks, and that meant a day indoors, and to start off, she stood up in her crib and called for "laim."

Marthy woke up sort of realizin' that Deedee was repeatin' that word slow, but regular, and she sat up and

thought. "Laim" was a new word, and the meanin' of it was unknown, but, whatever it was, Deedee wanted it. She wanted it bad. Nothin' but "laim" would satisfy her.

Marthy studied that word good and hard. It did not seem to suggest anything to eat or drink, and, as near as Marthy could make out, it did n't rightly apply to any toy, game, song, person, or anything else. Marthy woke me up, and I sat up with a sigh. Deedee looked at me as if she thought she would git what she wanted now, sure.

"Laim, Deedee?" I asked, and she smiled as sweet as you please.

"Papa, laim!" she says again.

"Laim!" I says, thoughtful, lookin' around the room and up at the ceilin'. I screwed up my forehead and studied, and twisted my neck to look into the next room. "Laim! What 's a 'laim,' anyhow?"

"I give it up," I says, after I 'd thought of everything in the world, pretty near. "Mebby her grandpa would know. Mebby it 's something he taught her."

We lifted Deedee out of her crib, and set her down on the floor, and she pattered down the hall. We could hear her tellin' him to give her "laim,"

and the puzzled way he answered her back.

"Laim, birdy? What is it? Say it again, Deedee. Laim? Granddaddy don't know what you want, Deedee."

Neither did Uncle Ed, who was stayin' with us about then. Nobody knew what "laim" was but Deedee, and she wanted it the worst way. She come back, and stood by Marthy's bed, and just begged for it.

It was a hard day for Marthy. It was Monday, and wash-day, so Deedee could n't bother Katie in the kitchen, and it was rainin' too. Deedee

just wandered through the house, like she had lost her last friend, and then she would come back to Marthy and ask for "laim." She would n't have nothing to do with her toys, and she would n't sew with a pin, and she would n't sit at the table and write, and she would n't look at the photy-graft book. And the worst of it was that she would n't keep still a minute. By noon-time Marthy had a headache. By sundown she had "nerves," and about then she began to look at Dee-dee with a sort of reproachful look. Deedee had said that unknown word about ten thousand times. Marthy put Deedee to bed in her crib, and

"She would n't keep still a minute."

Deedee stood up and called for "laim" just as insistent as ever.

I read once how Wellington, at Waterloo, in the big fight they had there, prayed for night or Blücher, and that was about how Marthy longed for the sandman or me to come. I was the one that come, at last. I come in the house wet to the skin, and plumb disgusted; my pants stickin' to my legs and all over mud, and I chucked my soakin' hat and my umbrelly into a corner, the way a tired-out man will, and just dropped into a chair, tuckered out. I let out one good, long sigh of thanks that I was at the end of a hard day.

"Hiram!" comes Marthy's voice; "Come in here, and see if you can do anything with Edith. I have worked with her all day, and I 'm played out; I 'm utter tired."

"Oh, plague!" I says. I sat a minute, drummin' on the arm of my chair, and then I got upon my feet, and walked into the bedroom.

"What 's the matter?" I says, as near cross as I calculate I ever git, and Marthy's eyes filled up.

"I *can't* do anything with her," she says. "She *won't* go to sleep. She has been dreadful all day. I don't feel like I could stand it another minute."

Marthy threw herself on the bed

and covered up her face with her hands. She was cryin'.

I guess I frowned.

Deedee looked up at me as sweet as a little angel.

"Papa, laim," she says.

"No!" says I, "No laim, Deedee. You lie down and go to sleep like a good girl. Papa 'll fix your pillow nice."

I pounded up her pillow, and turned it over, and pulled the sheets out straight. Then I took the baby and laid her down gentle. She smiled and cuddled into the pillow.

"Oh, what a nice bed!" I says. "Ain't it a nice bed, Deedee?"

"Nice bed," she allowed.

"Will I cover your feet?" I says.

"Feet cov," she says, eager.

So I spread the sheet up over her feet.

"Shut little eyes," I says in warning, but as gentle as you please, and she shut up her eyes so tight her eyelids wrinkled.

"Now, good night, Deedee," I says.

"'Night, pa—pa!" she coos.

I stole out of the room as quiet as I knowed how, and dropped cautious into my chair. I leaned back and smiled sort of grim. "That shows," I thinks, "that women ain't got the

right kind of tact to handle a kid, or else they 've got catchin' nerves. It shows how easy a man can—"

"Papa, laim!"

Deedee's clear little voice just cut what I was thinkin' into two pieces. I was into that bedroom in about two steps. Deedee was standin' up in her crib.

"Papa, laim?" she says, sort of anxious.

"No!" I says, stern in earnest. "No laim!"

"Papa, laim!" she demands.

"No!" I says, in a way that froze her smile right where it was. She

looked up at me doubtful-like, her little pink and white chin puckered up all ready to cry.

"Papa, laim, laim!" she pleaded.

I reached over and forced her right back on to her pillow.

"Deedee!" I says, in a voice that was new and that she was n't acquainted with; "go to sleep! Be quiet! Stop this instant, or I *will* SPANK you!"

I guess, mebby, the angels kept on singin' as joyful as ever up in Heaven. I guess, mebby, somewhere out west further, the sun was shinin' down gay on noddin', careless flowers. Mebby, even in the next block, some

good baby was bein' snuggled up in its ma's arms; but to Deedee, lyin' in the corner of her crib, the world had got a million years older in about a minute. Her world that had been all smiles and pleasant things had turned into a world of hard words and cruel faces. Her mama dear had on a mask of unfeelin' coldness. Her papa dear stood up there towerin' above her, a sort of giant of wrath, flourishin' an awful, mysterious weapon, the word "spank."

It looked like everybody had gone back on her. Her friends—which was me and Marthy, her playmates—which was me and Marthy, her lovers

—which was me and Marthy, the providers of her joy—which was me and Marthy, had turned into avengers. She was all alone in a world of clubs. Just one wee kid and everybody against her.

She lay there a minute palpitatin', with her chin tremblin' piteous. What was to be did when her parents vanished, and these strange, harsh people took their places?

She crep' to the foot of the crib, where I was still standin', and she got up and took hold of my arm and hugged it.

"Pa-pa!" she says, loving.

I pushed her back on the pillow again, gentle but firm.

"Edith," I says in the hard voice she was n't acquainted with; "Lie down and go to sleep. I don't want to have no more of this. Go to sleep!"

I heard the dinner bell tinkle from the dinin'-room, and I helped Marthy to git up, and we went out, and left Deedee alone in the dark.

I ate the first part of my dinner without sayin' anything. It was n't exactly easy to be lively under them circumstances. Even Uncle Ned did n't say nothin', and grand-daddy did n't feel called on to start a conver-

sation. It got so we was so quiet it hurt. Uncle Ed made bold to speak.

"When I was a kid," he says, lightly, "I used to git spanked with a six-inch plank."

"Edward!" says Marthy. "How can you say such a thing?"

"It done me good," he says. "You can't begin too young. We 've all got the devil in us, and the only way to git it out is to pound it out."

Marthy laid down her fork, and her lips trembled.

"Cut that out, Ed," I says. "Marthy has the nerves to-night; the subject ain't popular."

"I think she 's goin' to be good

now," says grand-daddy, who always stuck up for the kid bein' the best that ever lived. "She seems quiet enough. She must have gone off to sleep."

"I sure do hope so," says Marthy. "I never had such a day with her."

"Mama, laim!" came the little voice from the bedroom, of a sudden.

"I met Tuomy to-day," I says, "and he—"

"Mama, laim! Mama, laim!" called Deedee.

"He asked to be remembered to you," I says. "He was with May Wilson—"

From the bedroom come a low, maddenin' wail:—

"Mama, laim! Papa, laim!"

It kept gittin' louder. It got to be a regular cry, punctuated off here and there with calls for "laim."

Marthy looked at me, hopeless. I seen the look and looked down at my plate.

"I 'll spank her when I 'm done my dinner," I says. "There 's no other way."

We did n't say much durin' the rest of that meal. It was a very solemn feast. We was all thinkin' of Dee-dee. There was n't no doubt that the time had come we had been afraid of. The punishment and the crime was properly fitted to each other.

Now, or never, was the time to spank; but we was a ridiculous tender-hearted family, and, as the dinner went on, the spankin' of Deedee loomed up bigger than Pike's Peak. It piled up huge and record-breakin' above the tea-pots and the puddin's, and looked about as important as the end of the world, or a big war.

When we got up it was like the condemned goin' to the execution, and we marched into the front room like a jury, bringin' in the death verdict, files into the court room.

Deedee still cried for "laim."

We four sat down, and looked at the carpet, as gloomy as a funeral. I

opened my mouth, swallowed hard two times, and shut it again. Uncle Edward tapped on the carpet with his toe, grand-daddy looked at one of the spots on the same carpet like it was a personal insult to him, and Marthy smoothed out one of the roses on it with her heel. We was n't half so interested in that carpet when we bought it as we looked to be that very minute.

"Well?" says Marthy, at last. I kept my eye away from hers. I looked out of the window. Next I got up and stood by the window and stuck my hands deep down into my pants pockets.

"If you 're goin' to—" says Marthy. "If you ain't—"

Deedee was gittin' too bad to stand. It looked as if the neighbors would be comin' in to complain, next thing.

I turned around and walked slow toward the bedroom. The three other grown-ups sat like stone statures. As I pushed aside the curtains, Marthy jumped across the room and grabbed me by the arm.

"Hiram!" she cried eager, "You won't be too severe? You won't git mad and hurt her?"

"Marthy," I says, "if you want to spank her, do so. If you want me to spank her, don't you mix in." I shook

her hand off of me, and she went back to her chair cryin'.

Well, I went into that bedroom. Deedee left off cryin' when she seen me, and in the dim light I could see her standin' in the crib. I stuck out my hand to take her, and she hung on to it.

"Papa, laim!" she begged.

"Edith," I says, hoarse in my throat, "you 've been naughty. Papa told you to go to sleep, and mama told you to go to sleep. When we tell you to go to sleep, you 've got to go to sleep. Now, this is the last time I 'm goin' to tell you. Will you lie down and go to sleep?"

"Papa, laim!" she says, impatient.

I set my mouth and lifted her up and laid her on the bed on her face and held her there. She struggled and yelled.

"Be quiet!" I says, "be quiet, or I will spank you!"

She gave one long, lingerin' cry for "laim."

I took a long breath, and lifted up my hand, and—and— I ain't a-goin' to tell about that. Let 's go into the other room.

There set the three other grown-ups, holdin' their hands over their ears, with pained lookin' faces. Even at that they heard the sound of a

dozen short, sharp claps, and the sound of the quick cries, and then there was a silent spell, only broke by the great big sobs of the little kid in the next room,—sobs that sort of exploded their way out, shakin' the little body till the crib rattled. The sobbin' got weaker and weaker, and come further apart, and I stole out of the bedroom, wipin' my face with my handkerchief.

"I think she 'll be a good girly now," says grand-daddy, gentle-like.

That baby, shocked and surprised, laid on the pillow thinkin', as much as a baby could think. Something cruel and unexpected had happened to her.

Me and Marthy had turned cruel. She did n't have no one to love up to. She had been hurt. Her papa dear had hurt her, because she had cried for "laim."

"I hope she will," says Marthy in reply to grand-daddy, and that minute from the bedroom, come Deedee's voice.

"Papa!" it pleaded.

I jumped up from my chair. Evidently that child needed—

"Papa, kiss!" says Deedee, soft and pleadin'.

Well, I rather guess we all kissed her! We hugged her until she was gaspin' for breath, and she smiled at

us, and forgive us all, even while the sobs come once in a while to interfere with her smilin'.

"Ain't she a dear,*dear* baby?" cried Marthy. "Poor little thing!"

When we had loved her enough to spoil any good the spankin' had done, Marthy drove us out.

"Come, deary," she says to Deedee, "say your little prayers, mama forgot."

Deedee pressed up against her ma's knee, joyous.

"Now I—" Marthy prompts her.

"Nowee—" says Deedee.

"Lay me—" says Marthy.

"*Laim*," says Deedee, tickled as

you please, and then wonderin' why the whole lot of us shouts out "Laim!" of a sudden, and why we laugh, and crowd 'round her, and kiss her, and kiss her!

"Poor baby!" says Marthy. "To be spanked for wantin' to say her prayers!"

"By George!" says Uncle Edward. "Talk about your martyrs! She beats the whole bunch!"

And to think there was once a time when me and Marthy thought a kid was more bother than it was worth! There ain't no child, nowhere, that ain't worth more than everything else

in the world all put together. No, sir! A baby has got more human nature in it than a man has, even. You take your big, rough hand to it, and you chastise it, so that it screams out, and the next minute it takes time in between sobs to hug its soft little arms around your neck, and kiss you. Ain't that the reallest kind of human nature? Why, that 's the kind that makes the world worth livin' in at all.

I don't seem to recollect ever hearin' that Heaven was set aside as a sort of place where married folks could hang about by twos. Them that has had experience knows that that would be a mighty poor kind of heaven—one

without children in it. It 's the child kind of human nature that sweetens up the world. The "give and take" kind—take your spankin' when it comes, and give back love in return for it.